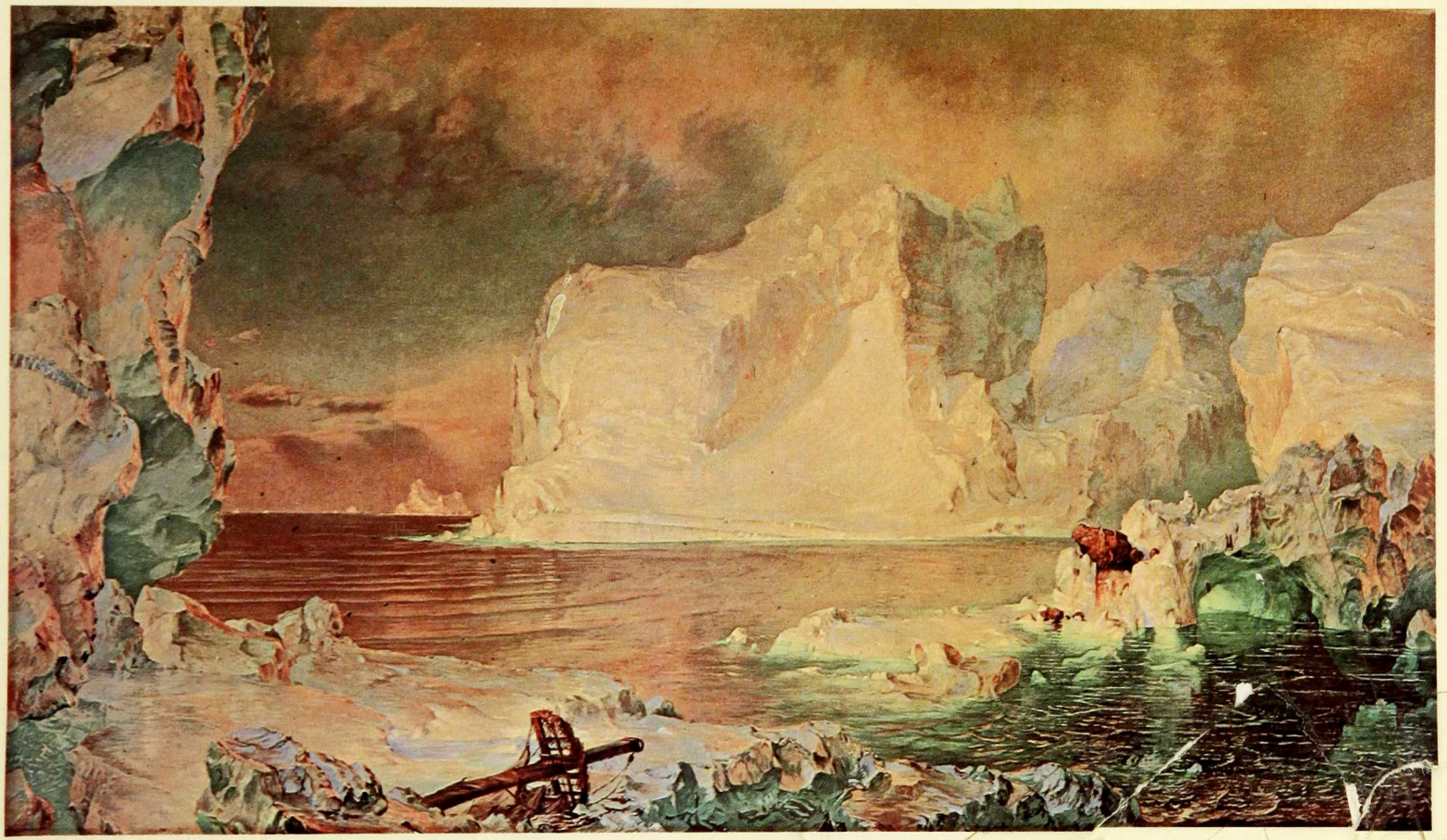
THE LANDSCAPES OF *Frederic Edwin Church*

VISION OF AN AMERICAN ERA



DAVID C. HUNTINGTON

THE LANDSCAPES OF *Frederic Edwin Church*

VISION OF AN AMERICAN ERA

DAVID C. HUNTINGTON

124 illustrations, 8 in full color

This is the first monograph to appear on the American landscape painter Frederic Church. The high quality of Church's art and the importance of his career within the larger frame of American intellectual life make the publication of the present book an important event for both the study of American painting and the cultural history of the United States.

Frederic Edwin Church (1826–1900) was the most talked about, most widely respected American painter of the eighteen fifties and sixties. He played a unique role in the spiritual making of this nation. His great landscapes inspired countless Americans—Irving, Bryant, Clemens, Greeley, Bancroft, Dana, Beecher and the young Isabella Stewart, to mention only a few. The London *Art Journal* named him "the successor of England's great Raphael of landscape, Turner." Gérôme, the leading painter of the French Academy, saw in Church's *Niagara* the beginning of painting in the New World.

(*continued on back flap*)

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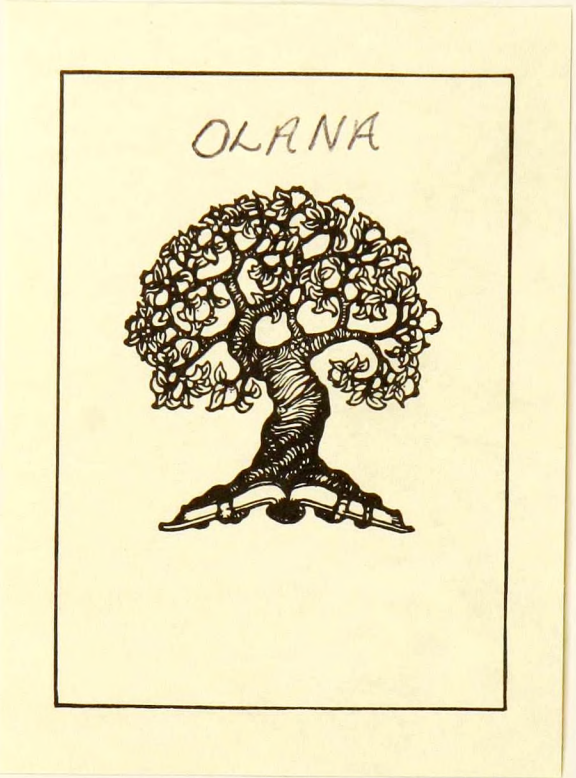

