

the spacious newly built loggia in front of the temple, and showed us with pride how he had caused all its walls to be decorated by a local Tun-huang artist with a series of quaint but spirited frescoes representing characteristic scenes from the great pilgrim's adventures (Figs. 189, 190). They were those fantastic legends which have transformed Hsüan-tsang in popular belief throughout China into a sort of saintly Munchausen. It is true they are not to be found in the genuine memoirs and biography. But what did that little difference in our respective conceptions of the hero matter? Gladly I let my delightfully credulous cicerone expound in voluble talk the wonderful stories of travel which each fresco panel depicted. Here the holy pilgrim was seen snatched up to the clouds by a wicked demon and then restored again to his pious companions through the force of his prayer or magic. Two queer-looking figures—one horse-, one bull-headed—were represented as his constant attendants. Elsewhere he was shown forcing a ferocious dragon which had swallowed his horse to restore it again, and so on.

But the picture in which I displayed particular interest showed a theme curiously adapted to our own case, though it was not till later that I appealed again and again to the moral it pointed. There was T'ang-sêng standing on the bank of a violent torrent, and beside him his faithful steed laden with big bundles of manuscripts. To help in ferrying across such a precious burden a large turtle was seen swimming towards the pilgrim. Here was clearly a reference to the twenty pony-loads of sacred books and relics which the historical traveller managed to carry away safely from India. But would the pious guardian read this obvious lesson aright, and be willing to acquire spiritual merit by letting me take back to the old home of Buddhism some of the ancient manuscripts which chance had placed in his keeping? For the time being it seemed safer not to tackle that question. Yet when I took my leave of the Tao-shih I instinctively felt that a new and more reliable link was being established between us.