

the place, and three wooden vessels for incense and offerings. The walls and the inner roof are covered with Buddhistic fresco-paintings.

One ascends by a ladder to the row of cave-mouths in the second tier, some of which have wooden doors facing the valley. A newly built outside stone stair leads to the third tier. Horizontal beams are stuck into the cliff-face here and there, showing that a balcony or verandah ran past the entrances to the grottoes in former times. In other places only the holes left by the beams remain. It is sometimes rather a neck-breaking performance getting into the sacred places; but a number of them are connected with one another by doorways inside.

A little farther south, the façade of the main temple was found to be newly built in the Chinese style. It was nine storeys high and contained a giant image of Buddha.

In a way, the »Caves of the Thousand Buddhas» disappointed me. I had expected something finer and more distinguished, and not the dull uniformity I found, neglected and allowed to fall into decay by a careless posterity. What is impressive is the multitude of grottoes, and the work and patience that must have been needed to excavate these rooms and niches in the hard conglomerate. The men who gave their time and strength to this gigantic labour must have had a burning faith in the power of their gods. The tall Lombardy poplars before the façade of the grottoes help to lend a touch of beauty and poetry to this curious monument to religious mysticism.

It would have been interesting if we had also been able to visit the new-found temple-grottoes Hsi-ch'ien-fo-tung, that BOHLIN had discovered in 1931 (see Part II, p. 182); but we had no time for further excursions.

RETURN TO TUN-HUANG

We were ready to go. Our light luggage was packed on the carts, and the slow-paced, horned philosophers that drew us began their leisurely journey northwards. The low hills disappeared in whirling clouds of sand, and we could scarcely see where we were going. A couple of carts loomed up ahead, one drawn by two horses, the other by a horse and a mule. Their drivers had been ordered by the mayor to meet us and help us back to Tun-huang by the same road we had covered in the cars two days before. The flood water had risen and spread far and wide, and the mayor had been afraid that the oxen would not be able to get us back to town without our getting wet feet.

We transferred ourselves and our baggage to the new conveyance, and resumed our journey.

In western countries the roads are best in and round the towns; but in Sinkiang and Kansu it is a relief to get away from the cultivated belts with their irrigation