

from Ibrāhīm Bēg and Tila Bai, another trusted old follower. Two midnight trips which they made to the temple with Chiang, under the screening shadow of the steep river-bank, allowed the huge sackfuls to be safely removed to my store-room without any one, even of my own men, having received an inkling. Prolonged absence from his clients in the oasis had caused the nervousness of Wang Tao-shih to increase. So as soon as our transaction was completed he hastened to resume his seasonal begging tour in the district.

In order to assuage his spiritual scruples as well as I could, and to give visible proof of grateful attachment to my 'patron saint's' memory, I had previously arranged through the priest to have one of the abandoned smaller shrines in the southern group of grottoes redecorated with a new clay image of Hsüan-tsang. The Tun-huang sculptor's work in due time produced an artistic eyesore, but widely advertised by the Tao-shih it helped to dispel suspicions about my long visit. So when a week later he returned I found him reassured that the secret had not been discovered, and that his spiritual influence, such as it was, had suffered no diminution. Thus it became possible to make him stretch a point further and allow me to acquire some twenty more bundles of Chinese manuscripts, with supplementary selections from the 'mixed' bundles, against an appropriate donation for his temple. When later on I proceeded to the packing, the manuscript acquisitions filled seven cases, such as horses could carry, while five more were required to hold the paintings, decorated textiles, and other miscellaneous relics. The safe packing of the painted silks proved to be a very delicate task needing great care, and I was glad to utilize for it the days when sandstorms made photographic work in the caves impossible. The risk of causing suspicion in Tun-huang by a sudden large order of cases was avoided by the precaution I had taken to bring some 'empties' to the site and by securing the rest by discreet instalments.

Further acquisitions and packing.

The forethought and care bestowed on such necessary safeguards did not remain unrequited. I had the satisfaction of seeing that the shy Tao-shih, honest in his own way, now breathed freely again. It seemed almost as if in a dim way he recognized that it was a pious act on his part to let me rescue for Western scholarship as much as circumstances would permit of those ancient Buddhist relics which local ignorance would allow to lie here neglected or to be lost in the end. When I finally took my departure from the 'Halls of the Thousand Buddhas', his quaint, sharp-cut face had resumed its customary expression of shy but self-contented serenity. We parted in fullest amity. But the most gratifying proof I received of the peaceful state of his mind was when, on my return to An-hsi four months later, he agreed to give up, for that 'temple of learning' in the distant West of which I had told him so often, another big share of the Chinese and Tibetan manuscripts in the shape of over two hundred and thirty compact bundles. How this was successfully achieved through Chiang Ssü-yeh's persuasive diplomacy and in perfect secrecy has been told in my Personal Narrative.<sup>4</sup> But it was only when all the twenty-four cases heavy with manuscripts rescued from the priest's precarious keeping, and the five more filled with paintings and other art remains from the same hoard, had been safely deposited in the British Museum that I could feel true relief.

Departure from 'Thousand Buddhas'.

#### SECTION IV.—SUBSEQUENT INVESTIGATIONS OF THE DEPOSIT

In giving above so full an account of my efforts and labours at the old library hidden away in Wang Tao-shih's temple I was guided mainly by two considerations. On the one hand, it was regard for the exceptional importance which may be claimed for this great deposit of early manuscripts and art remains, probably the largest ever brought to light in modern times within the

Detailed record of observations.

<sup>4</sup> See *Desert Cathay*, ii. p. 339.