Olana Historic Site
Reference

Frederic Edwin Church

THE LANDSCAPES OF *Frederic Edwin Church*

VISION OF AN AMERICAN ERA

by DAVID C. HUNTINGTON

GEORGE BRAZILLER, NEW YORK

To my parents

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE

THIS book has been conceived as an introduction to the life and works of Frederic Edwin Church, who was one of the most complex and interesting of America's nineteenth century painters. The emphasis is on the highlights of his career, on his successive concepts of the work of art, and on the peculiar role which he as artist played in the cultural life of his day.

Little has been written about Church in the twentieth century, and this study is only a beginning. Its aim is to suggest the uniqueness and the validity of his contribution to our artistic heritage. The discussion is concentrated on some fifteen or twenty major canvases, some thirty or forty of his studies from nature, and on Olana, his residence, which is itself worthy of a book.

Had it not been for the generosity of Olana Preservation, Inc. and of J. William Middendorf, II, the publication of this book might have been delayed many months. I wish to mention, too, my indebtedness to Charles T. Lark, Jr., who kindly gave me permission to undertake research at Olana, to Barbara La Penta who edited this manuscript, to Richard P. Wunder of the Smithsonian Institution and formerly of the Cooper Union Museum, who saved me weeks of research, and to Mary Bartlett Cowdrey who graciously lent me her extensive notes on the painter. Oliver W. Larkin, Leonard Baskin, Henry-Russell Hitchcock, Vincent J. Scully, Jr., Edgar P. Richardson, and the late Newton Arvin have in various ways encouraged me in this study. I express my heartfelt thanks to them. Finally, I am glad to acknowledge my gratitude to George Heard Hamilton for his patient and wise counsel and for his having first directed me to the rewarding subject of Frederic Edwin Church.

David C. Huntington
Northampton, Massachusetts
November, 1965

INTRODUCTION

"Mr. Church"

We were not more interested in a look at the painting itself than at the painter, who happened to be present. He has a boyish look, a pale, eager countenance, and belongs to that quick, restless class, who flame up so fiercely, and alas! burn out their brilliant lives so soon! Yet this slender youth has already put his immortality on canvas. As we looked at the little group gathered before Mr. Church's picture we thought, what an age is this for young men! (Theodore Cuyler in *Littell's Living Age*, June, 1859)

It has been the happiness of Mr. Church to achieve a more popular reputation than any American painter since Allston . . . He alone, with the confidence of success, exhibits his single works as they are completed. No other name, perhaps, among our artists would summon such crowds as his. (*Harper's Weekly*, April 4, 1863)

THIS book is a study of one of the most extraordinary and most neglected episodes in the history of American painting. Few people today know the story of the role of the painted picture in national life during the years of Manifest Destiny. Yet it is one of the most interesting chapters of our artistic past. There have been few moments when it was better to be a young painter in this country than in the years just before the Civil War. In that golden era of prosperity and cultural nationalism, painting in America finally evolved into an authentic movement with well-defined and in turn well-realized aims that were peculiar to New World needs. The artist was called upon to play a vital role in the national life: he could help to unify the citizens of all quarters of the land; he could inspire patriotism. And he was paid well for his services.

A self-confident United States wanted its own heroic art. That was already clear by the 1840's. But what that art should be was not immediately apparent. It took a while for the American to realize that neither portraiture, nor genre, nor human history could provide images adequate to the artistic task at hand. The inherited assumption that landscape was not truly heroic gradually dissolved in the face of a virgin New World. Thomas Cole (1801–1848) had done more than any other painter to bring landscape art to the level where it might play its proper cultural role. But it was the next generation which carried landscape to its logical American conclusion. Cole struggled to reconcile himself with a nature which he found wanting in associations with

man's past. His successors stopped regretting the historical poverty of American nature and, each in his own way, turned to celebrate the newness of this vast, half-claimed continent.

"Mr. Church"

In the 1850's, the most formative decade of the Hudson River School, one person stood head and shoulders above the swelling number of landscape painters. Though very young, he was then looked upon as the prime mover of the national school. Now, a century later, art history seems to justify the opinion of that youthful artist's contemporaries. Frederic Edwin Church (1826–1900) was indeed the man who guided American landscape to its classic expression. He was the most respected of the country's landscapists. Church was a gentleman who ranked at the top of his profession, and had a claim to something mysteriously more: no one else could make pictures quite like his; they struck deeper into the heart of American life. That is why "Mr. Church" was the nation's "first" landscape painter, when landscape painting was the nation's first art.

Yet when Church died in 1900, in the opinion of the old he had been "long out of fashion," while to the young he was "unknown." His once famous paintings had already begun a flirtation with oblivion that would continue well into the twentieth century. Between his time and ours Church was a half understood and therefore a misunderstood artist. We are in fact still somewhat bullied by the prejudices of a period which rejected him. These prejudices add up basically to the oversimplification that Church painted spectacular but intellectually empty landscapes with a photographic technique which seduced the naïve into believing that they were looking at art. But this late nineteenth century interpretation of Church is itself becoming dated. Visual literalism and sensational subjects are no longer automatically condemned. The mental blocks between our eyes and Church's paintings are fast disappearing. We now have a better comprehension of his immediate artistic heritage. We have a better understanding of his cultural environment. Measured against the background of mid-nineteenth century America, Church's accomplishment becomes truly monumental. He was "Mr. Church" because he created the essential style and imagery, in a word, iconology, for the America of Manifest Destiny—just what his generation most required of art.

