

lay here fully 700 feet higher than on the north side, and at 13,500 feet or so its growth was richer than at the lowest point touched by us in the Chu-lung-kuan Valley. The striking difference was manifestly due to greater abundance of moisture. For the same reason denudation and erosion of the slopes was far less advanced here than at corresponding heights north of the watershed. The same observation was repeated on our subsequent crossings of these Nan-shan ranges. It formed a complete contrast to the surface conditions with which I was familiar from the Hindukush and the Kashmir Himalaya. There invariably the northern slope is clothed in richer vegetation, the southern one being left relatively bare and consequently more exposed to erosion. Two hours' brisk walking brought us down close to where the narrow valley debouches into the down-like expanse of the upper Pei-ta Ho basin. The track was so faint that its use must have been rare for many years past.

There was luxuriant pasture and plentiful scrub where we halted near the debouchure of the little valley, about 12,000 feet above sea. Beasts and men, too, deserved a good rest after the trying pass. But soon after midnight a violent gale blew, and in the morning I found about an inch of snow on the ground. The minimum temperature had fallen to six degrees Fahrenheit below freezing-point. But the sun shone out brightly, and my eyes wandered with pleasure over the gently sloping basin ten to twelve miles broad, drained by the Pei-ta Ho (Fig. 238), which we were to cross that day from north to south. It promised an easy march, just such as our comfort-loving Chinese would appreciate; but human factors had decreed it otherwise.

We had just emerged from our little valley into the great Pamir-like plain beyond, when I noticed that our baggage train, instead of following us to where we intended to cross the Pei-ta Ho, was moving away at an unwontedly brisk pace by a track to the south-east. This was roughly the direction of the Kan-chou river's headwaters, and it was easy to guess that our pony-men would have liked us to turn there straight away. But my own plan was first to cross the range of Alexander III. and