

washed down the steep slopes by either the winds or occasional rainfall.

It was at the completely ruined tower—for such the mound already referred to (T. VIII.) proved to be—that I first obtained a clear idea of the quarters which seem to have been built by the side of most towers for the accommodation of the soldiers keeping watch at these posts. The mound measured about forty-eight feet in diameter at the base and rose to ten feet above the ground. From the coarse gravel which covered its top and slopes, and gave it the appearance of a natural hillock, there emerged first masses of sun-dried bricks mixed with plentiful bundles of reeds. It was the *débris* of the tower, which in its fall had completely crushed and buried the walls and roof of the guard-rooms adjoining. To clear it away was heavy work for the men, and their own spades made little impression. Not being accustomed to the 'Ketmans' of Turkestan, which, warned by previous experience, I had with no small trouble obtained at Tun-huang, they got little work out of these otherwise ideal implements of the excavator. But the greatest hindrance, perhaps, was the little doses of opium which most of these Nan-hu men used to take in the midst of their labour. However, at last we got at what remained of the walls of the structure buried by the fallen masonry, and successive finds of broken wooden implements stimulated the men's hope of earning the liberal reward I had promised for the discovery of the first written record.

We had just cleared a small outer room on the north side, and were working our way into a somewhat larger one built against the solid masonry of the tower (Fig. 171), when this eagerly-looked-for find was made. It was a strangely puzzling object,—a solid block of wood, about twelve inches long and five broad, thick at one end but narrowing wedge-like at the other, and painted black all over (comp. Fig. 172, 4). On one of the faces of this wedge there appeared two large Chinese characters in red. Chiang could read them without difficulty, but vainly sought for their sense. That they were meant for a name seemed the most likely conjecture. But how to interpret the