

them. Its meat provided a much-needed feast for all our Chinese party. So, in spite of drizzling rain which continued all the afternoon and evening, there was cheerfulness about the camp which we pitched on a thyme-scented flat by the left river bank.

We were now on a well-marked track which people from the Hsi-ning side used in going to the gold-pits which we had seen about Ta-pen-ko. But I knew that we could not possibly expect to find a passage right down the valley to Kan-chou, owing to the confined nature of the river gorge lower down. So I was eagerly scanning the crest of the Richthofen Range rising above us for the pass over which the route, first followed from Kan-chou by the Brothers Grishmailo, and marked on the small-scale Russian Trans-frontier map, was likely to cross the range. A low ridge we had sighted from our camp suggested its approximate position on the watershed, and when after proceeding four miles down the river we found a narrow track branching off towards it, I did not hesitate to ascend it.

We found that the pass, for which subsequent enquiry among Mongols elicited the name of Shen-ling-tzŭ, led at a height of close on 14,000 feet over the bog-covered shoulder of a broad peak still partly covered with snow. In spite of the low hanging clouds, there was a magnificent view to the south and west extending over some fifty miles of the Kan-chou River valley and the long snowy rampart of the To-lai-shan beyond (Fig. 245). With a violent wind sweeping the pass I just managed to bring away a photographic panorama before the rain came down. Over bare detritus slopes we followed the incipient stream down for some five miles, and then, seeing it disappear in a gorge amidst very bold rocky peaks to the north, were warned to look out for the track which turned off eastwards.

There we crossed a broad bog-covered saddle of the type with which we had grown familiar, and enjoyed from it a glorious vista over a succession of lofty side spurs of the Richthofen Range, one rising above the other. The sky had completely cleared when we descended into a verdant flower-carpeted valley which recalled scenery of the true Alps more than any I had seen since Kashmir