

for the moisture brought down by last night's rain was just rising in dense vapour as seen in the photograph. There was no visible outflow for the streams descending into this basin from the surrounding peaks and ridges; and when after a steep descent of some 300 feet I arrived at its edge, I found that the level bottom, fully two miles long from north to south, was completely clear of water. The fine sand covering the bottom showed plainly that the basin must at times still be under water, and a track leading well above the flat ground along the steep slope westwards confirmed this assumption. At the time of the snow's first melting a shallow sheet of water was said to extend where now we crossed dry-shod.

Just where the bottom of the basin began to show a gentle slope rising towards the main range, our track turned south-east to the first of the lateral passes by which we were to cross the high side spurs projecting from the main Richthofen range. The ascent to the Chio-po-chia Pass, about 12,600 feet above sea, led over rich mountain meadows and was easy enough. But from its narrow ridge, defended by a small ruined fort with a double rampart of rough stones and clay, we looked down into a deep-cut valley which with its many precipitous rock coulisses vividly recalled the trying Karanghu-tagh gorges south of Khotan. I was glad that the rough serpentine track which led down most abruptly had not to be negotiated by our baggage animals in the reverse direction. But even here, where erosion had exposed so much of the rock frame of the mountains, abundance of flowers delighted the eye. Edelweiss, gentians, and a host of Alpine flowers which, alas! I had never learned to name, covered the slopes of detritus. Wild rhubarb, for which the Nan-shan was famous in Marco Polo's days, spread its huge fleshy leaves everywhere.

The formation of the gorge, side ravines, and spurs was curiously alike to that seen so often in the poor desiccated Kun-lun ranges. Yet what a contrast there was in vegetation, colours, and true Alpine sensations! After three miles of a much-twisted course, the gorge suddenly debouched into a valley running parallel to that of Chin-fo-ssü, but quite impracticable in its lower part. A rapid