

than upon the scattered and comparatively small oases of the Tarim basin. But the distances separating these western territories of Central Asia from China were great. Relying upon the protection thus afforded, the people of Farghana after a time treated the Chinese missions with scant regard. In the end they robbed and killed some imperial envoys who had been sent to secure a far-famed local breed of horses for their master.

Chinese prestige required prompt punishment of such an offence, so a punitive expedition was dispatched in 104 B.C. against Farghana. It ended in complete failure. The large force sent became exhausted by the difficulties of the route followed across the 'Salt Marsh', *i.e.* the dried-up salt sea-bed of Lop (Fig. 8), and by the want of supplies beyond, long before its remnant reached Farghana. There it was utterly routed while besieging a town. When in its retreat it regained Tun-huang, we are told "only one or two out of every ten soldiers were left". To repair so signal a defeat all the resources of the Empire were strained. By 102 B.C. the Chinese General Li Kuang-li was enabled to set out once more from Tun-huang with a fresh army of sixty thousand men supported by a huge train and commissariat.

This time the Chinese power of intelligent organization triumphed over all the difficulties of Nature. The force of thirty thousand men with which the Chinese general reached the capital of Farghana sufficed to secure victory and the submission of its people. The prestige of China was so strengthened by this great feat that all the small states of the Tarim basin accepted imperial sovereignty. Henceforth Chinese control of the great natural highways, provided by the strings of oases in the Tarim basin, remained practically