



## CHINESE LANDSCAPE IN MINIATURE

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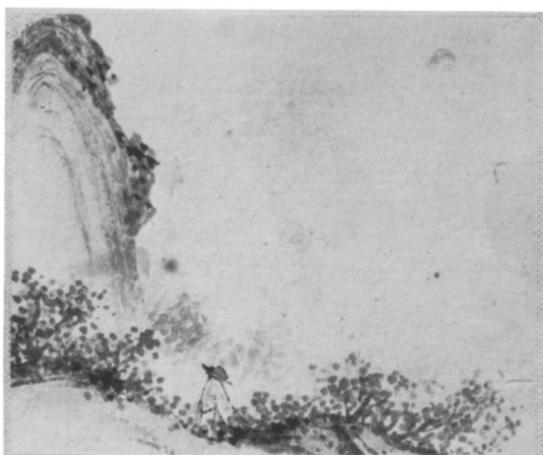
There has lately come into our hands a most charming—even adorable—little toy. It is a miniature album of Chinese paintings, complete with wooden covers and small faded yellow silk wrapper of the sort that many palace paintings have. The whole album measures only  $2\frac{1}{4}$  by 2 inches, and the actual paintings, which are on paper, measure less— $1\frac{3}{4}$  by  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inches, to be exact.

The last painting is signed and sealed by a famous painter of the eighteenth century, Chang Tsung-ts'ang, and the painter's name is preceded by the character *chen*, which means "subject," and followed by the two characters *kung hui*, which mean "respectfully painted." The same inscription appears finely incised upon the cover. This, together with the excellence of composition and draftsmanship of the several pictures, makes it impossible not to believe that the album is an original and was painted directly for the Emperor Ch'ien Lung. There are no supporting documents with the paintings. We know only that it was purchased from a Peking dealer who had obviously been in touch with various members of the imperial

household. The album rests on its own qualities, which are convincing enough.

Chang Tsung-ts'ang (1686-1755) was a native of Wu Hsien in Kiangsu Province. We are told that he studied painting with Huang Ting (1650-1731) and that he specialized in landscape. When, in 1751, the Emperor Ch'ien Lung visited the south, Chang Tsung-ts'ang presented him with a series of sixteen local scenes and was rewarded by an appointment to the Imperial Picture Studios. There are 106 paintings attributed to him in the imperial catalogue, many of them with laudatory colophons in the emperor's writing. The list includes an album of landscapes which might very well be this one.

We don't know exactly when the Chinese started painting miniatures—probably early. It may be that we shall find a great many. I have seen a number of small scrolls, but heretofore no album as small as this. I suppose that neither Easterners nor Westerners have taken them very seriously as works of art. Indeed, they were not intended to be taken seriously. They were intended to be enchanting toys,



*Paintings from a miniature album, by Chang Tsung-ts'ang, XVIII century. About 1½ times actual size*

and certainly this album is as enchanting a toy as could be imagined. Man takes a curious pleasure in both the colossal and the diminutive—things that are either much greater or much smaller than the objects he is accustomed to using. The great example of the pleasure we take in these matters is set forth in *Gulliver's Travels*, where Swift produced a whole world for us in miniature and in gigantic size. There is a little of Gulliver in most of us, and, to tell the truth, out of our innate dignity and pride, we prefer Lilliput to Brobdingnag.

All eight of our miniature album leaves are landscape paintings, but in five of them men appear. The man who painted them had in his mind's eye the majestic landscapes of the Sung Dynasty, but he achieves only the eighteenth century's elegant version of twelfth-century painting. It is a dreadful and a tragic thing for a scholar and a painter to be bound by a great tradition and born after the greatest glory of that tradition is over, if he knows it (and many painters do know it); and yet if it is his life's passion to paint, he paints and paints to the top of his bent and at long length he gets a reward. Time rolls on. For human beings certainly it rolls at varying pace, but as it goes from century to century in China the best painters of each successive day leave the mark of their times; and when we are able to look back we find that the eighteenth century had its own peculiar flavor, its own excellence,

its own real genius. Part of the tale is told in this tiny album. Here are the same great cliffs and vast spaces, the same quiet, lonely scholars looking out upon the world, but there is a difference: the Sung painter had attained a representation of men and mountains in their full majesty; the eighteenth-century painter sought to make the same world richer and more livable. The eighteenth century in China was one of comparative richness and order. For the most part, men could live in it with quiet enjoyment and have time to perfect their arts. This shows in these little pictures.

Chang Tsung-ts'ang was a painter of great skill and imagination. Looking back as he does, he still, in his own right, gives us a beautiful and lovely view of nature that the Sung masters would have been glad to praise him for. We, critically reviewing a phase of painting, can say this is primitive, this is mature, this is senescent; but let us be careful lest we miss the value and the genius of each phase.

The Chinese way of painting landscape still continues and is very far from coming to an end—already its fundamental concepts glimmer up in Western painting. There are glints of it in Whistler and Degas and Manet, and as time goes on more and more of the Chinese concept of painting will creep quietly in. There is an understanding and a force here that may change but will never die or fade entirely away.