

that the deposit was carefully locked away behind a wooden door; and when, after leaving Tun-huang for a month's journey of exploration, he returned in May, a brick wall had been added to protect the hidden treasure.

The reader must go to *Ruins of Desert Cathay* for the full account of the stages by which the Taoist priest who guarded the shrines was induced first to show some specimens, and finally to let Sir Aurel carry off a goodly hoard of the manuscripts and most of the pictorial remains.

The cave had been said to contain only MSS.; and bundles of MSS. were there in immense quantities; but on opening one of the bundles Sir Aurel was delighted to find that it contained paintings on silk. The paintings were all, or nearly all, crumpled up. It seems as if they had been hurriedly thrust away in the vault on some sudden alarm, probably of a barbarian raid. And, in fact, on one of the pictures is a votive inscription praying to Kuan-yin for protection against the Tartars and the Tibetans. The position of Tun-huang on the westernmost frontier of China, at the intersection of the great trade-route across Asia, from east to west, with the high road between Mongolia in the north and Tibet in the south, naturally exposed it to incursions and invasions. Internal evidence of dated documents seems to show that the treasure, or at any rate the great bulk of it, was hidden away soon after the close of the tenth century A.D.

To complete the story, we must add that M. Pelliot, the distinguished savant and traveller, paid a visit a year later to the Caves and was allowed to carry off what remained of the paintings and a large selection from the hoard of manuscripts. These are now in the Bibliothèque Nationale and in the Louvre. What was left of Chinese manuscripts was subsequently transmitted by official order to Peking; much being 'lost' on the way.

Not till the paintings were brought to London could any real examination of them be made. Each packet had to be carefully opened, and the brittle, dusty silk, sometimes in a hundred fragments, opened out, cleaned, and, where necessary, pieced together. This was done at the British Museum; and it was a labour of years for the staff of mounters attached to the Print Room.

The paintings were carefully cleaned, and the colours were found in most cases to have lost little of their pristine depth and brightness; though where a certain verdigris green was used, it has tended to eat away the silk on which it was laid, a whole figure in some cases having thus disappeared and left only its surrounding outline. Any attempt at restoration or retouching has been scrupulously avoided; but when a painting which is in fragments has been laid down on silk of a neutral tone, and mounted, the eye is easily carried over the gaps, and the main design reappears. Several of the paintings still retain their original borders, usually of a dull mulberry-purple silk. The small banners, of which a great quantity were found, had all originally a pediment-shaped head-piece, and long silk streamers with a wooden weight at the bottom to steady the banner as it hung. These banners are mostly painted on both sides.

The delicate work of mounting and cleaning was done by Mr. S. W. Littlejohn, Chief Mounter in the Department of Prints and Drawings, assisted in later stages by Mr. Y. Urushibara, a Japanese artist and craftsman. Meanwhile the large embroidery picture (Pl. xxxiv) had been skilfully stitched on to a new backing of canvas by Miss E. A. Winter of the Royal School of Art Needlework. A selection of the most important pictures, drawings, and woodcuts formed part of an exhibition of treasures of all sorts brought back by Sir Aurel Stein from his second expedition and set out in the long lower gallery of the new wing of the British Museum opened by H.M. the King in May 1914. The outbreak of the War so soon after, and the subsequent closing of the Museum, unfortunately prevented the exhibition from becoming adequately known to the public. In 1917 Mr. Littlejohn, who had received a commission in the R.G.A., was killed in action. During his last months at the Museum he had been preparing a note on the origin of the system of mounting pictures as *kakemono*, to use the convenient Japanese term. Those familiar with Japanese pictures know that *kakemono* are paintings mounted on silk, with borders of brocade above and below the design, and with two narrow strips of silk hanging down from above. These have been explained as intended to keep away