

A SURVEY OF TIBET.

THE EARTH'S HIGHEST POINT.

At a meeting of the Royal Geographical Society last night, much interest was evinced in a paper by Major C. H. D. Ryder, R.E., describing the results of some important explorations and surveys in connection with the Tibet Mission.

Major Ryder's account of the journey from Gyangtse (on the route to Lhasa) along the upper waters of the Bramaputra to Simla, by way of Gartok, supplements Sir F. Young's husband's paper, published in the Society's journal for this month, and proves that the geographical results were not less important than the political. His work may be grouped under three heads: the district around the Kangri La, a high pass on the watershed of the Himalays, almost due north of Darjeeling, crossed by the Mission on its first advance into Tibet; the route to Lhasa by the parallel pass of the Tang La, farther east, including halts at Gyangtse and at the forbidden city itself; and, lastly, the journey from the former town up the Bramaputra (here called the Tsang-po) to its source, with the return across the Himalayas, through the lake region, to Gartok and Simla. This third stage incidentally proves the political value of the Mission to Lhasa.

Major Ryder's small party (the other European members were Captains Rawling and Wood with Lieutenant Bailey), starting almost immediately after the conclusion of the treaty, made their way for between two and three hundred miles by the wild mountain region bordering the Bramaputra up to its source, and then through the south-western corner of Tibet to British territory, thus ending a journey of the highest geographical interest.

All the work in Tibet was done at a great elevation; surveys were made, even battles fought, at heights corresponding with the summits of the Bernese Oberland; passes were crossed, both by the survey parties and troops in the march, which rose above the summit of Mont Blanc, and the former were frequently employed at heights of seventeen or eighteen thousand feet. Their nearest approach to sea level, after entering the highest valleys of Sikkim till they approached Simla, was in crossing the Bramaputra, and they were still 11,500 feet, or higher than the Col du Geant, above it. The scenery of these mountain uplands, to judge from Major Ryder's photographs, is generally wild and desolate; though points of vantage, like some of the higher passes, often command fine views of the grand, snowy peaks of the Central Himalayas. One important result of this survey has been the settlement of a very interesting point in the mountain geography of this region. For several years doubts have been freely expressed whether Mount Everest was really the highest summit in this chain, or, in other words, the highest on the face of the earth. From points on the south two snow peaks have been observed behind it, which, though, apparently, lower, might very well, owing to their greater distance, be the higher. Major Ryder's party, while working about the passes into Tibet proper, and follow-

of the earth, from points on the south two snow peaks have been observed behind it, which, though, apparently, lower, might very well, owing to their greater distance, be the higher. Major Ryder's party, while working about the passes into Tibet proper, and following up the Bramaputra, obtained excellent views of all this part of the chain, and are certain that Everest stands alone in unquestioned supremacy, neither of its supposed rivals approaching within seven thousand feet of its summit. The net results of the work prior to the departure up the Bramaputra were the triangulation of an area of 45,000 square miles, connecting Lhasa with India, and the survey, on a scale partly of four, partly of two, miles to the inch, of the more important district from the Chumbi valley to that city, besides some details, far from trivial in value.

The second stage of the journey took them through a region, much of which was known only from native reports. They first passed through a fertile district, like that on the way to Lhasa, for this part of Tibet enjoys a fair rainfall, and at Shigatse they had an interesting and cordial interview with the Tashi Lama, a dignitary hardly inferior to the Dalai Lama of Lhasa. But as they ascended the great river valley it became more barren; the hamlets smaller and more scattered; trees gave place to brushwood at about 15,000 feet; partridges and sand grouse were plentiful, but four-footed game scarce. The grain ceased to be cultivated, and at last nothing but sparse herbage remained. The cold was severe, as might be expected in November. The valley was still generally broad, and the scenery monotonous, except when they reached positions commanding the central chain. Innumerable streams combine to form the Tsang-po, and the pass by which they left Bramaputra drainage was 16,900 feet above sea level. That led them down to the lake region of South-western Tibet, which, during the last few years, has been more than once visited by European travellers. The Mansarowar, the largest sheet of water, is 14,900 feet above sea level, and a place of pilgrimage; and, as the whole system is disconnected from the Sutlej, its sources must be further west. Though some fine snow peaks are to be seen, an easy pass, not more than 16,200 feet high, leads into the Indus Valley, by which some of the party, after a descent of little more than a thousand feet, reached Gartok, the summer residence of the two governors of Western Tibet, but a dreary place in winter. They ultimately reached British territory by some high passes, having surveyed with the plane-table an area of about 40,000 square miles, including the Tsang-po from Shigatse to its source, the Mansarowar lake region, the source of the Gartok branch of the Indus, and the Sutlej River above its entry into British territory.