

large silk hangings owing to their size and manner of storing, often after an evidently long use, and on the other, how much the conditions prevailing in this safe place of deposit had helped to preserve for us these fine relics of Buddhist pictorial art.

Selections
for 'closer
inspection'.

There was no time then to search for votive inscriptions likely to contain dates nor for any closer study of these paintings. My main care was how many of them I might be able to rescue from their dismal imprisonment and from the risks attending their present guardian's careless handling. It was with surprise and still more with a feeling of relief that I noted the little value which the Tao-shih seemed to attach to these relics. He raised no objection when I put aside rapidly 'for closer inspection' the best of the pictures on silk, linen, and paper I could lay my hands on in that first miscellaneous bundle. The temptation was great to claim there and then all its contents. But obviously it was not advisable to display too much *empressement* at this stage. So, restraining myself, I put the rest away, firmly resolved at the same time to return to the charge when the ground was prepared for more extensive acquisitions.

Wang Tao-
shih's low
estimation
of art relics.

This diplomatic restraint had its immediate reward. It seemed to confirm the priest in his low estimation of all such art relics. So, hoping to divert by their sacrifice my attention from the precious rolls of Chinese Sūtra texts, to which he seemed to attach most value, he subsequently proceeded more assiduously to grope for and hand out bundles of what he evidently classed under the head of miscellaneous rubbish. The result was distinctly encouraging; for among the quantities of fragmentary Chinese texts which formed their prevailing contents papers of clearly secular character could be picked out in increasing numbers, besides drawings and block prints on paper, as well as more paintings on silk and plentiful leaves in Indian script of Cursive Gupta type. So Chiang Ssü-yeh and myself worked on without a break that first day, until darkness in the cave put a stop to further efforts.

Highly gratifying as the variety and interest of these un hoped-for discoveries was, my foremost attention was claimed by a task that was all-important for the time being. It was to keep Wang Tao-shih in a pliable mood and to prevent him from giving way to the nervous flutterings with which the chance of any intrusion and of consequent hostile rumours among his patrons intermittently filled him. Chiang Ssü-yeh's genial persuasion and any reassuring display that I could make of my devotion to Buddhist lore and Hsüan-tsang's memory proved helpful for this end. At times the priest's apprehensive and suspicious look would yield to one of placid contentment or even pride at our appreciation of much that was to him valueless lore, even though he grew visibly tired of climbing over manuscript heaps and dragging out heavy bundles. I had taken care in advance to assure him of a generous donation for his shrine in compensation for the trouble and possible risk he was facing over my examination of his treasures.

Talks with
Wang Tao-
shih.

Late in the evening a big selection of manuscripts and painted fabrics properly packed lay ready on one side of our 'reading-room', awaiting removal for what our diplomatic convention styled 'closer examination'. But there remained the great question whether the Tao-shih would be willing to face the risks of this removal, and subsequently to fall in with the true interpretation of our purpose. It did not seem prudent as yet to approach him with ignoble words about sale and purchase, or to attempt removal except in strictest secrecy. But as we were leaving his shrine, tired with the day's work, I took occasion to engage the priest in another long talk about our common patron saint. I claimed it as an obvious proof of the Arhat's guidance and favour that I should have been privileged to behold such a great hidden store of sacred texts and other relics of piety, in part connected, perhaps, with his Indian pilgrimage, within a cave-temple which so devoted an admirer of 'T'ang-sêng' had restored to its full splendour. As we stood in the loggia, which the Tao-shih had adorned with the frescoes of his saintly hero's adventures, I emphatically