Thomas Cole, Church's teacher, had adapted the noble conceptions of human history painting to the painting of landscape. Church went significantly beyond his master and adapted those conceptions to the painting of natural history. While Cole's landscape characters enacted his moralizations about life in a sinful world, Church's protagonists of nature dramatized the myths of a hopeful democratic America which believed in a Great Cosmic Plan. Nature for Church was the theater of the world's and man's mystic regeneration. This Puritan painter was imbued with his century's belief in the "Science of Design"; it was his second Bible. Church's posture in the landscape was that of the prophet-seer watching for Nature's next revelation to her artist-son. He was sensitive to the life forces of the universe. The work of no other American painter of his generation has proved so susceptible to the same methods of criticism and analysis that have been applied to a Thoreau, a Dana, or a Whitman. Like Melville, Church was a symbolic realist. Like Emerson, Church sought to reveal the hidden spirituality of nature. Indeed, he produced the "continental" art which the Transcendentalist philosopher had anticipated. Church revised tradition inherited from Europe to fit it to American needs. His painting was conceived as an opening through which one confronted reality. He substituted nature for civilization, the future for the past, an unlimited vastness for confined space. In his art a tree becomes a New Adam; a fiery sunset an Apocalypse. His spectator enjoys the illusion of being actually present in a landscape so expansive it chases the global curve out of sight. Nothing less than an earthscape would do for Americans living in the millennial days of Manifest Destiny, and earthscape is what Church created. Instinctively his appreciative contemporaries recognized his achievement and thanked him a thousand times over.

"Mr. Church" helped his fellow man to discover himself as the emotional native of a great virgin continent. Through the work of art the spectator could slough off his Old World psyche and be spiritually reborn into the New World. Frederic Church's paintings were "great" because they were icons of the mythology of America. This is what endowed them with that "something mysteriously more" which thrilled his public and which fascinates today's student of Church and his time. Today his canvases offer us windows into the minds of our ancestors

rather than windows which open upon a present reality. For with the science of Darwin, Church's reality evaporated; this is why he has been for so long a wrongly understood painter.

It is indeed fortunate that the "world" which Church created for himself on the banks of the upper Hudson, Olana, has survived his death intact for sixty-five years. Like his pictures, Olana, his home, is an archetypal expression of the consciousness of his generation. This spectacular cultural entity may, with luck, become a museum and park. It is a living island of the spirit of our not-so-awful-after-all Victorian past. There, today, one may step into the setting of a once ideal way of life. On a hill which rises five hundred feet above America's Rhine and looks ten miles off to the main range of the Catskills, Church built a Yankee gentleman's Noah's Ark of all that civilization had to offer to the New World. This great house, exposed to cosmic nature by plate glass windows, porches, loggias, and decks, and surrounded by three hundred landscaped acres, guaranteed Church a way to live in an eternal Genesis. Stocked with specimens of seemingly every culture and science in the world and activated by countless visual and symbolic incidents, Olana is a feast for the eye and mind of the epicurean or the student of history. The place is a researcher's paradise, for it is crammed full of the painter-architect's sketches, letters, diaries, and any kind of memorabilia one can think of, including a traveler's collapsible set of flatware, and canceled checks to Brooks Brothers. But Olana is also a paradise for those who would understand Church's art; for as Church conscientiously placed the spectator within his painting, so at Olana one is suddenly surprised to discover himself living in Church's paintings. Olana is a never-ending Church.

On this American more than any other—but we wish particularly to say it without impugning his originality—does the mantle of our greatest painter appear to us to have fallen. Westward the sun of Art still seems rolling. (*Art Journal*, London, October, 1859)

CHAPTER I

"*The Painter of 'The Heart of the Andes' and 'Niagara'*"

WITH these words England's official voice on art proclaimed Frederic Edwin Church the heir apparent of the great J. M. W. Turner. In 1859 this was the highest honor that any nation could bestow on an American painter. *The Heart of the Andes*, an American painting, had gained world recognition for American art. Church's compatriots were now ready to announce the opening of a "new epoch" in the art life of the New World. The English had acknowledged the artistic independence of America. Actually, another painting by the same artist, *Niagara*, of 1857, had already won this victory. Indeed, one of *Niagara's* perceptive devotees beheld the New World art spirit moving upon its waters.[1]

These were the first two paintings to picture fully the cosmic enthusiasms of the Era of Manifest Destiny. As the prophet-painter of the era, Church went on to paint these enthusiasms in their rich complexity for almost twenty years. But he had become permanently established in the public mind as "the painter of *The Heart of the Andes* and *Niagara*."

Painted during the hush of millennial expectancy when there was still hope for civil reconciliation, these paintings of the late 1850's impressed themselves indelibly on the eager minds of a public that wanted "great national pictures." The American painter never enjoyed a better rapport with the American public than in those years. The national mystique made national manias of *Niagara* and *The Heart of the Andes*. That Church's art embodied this mystique will be discussed in later chapters; that Church's art was a mania will be discussed here.

"THIS IS NIAGARA, WITH THE ROAR LEFT OUT!"

"It was there before me, the eighth wonder of the world!" These are the words of one of the first viewers of the great painting which Frederic Church, in April of 1857, presented to the public at a gallery on lower Broadway. It was a public which had been waiting for this oc-

"This Is Niagara, with the Roar Left Out!"

casion. During the winter they had been told in the *Crayon* and the *Cosmopolitan Art Journal* that the painter was busy at work on a large picture of the Falls. It was the opinion of the day that the Falls of Niagara had been made by the Creator "to teach art its impotency." Its "reality" had never been transferred to canvas. Ready for the worst was "one of the most cultivated and charming women" known to the editors of the *Home Journal*. She went to the preview reluctantly, despite the "enthusiasm" of her "connoisseur" companion. What she had "dreaded" to look at was a three-and-a-half by seven-and-a-half-foot oblong view of the Horseshoe Falls from Table Rock. In five minutes she had "surrendered to the delight in [the painting's] success, which grew with every moment's stay." There she sat "fascinated as before the reality." All that was lacking was the great cataract's roar, but even this, it was suggested by another admirer, might be supplied by the noise on Broadway.

