

## CHAPTER LXXVII

### THROUGH THE RICHTHOFEN RANGE OF THE NAN-SHAN

ON the morning of July 28th the sixteen hired ponies and mules turned up late in spite of their having been kept under watch. By depositing at the Ya-mên whatever could be spared of stores and kit, I had greatly reduced our baggage. Yet it was not until 11 A.M. that the whole of the caravan was got under way. Fortunately the journey to the foot of the mountains south-eastwards could easily be divided into two marches. After only three miles through rich fields and along shady avenues lining the roads, near the large and already half ruined cantonment which had been established after the last great Tungan rising, we reached the bare gravel steppe which sloped gently down from the mountains.

The heat of the sun was fierce while we crossed this waste for upwards of six miles. But the sight of the great chain of snowy peaks, and of the fertile tract of San-chi-p'o which lined the horizon northwards, afforded relief. Numerous canals carrying water from the river which debouches from the Richthofen range east of the Pei-ta Ho, were crossed by the track. Then we entered a fan-like belt of rich red clayey soil; cultivation was here unbroken, yet the number of the fields evidently left long unsown suggested deficiency in either water-supply or population. Near Shih-hui-yao-miao, a large temple in course of construction, we pitched camp, a violent gale blowing down from the mountains all the evening. Without bringing a drop of rain to the plains, it cleared away all the clouds that had been hovering for days along the great snowy range.