

SECTION III.—ACROSS THE MOUNTAINS TO TURFĀN

Approach
to Pa-no-p'a
valley.

On October 22nd a very enjoyable march in true mountain scenery took us from Ch'üan-tzü-chieh far up into the Pa-no-p'a valley. For close on five miles the route ascended a fertile alluvial fan, well cultivated from scattered farms and rich in trees and shrubs. From where the road neared the bed of the stream that descends from the Pa-no-p'a valley, the northern and western slopes of the spurs flanking the latter could be seen to be clad with dense conifer forest. It was curious to notice this distribution of the forest growth, as it contrasted with that observed on the slopes above the Barkul valley, where just the western slopes were bare and the eastern wooded. The explanation is probably to be sought in a difference of climatic conditions between the two ranges. The first of the fir-clad spurs was reached at a distance of seven miles from Ch'üan-tzü-chieh (Fig. 299).

Ascent past
forest-clad
slopes.

From here onwards the track, no longer practicable for carts, wound up and down past steep slopes covered with rich grass or forest. The trees came down to both sides of the tossing mountain stream, which the route from above Lo-t'o-p'u-tzü repeatedly crossed, and the scenery assumed a character distinctly reminding me of Kashmīr (Fig. 296). A large valley, known as Pa-no-cha, of which we passed the mouth at an elevation of about 7,000 feet, was seen to descend straight from a conspicuous snowy massif in the south. Up to an elevation of about 9,000 feet it was clothed with dense forest, which looked as if it had never been touched by the axe. The route continued to the south-west over grassy slopes above the left bank of the stream and a mile farther on brought us to the few log huts of Pa-no-p'a, at an elevation of about 7,500 feet.¹ These serve as a resting-place on the north side of the pass.

¹ While halting there for the night I had an interesting opportunity of becoming acquainted with a small party of well-armed outlaws from Kara-khōja of whose presence on this much-frequented mountain route I had already been warned at Jimasa. As their story threw a significant light on the conditions of Chinese administration then prevailing in these parts, a brief record of it may be included here. They were the 'die-hard' remnant of a large party of Kara-khōja cultivators, who having had a long-standing dispute over some lands with neighbours of Astāna (Map No. 28. c. 3) and thinking themselves wronged, had about six months before attacked and killed the Muhammadan 'Jīsa', the local revenue official, whom they believed to have brought about the defeat of their rightful claims. Having thus vindicated the cause of outraged justice in their own way, they took refuge in the mountains, with which Aḥmad Mullah, their leader, was well acquainted as a 'Pāwān' or hunter. They were well armed with Mauser rifles, for since the revolution of 1911-12 it had become easy to purchase arms and ammunition from the Chinese garrison at Turfān, and probably elsewhere, at rates well within the reach of villagers of means.

During their stay south of the mountains they were attacked near Yaghan-terek (Map No. 28. B. 2) by a body of Chinese troops and lost two companions, but succeeded in escaping to ground inaccessible to their pursuers. Since removing themselves to a region outside the Turfān command, the four heroes had remained wholly unmolested. They were now maintaining themselves in comparative comfort at Pa-no-p'a

by the receipt of charitable gifts from sympathizing fellow Muslims and of blackmail from other wayfarers.

There was talk of troops being sent from Guchen to capture the little band, but Aḥmad, their leader, an intelligent man, in our long confabulation expressed his confidence of being able to resist any attempt at force in the mountains and his hope of arriving at an understanding with the Turfān Yā-mên which would before long allow them to return in peace to their homes. We parted next morning after a friendly exchange of gifts, his taking the shape of a piece of cloth printed with an auspicious Arabic text in return for a modest amount of silver.

Aḥmad's wish to meet me again during my winter's stay in Turfān was to be realized in a fashion rather different from that he had in mind; for, on returning from Urumchi in the first days of January, I was greeted by his shrivelled black head stuck up on a high pole outside the gate of the Yangi-shahr of Turfān. Chinese diplomacy had managed to create distrust and dissension between Aḥmad and his little band, and when he attempted to bring his followers to reason by driving them first into a cave and then kindling a fire before its entrance, they shot him in self-defence. Chinese justice asserted its claim to the corpse when it was being brought to Kara-khōja for burial, and there was little doubt that the negotiations that were then said to be in progress with the remaining three outlaws would sooner or later satisfy Chinese administrative needs in some similarly effective fashion.