

## CHAPTER XII

### THE CAVE SHRINES OF THE THOUSAND BUDDHAS

WHEN in the years immediately following my first Central-Asian expedition I was planning the second, it was my eager wish to extend it into Kansu, that north-western frontier province of China. This wish was prompted largely by what my friend the late Professor de Lóczy, the distinguished head of the Hungarian Geological Survey, had told me of the sacred Buddhist grottoes situated to the south-east of Tun-huang and known as Ch'ien-fo-tung, the 'Caves of the Thousand Buddhas'. As a member of Count Széchenyi's expedition and thus a pioneer of modern geographical exploration in Kansu, he had visited them as early as 1879. Without being himself an antiquarian student, he had rightly recognized the artistic and archaeological interest of the fine fresco paintings and stucco sculptures which he had seen there, and the glowing description he gave of them had greatly impressed me.

I found my expectations fully realized when within a few days after my arrival at the Tun-huang oasis in March 1907 I paid my first visit to the sacred caves. They are carved into the precipitous conglomerate cliffs overlooking from the west the mouth of a barren valley some twelve miles to the south-east of the oasis. A small stream descending from