

CHAPTER LXXVIII

ACROSS THE TO-LAI-SHAN RANGE

NEXT morning, August 5th, a heavy white fog hid the whole of plateau and mountains until 7 A.M. But when the sun broke through, the vistas were inspiring. Near by the eye was refreshed by the sight of young flowers, among them many edelweiss, just appearing amongst the scanty tufts of grass and moss. The men needed the forenoon to dry their clothes in the sun and to cook their food for which fuel had been lacking in the evening, and I used these hours of brilliantly clear sky to ascend to a dominating point of the watershed, about 14,000 feet high. From there I secured a complete panorama of this strange amalgam of high ranges, bright red downs, and boggy uplands (Fig. 235).

When I returned to camp I found everybody, Surveyor and Chiang included, eager to turn their back upon this bleak spot. The miners' little stock of dry dung and other substitutes for fuel had given out completely. Of course, I had to pay for it handsomely. The Surveyor took the chance of investing a loan of twenty Taels, a little over three pounds, which he had asked from me, in gold dust purchased from the miners. The rate of exchange, 25 ounces of silver to one ounce of gold, seemed to him to promise a fair margin of profit on taking the gold to India. The question as to the purity of the gold was the speculative element in the transaction.

I had determined that for survey purposes we should follow the plateau separating the Richthofen and To-lai-shan ranges as far to the north-west as possible, and then make our way over the latter. Accordingly we marched