

plans, etc., in short, to such work as could not reasonably arouse popular resentment with all its eventual risks.

Yet it was useless to disguise the fact from myself: what had kept my heart buoyant for months, and was now drawing me back with the strength of a hidden magnet, were hopes of another and more substantial kind. Their goal was that great hidden deposit of ancient manuscripts which a Taoist monk had accidentally discovered about two years earlier while restoring one of the temples. I knew that the deposit was still jealously guarded in the walled-up side chapel where it had been originally discovered, and that there were good reasons for caution in the first endeavours to secure access to it. What my sagacious secretary had gathered of the character and ways of its guardian was a warning to me to feel my way with prudence and studied slowness. It was enough that Chiang had induced Wang Tao-shih, the priest, who had come upon the hidden deposit, to await my arrival instead of starting on one of his usual tours in the district to sell blessings and charms, and to collect outstanding temple subscriptions.

I was glad that very first evening to find good quarters for all my people, as well as for the heavy baggage which had been brought up from its former place of storage at Tun-huang. Fortunately the only two dwellings which Ch'ien-fo-tung boasts of, apart from its caves, were unoccupied, except for a fat jovial Tibetan Lama who had sought shelter here after long wanderings among the Mongols of the mountains (Fig. 190). In one of the courts my Indians found rooms to spread themselves in, and the Naik a convenient place to turn into a dark-room. In the other my Muhammadan followers secured shelter under half-ruined roofs of outhouses, while a hall, still possessed of a door and trellised windows, was reserved as a safe and discreet place of deposit for my collection of antiques—and its eagerly-hoped-for additions.

Better still, the narrow strip of cultivation extending in front of the caves for about half a mile (Fig. 186) offered just one little plot, grass-covered, where my tent could be pitched under the shade of some fruit trees. My Mandarin friends