

pseudo-acacias. "In spring and summer," says Malte Brun, "when there is no rain, the vegetables wither, and the burnt soil inspires the traveller with sentiments of horror and melancholy ; the heat there is of short duration, the winter long and cold. The wild animals met with are the camel, the horse, the ass, the *djightai*, and troops of antelopes."

The southern region, extending almost to the Great Wall of China, no longer deserves the name of "desert," in the sense which we attribute to that word. The soil is fertile ; it abounds in pasturage, and supports myriads of herds, under the superintendence of millions of Chinese and Mongol shepherds, who call it the "land of grasses." The country is watered by numerous streams, and covered with forests, where walnut trees flourish, elms, aspens, and hazels. All the cereals do well, and a great number of vegetables and fruits ; so that many of the Chinese and Mongols devote themselves wholly to the cultivation of their gardens.

The great Asiatic Desert has exercised a fatal influence on the destinies of the human race ; it has arrested the extension of Shemitic civilization. The primitive peoples of India and Tibet were early civilized ; but the immense wilderness which separated them put an impassable barrier between them and the barbarous tribes of northern Asia. More than the Himalaya, more than the snow-crowned mountains of Sirinagur and Gorkha, these unknown and desert steppes have prevented all communication, all fusion between the inhabitants of the north and those of the south of Asia ; and it is thus that India and Tibet have remained the only regions of this part of the world which have enjoyed the benefits of civilization, of the refinement of manners, and the genius of the arts.

The barbarians who, towards the last agony of the Roman Empire, invaded and convulsed Europe, issued from the steppes and table-lands of Mongolia. It is to this fact Humboldt refers in the following paragraph :—*

"If intellectual culture has directed its course from the east to the west, like the vivifying light of the sun, barbarism at a later period followed the same route, when it threatened to plunge Europe again in darkness. A tawny race of shepherds, of *thon-khiu*—that is to say, Turkish origin—the Hioungnou, inhabited under sheep-skin tents the elevated table-land of Gobi. Long formidable to the Chinese power, a portion of the Hioungnou were driven south in Central Asia. The impulse thus given uninterruptedly propagated itself to the primitive country of the Fins, on the banks of the Oural, whence irrupted a torrent of Huns, Avars, Chasars, and divers mixtures of Asiatic races. The armies of the Huns first appeared on the banks of the Volga, then in Pannonia, finally on the borders of the Marne and of the Po, ravaging the beautiful plains where, from the time of Antenor, the genius of man had accumulated monuments upon monuments. Thus blew from the Mongolian deserts a pestilential wind which blighted even in the Cisalpine plains the delicate flower of Art, the object of cares so tender and so constant."

* Humboldt, "Tableaux de la Nature," i. 8.