

The first task was to assure that I should be allowed to see the whole of the manuscripts, and in their original place of deposit. Only thus could I hope to ascertain the true character and approximate date of the collection which had lain hidden behind the passage wall. In order to effect this Chiang had been despatched in the morning to another restored cave-temple where the priest had his quarters, and proceeded to sound him in confidential fashion about the facilities which were to be given. It proved a very protracted affair. Backed up by the promise of a liberal donation for the main shrine, the Ssü-yeh's tactful diplomacy seemed at first to make better headway than I had ventured to hope for. The saintly guardian of the reputed treasure explained that the walling up of the door was intended for a precaution against the curiosity of the pilgrims who had recently flocked to the site in their thousands. But evidently wary and of a suspicious mind, he would not yet allow himself to be coaxed into any promise about showing the collection to us as a whole. All that he would agree to, with various meticulous reservations, was to let me see eventually such specimens of the collection as he might conveniently lay his hands on. When Chiang, in his zeal momentarily forgetting the dictates of diplomatic reticence, was cautiously hinting at the possibility of my wishing, perhaps, to acquire 'for future study' one or other of those specimens, the Tao-shih showed such perturbation, prompted equally, it seemed, by scruples of a religious sort and fear of popular resentment, that my sharp-witted secretary thought it best to drop the subject for a time.

But after hours of such diplomatic wrangling he did not leave the priest's smoke-filled chapel and kitchen combined without having elicited an important piece of information. Statements heard at Tun-huang seemed to indicate that the great find of manuscripts had been reported at the time to the Tao-t'ai at Su-chou and thence to the Viceroy of Kan-su. Expression had been given also to a belief, of which we had no means of testing the foundation, that the latter had given orders for the transmission of specimens and for the safe keeping of the whole collection. If such