The charming lady's response to *Niagara* (PLATES I, II, FIGURE 44) was the response of everybody. Church's was the best "representation of Niagara ever painted." It was "incontestably the finest oil-picture ever painted on this side of the Atlantic." "All New York flocked to see it. I [saw] there at one time Horace Greeley, George Bancroft, George Ripley, Dr. Chapin, Henry Ward Beecher, Charles A. Dana, William Henry Troy and Fitz James O'Brien—but indeed, everybody in New York, resident or sojourner came to see it." [2]

Before the excitement began, Williams and Stevens, the exhibitors, had purchased the painting for twenty-five hundred dollars and paid two thousand dollars more to secure the copyright for the reproduction "to be printed in colors, in the highest style of chromolithography." Millard Fillmore is the first of the eleven hundred and some names to appear in the subscription book. He ordered an artist's proof for thirty dollars, as did New York's mayor, Hamilton Fish, and Church's patron, Jonathan Sturges. John F. Kensett, one of the painter's rival landscapists, however, chose the less dear alternative and signed for a twenty dollar print.[3]

By the summer *Niagara* was on display in London. John Ruskin discovered in it "an effect of light upon water" which he had waited for years to see in a painting, and he would not believe that "the optical

illusion" of the rainbow's iris was in the picture itself, until he had examined the glass of the gallery window. This attention from the mid-century arbiter of landscape was alone worth the cost of sending *Niagara* across the ocean. Other Englishmen were equally respectful. The painting "gave them an entirely new and higher view of both American nature and art."

"This Is Niagara, with the Roar Left Out!"

After a second showing in New York (it was perhaps on this occasion that a pamphlet containing ecstatic reviews of the painting was published), *Niagara* traveled "all over the country." By December of 1859 the painting had reached Boston. There at Williams and Everett's on Washington Street, "Church's Great Painting" could, for twenty-five cents, be inspected "day and evening." In the course of seven weeks some forty-four advertisements for the exhibition appeared in the *Transcript* alone. "Special" notices early in February announced that "in accordance with the expressed wish of some . . . citizens interested in Art" the painting would be exhibited "by Day-Light" on the final two days. Shown about the country in this fashion and popularized in the color facsimile (which proved an enormously popular wedding present), *Niagara* became America's best known landscape painting.

Illustrative of its fame is an amusing incident which was reported in *Harper's Weekly*. In 1858 Church returned to the Cataract to do some more sketching. A group of loiterers watched the artist "closely, and one ventured to inspect the sketch narrowly."

> Then with an air of mingled contempt and commiseration as if the poor artist might as well abandon his attempt; "Pshaw! You ought to see CHURCH'S Niagara." "I painted it," was the smiling reply which almost hurled the critic into the abyss.[4]

The response of fellow-painters to Church's "brilliant success" of 1857 is especially interesting. The following year his friend, the French-born Régis Gignoux, painted *Niagara in Winter* as a "companion-piece" to Church's version of the subject, which was supposed to picture the Falls in early autumn. Less inclined to risk comparison with such a formidable rival was Francis (J. F.) Cropsey who in 1858 painted his *Niagara:* in the foreground, presumably a trysting place on Goat Island, a pair of young lovers engage our benign attention, while be-

"This Is Niagara, with the Roar Left Out!"

yond them, partially obscured by framing trees, there appears a beautiful but not very grand Horseshoe Cataract.[5] Only one other artist, John Frankenstein, a cantankerous Cincinnatian, who had himself shortly before painted a sensational *Niagara*, dared publicly to condemn "the great" Mr. Church, or as Frankenstein put it "this great gas bag."

Church's NIAGARA! that classic phrase
In Art conveys the very highest praise.
This picture must be moving, brilliant, grand,
To make so great a furore in the land!

. . . . . .

Great is invention! in the grand Ideal!
It scorns the "nauseous detail" of the Real!
How nicely Nature's motion here is trimmed,
How all her glaring show is gently dimmed;
The water, if it move at all, moves on
With all the easy nonchalance of ton,
Observes the rules of good society,
Falls with Fifth Avenue propriety.

Frankenstein's *American Art: Its Awful Altitude*, quoted here, is an endless sequence of quaint irrelevancies, salted with occasional grains of truth. Looking for evangelical melodrama, the Ohioan found only "falls with Fifth Avenue propriety."

While the strident poetry of diatribe went one way, Church's *Niagara* continued to go the other. In 1864, now the property of the financier John Taylor Johnston who paid Williams and Stevens five thousand dollars for the painting, *Niagara* was exhibited at the Metropolitan Fair, a benefit exhibition for the Civil War precursor of the Red Cross. When the American paintings lent to the International Exposition of 1867 were returned, *Niagara* was again seen by the New York public. The judges in Paris had awarded its author a gold medal.[6] There it had been admired for its boldness of conception. And, standing before the painting, France's great Academician Léon Gérôme had observed: "*Ça commence la bas.*" He saw in *Niagara* the beginnings of a distinctively American tradition.[7]

But never any sight of new-found land
Shall equal this, where we entranced stand
With dewy eyes and overflowing heart
Gazing from the exalted hill of art!
(T. Buchanan Read, "The Heart of the Andes")

Glorious—magnificent—such grandeur of general effect with such minuteness of detail—minute without hardness; a painting to stamp the reputation of an artist at once. (Washington Irving, from *Life and Letters of Washington Irving*)

In the course of the spring of 1859, some thousands of Americans found themselves at one time or another standing in a room full of palms, before a five-by-eight-foot canvas which was dramatically set off by black crepe curtains and lit by brilliant gas jets. The canvas itself was mounted in a frame which was designed to suggest a window. The *mise en scène* was intended to hush voices to reverent whispers. The place was Church's room in the newly constructed Studio Building on Tenth Street. The painting, which introduced the New York art world to another world, was *The Heart of the Andes* (FIGURES 29, 30). Here, in a "single focus of magnificence" was a "complete condensation of South America—its gigantic vegetation, its splendid Flora, its sapphire waters, its verdant pampas and its colossal mountains." [8]

