

cave temples, known as *Wan-fu-hsia*, the 'Valley of the Ten-thousand Buddhas', and still forming a pilgrimage place (Fig. 112). In character and date they showed close affinity to the shrines of the 'Thousand Buddhas' though far less numerous. Here, too, fine fresco compositions on the walls served to illustrate Buddhist pictorial art as practised in 'T'ang times' on these confines of China proper (Fig. 113).

After surveying the great chain of glacier-crowned peaks which overlook the terribly barren detritus plateaux of the Nan-shan west of the Su-lo-ho, we made our way through a hitherto unexplored mountain tract where even at this favourable season want of water was a serious difficulty, to the famous Chia-yü-kuan gate of the still extant Great Wall. For centuries the passage through this wall, marked by an imposing fort, has been greeted by travellers coming from Central Asia as the threshold of true Cathay. All books and maps, in fact, whether European or Chinese, represent the line of wall which bends round the westernmost part of the large Su-chou oasis to the very foot of the Nan-shan, as the termination of the ancient Great Wall which protects the northern border of Kansu. Yet it was obviously impossible to reconcile a belief in the antiquity of this wall with the indications afforded by the remains of the ancient frontier wall I had discovered in the desert of Tun-huang and which I found to extend also to An-hsi and beyond it.

The problem was solved when on my third expedition I succeeded in tracing the continuation of that early Chinese *Limes* where it runs across desert ground to the Etsin-gol some fifty miles north of Su-chou. Its purpose had been to protect the whole belt of oases along the northern foot of the Nan-shan which, since Chinese expansion westwards