

CHAPTER II

CHINESE EXPANSION INTO CENTRAL ASIA AND THE CONTACT OF CIVILIZATIONS

WITH the passage land north of the Nan-shan to which the preceding chapter has brought us, we have completed our survey of the vast region which for close on a thousand years served as the principal scene for that important historical process, the early interpenetration of Far Eastern, Indian and Western civilizations. It is from this side of the area surveyed that we may start the rapid review of the chief phases in the political history of the whole region which is needed for the proper appreciation of that great process. Fortunately we can gather our knowledge of the earliest of these phases from a very reliable and precise source, the Chinese dynastic Annals.

Efforts continued for centuries to protect the Empire from those ever threatening neighbours, the Huns, on the side of Mongolia, led to the conquest, under the great Emperor Wu-ti (140-87 B.C.) of the Han dynasty, of the northern slopes of the Nan-shan. The story may be said to start with the adventurous Central-Asian mission of Chang Ch'ien. About 138 B.C. the Emperor Wu-ti dispatched that young officer to the tribe of the Great Yüeh-chih who later became the Indo-Scythian rulers of north-western India. The object