

In that exceptionally arid region climatic conditions would allow comparatively large communities to exist only on the basis of a highly organized system of irrigation. Such a settled population dependent on an orderly regime was specially suited for the absorption and transmission of cultural influences coming both from the Far East and the West. Geography in other respects, too, seems to have singularly prepared the Tarim basin for this its chief historical rôle. By denying grazing-grounds to the vast basin between K'un-lun and T'ien-shan, Nature had protected it against ever becoming the scene of great migratory movements and of such upheavals as are bound to accompany them.

The Huns in the north still remained dangerous neighbours, blocking the route along the northern foot of the T'ien-shan range. But by 60 B.C. the Chinese put themselves in possession also of the outlying small basin of Turfan, containing a well cultivated tract south of the eastern T'ien-shan, and thereby secured an important flank protection for the great trade route leading through the oases north of the Taklamakan.

The alternative line of communication along the southern rim of the basin, past Charchan and Khotan, was effectively protected from the danger of nomadic aggression by the mighty barrier of the K'un-lun, and still more, perhaps, by the utter barrenness of the high Tibetan plateaux which adjoin it. Not until some eight centuries later, when Tibet had risen from a congeries of barbarous tribes into a centralized state of military power, did Eastern Turkistan experience invasion from that side.

It is necessary to keep well in view the exceptional importance and advantages which the Tarim basin possessed for