"Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well
   As she is fam'd to do, deceiving elf.
Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades
   Past the near meadows, over the still stream,
   Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep
   In the next valley-glades:
Was it a vision, or a waking dream?
   Fled is that music:—Do I wake or sleep?"

The same approach to the natural world is evident in the three physical forms of landscape painting of the Southern Sung school, the hanging scrolls, the horizontal scrolls, and the album leaves; but the very difference in size and shape invites a different response upon the part of the spectator and actually stimulates different muscles of the eye and mind. One must view from some little distance, standing or sitting, the large vertical scrolls and look at them almost as if one were in the same landscape, only a little farther removed than the figures represented in them. The proper way to look at the horizontal scrolls is to sit at a desk or table and take part in the picture as one unrolls it from right to left, rolling forward or back at will, looking at just the expanse of the changing scene that one finds most pleasing. Unfortunately this practice is not possible in a museum gallery, and the spectator must work a little harder by moving himself instead of moving the picture and by bending his eye to the angle it would have if he were sitting at a table. For these pictures were painted. The painters who made these pictures worked with their eyes at just that distance from silk or paper, and if we are to see what a given painter saw we must adjust our vision to his. The third form of Sung landscape painting, the album

ABOVE: Left, Two Sages and an Attendant under a Plum Tree, by Ma Yuan (active about 1190—about 1225). In the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Right, Sages Admiring a Waterfall, attributed to Ma Yuan. From the Bahr collection. Fletcher Fund, 1947. Sung monochrome school
leaves, which include flat, round fan shapes some of which were actually used as fans and later mounted as album leaves, to be seen at their best and as the painter intended, should be looked at as if one were sitting at a table and turning the pages of a book or as if one were holding a book conveniently in one’s lap and bending over it. All this is so obvious that to set it down in cold black and white instantly appears to be almost puerilely didactic. But the great majority of Westerners see Chinese paintings only in the galleries of museums. They have not had the agreeable experience of handling a horizontal scroll themselves or of turning the pages of a Chinese album. They see these things laid out in a case or hung upon a wall, the horizontal scrolls extended, pinned down, bereft of movement, the album leaves stuck up like postage stamps. It is the difference between seeing a live panther and seeing a panther skin nailed to a barn door.

Having written this little preachment down, I view my own words with the same exasperation that I feel on reading Stella Benson’s request to the reader of her Faraway Bride that he read the book of Tobit in her appendix before beginning the story. If I dance with rage to be told by Miss Benson to read Tobit I should be prepared to have my ears boxed when I have the impertinence to tell my own small and usually indulgent public how to look at Chinese pictures. Box. Box. Box. I will be most meek. To tell the truth, I never stopped to think the matter out before in just this way and, obvious as it is, I am so pleased with what is a discovery for me that I should like to hand it on.

Pictures hanging on a wall, pictures to be unrolled upon a desk, albums with leaves to turn, three pleasant things; which pleases more or most is according to each one who looks, according to time and place and mood. Of the three, the album leaves are the most intimate, and as we look and wonder and imagine what this Sung school really was at its best, as we worry about dates and attributions, the heart of the secret and the answers are waiting in the album leaves.

There are myriads of album leaves in the Sung style; among them must be many that were painted during the Sung dynasty, some with correct signatures. Sooner or later we shall surely arrive at an agreement on some as actually Sung and on just who painted which. The
matter of physical survival enters into this. The large hanging scrolls were apt to be hung for periods of considerable length. They were used more often. Their very size made their preservation more difficult. The horizontal scrolls were taken out and unrolled occasionally. Every unrolling takes its toll, and wise owners were careful of the best ones and unrolled them rarely. Some of the hanging scrolls and some of the horizontal scrolls might be stored away and, half forgotten, have long periods of rest. Both are very vulnerable. But the album leaves, small rounds and squares, never hung or long exposed, protected by blank pages and heavy covers of wood or layers of paper mounted with brocade, could be looked at year in and year out with a minim of wear and tear.

It is true that the album leaves were easier to copy than the scrolls. Through the centuries almost any painter might try his hand at painting a Hsia Kuei or Ma Yuan (adding the signature for full measure), some of them succeeding so well that even in our day an album leaf by Prince P'u Ju with the help of a little staining and sun rot might easily be collected by the unwarthy as a Ma Yuan. True enough, but equally true that among the myriads of extant album leaves many are actually Sung. View the activities of Ch'i Pai-shih, one of the greatest of contemporary painters, whose shrimps please everybody so much that not only does he, at the age of ninety, repeat himself half a dozen times a day, but his contemporaries imitate, copy, and forge his paintings and even his signature until his shrimps seem to breed almost faster than real shrimps in the sea. If you stop to think of
the probable shrimp census or even of those shrimps which have been personally presented to you and devoured, you will probably be quite frightened by the number; indeed if you think of the number of shrimps too much you are likely to end up in a padded cell. Don’t think of them too much; think of them just enough to see that if Ch’i Pai-shih can paint shrimps from morn till night it is quite possible that a Sung painter, having achieved an album leaf that pleased him, painted it more than once—perhaps a score of times—so that if we find twenty similar leaves all of the same subject, all attributed to the same master, all with the same signature, it is not to be insisted upon that one is the original, the other nineteen forgeries. It is quite possible that the same painter did all twenty of them himself.

