

**MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS.
EXHIBITION OF THE WORKS OF
WILLIAM MORRIS HUNT. THE
EXHIBITION OPENS DEC. 20,
1879, AND CLOSSES JAN. 31, 1880**

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Boston -

MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS.

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OF THE WORKS OF

WILLIAM MORRIS HUNT.

THE EXHIBITION AS REARRANGED OPENS DEC. 20,
1879, AND CLOSES JAN. 31, 1880.



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WILLIAM MORRIS HUNT.

WILLIAM MORRIS HUNT was beyond question among the first of American artists. He will certainly always retain that position, whatever may be the success of others in the future. Works of commanding merit, like his, require a certain time to be fully appreciated, and need the judgment of another generation to fix their exact place in comparison with those of a different kind. But the superiority of his aims and methods is wholly unmistakable. Every picture that he has left bears the stamp of a master; and in certain qualities, at least, he was far beyond any of his predecessors or contemporaries.

He was born March 31, 1824, in Brattleboro, Vermont. His father, Mr. Jonathan Hunt, was for many years a member of Congress from that State, and died in Washington, in 1832. The family had been settled in New England for six generations, the first who came to this country, Mr. John Hunt, having died in Northampton in 1691; but the immediate line of William's

ancestors had been land-owners and residents in the neighborhood of Brattleboro, since the middle of the last century.

After going through the usual preparation, Hunt entered Harvard College in 1840, and continued a member of the University for most of the college course. During this period of his life, his cheerfulness of disposition, his unvarying good-humor, and the quickness and versatility of his intelligence, made him the favorite of his college associates. But with every natural advantage of person, manners, talent, and popularity, it was noticeable that in his intercourse with others, he never presumed in any way upon the possession of these advantages. He seemed to consider them as the accidents of his birth or organization, which gave him no title to the assumption of personal superiority. It is probable that among all his classmates, those who were the least gifted in intelligence and position would never have felt, from anything in his manner or language, the difference between them. His peculiar tastes showed themselves equally in drawing, in modelling, and in music. These employments were his principal recreations; and although the originality which afterwards became so prominent was not recognized at

that time, his facility of execution and expression was abundant evidence of his natural aptitude for artistic pursuits. After leaving college he went to Europe with the rest of his family, and there began the systematic work of his artistic education.

After spending a year or two at Düsseldorf, he changed his residence to Paris and there became the pupil of Couture. This was in 1848, and the relation of teacher and pupil was soon replaced by one of more equal association, as the two men mutually recognized each other's qualities. Hunt was afterward brought into close companionship with the painter Millet, whose manner and ideas he estimated at a very high value, and he continued this association almost uninterruptedly for the last few years of his residence abroad.

He returned home in 1855, and resided in Newport until 1862. He then removed to Boston, where he was already well known to many, both as a friend and as an artist, and from that time he continued to devote himself to his professional occupation.

In his personal traits, Hunt was an exceptional man. His tall and slender frame, his noble features, and his fine but tawny complexion were enough by themselves to make him a distinguished figure in any

average group. But no photograph or portrait could do justice to his activity of expression and the animated play of his features when engaged in talk. His powers of description and imitation, his fine sense of humor, and the sudden turns of his dramatic action were an unending source of surprise and entertainment to his oldest acquaintances. He was not a man to use with success the arts of logic or persuasion; but he rarely undertook anything that needed their employment. He was fully decided as to what his own opinions and conduct should be, without wishing to impose them on others; and he was restive under any attempt to invade the domain of his personal liberty or convictions.

Though never of a very athletic organization, he was fond of active exercise, and for the greater part of his life was in good health. But in the spring of 1878, he began to suffer a diminution of muscular strength, which interfered with his comfort, and somewhat with his capacity for work. He was then engaged upon a series of studies and sketches at Niagara, when he was called to Albany and invited to undertake the decoration of two large wall-spaces in the Assembly Chamber of the new State House in that city. On examining the location and dimensions

of the proposed work, he hesitated to undertake it, fearing that he would be physically unequal to the labor required. But the enterprise was so attractive on other accounts, and so well adapted to his tastes and ambition, that he was persuaded to accept the charge, and immediately began to prepare for its execution. The remainder of the summer he spent at his studio in Boston, occupied with the preliminary drawings and sketches; and on the last day of October, he commenced the work of painting at Albany. Contrary to his anticipation, the labor was not an exhausting one. Every means was employed by the commissioners in charge to diminish the physical difficulties of the situation and to provide for the comfort of the artist. Both his spirits and his strength improved visibly under the stimulus of a congenial occupation. The pleasure of carrying out his ideas on a large scale, with no interference or criticism to hamper their execution, was sufficient to restore his normal vigor of mind and body. The testimony of his companions, as well as his own expressions, show that he had never been happier or more efficient than when engaged in this labor, which at first he had feared to undertake. He completed it successfully on the last of December, and continued,