

CHAPTER LXXIV

IN THE MOUNTAINS OF THE WESTERMOST NAN-SHAN

THE picturesque seclusion and the cool air of the abode of the 'Myriad Buddhas' had been so delightful that I felt quite sorry to leave when after two days' busy work my tasks there were ended. Alas! there was no hidden library to explore—or, if ever there had been such a deposit, the rock walls of the caves had kept their secret. A few camels had been brought down from the Mongol grazing-grounds at the foot of the snowy range, and with their help and that of our own camels we resumed our journey to the latter by the morning of July 3. For two days we marched up by the river which flows past the 'Myriad Buddhas' and T'a-shih. First we ascended a steadily rising gravel plateau, and then passed through the narrow gorge in which the river has cut its way through the second barren hill range sighted from Ch'iao-tzŭ.

With its absolutely bare slopes fissured by a maze of ravines and its serrated crest-line frowning down from a height of over 10,000 feet, this range was sufficiently forbidding. But once we had passed through what looked like the apex of this outer hill chain, a great change occurred in the scene. A grand semicircle of mountains, carrying snow-beds and small glaciers on their most prominent peaks, rose suddenly before us in the distance, some thirty miles away to the south. A huge fan-like glacis, descending with unbroken slope from its foot, seemed to absorb all the drainage from the numerous valleys of the range and to discharge whatever was left of it into the gorge we had ascended.

A little above this point we reached the ruins of Shih-