The viewer just quoted considered himself fortunate to have had a "first view" of the painting, "before the crowd 'got upon the scent' and rendered quiet study of the picture an impossibility." Indeed, it soon became necessary to call policemen "to keep the street clear of passage." Four thousand miles away in Rome, another American landscape painter, Worthington Whittredge, received news that *The Heart of the Andes* was netting six hundred dollars a day in receipts. This figure was surely an exaggeration, but the receipts did total more than three thousand dollars in one month. At twenty-five cents admission per person, this adds up to some twelve or thirteen thousand visits. Even on the final day, after the painting had been on display for almost seven weeks, "the crowd was so great that many were obliged to turn away and not see the picture." Praise for *The Heart of the Andes* was

The Rage of 1859

close to hysteria. It was "the finest painting ever painted in this country, and one of the best *ever* painted." It was to be ranked with Raphael's *Transfiguration* and *Sistine Madonna. The Heart of the Andes* was "one of the events of May." In short, the painting was a "rage." [9]

The general enthusiasm which *The Heart of the Andes* had inspired was expressed in forms other than high praise and high attendance counts. Poems dedicated to the picture were published in journals and newspapers. A forty-three page companion-piece to the painting was written by Theodore Winthrop, and for those who could not afford that much time Louis Noble wrote one that was only twenty-four pages long. These pamphlets, written by close associates of the painter, are virtually manifestoes of his art. They in turn warranted reviews in their own right.

In June there was a report that Church was about to accompany the painting to London and some nine Continental cities. Actually the painting crossed the ocean only to London and Edinburgh and without Church. It seems that the painter gave his "stony" picture to the world and lost his own "susceptible heart" to a fair cousin of his friends, the de Forests, who happened to be visiting New York. Family tradition has it that the newly engaged couple were applauded one night as they appeared in their box at the opera.

In London, artists and critics promptly found their way to the German Gallery on New Bond Street where *The Heart of the Andes* was on view. Here the response was just Englishly short of American hysteria: "Turner himself, in wildest imagination, never painted a scene of greater magnificence" (*Daily News*); "A wonderful picture—a wonder-picture! . . . the man must be a great genius" (W. Clarkson Stanfield, one of England's leading landscapists). In Edinburgh the painting was viewed by the public, while William Forrest studied the painting preparatory to his engraving it on steel—a task which consumed the better part of three years.

After a second showing in New York *The Heart of the Andes* started a tour of the United States which lasted into 1861. A scrapbook at Olana, which includes thirty-four clippings about the picture from American papers, indicates that the painting was exhibited in Boston, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, Chicago, and St. Louis.

The painting's stint in Boston where it was on display at the Athenaeum from mid-December, 1859 until the beginning of February of the following year, is well documented. Ironically *The Heart of the Andes* was here directly competing with *Niagara*, which was then being exhibited only a stone's throw away. Though the earlier painting has stood the test of time better, it was sadly outclassed as a public attraction by its exotic rival. Notices on *The Heart of the Andes* appeared in the news or advertising columns of the *Transcript* almost daily, and would-be spectators of this Andean scene of "balmy peace and dreamy beauty" were advised "to bring opera glasses" (FIGURE 45). New York's enthusiasm was again repeated but on the smaller scale which one might expect of New England's "hub of the universe." Features on the painting (some of them simply column fillers) would in different ways rephrase the points that the painting had no equal, that it was being seen daily by hundreds of people, and that everybody was enchanted by it. The *Transcript* printed H. T. Tuckerman's poem on *The Heart of the Andes*, which had first appeared in the *New York Post*. George Loring Brown, Boston's leading landscape painter, was reported to have said that "the sky distances had never been equalled in any landscape, ancient or modern." And school children, admitted "at a very nominal charge," were given instruction by their teachers before the picture. Unknown to readers of the *Transcript*, however, was a comment written in a diary by a very young lady who would one day herself make news in Boston: "I went to see the famous picture, *The Heart of the Andes* by Church . . . I think it deserves its reputation, for it is magnificent, and compares well with any Claude [Lorrain] I ever saw." She was later to create the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum.

A James Sommerville, M.D., in the city where Benjamin Franklin said "time is money," published a twelve-page pamphlet for Philadelphia viewers who wanted something more condensed than short books to guide them through *The Heart of the Andes*. Cincinnati is distinctive for having produced a poem in German, "Das Herz der Andestette." And it was perhaps in that city that a dreadful, tinted and reversed engraved view of the painting was printed with the title (in German) reading *The Hearts* [sic] *of the Andes*. A Chicago newspa-

perman (for lack of anything else to say?) recommended the painting as "worth the studying by all who dwell in flat places": the more it is studied, "the more flat will our own surroundings appear by comparison." A more art-conscious critic in the *Tribune* expressed his disappointment that the subscription-book for the engraving had remained "almost blank." The next day his counterpart on the *Evening Journal* defended Chicagoans for not ordering the engraving: "the principal merit" of *The Heart of the Andes* lay in "*the color*"; "viewed as a *whole*, without an opera glass, the picture is 'spotty' " (It appeared under the caption "Have we a Critic Among Us?") The rebuttal in the *Tribune* cited the expert opinions of W. C. Bryant, N. P. Willis, and other eastern gentlemen, along with New York and London critics, as ample certification to the excellence of the painting. If the *Evening Journal's* critic was not philistine, he was twenty years ahead of his time.

But whether or not the painting was "spotty," it appealed to a young writer in St. Louis who ordinarily would not look at a picture. He wrote in a letter to his brother: "Your third visit will find your brain *gasping* and straining with futile efforts to take all the wonder in—and understand how such a miracle could have been conceived and executed by human brain and human hands." [10] The young enthusiast's name was Samuel Clemens. Years later he was to visit the painter at Olana.

