

PREFACE

THIS book is meant to present a succinct account of the explorations, antiquarian and geographical, which I had the good fortune to carry out in Chinese Turkistan and adjacent parts of innermost Asia. The years spent on hard travel in those little-known regions, difficult of access and trying in their physical features, remain among the happiest memories of my life. But more strenuous still and longer were the years needed for the elaboration of the abundant scientific results which my three Central-Asian expeditions had yielded.

By the publication of personal narratives on the first two journeys and of eleven heavy quarto volumes of detailed reports on all three (see p. xii) I may well believe my duty done in the matter of record. But with the exception of *Ruins of Desert Cathay*, containing a full account of the personal experiences on my second expedition (1906-8), all the above publications have long ago passed out of print and are now difficult to secure.

Since the last of those labours were disposed of, fully twenty-seven years after my return from the first journey, I have been free to turn to new fields of archaeological exploration farther south. But my recollections of those fruitful years spent in the deserts and mountains of inner-