

washers and small channels dug to carry the needful water, Of the gold-washers' hovels nothing remained but small shapeless lines of rubble; there was nothing to determine how long they had been deserted.

As we moved south towards the watershed between the Hong-shui-pa Ho and the Kan-chou River, the ground became more and more boggy. The snow had melted here but recently, and evidently the soil was unable to absorb all this moisture. At last, as it was getting dark, we arrived at the miners' camp known as Ta-pen-ko, at an elevation of over 13,400 feet. The pits, no longer worked, had been cut into the edge of the watershed. In their midst stood two hovels built of boulders and cut turf, giving shelter to some twenty men working pits lower down to the south. They were hardy Tungans from the Hsi-ning side, whom a more venturesome disposition made brave the rigours of this terribly exposed upland (Fig. 234). Our twenty odd Chinese quickly huddled up with them. The ground along the ridge was so spongy and peat-like that it took time before a spot sufficiently firm and dry could be found for my tent. A bitterly cold south-west wind had followed the shower of sleet, and my Turkestan followers were not without reason venting their feelings against the perversity of those 'heathen Khitais' who had brought us out of our way to this bleak spot.