

by some furious barks; but nobody gave heed to his warning until next morning we came upon the huge footprints of the beast, which could be traced for over six miles along the caravan track from the Tarim.

We crossed the latter by a shepherds' ferry on the evening of April 27th, and after a heavy thunderstorm during the night were regaled next morning by a glorious vision of the big snowy range far away to the north of Ak-su. A huge ice-clad massif towering above the rest was, on the strength of the Russian map, identified by us as Khan-tengri, the highest known peak of the T'ien-shan, some hundred and thirty miles away in a straight line. It was a most refreshing welcome from the great 'Mountains of Heaven'; but within a few hours it vanished for good in the dust haze.

During the three long marches which carried us to the 'New Town' of Ak-su, I had ample opportunities for studying the striking contrast between the abundance of water available for irrigation in the big snow-fed river of Ak-su and the scanty and careless cultivation carried on in the narrow village belt along it. Here the undeveloped condition of what might become a series of flourishing oases had manifestly nothing to do with inadequate water. The difference between Khotan and Ak-su was brought home to me also by the strong 'Tartar' look and the churlish ways of the people (Fig. 300). A strong infusion of Kirghiz blood was subsequently proved by my anthropometrical observations.

At the district headquarters of Ak-su I found an excellent camping-place in the shady garden attached to a Beg's suburban mansion (Fig. 299), and next day had the great joy of greeting again my old Mandarin friend, P'an Ta-jên, the Tao-t'ai (Fig. 301). He looked as hale and was as kindly and simple in manners as when I last saw him at Khotan seven years before, and his scholarly interest in all my explorations remained unabated. The dignified but peaceful post at Ak-su just suited his learned habits and serenely disinterested ways. For him there was no chance of becoming a Nabob in any administrative charge, and I often wondered inwardly how a man of his honesty and