

had commenced under the Former Han dynasty, was indispensably needed as a passage into the Tarim basin. The crumbling wall of stamped clay through which the traveller now passes by the Chia-yü-kuan gate, has proved to be of late mediaeval date. It was built for the very opposite purpose, that of closing the great Central-Asian route at a time when China had resumed its traditional attitude of seclusion.

At Su-chou, the first town 'within the wall', I had to overcome considerable difficulties before we could start by the close of July on our expedition into the Central Nan-shan. The local authorities were full of apprehensions about attacks of Tangut robbers, etc., and the collection of the necessary transport proved a difficult task. Generally, the Chinese settlers of the Kansu oases are swayed by a perfect dread of the mountains, which to them remain a *terra incognita* beyond the outermost range. We could obtain guides only as far as the broad plateau-like valley between the Richthofen and Tolai-shan ranges. There we found gold-pits at an elevation of about 13,000 feet worked by small parties of more venturesome people from the side of Hsi-ning on the north-eastern border of Tibet.

After leaving these exposed mining camps we did not sight human beings until towards the close of August we came upon a small camp of interesting nomads of Turkish race grazing in the valleys south of Kan-chou. Fortunately the well-defined character of the four great ranges in which the Nan-shan rises towards the uplands round the Khara-nor and Koko-nor lakes made the want of all guidance less serious. The excellent grazing met with almost everywhere at elevations between 11,000 to 13,000 feet was a great boon for our hard-trying animals. This abundance of grazing must