It is in the album leaves—these agreeable rounds and squares, most commonly about ten inches across—that we arrive at the heart of Sung monochrome landscape painting and see and feel as clearly as if we ourselves lived in the twelfth century; the silk may have darkened a little with age but not enough to obscure our sight. When we look at the finest of these we are looking without a shadow of a doubt at Sung painting at its best.

The size of the album leaves is small, but they are not in any wise miniatures. One after another has the quiet splendor of scale which we find in the hanging scrolls. These album leaves are not little things. The best of them are very great paintings, set down in terms comfortable for the human eye. (Reinach’s Apollo gives intimation in postage-stamp size of

---

*Sailboat in the Rain, by Hsia Kuei (active about 1180-1230).*
*Sung monochrome school. In the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*
the grandeur of Titian’s Assumption or Tintoretto’s Milky Way.) The human eye is nimble as a monkey. The human eye looks as it pleases, it lives a life of its own; and so valuable is it to us who sit in darkness, more helpless than a jellyfish without our senses to report and inform us, that we give it a good deal of latitude. Our eyes are our most exciting messengers. They are the most agile reporters in the history of mankind. In the present case the eye will report that the Sung album leaves are little only in the matter of inches. They are not small things; they are large things. The painters of the album leaves, perhaps unconsciously and perhaps without plan, hit upon a means of expression which holds good century after century. Photography is rather recent (the camera was not a nuisance in the Sung dynasty). Contemporary man with monkey eye looks at a small photograph of the Jungfrau and juggles it without much trouble into scale. But the Sung painters produced a form of painting which would reduce a mighty mountain into terms the eye could understand then and can understand now.

There never has been a more beautiful or noble school of landscape painting than that of the Sung monochromes. Just at that time, just at that moment, painters for a little space saw, not only saw but understood, not only understood but were able to set down by the simple means of ink on silk or paper for the eye to see and for the eye to inform the mind of simple and profound truths. Just at that moment these men clearly saw the law and the pattern of the world in all its inexorable majesty. They saw more: they saw and understood man in his relation to it. They saw it then, and their record is not lost. Even if there were no painting left which we could call surely Sung, even if we had only dim
reflections, we too could see and understand. The Greek archaeologists have to guess at lost Greek paintings from echoes on vases, in literature, and in garbled later paintings. A Greek archaeologist might well stare enviously at the complaints of a Chinese archaeologist—we Chinese really might complain that we have too much.

In the album leaves the promises which are in the reflections of the hanging paintings and the horizontal scrolls are fulfilled. From them you may make your judgments and demands upon the larger paintings. There are album leaves in Boston which are called "by Ma Yuan" and "by Hsia Kuei," not "attributed to," nor "after." Take them as standards, and if the larger paintings or other album leaves do not approach them in quality then you may suspect them. Let us not enter into controversy or names at all; it is not necessary for pleasure or understanding. But let us repeat and repeat again that here in the album leaves is the pure jewel that all our writers East and West are searching for. It is here, not in isolated fragments but in small, perfect things repeated again and again, as clear and lucid as the drops of dew that will appear on the lotus leaves of July 1950 and be collected just as they were in 1150 by the tea drinkers of China. The thing we have sought for is here. It is as simple as so many things—as Newton's apple, for instance. Once it is put in words everybody says of course, so obvious why bother to say it. This is one of those things.

Pay no heed to the yap and snarl of scholars as to who painted what and when, nor to their gloomy howls against the moon that Sung painting is lost. It is not lost; it is present in the scrolls and in almost innumerable album leaves. This country is lucky; in the Boston
Winter on the Mountain Lake, attributed to Hsu Ching (active about 1100). Sung monochrome school. Kennedy Fund, 1913

Museum of Fine Arts and in the Metropolitan—take the two— one example after another of the "lost" school of Southern Sung exists in such variety that we are able to see in brief dimension much if not all of its subject matter and the peak of its performance. Here we can see, caught in a small space, mountains rounded, mountains sharp, mountains in sunlight, mountains in mist, mountains in summer, in winter, spring, and fall. We can see the perfection of a particular tree, the rush of water in a stream, and, swirling in vapor, that strange and wonderful creature the Chinese dragon, which is the seed and the soul of mist and rain, of moving water, and also of the mind powerful and free. Lung t'iao T'ien Mên, "the dragon leaps past Heaven's gate." The symbolism is explicit: the great carp, like a salmon vaulting the rapids, already shows dragon whiskers and passing the gate of Heaven becomes dragon at last, no longer bound to struggle against the rushing flood but free to move wherever water is in any form.

