

massive posts, bleached and splintered, still rose high, marking the position of the timber framework. But when I examined the ground underneath what appeared to have been an outhouse or stables about fifty feet square, I realized quickly that it was made up of the layers of a huge refuse heap. Previous experience supplied sufficient reason for digging into this unsavoury quarry; though the pungent smells which its contents emitted, even after seventeen centuries of burial, were doubly trying in the fresh eastern breeze, driving fine dust, dead microbes, and all into one's eyes, throat, and nose.

Our perseverance in cutting through layer upon layer of stable refuse was rewarded at last by striking, on a level fully seven feet below the surface, a small wooden enclosure about eight by six feet and over five feet high, which had probably served as a dustbin for some earlier habitation. In the midst of coarser refuse, mixed up with various grains, we found there curious sweepings of all sorts—rags of manifold fabrics in silk, wool, cotton, and felt; pieces of a woollen pile carpet, embroidered leather and felt, plaited braids and cords, arrow-heads in bronze and iron, fragments of fine lacquer ware, broken implements in wood and horn. But more gratifying still was a find of over a dozen small label-like wooden slips inscribed with Chinese characters of exquisite penmanship, which Chiang-ssü-yeh's subsequent interpretation made out to be forwarding notes of various presents (Fig. 119, I, II).

But it was only through the scholarly analysis and translation furnished to me years later by M. Chavannes, my learned Sinologist collaborator, that I became aware of the special antiquarian interest attaching to these small records. He has shown that not less than eight among them were originally fastened to presents consisting of a jewel which members of the royal family made to each other, or received from their subjects, perhaps on occasion of the New Year. On one side of the slip the donor inscribed his name and the mention of his present and good wishes, on the other the name or title of the recipient is indicated. In one case it is the mother of the king who presents her gift and salutations to her son; in another the wife of