After all its travels the painting eventually was hung in the residence of its original purchaser, William T. Blodgett, a New York manufacturer. The contract between the painter and his patron was an intriguing exercise in legal gymnastics. The gist of it was that Church would sell *The Heart of the Andes* to Blodgett two years from the date of the contract (June 6, 1859) for ten thousand dollars, unless the painter were in the meantime offered the sum of twenty thousand or more dollars for the picture. This contract doubtless was the source of a rumor that Blodgett had paid the higher figure for the painting. We can be sure that Church, one of the shrewdest Yankees ever to have painted, did little to discourage the rumor. But even at ten thousand, Church's picture was still the most expensive landscape to have been

sold on this side of the Atlantic. *The Heart of the Andes* was seen alongside *Niagara* in the spring of 1864 at the Metropolitan Fair. Then for more than a decade it could be viewed on certain specified days when Mr. Blodgett's gallery was opened to the public. The last occasion in the nineteenth century for the showing of *The Heart of the Andes* was the sale of the Blodgett collection early in 1876, when, for a second time, it sold for ten thousand dollars.

The Rage of 1859

By this time *Niagara* was already becoming the less dated of the two most famous "Churches." Not long before, Goupil's (later the Knoedler Gallery) had gauged public interest in the painting well enough to offer a subscription to a new engraving of it: William Forrest's handsome ten-by-twenty-two-inch black and white engraving of *Niagara* was published in 1875. The timing could hardly have been better. Public esteem was well primed for an event which occurred in December of the following year. The collection of John Taylor Johnston, which in addition to *Niagara* included works by Meissonier, Turner, Delacroix, Diaz, Corot, Breton, and Gérôme, was sold at auction. When Church's masterpiece appeared on the auction block there was an explosion of applause. W. W. Corcoran's bid of twelve thousand five hundred dollars left the pictures of the Frenchmen and the great Turner well behind, if not out of sight. Corcoran had bought the painting for his national gallery in Washington. *Niagara*'s future before the public was assured.

Eighteen seventy-six was the last year during Church's lifetime that *Niagara* and *The Heart of the Andes* made art world headlines. Their story after this is anticlimactic, for their chief mission in American life had already been fulfilled. In the closing years of the century the painting of 1857 was considered simply a very fine and accurate representation of the landmark of North America; the painting of 1859, a rather extravagant and not so scientific idealization of South America. The next generation could not understand what the excitement had been all about, and the generation after that did not care.

But no other painter in America had ever pictured so fully or probed so deeply the spirit of his own generation. Church had been the prophet-painter of the millennial Era of Manifest Destiny. By 1880 this era was becoming history.

CHAPTER II

A Prophet with a Brush

To our art the paintings of Mr. Church are what the geographic cantos of "Childe Harold" have been to the poesy of England, or the burning descriptions of St. Pierre and Chateaubriand to the literature of France . . . Yes! what "Childe Harold" did for the scenery of the Old World, the art of Church has done for the New. The vastness and the glory of this continent were yet unrevealed to us . . . Our civilization needed exactly this form of art expression at this period, and the artist appeared. (S. G. W. Benjamin, *Art in America*, 1880)

CHURCH, it was recalled after his death in 1900, was the genius of American landscape in the years 1855 to 1875. His artist's hand held the pulse of a generation, not just any generation. It was the most privileged and the most challenged generation of history. A New Era was about to begin in a New World. This was Manifest Destiny. The mood of the hour was one of hushed and wondrous expectancy. A mystic millennium was at hand. This was evident to all who had eyes to see and ears to hear. Science was about to reveal the age-old mystery of the universe. Man, who had been estranged from the mystery since Adam's Fall, was about to be reunited with nature. The New Man was to be born in the New World. It was glorious news that resided unspoken in the minds of the multitude as an "indefinable Something." This is what Mark Twain sensed in *The Heart of the Andes*. Only the few had been ordained to pronounce the word: Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman were among the number. So too was "Mr. Church." "His canvas lives . . . His pictures speak their meaning, have an influence, excite feelings." Church, like Moses, "looked on God unveiled." [1] There are good reasons to explain why both landscape and Church were destined to lead in American art. Church was a sixth generation inhabitant of the New World, a "Yankee of Yankees." He "exhibited the New England mind pictorially developed." He was immune to European influences, so at least it was believed. He alone among our painters had experienced "total immersion in nature," to borrow a phrase from Thoreau. Church was an archetypal American.

Landscape, of course, led in American art because nature was the national hero. The Science of Design had revealed to this Bible-bred-and-read generation the inviolate truth that natural history was the great

determinant of human history. The New World was the favored continent. This was a heroic challenge to its inhabitants. They would have to be worthy of their privilege; it was a trust from nature. Never before had the landscape painter known such urgency. He had, for the first time in the world, been asked to paint the myth of human destiny.

The implicit command of the hour to the artist was to paint the immediate confrontation between mankind and nature in the fullness of its fact and of its meaning. Only a genius could answer this unique and heroic call. For the Puritan-raised Frederic Church it must have seemed that he was predestined to be the prophet-painter of the "New Era."

> [Church] owes it to himself and to his country to mark out an original path . . . We would have his affections so deeply rooted in the soil of his native land that every stroke of his pencil may tell the world that he is an American . . . He must learn to "labor and to wait," for he will, in due time, receive his just reward.[2]

"'COTOPAXI,' 'THE HEART OF THE ANDES' THROBBING WITH LIFE"

"'Cotopaxi,' 'The Heart of the Andes' Throbbing with Life"

This book is essentially a study of Church's major prophetic landscapes and how he came to paint them. The painting which he invented is a new order of art, indeed so new that the uninitiated viewer of the mid-twentieth century may not know how to interpret a *Niagara* or a *Heart of the Andes*. There is perhaps no better way to begin than to plunge into one painting up to one's eyes and study it closely.

