

(Fig. 246). The Chinese seemed now assured that they were near their eagerly-prayed-for 'ta-lu,' or 'big road,' and had still morsels of their wild ass to fall back upon. We had no fodder left for the ponies, but on such splendid pasture they could well make shift without it.

The promise of this refreshing camp was more than fulfilled by the next day's march. There was serious trouble at first with our half-mutinous pony-men when, at a parting of the now well marked track, I insisted upon taking the route leading up a precipitous ridge which held out hope for, and actually gave us, a commanding 'station' for survey work. But there was reward in the impressive panorama we secured over the succession of rugged side spurs projecting northward from the main range, now behind us, and the deep-cut green valleys between them. Then, as we descended the valley leading south-east over alluvial terraces clothed in rich Alpine vegetation, Tila Bai's sharp eyes were the first to discern ponies grazing lower down in the valley. Some miles farther on, to our Chinamen's intense relief, we lighted upon a small camp of Mongols grazing yaks, cattle, and ponies on a delightful Alp (Fig. 248).

The aged Mongol couple we met there were the first human beings seen since we had left the gold-miners' camp nearly three weeks earlier. It was pleasant now to be assured of guidance, and to know that the worst of their fears and tribulations were lifted from our 'senile babies.' But what I greeted with even greater joy was the sight of the luxuriant forest of firs which clothed the slopes of the valley facing north. Not since leaving the Lowarai Pass had I seen real tree growth in the mountains, and now I could fancy myself again in Kashmir. That day we marched down the Khazan-gol Valley for a good distance amidst equally lovely scenery, and halted near other Mongol encampments which supplied sheep and that long-missed luxury, milk (Fig. 249).

We had by no means yet finished with the mountains, and the succeeding marches gave plentiful opportunities for interesting observations as well as for trials of endurance for men and beasts. But considerations of space