

great belt of ground incapable of settled life or even nomadic occupation for another 400 miles or so westwards. Pei-shan and Kuruk-tagh in conjunction form a barrier, nowhere from north to south less than 200 miles wide, between the nearest places where cultivation is nowadays possible.

In the eastern and western portions of this 'Gobi' brackish wells or springs can be found at rare intervals in the depressions between the greatly decayed ranges, and thus render a crossing there practicable for small parties at a time. Violent winds, mainly from the north-east and icy even late in the spring, blow across this whole region at frequent intervals and cause its crossing to be dreaded by wayfarers.

It is to the east of the Hami oasis that begins the great mountain chain of the T'ien-shan, the 'Celestial Mountains', which extends unbroken westwards far beyond the Tarim basin and throughout forms its northern rampart. It varies considerably in height and width, but everywhere constitutes a strongly marked dividing line, in climate and all that depends upon it, between that great basin and the regions which adjoin it northward. These comprise the wide plateaux of Dzungaria stretching north as far as southernmost Siberia as well as great fertile valleys. Owing to a distinctly moister climate grazing is to be found there both in plains and valleys, and this has at all times attracted waves of nomadic nations, from the Huns to the Turks and Mongols.

Notwithstanding the continuity of its rampart, the T'ien-shan range offers opportunities to nomadic neighbours on the north for plundering inroads upon the oases and trade routes in the south. These opportunities are due to the