

ment with forms in repose, rich detail with empty space, so as to stir in the spectator the intensest appreciation of each particular element. Space is not, in Chinese painting, something left over and unfilled; it is a positive power and an integral factor in design.

In the typical classics of Chinese art these special powers in the control of ordered, fluent line, and in mastery of spacing, are magnificently displayed. But even in these Tun-huang pictures, where the subject-matter, the imagery, and the canons of ideal form are taken over from India, we feel how all this is being fused in the fire of a different genius. And in such a picture as the large Paradise (Pls. I and II) how potently this genius is at work, controlling all these many groups of crowded figures, and this built-up composition, with all its various colours, in the spell of a single mood of immaterial felicity and peace!

IV

It has been mentioned that a series of Nepalese paintings of Bodhisattvas were found at Tun-huang. These are precious documents, because of the extreme rarity of Indian paintings of so early a period; but as their artistic interest is but slight, they have not been chosen for illustration. Plate xxxi reproduces a Tibetan painting. The territory of Tun-huang was conquered by the Tibetans in the middle of the eighth century A.D., and till the middle of the ninth century the Tibetan power was dominant. Quantities of Tibetan Buddhist writings were found in the cave: and among the paintings this one, certainly, is entirely Tibetan in style. (Two Tibetan drawings are reproduced on Pl. xxxii.) It is of the same type as the numerous pictures brought from Tibet itself in recent years, collections of which are in the British Museum, and in other museums of Europe and America. With regard to these pictures the question of date has always been a matter of conjecture. Many are darkened by incense-smoke, which in a few years can give an appearance of impressive antiquity. The probability is that the Tun-huang specimen dates from about the tenth century, and, if so, it is likely to be the oldest of its kind now in existence, or at the least one of the oldest. It is painted in distemper on linen, a technique favoured by the Tibetan artists.

But how did this Tibetan art grow up? What is the indigenous element in it? Buddhism was only introduced into the country in the seventh century, and whether Tibet had any art to speak of before its introduction we do not know. In Tibetan Buddhism the Tantra system of magic and witchcraft, and the worship of demons (supposed to be converted by Buddha and to be vassals under his sovereignty), play a dominant part; and in the paintings the forms are often monstrous and horrible, the colouring sombrely splendid. But the harmonies of fluid, sinuous line, for which they are even more remarkable, seem to be an element borrowed from Chinese art and carried to excess in Tibet. If we compare for a moment this painting with, for instance, the one reproduced on Plate XLII, we see how much this element counts for. And on the whole it seems likeliest to suppose that Tibetan painting is rather an offshoot of Chinese art, developed in a certain direction, and so acquiring a special character, than a native growth. But of this we cannot be certain.

Plate XLII illustrates, much reduced, an imposing example of the kind of painting in a mixed style which flourished in Eastern Turkestan. Note how the flowers dropping through the air suggest none of that sense of the fragility of flowers, and of their light floating on the air, which the Chinese artist knows instinctively how to give: they are heavy and motionless. There is a certain rigidity and solidity in the whole picture; and the effect of solidity is consciously aimed at by the system of modelling the central figure in two tones of colour. This system is carried yet further in Plate X, where high lights on nose and forehead (blackened through oxidization in some places) have been added in white. Compare also Plate XI, illustrating a very large painting of similar character, full of the most interesting detail (note the babies enclosed within the lotus-buds, souls of the blessed about to be born into Paradise). These pictures are painted in what Sir Aurel Stein calls 'the fresco style',