

terrace at the foot of the cliffs on the right bank (Fig. 244) seemed kept in fair repair. This and the cheerful appearance of the three well-fed Taoist priests holding charge gave to the place the air of a religious establishment quite 'in being'. The visits of well-to-do Mongols from the high valleys and plateaus to the south are probably of considerable help in the matter of pious support. The three Tao-shih, who claimed to have been in residence for over thirty years, appeared to know little or nothing about the history of the place they were guarding. But from various indications I concluded that, owing to its position far away from ground affording supplies and plunder, it had escaped most of the havoc suffered by Chinese shrines on the main track of the great devastating Tungan inroads.

Caves of  
lower story  
on R. bank.

The grottoes of Wan-fo-hsia, though executed on a distinctly smaller scale, in all essential points of architectural disposition and artistic decoration show the closest resemblance to that average type of Ch'ien-fo-tung shrines which has been described above, and which may approximately be assigned to the ninth-tenth century. This will explain why in spite of the pleasant stay offered by Wan-fo-hsia I did not feel justified in extending my visit beyond two days, and also why my description of its remains must be brief. The principal caves are found on the right bank ranged in two stories, as seen in Fig. 244. The lower one opens on a terrace, about 20 feet above the river; the other extends on a level about 50-60 feet higher. The series of five main caves below starts on the south-east with one containing a colossal seated Buddha image, which rises up into the second story and is there approached by the shrine I numbered xvii.<sup>4</sup> Next to it is a cave with a colossal figure of Buddha recumbent in Nirvāṇa, fully 30 feet long. Both these, like all the other stucco images in the caves of Wan-fo-hsia, are abundantly restored and in consequence bear a modern appearance. The five caves of the lower story are rendered very dark by the verandahs built in front of them. Added to the effect of incense smoke this makes the examination of the wall-paintings, executed here as elsewhere in tempera, difficult. The subjects of the larger panels appear to be chiefly assemblies of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, set within a square frame of geometric design, and this again enclosed within a circle or oval of elaborate floral pattern. In some of these panels, I thought, the style suggested Tibetan influence. These lower main caves, together with five or six small grottoes between them containing new frescoes, are the shrines which seem to receive now most attention from resident priests and pious visitors.

Upper row  
of cave-  
temples on  
right bank.

The upper row of caves is approached by flights of stairs roughly cut into the rock, which start near some small grottoes serving as quarters for the priests and visible on the extreme left of Fig. 244. After crossing a deep cleft of the rock wall by a rickety bridge and ascending a roughly hewn tunnel past a cave of which the front part has fallen, we reach the northernmost of a line of cave-temples, xi-xxiii, extending on a uniform level. All of them comprise a cella, square or nearly so, with sides varying from 20 to 32 feet; an antechapel, itself as broad as the cella, but only of moderate depth and separated from the cella by a shallow wide passage; a high porch or outer passage, in some cases 20-30 feet deep where it is intact, admitting light and air from the face of the cliff, and visible with its opening in Fig. 244. The shrines originally communicated with each other by means of narrow plastered passages leading from one porch to the other through the facing part of the rock wall. But where this had crumbled away or become unsafe, a rough

<sup>4</sup> The temple court built outside the cave of the colossal Buddha is seen on the extreme right in Fig. 244, and above it also the balcony and porch in front of xvii.

I much regret that want of time did not allow me to make a plan of the site. My references to the caves needing special mention are based on a numeration which starts with the

uppermost of the shrines on the left bank (i; see Fig. 242). After descending this bank to shrine x, it is continued with the lowermost of the grottoes in the upper story on the right bank (xi, in Fig. 244) and closes with shrine xxii at the south-eastern end of this story.