CENTRAL-ASIAN RELICS OF CHINA'S ANCIENT SILK TRADE.

BY

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It is a well-known historical fact that the export of China's silk fabrics had played a very important part in that earliest expansion of Chinese trade and political power into Central Asia which commenced under the great emperor Wu-ti, of the Former Han dynasty, towards the close of the second century B.C. These Notes are culled from Serindia, my detailed report on the scientific results of my second journey, completed in 1918 and now approaching publication at the Oxford University Press.

The relics deserving first mention consist of two silk strips discovered at a ruined watch-station, T. XV. a, of that ancient Chinese Limes in the desert west of Tun-huang (or Sha-chou) which my exploration of 1907 proved to have been constructed during the closing years of the second century B.C. and for a great part of its length to have been garrisoned down to about the middle of the second century A.D. ¹) Both strips marked (T. XV. a. 1. 3)

¹) A fairly detailed account of those explorations has been given in my personal narrative, Ruins of Desert Cathay (Macmillan, 1912), II, pp. 125—126. All archaeological, historical and geographical facts bearing on this westernmost portion of the Han border line will be found fully discussed in Chapters XV—XX of my Serindia. For a succinct preliminary record of my explorations of 1914 by which I traced this ancient Limes eastwards to the Etsin-gol, see A third journey of exploration in Central Asia, in Geographical Journal, 1918, XLVIII, pp. 193 sqq.
originally belonged to the same piece of undyed creamy silk and were found together in one of the extensive refuse-heaps adjoining that post on the *Limes* wall. Among the Chinese records on wood recovered here and elucidated with hundreds of other Chinese documents from the Han *Limes* by my lamented great collaborator M. Chavannes a number bear precise dates, extending from 67 A.D. to A.D. 137, and conclusively proving when that particular refuse-heap, T. XV. a. 1, had accumulated. 1)

One of those strips 2) bears the ink impression of a Chinese seal not as yet deciphered, and by the selvages retained at both ends is shown to have come from a piece or roll of silk which had a width of about 19.7 inches or 50 centimetres. The other strip, 12¾ inches long and incomplete at one end bears a Chinese inscription read by M. Chavannes: 任城國古衣網—匹幅廣二尺二寸長四丈重廿五兩直錢六百一十八. He translates it: "A roll of silk from *K'ang-fu* in the kingdom of *Jen-ch'eng*; width 2 feet and 2 inches; length 40 feet; weight 25 ounces; value 618 pieces of money" 3). M. CHAVANNES has pointed out that the kingdom of *Jén-ch'êng* was established A.D. 84 and is represented by the present Chi-ning-chou in the province of Shan-tung.

M. Chavannes has already in a general way called attention to "the historical importance of this text which furnishes us with

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2) These strips are described by M. Chavannes, *Documents chinois*, p. 118, under No. 539 and in part reproduced in Plate XV.
3) In a note written down for me at our last meeting October 3, 1917, M. Chavannes thus corrected his previous reading of the record. "Les mots que j'ai lus *kou-fou* ont été corrigés par M. Wang Koo-wei (*Lieou cha to kien*, chap. II, p. 43") en *K'ang-fou*, et cette heureuse rectification permet de donner maintenant une traduction exacte: *K'ang-fou* est le nom d'une sous-préfecture située dans le royaume de *Jen-chêng* et qui était à 50 li de la ville actuelle de *Tsi-ning* tcheou dans le Chan-tung". [亢父 K'ang-fou, — P. P.]