

Akhun's care (Fig. 217) for the fine grazing below Wangfo-hsia, where they were to enjoy an unbroken and much-needed holiday until my return to An-hsi in the autumn. The presence of Ibrahim Beg at An-hsi and the neighbourhood of the friendly priests at the 'Myriad Buddhas' had recommended that vacation-retreat for my camels, and I may say at once that I had no reason to regret it.

On July 11th we marched over easy but barren slopes to the north-east, and, just after crossing the almost imperceptible watershed between the great basins of Shih-pao-ch'êng and Ch'ang-ma, found a spring of slightly sulphurous water at the foot of the absolutely bare outer range known as Ying-tsui-shan. There we camped. The sky had become delightfully clear, and next morning a magnificent view revealed the glacier-girt main range rising to peaks over 20,000 feet high and draining towards Ch'ang-ma. The distance and relatively high elevation from which we saw these bold peaks, with the extraordinary contrast of the flat fore-ground formed by another huge gravel glaciis sloping down towards Ch'ang-ma, made the panorama most impressive. Everything seemed on such a big scale, and there were no distracting details. A broad gap above the alluvial fan to the south-east marked the point where the Su-lo Ho on its way down to Ch'ang-ma breaks through the snowy range flanking it from the north.

For over fourteen miles we marched down over a stony steppe, showing but very scanty scrub and, in spite of numerous shallow flood beds, not a drop of water. Nor did we come upon any spring in the broad dry river bed we were at last following, until within half a mile of Sha-ho, the westernmost hamlet of the oasis. But from here onwards water abounded; it seemed as if all the underground drainage from the snowy range was here eager to get to the surface. Our surroundings seemed changed as if by magic, and the eleven miles' ride down the gradually broadening oasis of Ch'ang-ma was delightful.

There were marshy meadows full of springs along the left bank of the river, and in spite of canals taking off on the right, a short distance below Sha-ho the main channel was about fifteen yards broad with a depth of over two feet