

Pendant  
to 'wind  
scene',  
Ch. XVI.

calm dignified presence in the centre of a Buddha or Bodhisattva, dressed in the patchwork robe of a monk, like the usual garment of Kṣitigarbha, and gently fanning himself with his right hand. Above his head graceful cloud scrolls support an elaborate canopy. At the feet of the divine figure and in front are shown, in small detached groups, persons undergoing painful operations; one with his head pressed down, another with his arms tied at the back, etc., while a lamenting female turns her hands towards the Buddha as if to implore redress. Above a priestly figure seems about to strike a bell hanging from a massive timber framework; it is seen again on the right in the distance, but there carried through the air by the gale. The arm of another figure close by is raised, as if pointing to the effect produced far away. This effect seems likewise to be marked by the wind-tossed figures and objects which are shown in the middle portion of the fresco where it passes behind the central screen. The scenes represented along the side margin and below the main subject show no direct connexion with it, but may safely be assumed to have their place in the legend which the whole fresco was intended to illustrate.

Legend  
represented  
on west wall  
of Ch. XVI.

What this legend was I have not been able to ascertain so far.<sup>20</sup> That it will ultimately be traced in the vast lore of sacred stories preserved in Chinese Buddhist texts is very probable *a priori*, and the cartouches, where filled in, may give help. But anyhow it is certain that the legend must have been well known and popular in this region; for I found its representation repeated, not only in the shrine Ch. VII (Fig. 213), but also in one of the cave-temples of Wang-fohsia.<sup>21</sup> The fact that the general design and most of the details are substantially identical in all three wall-paintings raises a strong presumption that we have here replicas of some earlier and favourite picture. That its original designer may be credited with a considerable degree of artistic imagination and skill is clear. But without knowing the story we are not in a position to judge whether the striking contrast between the gentle act of the Blessed One's fanning and the violent storm shaking the royal tent in the distance was first brought out by the art of the painter, nor whether the wind-swept condition of the Tun-huang marches had something to do with the local popularity of the story which he set himself to illustrate.

Oldest ex-  
tant grotto.

I cannot conclude these very imperfect notes on individual shrines without expressing my regret that what apparently is the oldest extant grotto retaining its original decoration had completely escaped my attention. I mean the grotto of which M. Pelliot, in the first summary account of his expedition, has reproduced two photographs, and which he describes in the 'under-lines' as of the Wei period, about A.D. 500.<sup>22</sup> The close agreement which its plastic remains, as seen in these photographs, show with the sculptures of Yün-kang and Lung-mên places this attribution beyond all reasonable doubt. In the absence of any textual description, I am led to conclude that this early grotto is among those high up on the cliff which their position has rendered difficult of access as soon as the wooden galleries leading past them had decayed, and which consequently were better protected from risks of vandal damage and subsequent renovation than the rest.

Tasks re-  
maining at  
Ch'ien-fo-  
tung.

But apart from such places there will still remain chances of important discoveries as long as the masses of drift-sand covering the foot of the cliff at both ends of the main group of caves is not cleared, nor a careful search made for any old work that may lie hidden behind the plaster of the frescoes now decorating the walls. All this and the thorough study of the remains actually exposed in respect of their technique, chronological sequence, etc., may well claim the labours of

<sup>20</sup> In 1913 M. Petrucci in a letter informed me that he believed himself to be on the track of a text in the Chinese Buddhist Canon likely to explain this wall-painting. But he does not appear to have been able to follow up the clue, if it was the right one, before his untimely death.

<sup>21</sup> See Fig. 245 and below, Chap. xxvi. sec. iv.

<sup>22</sup> See the illustrations in Pelliot, *Trois ans dans la Haute Asie* (reprint from the *Bulletin du Comité de l'Asie française*, 1910, janvier), pp. 12, 13. The text of the lecture contains no reference to these very interesting photographs.