

NOTE I.—Marsden translates the commencement of this passage, which is peculiar to Ramusio, and runs “*E in capo di cinque giornate delle predette dieci*,” by the words “At the end of five days’ journey *beyond* the ten,” but this is clearly wrong.* The place best suiting in position, as halfway between Cho-chau and T’ai-yuan fu, would be CHENG-TING FU, and I have little doubt that this is the place intended. The title of *Ak-Bdigh* in Turki,† or *Chaghán Balghásun* in Mongol, meaning “White City,” was applied by the Tartars to Royal Residences; and possibly Cheng-ting fu may have had such a claim, for I observe in the *Annales de la Prop. de la Foi* (xxxiii. 387) that in 1862 the Chinese Government granted to the R. C. Vicar-Apostolic of Chihli the ruined *Imperial Palace* at Cheng-ting fu for his cathedral and other mission establishments. Moreover, as a matter of fact, Rashiduddin’s account of Chinghiz’s campaign in northern China in 1214, speaks of the city of “Chaghan Balghasun which the Chinese call *Jintzinfu*.” This is almost exactly the way in which the name of Cheng-ting fu is represented in ’Izzat Ullah’s Persian Itinerary (*Jigdzinfu*, evidently a clerical error for *Jingdzinfu*), so I think there can be little doubt that Cheng-ting fu is the place intended. The name of Hwai-luh’ien (see Note 2), which is the first stage beyond Cheng-ting fu, is said to mean the “Deer-lair,” pointing apparently to the old character of the tract as a game-preserve. The city of Cheng-ting is described by Consul Oxenham as being now in a decayed and dilapidated condition, consisting only of two long streets crossing at right angles. It is noted for the manufacture of images of Buddha from Shan-si iron. (*Consular Reports*, p. 10; *Erdmann*, 331.)

[The main road turns due west at Cheng-ting fu, and enters Shan-si through what is known among Chinese travellers as the Ku-kwan, Customs’ Barrier.—H. C.]

Between Cheng-ting fu and T’ai-yuan fu the traveller first crosses a high and rugged range of mountains, and then ascends by narrow defiles to the plateau of Shan-si. But of these features Polo’s excessive condensation takes no notice.

The traveller who quits the great plain of Chihli [which terminates at Fu ch’eng-i, a small market-town, two days from Pao-ting.—H. C.] for “the kingdom of Taianfu,” *i.e.* Northern Shan-si, enters a tract in which predominates that very remarkable formation called by the Chinese *Hwang-tu*, and to which the German name *Löss* has been attached. With this formation are bound up the distinguishing characters of Northern Interior China, not merely in scenery but in agricultural products, dwellings, and means of transport. This *Löss* is a brownish-yellow loam, highly porous, spreading over low and high ground alike, smoothing over irregularities of surface, and often more than 1000 feet in thickness. It has no stratification, but tends to cleave vertically, and is traversed in every direction by sudden crevices, almost glacier-like, narrow, with vertical walls of great depth, and infinite ramification. Smooth as the *löss* basin looks in a bird’s-eye view, it is thus one of the most impracticable countries conceivable for military movements, and secures extraordinary value to fortresses in well-chosen sites, such as that of Tung-kwan mentioned in Note 2 to chap. xli.

Agriculture may be said in N. China to be confined to the alluvial plains and the *löss*; as in S. China to the alluvial plains and the terraced hill-sides. The *löss* has some peculiar quality which renders its productive power self-renewing without manure (unless it be in the form of a surface coat of fresh *löss*), and unfailing in returns if there be sufficient rain. This singular formation is supposed by Baron Richthofen, who has studied it more extensively than any one, to be no subaqueous deposit, but to be the accumulated residue of countless generations of herbaceous plants combined with a large amount of material spread over the face of the ground by the winds and surface waters.

[I do not agree with the theory of Baron von Richthofen, of the almost exclusive Eolian formation of *loess*; water has something to do with it as well as wind, and I think it is more exact to say that *loess* in China is due to a double action, Neptunian as well as Eolian. The climate was different in former ages from what it is now, and

* And I see Ritter understood the passage as I do (IV. 515).

† *Báligh* is indeed properly Mongol.