

year to succour I-wu marched to the P'u-lei lake. But the evasive chief had retreated, and the Chinese retired without having achieved any success.²⁵ This is one of the last events relating to the 'Western kingdoms' that the Later Han Annals record, and with the steady decay of Chinese influence beyond the frontiers that accompanied the internal disintegration of the Empire during the closing reigns of the Later Han dynasty, our sources of information about the territories along the T'ien-shan dry up for centuries.

Turkish
tribes in
possession
of Hāmi.

It is probable enough that the valleys on the northern slopes of the T'ien-shan offering attractive grazing grounds continued during the succeeding centuries to be haunted by tribes of the Hsiung-nu or Huns, and subsequently, after these had moved westwards, by the Juan-juan or by Turkish tribes like the Tölös subject to the latter. But it is not until the beginning of the seventh century that, owing to the relations which China had resumed with Central Asia under the Sui emperors, and which the 'forward policy' of the founder of the T'ang dynasty and his successors was soon to develop, some light is again thrown upon the conditions prevailing in this region by the Chinese records accessible to me. The Tölös or *T'ieh-lo* 鐵勒 of the Chinese, later famous under the name of Uighur, after their victory over the Kagan of the Western Turks in A. D. 605, are said to have become masters of I-wu or Hāmi as well as of Kao-ch'ang (Turfān) and Yen-ch'i (Kara-shahr).²⁶ The chief of I-wu, who about A. D. 608 made his submission to the Sui Emperor, is designated by a Turkish title, and it is probable that he belonged to a tribe established in the T'ien-shan valleys to the north.²⁷ I-wu subsequently passed again under the domination of the Western Turks, and Chinese control was not definitely established there until A. D. 630. It is significant, in view of the political interdependence which, as explained above, geographical conditions create between the Hāmi oasis and the valleys adjoining it north of the T'ien-shan, that this natural base for the T'ang conquest of the 'Western Kingdoms' was not finally secured until the Chinese had in A. D. 630 won their decisive victory over the sovereign chief of the Northern Turks.²⁸

Inscription
recording
expedition
against
Turfān,
A. D. 640.

An attack which Ch'ü Wên-t'ai, king of Kao-ch'ang or Turfān, and the Kagan of the Western Turks directed some years later against Hāmi was followed by a great Chinese expedition in A. D. 640, which led to the conquest of Turfān and, in its ultimate effects, to the firm establishment of Chinese supremacy over the territories occupied by the Western Turks. To this expedition we owe an interesting epigraph set up in the same year on the top of the Barkul pass and still to be found there. This long inscription, which is engraved on a stēlē and has been edited and translated by M. Chavannes from an impression secured by M. Bonin, commemorates the exploit of the general Chiang Hsing-pên 姜行本 commanding one of the three armies sent by the Emperor T'ai-tsung for the subjection of Turfān. In the fifth month of the Chinese year corresponding to A. D. 640, he took his troops to the top of Mount *Shih-lo-man* 時羅漫; thence ascending to *Hei-kan-so* 'they cut down the trees until the forests of the mountains were exhausted' and within a month constructed siege machines such as ballistae and other engines of war with which to meet the task awaiting the 'army of Kao-ch'ang'. Neither the redundant rhetorics of the praise bestowed upon the commander and his valiant troops, nor the poetical eulogy with which the inscription closes, furnish local data.²⁹ But there can be no doubt that the force moved to the pass and thence to the heights of *Hei-kan-so* 黑紺所 because, then as now, no forest furnishing an adequate supply of

²⁵ See Chavannes, *T'oung-pao*, 1907, p. 214.

²⁶ See Chavannes, *Turcs occid.*, p. 89, note 3.

²⁷ See *ibid.*, p. 169, note 8. ²⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 170.

²⁹ The greatness of the physical difficulties which the march of the large Chinese forces across the Pei-shan desert must have involved is, however, reflected in the third strophe

of the poem. Its words in M. Chavannes's rendering: 'Les nuages de la frontière s'accumulaient de manière à troubler la vue;—le vent des barbares faisait l'obscurité en plein jour', clearly allude to the formidable sand-storms which are frequently encountered during spring and summer by those crossing the desert south of Hāmi.