

CHAPTER XII

FROM SU-CHOU TO THE LIMES OF MAO-MEI

SECTION I.—THE LIMES ALONG THE PEI-TA-HO

Halt at
Su-chou.

MANY arrangements had to be made, necessitating a halt at Su-chou, before I could set out for the explorations I had planned along the Etsin-gol and at the ruined site of Khara-khoto. This ground, beyond the oasis of Mao-mei, lies outside the border of direct Chinese administration and is subject to a petty Mongol chief who exercises authority under the 'Wang' of Ala-shan. It was therefore essential, before entering Etsin-gol territory, to secure the goodwill of the Tao-t'ai of Su-chou, who acts in the capacity, as it were, of a Political Officer for the south-western corner of that portion of Mongolia which acknowledges Chinese suzerainty. Fortunately H.B.M.'s Minister at Peking had given effective support to the requests submitted by me in the autumn through Sir George Macartney, with the result that timely instructions had been sent from the Chinese Foreign Office to Mr. Chou Wu-hsüeh 周務學, the Tao-t'ai of Su-chou. After an exchange of several visits with this intelligent and energetic dignitary I obtained the issue of the needful recommendation to the chief or 'Beili' of the Mongols, a sub-tribe of the Torguts, grazing along the Etsin-gol.

Raising
of funds.

The arrangements kindly made by the Legation included the payment to me of three thousand Taels in Chinese bullion, against a corresponding amount out of my grant remitted to Peking through the Kāshgar Consulate Treasury. But the economic uncertainties created by the upheaval of the Chinese revolution had not been without their effect upon Ya-mên finances in Kan-su, where apprehensions roused by the advance of the predatory bands of the rebel leader known as the 'White Wolf' were just then increasing the general stringency. As a consequence, the collection of this sum, comparatively small as it was, in sound silver had, I was told, cost some special effort. It took several days before the desired bullion in the shape of properly weighed 'horseshoes' actually reached my hands. But I found compensation for this delay in the fact that this payment, and still more of the authority on which it was made, which quickly became known, helped to create a favourable disposition towards my work among the officials of the districts controlled by the Su-chou Tao-t'ai. This was a source of special satisfaction to me, after the obstruction attempted from Urumchi.

Prepara-
tions at
Su-chou.

Attempt at
triangula-
tion.

In view of the great distance which our journey down the Etsin-gol would take us and of the possibility of extending it eastwards, the six days of our stay at Su-chou were very fully occupied. Careful arrangements had to be made for at least two months' supplies for all men and animals, since none would be obtainable among the Mongols nor even at the outlying oasis of Mao-mei, where there had been a serious failure of the crops in the previous year owing to insufficient irrigation. The remoteness of the region to which I was proceeding also made it necessary to attend to a great deal of writing, while still within reach of postal facilities. These days of halt moreover afforded an opportunity for supplementing our survey work of 1907 in the Nan-shan, and I endeavoured accordingly to have the relative position and height of the high snowy peaks of the