

situation, near the eastern extremity of a belt of fertile oases stretching along the foot of the Bogdola massif, makes it the convenient starting-point for a series of important trade routes into Mongolia, as well as towards south-western Siberia and the westernmost marches of true China. At the same time Guchen is assured easy access, through Urumchi, the present capital of the New Dominion, to the great fertile valley of Ili in the west and also, via the Turfān depression, to the high road connecting the chief oases of the Tārīm basin. Without reference to Chinese texts I am unable to determine whence the name *Ku-ch'êng-tzŭ* 古城子, meaning the 'ancient town', is derived. A ruined town site north of Guchen was mentioned to me by Li Ta-lao-yeh as attributed to T'ang times. But I regret not to have been able to visit it or to secure local information about it.

Commercial
importance
of Guchen.

During my two days' stay at Guchen, I noticed evidence in many directions of the importance it enjoyed as a commercial emporium. The hospitable reception that Sir George Macartney's kind recommendation had assured me under the roof of a rich Kāshgarī trader allowed me to observe, by many unmistakable signs, the great influence which Russian trade, carried mainly from Semipalatinsk and the Trans-Siberian Railway, has exercised all through the western towns of Dzungaria. The presence of parties of Mongols at the Ya-mêns of Guchen showed that the declaration of 'Independent Mongolia' had by no means interrupted the relations of old standing which geography has established between the nomadic populations of the Altai and the oases on both sides of the T'ien-shan.

Close inter-
course with
Turfān.

Still more was I interested to remark evidence of that close intercourse with the Turfān basin which is suggested by all the historical data in our possession. Large numbers of Turfān people were to be met with in the Bāzārs, mostly labourers preparing to return home after the summer's work north of the mountains. The others were traders; these bring chiefly cotton and fruit, produce which the warm climate of Turfān favours and which are lacking in the colder regions of the north. They carry back flour, sheep, felts and the like, which the Guchen tract either produces in plenty or else receives from its nomadic neighbours. The abundance of Turfān fruit displayed on all sides afforded ocular proof that the high range to the south, in spite of its snowy crest and its ruggedness, formed no effective barrier between the two territories that the Chinese significantly designated as those of the 'Anterior and Posterior kings of Chū-shih'.

SECTION II.—THE SITE OF PEI-T'ING AND THE POSTERIOR COURT OF CHÜ-SHIH

Reasons for
turning to
Turfān.

Many as were the points of geographical interest that this region along the northern foot of the snowy range seemed to offer, two practical considerations of importance rendered it necessary for me to limit my stay there and to turn south to Turfān before long. The Turfān basin was to serve as our main base for the work of the autumn and winter. The programme I had planned for Lāl Singh comprised extensive surveys, including triangulation, in the desert region of the Kuruk-tāgh. The conditions there prevailing necessarily limited operations over a great portion of that area to the few months during which the salt springs were frozen and water could be carried in the form of ice. It was essential for me to make timely arrangements at Turfān by which Lāl Singh might start as soon as possible on the task, to which he looked forward with eagerness. I myself wished to reach Turfān by travelling direct across the mountains due south, and thus to pass through a portion of the main T'ien-shan range that had never been surveyed.

Mountain
route to
Turfān.

My desire to follow the direct line connecting Guchen with Turfān town had been greatly increased when I discovered, in the course of discussions on antiquarian subjects with learned Li Ta-lao-yeh of Barkul, that a much-frequented mountain route between the two places, that

