

a small amphitheatre, and an ascent of 1000 feet over steep Alpine meadows brought us to a grassy plateau known as Pan-t'o-pa. On its edge rose a watch-tower, built of stamped clay with a wooden framework and similar in size and construction to the watch-towers familiar to me from the desert *Limes*. But what a change in the surroundings! Clay and woodwork both looked much decayed; but with climatic conditions so different from those of the plains no estimate of date could be hazarded.

Only one thing seemed clear. This tower and an exactly similar one on the pass itself, together with the little fort of which I found traces on the Chio-po-chia Pass beyond, plainly proved that inroads had been feared from these mountains. Who were the people who once threatened the low lands from the now uninhabited valleys of the Nanshan? I thought of the 'Little Yüeh-chih,' remnants of an ancient nomad race, who are mentioned in these mountains by later Chinese records down to the tenth century A.D. They are said to have been left behind here when their kindred, the 'Great Yüeh-chih,' who under the name of Indo-Scythians were destined to become the rulers of the Oxus region and the Indian North-West, were forced by Hun aggression in the second century B.C. to start on their great migration westwards. If only the snowy peaks which have ever looked down on these valleys and plains could tell us the story!

The distance across the plateau to the Hou-tzü Pass southward was only three-quarters of a mile; yet, small as it was, it brought a surprise. A stream which came down from a snow-capped peak on the right disappeared before my eyes in a boulder-filled basin enclosed by grassy slopes on all sides. Its water, no doubt, finds an underground passage into the Chin-fo-ssü valley below. As soon as I had reached the pass itself, about 11,350 feet high by the aneroid, the same curious topographical feature presented itself on a larger scale. Below a beautiful semicircle of snowy peaks rising in the centre to close on 9000 feet there extended a large level basin to the south foot of the pass (Fig. 232).

At first glance it might have been taken for a lake;