

truth be an act which Buddha and his Arhats might approve as pious. He also urged that the big sum I was prepared to pay (I hinted at 40 horse-shoes, about Rs.5000, and was resolved to give twice as much, if need be, whatever the excess over my sanctioned grant) would enable Wang to return to a life of peace in his native province, distant Shan-hsi, if Tun-huang should become too hot for him. Or else he could allay any scruples by using the whole sum for the benefit of the temple, which by his restoration he could claim to have annexed as his own with all its contents known or unknown.

But all in vain. The prospect of losing his precious 'Chings' as a whole or in part profoundly frightened the good priest, who had before resignedly closed his eyes to my gathering whatever I thought of special artistic or antiquarian value. For the first time our relations became somewhat strained, and it required very careful handling and our suavest manners to obviate anything like a breach. What the Tao-shih urged with all signs of sincere anxiety was that any deficiency in those piles of sacred texts would certainly be noticed by his patrons, who had helped him with their publicly recorded subscriptions to clear and restore the temple; that in consequence the position he had built up for himself in the district by the pious labours of eight years would be lost for good, and his life-task destroyed. He even vaguely reproached himself for having given up sacred things over which his lay patrons ought to have as much right of control as he himself, and doggedly asserted the need of consulting them before moving a step further. And in the depth of my heart I could bear him no grudge for these scruples and recriminations, or even gainsay them.

For two long days these discussions had to be carried on intermittently with a view to gain time while my examination of the miscellaneous bundles was proceeding. I managed to complete this by the second evening. But on returning early next day to the temple in order to start the close search of the regular Chinese bundles for Central-Asian and other foreign text materials, I found to my dismay that the Tao-shih in a sudden fit of perturbation