

which water the Khotan oasis, the Kara-kash and Yurung-kash, break indeed through the northernmost main range, which maintains from here onwards a crestline of close on 20,000 feet for a distance of at least 300 miles, but their passage lies largely through extremely deep-cut and for the most part quite inaccessible gorges. Even where less confined ground can be gained at the head of their valleys, the extremely rugged character of the northern slopes of the glacier-clad range would suffice to close the way to any but expert mountaineers. But quite as great a barrier is represented by the utter want of resources on the drainageless Tibetan plateaux, 15,000 to 16,000 feet in height on the average, which adjoin and extend for many marches to the south. They are bare of grazing, fuel, and in many places even of drinkable water.

Very different in character and yet almost as forbidding and barren is the aspect which the outer slopes of the K'un-lun present above the Khotan section of the basin. Here by the side of wide loess-covered peneplains we find areas where a perfect maze of steeply serrated ridges and deep-cut gorges (Fig. 2) has been produced by erosion. Such a condition can only be due to prolonged water action, and yet only on rare occasions do these barren slopes, unprotected by vegetation, receive any heavy fall of rain or snow.

To the east of the glacier-girt high ground where the sources of the Yurung-kash river take their rise, the chain which overlooks the Tarim basin takes for over 400 miles a trend to the north-east. Throughout the whole length of the chain the foot of its northern slopes is formed by a glaciis of piedmont gravel, attaining in parts a width of forty miles and more, and everywhere utterly barren.