For the most part, Western writers on Chinese painting have directed their attention to the painters of the T'ang and Sung dynasties (618-907 and 960-1279) or later reflections of their styles, and have ignored the work of the Ming and Ch'ing dynasties (1368-1644 and 1644-1912), in the belief that the great days of Chinese art came to an end with the Yuan dynasty (1280-1368) and that nothing really worth looking at has been done from that day to this. Nothing could be further from the truth. Contemporary collectors are beginning to pay serious attention to the later paintings, and they are being richly rewarded for their pains.

The Museum has recently acquired a miraculous landscape scroll which is believed to have been painted by Ch'en Shun (1483-1544), better known as Ch'en Tao-fu, a Ming painter famous for his landscapes and pictures of flowers and birds. The scroll is painted on paper 24 feet 7½ inches long and 12½ inches high in black and gray ink against a background of washes in pale colors. The painting is prefaced by four beautiful Chinese characters. One by one, stripped to the bone, they mean in English "fall—brush—mist—clouds." This is in a way a title, a title of unbridled poetic license. Since the words are richer in meaning and more lovely to look at in Chinese calligraphy than they are in English print, it is better not to tamper with their literal rendering or to try to explain how, as the painter's brush falls, mist and clouds arise.

The main tenets of Chinese landscape painting are easy enough to understand. Chinese painters chose to interpret the visual world by means of flat washes and line—particularly line. In this there should be nothing strange or alien to Western eyes, for we accept without question the wash drawings of Claude Lorrain or the pen drawings in sepia that Turner made for...
Small villages and temples

the engraver of the Liber Studiorum. And yet, when the Chinese paint landscapes in the same mode and almost the same way, we are apt to find the results exotic and unreal. Why? Is it because in the West we have one set of standards for sketches and drawings and another for oil paintings? Would we accept Chinese pictures more readily if we called them drawings rather than paintings? Perhaps the answer is that we are so habituated to words and phrases that we look at pictures as our historians direct us, instead of looking with innocent, unconditioned eyes. If, however, we would look at Chinese paintings without prejudice, we would find that, while the artists have kept to what we consider the slighter, more informal technique, they have wonderfully developed it, devising many deft tricks and changes.

The fact that the Chinese use ink and brushes of various sizes rather than pencil or crayon enables them at once to produce an almost infinite variety of line and to create easily the effect of weight and mass by the repetition of strokes. This use of line—and the effect is almost always produced by line—gives the painters enormous freedom, especially in suggesting movement. A few swift strokes inform us as to the quietness or turbulence of water. A few more, and with the bulge of a sail, the direction of a leaf, or the flutter of a drapery, these painters have become delineators of the wind itself. Proceeding thus, they have worked out formulas to convey to the eye with seeming realism the forms of trees and plants, of mountains, cliffs, and rocks. Once the repertory is learned they are free to compose landscapes as they please—sometimes almost recognizable views of specific places but more often landscapes of the mind.

In many of their horizontal hand scrolls, as in the present landscape, Chinese painters have achieved something for which we in the West have no close parallel. Since these pictures, some of them more than thirty feet in length, are meant to be seen only a short space at a time—as much as can be conveniently unrolled between the right hand and the left—the beholder is instantly given an active part in his relationship to the picture; he can roll the scroll forward and back, choosing his view and composition at will. The invitation is irresistible. The extraordinary thing is that almost any given space appears to be a complete composition. Moreover, the beholder is likely to be further beguiled with a path or a waterway, or both, which begins at one end of the scroll and continues all the way through, so that he has the illusion of following it. Sometimes it is near at hand, sometimes it goes far off; it may pass
briefly from sight behind a cliff or even, perhaps, lead the spectator high into the mountains. The Chinese know full well what they are doing in this matter, for an agreeable story of theirs tells of a painter who, having completed a great wall painting, sketched a doorway in it, walked through, and disappeared forever.

In this spirit Ch'en Tao-fu's river scroll was painted. To look at his landscape is as refreshing as to spend a long and perfect day in the country. There are no snares or pitfalls in it, no plagues of noxious insects or unwelcome picnickers in a favorite spot. It presents, I should say, a day in September—a day of delicious temperature, warm enough to raise a delicate haze on distant flats and mountains, but not too warm to walk in—a day with light breezes that propel occasional sails, suggesting the pleasant alternative of taking a boat if one is not disposed to walk. The sun falls pale and white upon the river. The water flows quiet and serene; only once, when momentarily confined by an arched bridge, does it break into rapid movement. The country through which the river runs is varied and pleasant; though fairly wild and rugged at times, it is never grandiose or terrifying.

At the beginning of the scroll the beholder finds himself upon a promontory with a few houses and a bridge from which he looks across the wideness of the river to the far bank and flats. For some distance—a mile, two miles perhaps—he proceeds through narrows, past occasional small villages and temples and rather fine rocks, meeting occasional strollers and catching sight of two or three sailboats, an island, groups of trees, reeds. Then he discovers a distant mountain range, rising from plain to foothill, from foothill to peak. In the course of the river day he passes two such ranges and finally, at the end of it, comes again to flat lowland, to open water with little boats in the distance, and at the very last to nothing at all. From this most pleasant state of being the beholder is snapped back into the world he has lately left by a brief burst of sky-written calligraphy in which the painter signs off with two of his intimate names or nicknames, "White Shining Mountain Man" and "Follower of the Way" (Tao), and explains that the scroll was painted "in play" for an elder brother. This is the river trip and the kind of day which Ch'en Tao-fu offers to anyone who cares to look.

I had much rather let matters go at that than enter into a preachment on the differences between early and late landscapes; but, as this is the first landscape that has been presented to

*Narrows through which the river runs*
Light breezes that propel occasional sails

Bulletin readers since the majestic splendors of The Tribute Horse, a painting of the early Sung dynasty (960-1279), were displayed in October, 1943, in all fairness a little more should be said about it.

The technique of the river scroll would certainly have outraged the painter of The Tribute Horse, and it is likely to annoy and exasperate any right-thinking realist. If, however, one remembers that the picture was painted in play he will be more amused than offended at the visual tricks—and there are a good many—that the artist has played on him. In the first place, very few colors are used throughout the scroll: neutralized yellow, orange that is almost a faded tiger color, grayish blue that is sometimes greenish and that is occasionally strengthened in intensity on a distant mountain peak, and a great deal of gray. Having set forth these subdued, autumnal, pastel hues, Ch’ênnf Tao-fu makes them the background for a bravura performance of electric black brush strokes with which he directs attention to the shapes of foreground rocks and sails, an occasional wayfarer, temples, reeds, and trees. This brush-stroke performance is brilliant in the extreme. If one blinks slightly on finding that a fisherman walking across a bridge in the middle ground is four times the size of the men in sailboats in the foreground, or on discovering that tiny lichens and plant forms, which according to the classical convention should be represented as tiny dots, have here been exaggerated into loud, staccato arpeggios, it is not hard to forgive the painter. These are minor licenses when one takes into consideration the successful illusion of the painting as a whole and the almost countless details which, flashed in with dazzling speed and brevity, delight the eye with the sheer brilliance of their execution. There is a passage of water reeds, a congregation of sails behind a rock, a tier of distant mountain peaks—many such things—that can hardly be equaled in any painting we know.