

had insisted upon my taking along a petty officer and some soldiers of the Tun-huang levy corps. For them and the Ssü-yeh there was ample room in the big verandahs and halls built in front of the large caves just opposite our camping-place. Chiang himself had a delightfully cool room at the very feet of a colossal seated Buddha reaching through three stories, and with his innate sense of neatness promptly turned it into quite a cosy den with his camp rugs. Later on, when it got hotter, I myself used the anteroom of another restored grotto close by for a 'Daftar.' After what we had gone through during the desert winter and spring we had all reason to feel ourselves in clover, in spite of the somewhat salt water of the stream, which the Surveyor grumbled at much and accused of reviving his rheumatism.

Next morning I started what was to be ostensibly the main object of my stay at the site, the survey of the principal grottoes, and the photographing of the more notable frescoes. Purposely I avoided any long interview with the Tao-shih, who had come to offer me welcome at what for the most of the year he might well regard his domain. He looked a very queer person, extremely shy and nervous, with an occasional expression of cunning which was far from encouraging (Fig. 187). It was clear from the first that he would be a difficult person to handle.

But when later on I had been photographing in one of the ruined temple grottoes near the great shrine restored by him, where the manuscripts had been discovered, I could not forgo a glance at the entrance passage from which their place of deposit was approached. On my former visit I had found the narrow opening of the recess, locked with a rough wooden door; but now to my dismay it was completely walled up with brickwork. Was this a precaution to prevent the inquisitive barbarian from gaining even a glimpse of the manuscript treasures hidden within? I thought of the similar device by which the Jain monks of Jesalmir, in their temple vault, had once attempted to keep Professor Bühler from access to their storehouse of ancient texts, and mentally prepared myself for a long and arduous siege.