

Here at last the ground became safe for the animals. It was a terribly bleak nook of the mountains, closed in by rugged rock ridges. But the wild yaks evidently fancied it for its height and seclusion; for their droppings thickly covered the ground up to the narrow crest at which the gorge ended south-eastwards. From here a view opened eastwards into a maze of bare gorges, with rock slopes of deep red and yellow. The watershed was only reached after half a mile more of steady ascent along the narrow arête just mentioned. The pass proved a much-confined saddle, close on 15,000 feet high, cut into a line of serrated ridges remarkably steep. The crest-line of the range was here visibly lower than to the east, where it was formed by a chain of broad peaks clad with small glaciers. The ridges on either side of the pass showed but little permanent snow, and that only in shaded ravines northward. Yet, owing to the peculiar ruggedness of the rock faces produced by the withering forces of Alpine nature, the ground was far more difficult than we should have found it near one or other of the passes eastwards.

For the sake of getting a more commanding survey station, Ram Singh and myself climbed the crest of the watershed to the north-west over a staircase of huge fissured rocks (Fig. 237). On reaching the nearest pinnacle at a height of close on 15,500 feet a glorious panorama rewarded us (Plate x.). The whole of the Richthofen range lay before us from the high needle-like peaks beyond the Pei-ta Ho to the great snowy domes first seen east of the Chiang-tzŭ-k'ou Pass. Due north there revealed itself a big massif -girt with imposing glaciers, a buttress as it were of the range on its south side. Of the To-lai-shan Range, on which we stood, the neighbouring rocky ridges hid all but one snowy peak.

But of the next parallel mountain rampart southward, which its first Russian visitors, Obrucheff and Kozloff, have named the range of Alexander III., we enjoyed a vista extending probably over more than forty miles. Most of its peaks bore large snow-beds. To the south-east rose a grand array of glacier-clad mountains, more