

and antiquarian research, and the like, however helpful I had always found such topics for securing the friendly interest and good will of educated Chinese officials. But there was another source of aid to fall back upon—the memory of Hsüan-tsang, an appeal to which had never failed to secure me a sympathetic hearing alike among the learned and the simple. The very presence of this quaint priest, embodying in his person a compound as it were of pious zeal, naïve ignorance, and astute tenacity of purpose, was bound to recall those early Buddhist pilgrims from China who, simple in mind but strong in faith and in superstition, had made their way to India, braving all difficulties and risks. Wang Tao-shih, too, was likely to have heard of my attachment to the saintly traveller whom I was accustomed to claim as my Chinese patron saint.

So, amidst the tokens of lingering Buddhist worship surrounding us in the temple cella, I proceeded to tell the Taoist priest of my devotion to Hsüan-tsang: how I had followed his footsteps from India across inhospitable mountains and deserts; how I had traced the ruined sites of many sanctuaries he had visited and described; and so on. However poor my Chinese, it was a familiar theme for me to expatiate upon, and, as always, I found my efforts eagerly seconded by Chiang Ssü-yeh, elaborating details and making the most of my knowledge of Hsüan-tsang's authentic records and of the distant scenes of his travels. There was encouragement in the gleam of lively interest which I caught in the Tao-shih's eyes, otherwise shy and fitful, and soon the impression made upon him was plainly readable in his generally puzzling countenance.

The priest, though poorly versed in, and indifferent to, things Buddhist, proved in fact quite as ardent an admirer in his own way of *T'ang-sêng* 唐僧, 'the great monk of the T'ang', as I am in another. Of this fortunate link between us I had ocular evidence to assure me when he took me outside into the spacious loggia he had built in front of the temple, and proudly showed the series of quaint but spirited paintings representing scenes from the great pilgrim's marvellous adventures with which he had caused its walls to be decorated by a local artist.<sup>2</sup> The fantastic legends there depicted were just those which have transformed Hsüan-tsang in modern popular belief throughout China into a sort of saintly Munchausen. The fact that they are not to be found in the pilgrim's genuine *Memoirs of the Western Regions* and biography could in no way detract from the satisfaction with which I listened to my credulous cicerone expounding in voluble talk the wonderful stories of travel illustrated in the successive panels.<sup>3</sup>

There was one picture in particular in which I saw good reason to display a marked interest, though it was not till later that I appealed again and again to the moral it pointed. It showed a scene which I thought at the time curiously adapted to my own case. There was T'ang-sêng standing on the bank of a violent torrent, and beside him his faithful steed laden with big bundles of manuscripts. A large turtle was to be seen swimming towards him to help in ferrying across

<sup>2</sup> For reproductions of two of these fresco panels, each comprising four different scenes, see *Desert Cathay*, ii. Figs. 189, 190.

<sup>3</sup> The apocryphal *Hsi-yu-chi* which embodies these tales seems to be a widely known story-book commanding considerable popularity in the westernmost parts of China and probably elsewhere, too. It certainly deserves the attention of a critical analysis on the part of European Sinologists interested in the later growth of Chinese Buddhism and folklore.

It would be of particular interest to examine to what extent the extravagant exploits foisted upon the great pilgrim by popular legend have their ultimate source in the miraculous stories which Hsüan-tsang himself reproduced in his *Memoirs*

as he had heard them from his priestly guides at various sacred sites in India. If this assumption were right—and some of the tales, as I understood them, seem to support it—it might be taken as a kind of just penalty imposed by Fate upon the pious traveller for the *penchant* he undoubtedly shows in his *Memoirs* for the credulous if faithful reproduction of all legends, however improbable, as told to him by Indian local priests, etc.

[Mr. J. L. Smith, of H.B.M.'s Chinese Consular service, has kindly called my attention to the notice of the apocryphal *Hsi-yu-chi*, contained in Mr. S. Couling's *Encyclopaedia Sinica*, pp. 241 sq., and the abstract translation of the story published by the late Dr. Timothy Richard under the title *A Mission to Heaven*, 1913.]

Appeal to Hsüan-tsang's memory.

The priest's admiration for T'ang-sêng.

Picture illustrating Hsüan-tsang's story.