

crowning them at intervals. When we had climbed the crest of the nearest plateau the whole of the great snowy range towards Ladak and the westernmost border of Tibet lay spread out before us. Over the whole chain towered the great Kuen-luen Peak already referred to, with its glaciers now clearly visible. The Un-bashi ("head of Ten") of Buya, an uncouth looking hillman or 'Taghlik,' knew the peak only by the name of 'Muz-tagh' ("the Ice-mountain"). Apart from the glittering wall of snow and ice in the far south, there was nothing to be seen before us but the yellowish slopes of the plateaus that mark where transverse ridges must once have risen. The extremes of temperature, and possibly the excessive dryness of the climate, with the consequent absence of vegetation, may partly account for the extraordinary disintegration of the soil. In colour and outlines the near view reminded me of the hill ranges that are seen when passing along the Egyptian coast of the Gulf of Suez. The plateaus are separated by broad depressions in which tiny streams of saltish water try to make their way towards the Yurung-kash. Except when the snow melts on the distant mountains eastwards, there is no moisture to fill these ravines.

Thus we marched for about ten miles to the south-west, glad that the ground offered no difficulty to the tired ponies. From a high ridge that crowns the last plateau southwards, I sighted the broad and partly cultivated valley of Pisha, and on its other side the ridge that still separated us from Karanghuta, the last inhabited valley at the northern foot of the Kuen-luen, our immediate goal. At 5 p.m. I arrived at Kul-döbe, the main hamlet of the Pisha Valley, where two dozen or so of Taghliks were assembled to welcome me. There seemed little in their speech or manners to distinguish them from the people of Khotan. But their sheepskin coats and hard weather-beaten faces indicated the difference of the climatic conditions. Many among them had never seen the plains. Harsh and bare of all graces are their surroundings.