

acted as mediators between the far east and the Mediterranean. However, the case of alfalfa presents a different problem. The Chinese, who cultivate alfalfa to a great extent, do not claim it as an element of their agriculture, but have a circumstantial tradition as to when and how it was received by them from Iranian quarters in the second century B.C. As any antiquity for this plant is lacking in India or any other Asiatic country, the verdict as to the centre of its primeval cultivation is decidedly in favor of Iran. The contribution which the Chinese have to make to the history of *Medicago* is of fundamental importance and sheds new light on the whole subject: in fact, the history of no cultivated plant is so well authenticated and so solidly founded.

In the inscription of Persepolis, King Darius says, "This land Persia which Auramazda has bestowed on me, being beautiful, populous, and abundant in horses — according to the will of Auramazda and my own, King Darius — it does not tremble before any enemy." I have alluded in the introduction to the results of General Čan K'ien's memorable expedition to Central Asia. The desire to possess the fine Iranian thoroughbreds, more massively built than the small Mongolian horse, and distinguished by their noble proportions and slenderness of feet as well as by the development of chest, neck, and croup, was one of the strongest motives for the Emperor Wu (140-87 B.C.) to maintain regular missions to Iranian countries, which led to a regular caravan trade with Fergana and Parthia. Even more than ten such missions were dispatched in the course of a year, the minimum being five or six. At first, this superior breed of horse was obtained from the Wu-sun, but then it was found by Čan K'ien that the breed of Fergana was far superior. These horses were called "blood-sweating" (*han-hüe* 汗血),<sup>1</sup> and were believed to be the offspring of a heavenly horse (*t'ien ma* 天馬). The favorite fodder of this noble breed consisted in *Medicago sativa*; and it was a sound conclusion of General Čan K'ien, who was a practical man and possessed of good judgment in economic matters, that, if these much-coveted horses were to continue to thrive on Chinese soil, their staple food had to go along with them. Thus he obtained the seeds of alfalfa in Fergana,<sup>2</sup> and presented them in 126 B.C. to his imperial master, who had wide tracts of land near his palaces covered

<sup>1</sup> This name doubtless represents the echo of some Iranian mythical concept, but I have not yet succeeded in tracing it in Iranian mythology.

<sup>2</sup> In Fergana as well as in the remainder of Russian Turkistan *Medicago sativa* is still propagated on an immense scale, and represents the only forage-plant of that country, without which any economy would be impossible, for pasture-land and hay are lacking. Alfalfa yields four or five harvests there a year, and is used for the feeding of cattle either in the fresh or dry state. In the mountains it is cultivated up to an elevation of five thousand feet; wild or as an escape from cultivation it reaches