

ranged between 65 and 57 B.C. This fine haul all came from an area scarcely more than two to three feet square.

It was clear that a little office archive had been thrown down here on the rubbish-strewn slope; and it proved by no means yet exhausted. Clearing the thinner refuse stratum lower down on the slope until the hard gravel surface was reached, and subsequently excavating and sifting with care the refuse round the original find-place, we brought the total of inscribed pieces of wood to over three hundred. Of uninscribed slips and tablets where the writing had become effaced through exposure there were found over two hundred more. Fig. 183 shows the scene of this successful digging, and also how shallow the protecting cover of gravel and refuse was.

The rest of the rubbish heaps on the other slopes below the watch-tower, extensive as they were, added scarcely more than a dozen wooden records. But in the course of this search, which Chiang-ssü-yeh supervised with his unflinching zeal and patience, there came to light at one point a great mass of wooden 'shavings' covered with Chinese characters. As the writing was manifestly by the same hand, and the phrases constantly recurring, Chiang at once rightly concluded that these were chips from tablets which some officer or clerk, eager to improve his penmanship, had used again and again for writing exercises, planing them down with a knife each time to obtain a fresh surface. The material had been of the cheapest, roughly cut from tamarisk and Toghrak branches, which the jungle close at hand would furnish in plenty.

The number of accurately dated records had been so great at this station, and their range in time so restricted, that the assumption seemed fully justified of the ruined quarters built against the tower representing the state in which they were when last occupied about 57 B.C. So all constructive details about the rooms, plain as they were, presented points of interest. The plan reproduced in Fig. 184 will illustrate their arrangement, which differed in no essential from that elsewhere observed along the *Limes*. The thickness of the outer walls and the massive