

were evident when I came upon convolutes of silk paintings much larger in size, showing, as subsequently ascertained, dimensions up to six feet or more (Plate VIII.). Closely and often carelessly folded up at the time of their deposition, and much creased in consequence as they were, any attempt to open them out would have implied obvious risk of damage to the thin material which centuries of compression in the driest air had rendered terribly brittle. But by lifting a fold here and there I could see that the scenes represented were almost as elaborate as the fresco panels on the walls of the old grottoes. Greatly tempted as I was to search for votive inscriptions likely to contain dates, I had to leave the opening till later from fear of possible damage.

Nor was there time for any closer study, such as I should have loved to give there and then to these delicate, graceful paintings. My main care was how many of them I might hope to rescue from their dismal imprisonment and the risks attending their present guardian's careless handling. To my surprise and relief he evidently attached little value to these beautiful relics of pictorial art in the T'ang times. So I made bold to put aside rapidly 'for further inspection,' the best of the pictures on silk, linen, or paper I could lay my hands on, more than a dozen from the first bundle alone. I longed to carry away all its contents; for even among the fragments there were beautiful pieces, and every bit of silk would have its antiquarian and artistic value. But it would not have been wise to display too much *empressement*. So I restrained myself as well as I could, and put the rest away, with the firm resolve to return to the charge as soon as the ground was prepared for more extensive acquisitions.

To remains of this kind the priest seemed indifferent. The secret hope of diverting by their sacrifice my attention from the precious rolls of Chinese canonical texts or 'Ching' made him now more assiduously grope for and hand out bundles of what he evidently classed under the head of miscellaneous rubbish. I had every reason to be pleased with this benevolent intention; for in the very first large packet of this kind I discovered, mixed up