

half barren gravel Sai and half scrubby waste, with its scattered small oases, through which the great route leads from Su-chou to Yü-mên-hsien. But I had determined, before proceeding to Su-chou, to visit the watershed of the northernmost chain of the Nan-shan at the Tu-ta-fan Pass where Obrucheff, the distinguished Russian geologist and traveller, had crossed it. Baffled by the difficulty about guidance and suitable transport in reaching the Pass from the south, I now made my way to it from the north.

One forced march along the stony glacis of the range and across the Po-yang Ho river carried us to the tiny hamlet of Po-lo-hu-tung at the opening of the valley coming from the Tu-ta-fan. While waiting till late at night for the arrival of the baggage, I learned a good deal of curious local information from the centenarian head of the family owning the central walled farm. Cultivation depended on a single spring at the mouth of the valley, and the extent of old abandoned fields seemed to suggest increasing scantiness of water. Yet the old man was loth to admit this, and dwelt more on the losses in men and labouring cattle which the raids of Tungan rebels had caused. He seemed not a little proud of the fine substantial coffin which filial piety was keeping ready in the best room of the house for his occupation. Owing to the elevation, well over 8000 feet, oats were the main crop, and the lateness of spring here was pleasantly attested by the little blue irises and other wild flowers recalling Tun-huang in May.

Next morning, on July 18th, I sent off the baggage to the neighbouring hamlet of Ta-han-chuang and set out with the Surveyor towards the pass. We found the narrow mouth of the valley, known as Ch'ing-tao-shan, defended by a small post of Mongol levies and a large empty entrenchment thrown up some twelve years before against Tungan rebels expected from the Hsi-ning side. Above this point the valley opened out rapidly, and as we rode up became greener and greener. There was luxuriant grass such as I had nowhere yet seen in these mountains, and flowers, too, suggestive of an Alpine vegetation. It