

managed to meet the conflicting requirements of the situation. But, I confess, the strain and anxieties of the busy days which followed were great.

The first bundles which emerged from that 'black hole' consisted of thick rolls of paper about one foot high, evidently containing portions of canonical Buddhist texts in Chinese translations. All were in excellent preservation and yet showed in paper, arrangement, and other details, unmistakable signs of great age. The jointed strips of strongly made and remarkably tough and smooth yellowish paper, often ten yards or more long, were neatly rolled up, after the fashion of Greek papyri, over small sticks of hard wood sometimes having carved or inlaid end knobs (Fig. 191). All showed signs of having been much read and handled; often the protecting outer fold, with the silk tape which had served for tying up the roll, had got torn off. Where these covering folds were intact it was easy for the Ssü-yeh to read off the title of the Sutra, the chapter number, etc.

Buddhist literature lay wholly outside the range of Chiang's studies, as indeed it is nowadays beyond the ken of almost all Chinese literati. I myself, though familiar to some extent with Buddhist scriptures in their original Indian garb, laboured under a fatal disadvantage—my total ignorance of literary Chinese. So what Chiang could make out of the titles was of no guidance to me. But on one point his readings soon gave me assurance: the headings in the first bundles were all found to be different. So my apprehension of discovering here that inane repetition of a few identical texts in which modern Buddhism in Tibet and elsewhere revels, gradually vanished. I set the Ssü-yeh to work to prepare a rough list of titles; but as by and by the devout guardian of these treasures took more courage and began to drag out load after load of manuscript bundles, all attempt even at the roughest cataloguing had to be abandoned. It would have required a whole staff of learned scribes to deal properly with such a deluge.

Mixed up with the Chinese bundles there came to light Tibetan texts also written in roll form, though with