

plains to the north, had covered up these ancient terminal moraines. On them alone at an elevation between 12,500 and 13,000 feet, where moisture seems to be less deficient than elsewhere in these forbidding mountains, was the eye refreshed by the sight of real green grass and a few alpine flowers. The barrenness of the valleys lower down was great, and the bleak steep slopes of rock or detritus plainly told the story of rapidly progressing erosion. The perfect maze of steeply serrated ridges and deep-cut gorges between them which is to be found in parts of the outer slopes of the K'un-lun strikingly illustrates how far this process has advanced there (Fig. 2).

I have described elsewhere the difficulties encountered in our search for an old route across the main K'un-lun range by which communication with Ladak on the Indian side of the high Tibetan plateaux was once maintained in times of emergency. These difficulties were not entirely those of Nature. They were caused quite as much also by obstruction on the part of the small settlement of semi-nomadic hillmen and select malefactors (Fig. 21) exiled from Khotan who, counting probably less than two hundred souls, form the only population in this desolate mountain region. There seemed significance in its general name Karanghuthagh, 'the mountains of blinding darkness'.