

Climate of Central Nan-shan. than that of the Western Nan-shan or of the K'un-lun. It indicates the vicinity of the Pacific drainage area which extends to the adjoining parts of Kan-su and of the north-eastern uplands of Tibet. Abundant vegetation clothes the valleys from the westernmost limits of the Pei-ta-ho or Su-chou river's drainage<sup>1</sup> and makes the big open troughs at the headwaters excellent summer grazing grounds, notwithstanding their great elevation, above 11,000 feet, and Pāmīr-like appearance. Further to the south-east increasing snow and rainfall permits of plentiful forest growth in the valleys of the Richthofen Range draining into the Kan-chou river.<sup>2</sup>

Cultivated area N. of Nan-shan. Along the northern foot of this range at an elevation of about 5,000—6,000 feet, stretches a broad belt of fertile alluvial fans, separated in places by scrub-covered table-lands.<sup>3</sup> Its northern limit is formed by the barren hill-chain overlooking the middle course of the rivers of Kan-chou and Su-chou, and belonging to the Ala-shan system of southernmost Mongolia. Over great parts of this second region, cultivation is assured by abundant irrigation from the rivers and also by the fact that from about the longitude of Kan-chou city eastwards, climatic conditions along the fertile foot of the Nan-shan permit of cultivation dependent on snow and rainfall only. Hence we find in this region not only large and populous oases occupying the alluvial fans of the Su-chou and Kan-chou rivers, but also an almost continuous chain of smaller village tracts skirting the foot of the mountains beyond those fans.

Passage through N.W. marches of Kan-su. The physical features here briefly indicated have made this region historically a very important 'land of passage' between China and Central Asia. For the Chinese its possession was indispensable in economic and military respects ever since their policy of Central-Asian expansion more than two thousand years ago first opened the route through the north-western marches of Kan-su and along the Su-lo-ho into the Tārīm basin. But before their advent and during the periods when their control of the route ceased, the abundant winter grazing which parts of this region afford, made it also for centuries a goal of conquest for a succession of nomadic nations.<sup>4</sup>

Cultivated areas on Etsin-gol. A region of very different character stretches from the barren hill-range north of the chain of oases down to the terminal basin of the Etsin-gol. We find there, indeed, two narrow strips of cultivation, those of Chin-t'a and Mao-mei, lying beyond the gorges in which the rivers of Su-chou and Kan-chou, respectively, have cut their way through that range.<sup>5</sup> But apart from them the whole of this region consists of desert ground, affording now but limited grazing in the delta which the Etsin-gol forms from a point about 60 miles below the lower end of Mao-mei cultivation.<sup>6</sup> Amidst the almost waterless valleys and plateaus which adjoin the Etsin-gol on the east and west, even camel grazing is scanty and confined to rare patches of ground.

Etsin-gol valley as highway. Nevertheless, the Etsin-gol valley has always possessed considerable importance as a highway for nomadic migration and trade from Mongolia into north-western China. It resembles in this respect the territory of ancient Lou-lan, now completely abandoned to the desert, and this affinity is curiously illustrated also by the evidence of desiccation within historical times which the Etsin-gol delta and its mediæval remains afford.<sup>7</sup> The fact that the river loses itself in two separate lake-beds (Sheet No. 44. C. 4) is also of interest with regard to the observations made above concerning the simultaneous existence in earlier periods of two terminal basins of the Su-lo-ho, and concerning that of the Lou-lan delta by the side of the Kara-koshun.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Near the T'u-ta-fan, Sheet No. 41. D. 1.

<sup>2</sup> See Sheets Nos. 43. D. 3, 4; 46. A. 3, 4, B. 4, C, D. 4, 5.

<sup>3</sup> See Sheets Nos. 43 A-D. 1, 2; 46. A. 2, B. 2, 3, C. 3, 4.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Serindia*. ii. pp. 113 sq. Such grazing is to be found in plenty along the lower courses of all rivers that drain the northern slopes of, or pass through, the Richthofen range. It is not altogether

absent even in the tracts of drift-land and to be met with between them; see Sheet No. 42. C, D. 1, 2.

<sup>5</sup> See Sheet No. 42. B-D. 4.

<sup>6</sup> See Sheet No. 45. B. 2.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *Third Journey*, *Geogr. Journal*, xlviii. pp. 197 sq. For the site of Khara-khoto, Marco Polo's 'City of Etzina', see Sheet No. 45. C, D. 1.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. above pp. 31 sq., 47.