

CHAPTER XLIV

MURAL PAINTING OF BUDDHIST LEGEND

THIS cycle of youthful figures, proclaiming as it were the rights of the senses, seemed a strange decoration for the dado of a Buddhist temple, and the problem presented by the contrast between it and Buddha's orthodox preaching made me turn with increased interest to what remained of the fresco decoration above. The wall of the northern hemicycle had suffered much damage, and of its frieze only detached groups of figures, mostly broken, were to be seen, which, though full of interest in themselves, could give no key to the general composition and subject. But on the south-east the frieze immediately above the dado was intact over a segment more than eighteen feet long, and the picture there presented was the most striking I had yet set eyes upon in the course of my explorations.

On a field of true Pompeian red about three feet wide and marked off above and below by a symmetrical succession of narrow bands in black, slaty green, and cream, there extended a procession which at first sight suggested a Roman triumph more than anything else. Starting from the left and passing over the partially broken piece of the frieze near the eastern entrance, I saw a princely figure on horseback riding out of a palace gate (Fig. 146). The wooden framework of the walls and decorative carving on the gate was elaborately indicated, while on the lintel and above the rider's head a line was inscribed in large Kharoshthi characters. The horseman's costume was very much like that of the 'Indian Prince' in the dado. A crimson cloak descended across the left shoulder to below the waist, while a green garment resembling the