

PLATE XX

AVALOKITEŚVARA WITH FLAME-WREATHED HALO

THE fine silk painting (Ch. xviii. 003) reproduced here on a scale of a little over two-thirds of the original is a work of considerable artistic merit and is without a pendant in the Collection. It shows a standing Avalokiteśvara painted in a style which shows affinity to the 'Indian' type of Bodhisattva figures previously mentioned but has marked peculiarities of its own. The picture is complete, but the bare upper part of the figure painted with dull red outlines and comparatively faint pink colouring has unfortunately much faded, while the more solid and brilliant colours of the dress and jewellery are well preserved and in consequence now absorb a disproportionate share of attention.

Avalokiteśvara stands facing the spectator with his feet planted on the bright green centres of two open dark-pink lotuses. His face, turned slightly towards the right shoulder with eyes downcast, bears an expression of serious mildness, as if of comprehending pity. The hair about the forehead is shown in pale blue, the eyebrows light green. Eyelashes, pupils of eyes, and the dividing line of lips, being painted in black, stand out distinctly among the otherwise faded features. Both arms are raised at the elbow, the right holding the willow spray over the shoulder, while the left carries on the open palm a short flask of blue and pink. The dress consists mainly of brilliant scarlet sprinkled with small blue trefoils and tied at the waist with a narrow blue girdle. A green sash is also loosely knotted round the hips. A long narrow stole of dark pink lined with green winds round the body from the left shoulder and flutters about the arms. White draperies descend from behind the head and shoulders.

The head-dress consists of a gilded circlet with a ball over the forehead supporting the Dhyāni-buddha's figure, and behind this of a tall cylindrical piece in dark pink and green surmounted by what may be meant for a topknot of hair but is now almost effaced. The rich jewellery is set with stones of bright scarlet, blue, and copper green, and hung with strings of pearls. A large greenish disc wreathed with scarlet flames forms a nimbus. Open lotus flowers are seen floating down in the air. The Chinese inscription in the left top corner describes the painting as the gift of a son in memory of his father, without recording the date of its dedication.

PLATE XXI

AVALOKITEŚVARA STANDING

THE figure of Avalokiteśvara which this Plate shows us on the scale of one-third of the original silk painting (Ch. liii. 005), well preserved except for the extreme top and bottom, shares with the Bodhisattvas of 'Indian' style characteristic features of physical type, pose, and dress. But the air of grace and gentleness which the Chinese painter has here infused into the formality of their conventions invests the figure with a peculiar charm and raises it well above their average level as a work of art.

We see Avalokiteśvara standing with the slender-waisted body inclined from the left shoulder and its weight thrown on the right hip in characteristic Indian pose. But the stiffness of this attitude, just as that of certain traditionally fixed details in the dress, is transformed by sweeping Chinese brush lines. The figure stands slightly to the left, with the eyes gazing down and the hands holding the usual attributes of the willow spray and the flask. The face is short and round, the mouth slightly larger than usual, with a tiny moustache and a tuft of beard indicated below by a small curl. The eyes are wide apart