

down the Hung-shui-pa Ho to the debouchure of a side valley which drains the small glaciers of some To-lai-shan peaks. Here at an elevation of close on 12,900 feet scanty scrub could be collected for fuel, and a few wooden poles discovered in a deserted miner's hut made a very welcome addition. The spot, known as Hsiao-lung-k'ou, was apparently the lowest in the basin where gold had been washed from the detritus.

The evening brought drizzling rain, and during the night it poured so heavily that next morning, the clouds still hanging low and rain continuing at intervals, a start became impossible. I used the enforced halt for writing work and Chinese study. That day our little escort departed, having been relieved by a fresh batch of men sent from another post at the foot of the mountains. I could see no purpose in this relief by men who had practically started at the same time as ourselves, and who apparently had not even been warned of the length of time likely to be taken by my journey. But, as I had not asked for their services, the adequacy or otherwise of their food-supply would be their own look-out.

Next morning the heavy rain-clouds had drifted eastwards, and, the sun breaking through at last, we resumed our march westwards to the watershed of the Pei-ta Ho drainage. For about four miles we followed the Hung-shui-pa River, with its brick-red waters now considerably swollen, down to the point where, turning north, it disappears in a gorge quite impassable at this season. All along its course on flat ground deserted gold-pits abounded. Then we ascended for some six miles over grass-covered alluvial fans of streams draining large snowbeds of the To-lai-shan, and over undulating ridges, until we reached the Chu-lung-kuan pass, at an elevation of about 13,600 feet (Fig. 236). It commanded a very extensive view westwards, as far as a fine massif of snowy peaks we had seen weeks before from the Tu-ta-fan. Its highest point rose to over 19,000 feet.

On our left the To-lai-shan range showed little snow for some ten or twelve miles, but beyond rose again in a beautiful ice-clad ridge close to where the Pei-ta Ho