

CHAPTER LXVII

BUDDHIST PICTURES FROM THE HIDDEN CHAPEL

NEITHER at the time of that hurried 'excavation' and gathering at the 'Thousand Buddhas,' nor in the course of my subsequent explorations, was it possible to find leisure for any close examination of my novel 'finds.' I had to be content with knowing them safely packed and transported across the deserts and mountains. The year and a half which has passed since the unpacking of those precious cases at the British Museum has not sufficed for more than a preliminary sorting and survey of the contents. The *embarras des richesses* in materials has proved great, and the labours their proper arrangement and study will demand from my scholar-helpers in different fields of research are likely to be protracted. So a succinct review of the main classes of remains undergoing elucidation is all that can be attempted at present; even this must needs be incomplete in various directions.

Of all the contents of the Tao-shih's cave the fine relics of Buddhist pictorial art impressed me most from the time when they emerged to the light, and in view of their artistic interest and importance I may give a brief account of them first. The great majority were painted on silk, while the rest had for their material either linen or paper. The prevailing use of fine silk gauze was a gratifying fact in itself; for it was reasonable to assume that to the superior material there would correspond also a higher degree of care and technique in the painting. Nor was this expectation disappointed. But I had not proceeded far in my search before I realized how much this very