

power to them towards the close of the second century B.C. I knew well that, in spite of the mass of precise and important historical data there recorded, I could not look for topographical details or picturesque glimpses of the route which had made that expansion possible and which I was now endeavouring to retrace. But even thus it was of great interest to review the few broad facts which emerged with clearness.

Ever since the remarkable mission of Chang Ch'ien (*circa* 136-123 B.C.), whom the Emperor Wu-ti had sent westwards to open communications with the Great Yüeh-chih tribe (the later Indo-Scythians, then settled on the Oxus) for an alliance against their common enemy, the Hsiung-nu or Huns, the Chinese knew of two main routes by which to reach the 'Western Regions,' *i.e.* the Tarim Basin and the countries on the Yaxartes, or Syr-Darya, and Oxus. One, known then as the 'Northern' route, led from the territory of Tun-huang past Chü-shih (corresponding to the present Turfan) and through the northern oases of the Tarim Basin to Kashgar, and thence across the mountains to Farghana and Sogdiana, *i.e.* the present Russian Turkestan. The other, or 'Southern' route, also starting from Tun-huang, passed first to the territory of Lou-lan or Shan-shan in the vicinity of Lop-nor, and thence along the northern foot of the Kun-lun mountains through Khotan to Yarkand, whence the country of the Great Yüeh-chih in the Oxus Valley was gained.

We are not told exactly how the 'Northern route' reached Turfan and the northern oases. But a number of significant passages in the Han Annals show that, during the earliest period of direct Chinese intercourse with the 'Western Regions' which followed a great victory over the Hsiung-nu or Huns in 121 B.C., the main approach to the former for all Chinese missions, whether diplomatic or military, lay as a matter of fact through Lou-lan, *i.e.* the Lop-nor region. The king of the latter, at the instigation of the ever hostile Huns, is reported to have repeatedly waylaid and robbed Chinese envoys. At last an imperial general, despatched at the head of a small force of light horse, about 110 B.C., seized