

unbroken for more than a century, until internal disorder in China brought about the downfall of the former Han dynasty soon after the commencement of our era.

This prolonged maintenance of Chinese control was due far more to the successful diplomacy of the Empire's political representatives in these territories, and to prestige based on China's superior civilization, than to the force of arms. From the references of classical authors to the famous 'Seric fabrics', *i.e.* silks, we know that these products of Chinese industrial skill then travelled westwards in an unbroken flow. In return China must then have received, particularly from Eastern Iran, many of the articles of foreign origin, both natural and manufactured, the introduction of which from the West is distinctly traceable in Chinese literary records.

It is to the same period of the 'open road' through Central Asia that we may safely attribute the initial stages of that close mingling of cultural influences from China, Persia and India which archaeological explorations at ancient sites of the Tarim basin have so clearly revealed as the characteristic feature of the civilization which prevailed throughout that region during the pre-Muhammadan epoch. It is true that the earliest relics of that civilization as yet brought to light there do not reach back so far. But there is every reason to believe that the people who cultivated the oases of the Tarim basin at the time when that great highway between China and the West was first opened were of the same race and speech as those whose documents and literary remains, written chiefly in a variety of Indo-European languages, we have recovered from ruins abandoned from the third century A.D. onwards.