

under Sir Sidney Colvin's kind supervision, only about two-thirds of these precious packets have been dealt with.

The work has been attended by many surprises. From some of the least promising convolutes, when the crinkled and brittle silk resumed its original suppleness, there have emerged wholly unsuspected pieces of fine paintings, complete or fragmentary. Portions missing in some large compositions have been discovered in quite a different conglomeration. No exact estimate as to the total number of individual pictures can, therefore, be given at present; but it is probable that it will exceed three hundred. Still more difficult does it appear to estimate the extent of labour that will be needed for the permanent preservation of all these paintings. For the present we have to be content to strengthen the silk banners by getting them mounted on a fine gauze with large meshes, and subsequently fixed under sheets of glass, while the large compositions have been temporarily backed with thin sheets of Japanese paper, and thus made capable of being rolled in the traditional fashion of the Far East.

The primary task of recovery and safeguarding is still far from being completed. But the materials already available are sufficient to allow us to form an adequate idea of the general character and art value of these paintings. Their detailed study and interpretation was bound to offer puzzles, no less than points of novel interest. It was evident from the first that these relics from the 'Thousand Buddhas' of Tun-huang were separated by considerable intervals, both in time and space, from almost all hitherto known representations of Buddhist pictorial art. The great majority of these pictures and the corresponding frescoes of the caves undoubtedly belong to the T'ang period (7th to 9th century A.D.), from which scarcely any genuine specimens of Buddhist religious painting have survived in China or Japan. There were marks, too, of a distinct local influence which the art of these paintings must have undergone for a prolonged period, in spite of its close dependence on the models originally supplied by Indian and Central-Asian Buddhism. So I