

internal consolidation which the reign of this capable and energetic monarch assured, singularly favoured expansion.

The avowed aim of this policy at the outset was to open the road leading through the Tarim basin to the large territories in the Oxus region. The hold of the Huns on the northern slopes of the Nan-shan blocked access to this, Nature's true highway from China to the settled lands of Western Asia. So it was against them that the Chinese effort was turned. And here the fortune of war soon rewarded the Emperor Wu-ti's persistent endeavours. After a series of successful campaigns the territories which correspond to the present Liang-chou and Kan-chou were in 121 B.C. freed from Hun domination. Then the Huns were finally forced to retreat to the north of the desert, and by 115 B.C. control of the newly secured border was united in the command of Chiu-chuan or Su-chou.

This military advance along the great highway towards Central Asia was accompanied by a rapid organization of Chinese political missions to the different states both within the Tarim basin and beyond, even as far as Bactria and Persia. These were meant to impress the states with the power of China and its industrial wealth. There can be no doubt that among the Chinese industrial products carried by these missions there prominently figured those fine silk stuffs which then began to reach the Mediterranean through Parthia and Syria, and soon carried the fame of the 'silk-weaving Seres', *i.e.* the Chinese, to the great centres of Greek and Roman civilization. It is easy to realize the economic importance of this silk trade for China, since for centuries the production of silk remained its jealously guarded monopoly.