Cotopaxi, painted in 1862 at the height of Church's reputation and powers, lends itself ideally to such an examination. We can know *Cotopaxi* from Church's initial impressions of the Ecuadorian volcano, through preliminary compositional studies for the picture, to its conclusion in the four by seven foot canvas which the public first saw at Goupil's in the spring of 1863. Since this large canvas, now owned by John Astor, loses much detail when reduced to the size of a page, we illustrate in FIGURE 31 a smaller, identical version of *Cotopaxi*. A preliminary oil sketch is here reproduced in color in PLATE III.[3]

Cotopaxi is one of the painter's half dozen finest works. More than fifteen American and English reviews were written of the painting. Church himself discussed the picture in a broadside published for its

"'*Cotopaxi*,' '*The Heart of the Andes*' *Throbbing with Life*"

first New York showing. The reviews and comments in New York and London are a representative sampling of the consensus on Church in the 1860's. In the eyes of the reviewers Church had produced "a masterpiece."

Those who sympathized with the painter's intentions found themselves "surrendering to the picture's spell." What they said reveals the meaning of *Cotopaxi.* Hence, we shall look at it through their words, occasionally reading between the lines. A description composed by its first viewers offers a logical beginning:

> You look down over a plain, of which the abrupt horizon stretching across the picture, not far beneath the peaks of mountains, creates the impression immediately of a great height above the sea.[4]

This vast "fifty mile" plateau of volcanic rock reaches, in the lower left foreground, to "the very feet of the spectator," who is to imagine himself standing at an altitude nine or ten thousand feet above the sea. Looming in the distance is the "apparently smooth, symmetrical" "snow-flecked cone" of "the great" Cotopaxi, "the highest in that huge chain of volcanoes, extinct or in action, which pierces the Andes at narrow intervals from Mexico to Peru." In his broadside, Church quotes the altitude of the summit as 18,858 feet, but as one alert Londoner pointed out, the spectator is looking at only the top three thousand feet, for "5,000 feet are hidden from us by the convexity of the earth." Ejected in "successive jets" from the mouth of the volcano is a gigantic column of smoke rising "half a mile high" into the atmosphere. "Caught by the wind" the smoke is thence "bent down and rolled sideways," obscuring most of "the eastern region of the sky" under a "sulphurous canopy" until "it grows light enough for the wind to spread it on one side all over the heavens in huge mountainous volumes." To the north is a "serene" sky of "pearly gray morning twilight." You see its "spray of silver dappled clouds . . . shooting up behind [the] ruddy, loosely hanging films" which have been hurled into the "lucent" atmosphere by "the burning mountain." Above the earth's bend to the east there rises the burning "red disc" of the "central luminary." Its "dull fire" "literally flares" through the "murky atmosphere," as a "warm flood of light" streams "from the horizon to the foreground." The sun's rays

"empurple the serrated edge of the Andes," mere fifteen thousand foot bumps on Cotopaxi's flank, and are then "reflected in the volcanic lake below the mountain till its surface glows like molten copper." The "high-seated" lake "fills the middle distance." The waters overflow into a river which "cleaves its way between high and rocky banks, tumbling so precipitously as to suggest an almost continuous cataract." Then, in the "delicate and prismatic hues" of the cataract's "spray and vapour, gently touched by slant and straggling sunbeams," one discerns "the merest suspicion of a rainbow." In the right foreground "limestone rock, split by fury, forces on the right into a river gorge." The sheer precipice and the "level promontory" of red stone are "stained with the myriad shifting hues of lichens" and here and there tufted with "emerald green" paramo grass. The promontory is tinged red with the hot light from the sun. The darker precipice and birds circling before it have at this very instant seemingly emerged into the sun's dimmed rays. On the opposite side of the foreground is a tropical thicket "pierced by a bowery path," along which there comes a "gaily dressed" peasant leading a llama. The "rather thin foliage" of these trees catches the reddish hues from the striving sun, while the path lies in "luminous shadow." "And that is all the picture."

"'*Cotopaxi,*'
'*The Heart of the Andes*'
Throbbing with Life"

Those of us living in the 1960's would rather see than read the painting, but this language, though florid, is also history. It is history not only in the sense that it expresses the mentality of an era, but it is also history in the sense that it expresses what is going on in the painting—natural history, natural history as it was before Darwin. *Cotopaxi* reveals the harmony of spirit and matter that is the life of a purposeful universe. The painting was "both a work of art and a matter of fact": a true depiction of "the word, the meaning and the expression of nature." It was at once "reality" and "poetry."

Cotopaxi was a reality both as persuasive visual presence and as natural history. The spectator enjoys the illusion of an authentic firsthand experience. The scene comes "to one's very feet." The river is "foreshortened to accord with the spectator's point of view." He stands at mid-height between sea and summit as his eyes "range" and "gaze" over the landscape. If one wishes, he may survey the scene with opera glasses and imagine himself confronted by the original landscape. In

"'*Cotopaxi*,' '*The Heart of the Andes*' *Throbbing with Life*"

good democratic fashion the painter "eliminates himself." No authority in the guise of artist intervenes between man and nature. Thus Church's spectator, as it were, "sees through his own eyes, and not another man's eyes." The artist and the spectator become one.

The effect of a seen physical actuality is enhanced by the sureness with which the painter has grasped a chapter of natural history. With Church, admirers said, the work of art was "an essential correspondence of the earth itself." He "gives the same prominence that nature gives": "the grain of the bark and the broad splendor of the tree," "the rockiness of rock," and the broad outlines of the structure of the paramo plains. The mountains, even through leagues of aerial perspective, maintained their solidity. The atmosphere was at once "transpicuous" and "palpable." Church re-created this Andean spectacle as living earthscape:

> *Cotopaxi* is the *Heart of the Andes*, throbbing with fire and tremulous with life. It is a revelation of the volcanic agencies which make the landscape of Alpine South America what it is. The mountain is breathing; the waters which its central forces, at work far below the smiling plains, unloose and set in motion, are breaking from their gleaming reservoirs in capricious cascades.[5]

In this great painting Church's contemporaries could break in upon the cycle of natural history. The painting was the poetic equivalent of science delivering man from the errors of human history. Cotopaxi "hurls superb disdain at high civilization," exclaimed a beholder of Church's volcano. America was an opportunity to slough off the folly of the past civilizations and begin anew. The truth of the universe could only be discovered in nature. Landscape with Church became the means of seizing and revealing that truth, in short it became the means of civilization's redemption. His style of painting is "realistic"; it "rivals nature," in order to engage man with the life processes of the universe. Church even painted according to "the manner and method" of nature. His handling of the pencil and brush sympathized with the movements of organic and inorganic matter. He could grasp the total harmony of an instant in any clime and at any season. Church was a "conscientious" observer of nature because destiny had placed a trust in his hand. Barely

twenty-five, Church had read about himself: "He shows us in the splendid play of light, and air, and clouds that which we do not see, or seeing do not perceive."

