

higher than 14,000 or 15,000 feet. Large glittering expanses of salt in the centre marked dry lake beds. Our guide pointed to a pass leading over this low range to the head-waters of the Tun-huang river and called it P'in-ta-fan (Dawan).

The whole view before us looked thoroughly Tibetan in type, and I was by no means surprised when a wild ass approached us to within 300 yards or so. A bitterly cold north wind was blowing, suggestive of what the summer breezes of these bleak uplands of northernmost Tibet are like. The position of the Ta-kung-ch'a Pass gave us a chance of sighting the southern slopes of the main range for some distance. So I was able to convince myself that the permanent snow-line here lay at an elevation of fully 18,000 or 19,000 feet, and thus even higher than on the north side. It all helped to confirm the impression of the scanty moisture received by this westernmost part of the Nan-shan.

All the more gratified did I feel when, on the day after moving from Ta-kung-ch'a eastward, while encamped at a small spring called Su-chi-ch'üan, we experienced the first rain which, according to Mongol testimony, these mountains had received that summer. It was gentle, but sufficiently steady to give one the feeling of being somewhere in the Alps, and a little snow melting as it neared the ground was thrown in as an extra. When the sky cleared in the afternoon of July 10th and I could take a stroll round, the effect on the vegetation seemed like magic. Where the grass had before looked stunted and shrivelled, blades were now sprouting rapidly. For the first time I noticed hardy edelweiss showing in large clumps, and a few white flowers resembling *Podophyllum*. It was such occasional rain which accounted for the very thin but sufficiently cohesive coat of vegetation clothing the lower slopes of the range up to an elevation of about 11,000 feet, while the absence of heavy rain or snow explained the fact that it escaped denudation.

At this same camp we were joined at last by hired camels sent up from the hill oasis of Ch'ang-ma. I was thus able to let our own hardy beasts depart under Hassan