

road to An-hsi and Turkestan from the north drew nearer and nearer as we moved transversely over the valley, and eagerly I scanned it for traces of the ancient wall which might have followed its foot on the way to Yü-mên-hsien and the Su-lo Ho. When after sixteen miles' straight march I struck at last the great route near the point where the gorge of Hao-shan-k'ou cuts through the south-eastern end of the range, three large towers perched on low spurs of the range came clearly into view. In spite of their white plaster facing they might be of early date, remnants of the fortified line for which I was looking. But they were too far off to be examined in the course of the day's march.

It did not need ruins to make me feel the historical importance of the narrow cart track by which we continued our march due east. I knew that I was now treading the very ground over which all Chinese enterprise towards the 'Western Regions' had moved during more than two thousand years. These terribly barren ridges, furrowed by a maze of narrow ravines, must have frowned down on the very first Chinese missions and expeditions which went forth to conquer Turkestan. How many of those thousands and thousands of soldiers and administrators who passed by here to the lands of exile in Central Asia, had lived to see the day of their fondly-hoped-for return 'within the Wall'?

In the annals of the Han and later dynasties the military and official story of Chinese expansion westwards is amply chronicled. But where are we to look for all that was of human interest and worthy of record in the lives lost during long centuries of struggle with Huns and Turks, Tibetans and Arabs? As I thought of the dreary deserts which then as now must have made up nine-tenths of these much-disputed regions from the Oxus to the Kan-su border, the sacrifices in men and treasure which this policy of Central-Asian expansion had cost to the Middle Kingdom seemed great beyond all proportion. But what would have been our knowledge of the past of those vast regions, of the great migrations which with their last waves shaped the destinies of Europe as well as of India, without the light transmitted through the records of those who during