

indulge in the long-missed pleasure of gathering Alpine flowers by the handful, among them deep blue gentians which I could greet as old friends. In the rocky ravines descending on both sides grew luxuriant brushwood, and the men were soon drying themselves by huge fires such as these poor folk of Su-chou could scarcely ever have afforded to light.

I was just gleefully reflecting how our ponies would revel in their Alpine pasture when Sahid Bai, my wild-looking but quaintly tame pony-man from Yarkand (Fig. 246), came up with alarmed mien to report that five of the animals were standing about benumbed and refusing to touch grass or fodder. I at once suspected that they had eaten of the poisonous grass which infests certain parts of the Nan-shan, and about which old Marco has much to tell in his chapter on 'Sukchur' or Su-chou. The Venetian's account had proved quite true; for while my own ponies showed all the effects of this inebriating plant, the local animals had evidently been wary of it. A little bleeding by the nose, to which Tila Bai, with the veterinary skill of an old Ladak 'Kirakash,' promptly proceeded, seemed to afford some relief. But it took two or three days before the poor brutes were again in full possession of their senses and appetites. The evening brought more rain, and to my tent plentiful company. Under the sides of its outer fly there collected rapidly a dense crowd of humanity, the pony-men fleeing thither from the elements. How glad I often felt thereafter for being able to offer this much-appreciated hospitality! The five soldiers from Chin-fo-ssü, whom the Magistrate had insisted on sending along as escort, had wisely brought their two tiny *tentes d'abri*.

Next morning I woke to a delightfully clear day; but at first a heavy mist clinging to the higher slopes hid its glory. We had to wait until the bright sunshine had made its way into the narrow valley and partially at least dried men and tents. The preceding day's ascent had been steep and had brought us to a level of about 10,400 feet above the sea. Yet I scarcely suspected our first pass to be so near as it actually proved. As soon as we had turned a rocky spur above the camp the valley widened to