And in the album leaves the birds appear, numbers of them. We must not forget that while we speak of the major theme of the Sung monochrome school, landscape and man's relation to it, the Sung painters stopped to look at particular birds and flowers and painted them with the dignity usually given to portraits. When we attend the landscapes we scarcely find birds at all in the large hanging pictures and find them only as grace notes or indications of movement in the horizontal scrolls, but we occasionally find them in the album leaves. Suddenly in an album leaf where the
bare, ruined choir of branches would seem to be enough we find a pair of magpies or a flock of white-collared crows, noisy things in real life, but here, although silent of throat, the variety of movement, the flash of wings affects the eye as the agreeable cacophony of an orchestra tuning up affects the ear. In such album leaves the birds appear as part of the landscape just as in other album leaves men appear each in their relation to the whole scheme of nature.

Look to the album leaves, my younger friends, and do not let your eyes become be-clouded nor your minds become befogged by the contentious, pessimistic prattle of professors. Look at the album leaves. There is the “lost” Sung painting, pure and serene as light at morning. There it is. Add to the album leaves the information in the horizontal and vertical scrolls and you will have your Sung dynasty ink landscape painting, as familiar to you as Central Park. Lovely, lovely, lovely are these pictures. They do not need explanation or meaning. They may be accepted lightly as one accepts and takes pleasure in the light of afternoon.

Light—air. Air, that seeming weightless nothingness so weighty that it supports the suns and moons and the stars of the universe and keeps them in balance. Air, that seeming life-less nothingness so charged with life that it can explode into a burning spark, a spark which may become a flaming entity. Out of the seeming empty air a spark, out of the spark an amorphous ball of fire, and the never-ending cycle has begun. Out of the flame a sphere of molten mineral and steam. The mineral cools
to rock, the steam to water. The ceaseless play of water on the rock brings earth; lichens appear and, with increasing speed, plants, reptiles, birds, animals, and at long last man. And all of these, from the long-lived rock to short-lived man, at last return to the air from which they come. This is the never-ending cycle on our particular planet. It is governed by inexorable laws which we prying humans learn more and more about. Majestic and awful is this scheme, pitiless and proud.

Very lofty and beautiful, but not, alas, satisfactory (and what philosophy is?) for the teeming billions of human beings who struggle for existence and do not like to be told that they play any such humble role in the universe. They do not like it a bit. My great Aunt Charlotte would have made short work of the Ch'an philosophers, and I myself find it difficult to maintain such composure as theirs on those days when I have an aching tooth or am harassed by my landlord, who quite evidently cares not a whit about Ch'an philosophy or whether I am hot or cold. Indeed once I did see one of the great Ch'an abbots, usually tranquil and serene, lose his temper and beat a countrywoman about the head with a broom. He jumped up and down like a gorilla, red robes flying. This I saw by peeking through the windows of the peaceful chambers of my guest apartment with startlement and horror. An hour later the abbot was as serene as ever, turning the pages of holy books. I dared not ask how such serenity could be upset, but I took pains to find out what upset it. There were bandits about. The countrywoman had accused him of telling the bandits where her donkeys were hidden, to keep them
away from the monastery’s donkeys. From this I deduce that noble as philosophy can be, far as your philosopher can see, aeons ahead, aeons behind, he is likely to be caught and irritated beyond endurance by the tiny frets of contemporary life.

There are contradictions always, but there is no doubt that through our human history men alone and men in concert have immortal longings and now and then achieve nobility and leave a record of it. Here in Sung painting is one of those achievements. The Sung painters, especially those under the spell of Ch’ān Buddhism, achieved one of the noblest and purest expressions of a tranquil understanding of the physical world we live in and, by implication, of the universe.

The whole thing sums up very simply. If one (not me) is so presumptuous as to write a history of art one sees that now and again there appear enduring manifestations of one art or another. We of today are aware of the splendor of Egypt and the glory of Greece. We are aware of the grandeur of Rome and the ecstasy of Chartres. Sung painting—especially the monochrome landscape paintings, catalogue them as you will—is one of the most noble records in the history of man.

With this article on the album leaves a presentation, in three parts, of the subject of Sung monochrome landscape painting is brought to a close. The hanging scrolls were discussed in the February Bulletin and the horizontal scrolls in March. The horizontal scroll attributed to Kuo Hsi and the Yuan version of a scroll by Hsia Kuei illustrated in the March
Bulletin on pages 198, 199 and 202, 203 are from the Bahr collection.

The album leaves in Boston and Kansas City illustrated in the present article are reproduced with the permission of their owners, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and the William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art, Kansas City.

The lines with which the article opens are from Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale," in The Poetical Works of John Keats, edited by H. Buxton Forman and published by the Oxford University Press, London, 1929.