

## CHAPTER XV

### EXPLORATIONS IN THE NAN-SHAN RANGES

By the time my work about the Tun-huang oasis was completed the summer of 1907 had set in. So I was eager to exchange archaeological work in the torrid desert plains for geographical exploration in the western and central Nan-shan, the great 'Southern Mountains' of the Chinese. Before, however, I could seek their alpine coolness I had to visit An-hsi, three marches to the east of Tun-huang, where the great road coming from Kansu and the interior of China turns off towards Chinese Turkistan. Ever since the times of the Later Han, this route leading across the desert hills and plateaux of the Pei-shan had become the main line of communication to Central Asia. An-hsi has always been a position of importance on it; but there was nothing to be found there to reflect this importance, either in the desolate circumvallation of the place with its single straggling street or within the wind-eroded walls of a ruined town site outside it.

But I succeeded in tracing on the waste ground to the south remains of the ancient border wall through which Hsüan-tsang must have passed when, defying official prohibition, he made his clandestine start on the adventurous journey that was to take him to the Western Regions. I have