"'*Cotopaxi*,' '*The Heart of the Andes*' *Throbbing with Life*"

It is a peculiar accident of history that the impulses to "photographic" likeness were at this time superficial in European painting, while in America they were profound. A cogent mythology made the difference. The harmony which Church created in *Cotopaxi* was metaphysical as well as physical. The cycle of cause and effect is an aesthetic-dramatic-symbolic unity. The "hidden spirituality" of which Emerson spoke begins in *Cotopaxi* with the drama of the contest between the forces of death and the forces of life, "*la lumière . . . et les ténèbres*," to quote a Frenchman visiting New York in 1863. The two great cosmic personages, the sun and the volcano Cotopaxi, struggle with one another for supremacy. The moment of resolution is at hand. Effects of the confrontation of darkness and light pervade the scene in apparently endless encounters of action and repose, tension, and release, gloom and joy. The "expressions" and "actions" of phenomena become the "characters" and "gestures" in this inanimate drama. These actors are endowed with various attributes of the sublime, the beautiful and the picturesque: in essence, energy, youth, and individuality. Characterization and action, contrast and repetition, are the time-tested principles of heroic art which fix the drama. The description of the characters might almost have been written by a Melville. Here is Cotopaxi, one of the two principals on this natural stage:

> Far above all other crests, against the fair cool brightness of the morning, the volcanic cone ascends, itself pale with snow, and therefore in aspect of a spirit-like mystical faintness; but not the less a most energetic fountain of dark smoke, which shoots up elately in forms of strange fantasy.[6]

Cotopaxi is "the grim Ecuadorian sentinel," there before us "presiding and transcendent." "The cone of the volcano seems to stand between day and night with sublime abruptness." "It rears itself stark and cold against the sky, and wears its plume like a monarch." This earth hero is the protagonist, the cause, of this cosmic drama: its "dense volumes of smoke prescribe the tone and character of the work," provide the substance of the plot. "Lake and tree, and crag, and waterfall" all

"'*Cotopaxi*,' '*The Heart of the Andes*' *Throbbing with Life*"

are "subordinate" to the volcano's action. It spews its sooty vapors across the sky, half obscuring the early morning sun. But beyond "the majestic demon of the landscape" the beautiful clear sky holds the promise of what is to come. There are other signs, too, that "relief" from the distant gloom is at hand. Rain has brought the "refreshing" greens of the lichens and paramo grass. And the "dappled rosy" glints on the foliage and the cliffs reflecting the sun are other notes of new cheer within this landscape. For an artist who believed the divine to be immanent in nature these effects of hope are the result of both natural and aesthetic causes, for "truth and beauty" are one and the same. Beautiful colors are signs of the life of matter and of spirit.

The "newly risen sun" is the principal antagonist in the drama; it is the cosmic savior, come to dispel the darkness and bring new life. At this very moment its light has "transfigured" the source of gloom into "a thousand delicate and fitful tones of color" (PLATE III). The glory of the event is also intimated by "the merest suspicion of a rainbow" in the spray and vapor of the cataract. Thus the fiery water has bled into cool prismatic radiance. The foreground trees, the expressive delegates of man's consciousness in the landscape, bend transfixed by what is happening. Upon land and water the sun, "god of day," burns a cross: God and the Son of God live in Nature. There is Hope in the World.

Through the painting, the painter and the spectator could poetically step into an eternal cosmic Genesis. In this mythological territory created by the hour's Science of Design, Man could be psychically reborn as Adam before the Fall. In *Cotopaxi*, Church painted the New World as Resurrection and Millennium. And so the picture was an icon of the American religion of 1862, and its creator was a prophet with a brush. Never, perhaps, since the beginning of the Renaissance had the work of art functioned with such psychic efficiency. *Cotopaxi* enabled American man to become a new man. No other painter attempted to do this. This is one reason why Church was a mania in his day, and one reason why he is an enigma in our day.

The Evolution of a Painting

He has accomplished some feats of rapid execution, but generally paints slowly—rarely over one large picture in a year, besides several smaller ones. Five hours of hard work before an easel, the artist will admit, is sufficient for a full day's work; but his indefatigable energy often holds him for ten hours upon a canvas. (H. W. French, *Art and Artists in Connecticut*, 1879)

We can study *Cotopaxi* in virtually every phase of its development, from Church's first sight of the volcano in 1853 to the last days before he began work on the canvas which he sold in 1863 to James Lenox, ancestor of the present owner, John Astor. Indeed, there are some very large and nearly empty pencil studies for the incline of the volcano which were probably drawn after the painter had actually started the final version.

Church probably first became aware of Cotopaxi's existence when he began reading the popular translations of the works of the great German scientist Alexander von Humboldt (1769–1859). Humboldt was one of the last of the Enlightenment's encyclopedic synthesizers of knowledge. His life masterpiece, *Cosmos*, is an awesome consolidation of the early nineteenth century's intelligence of geology, botany, meteorology, astronomy, and all other science that an interpreter of the physical universe should know. Humboldt's major field trip had been in the northwestern corner of South America, the setting, of course, of Cotopaxi. The substance of his many writings was that the physical life of the earth determined the character of its inhabitants. One environment was conducive to slow or arrested development; another to rapid and progressive development. Americans, who believed themselves God's chosen people, were quick to read into Humboldt's geographical determinism a scientific basis for their own Bible-inspired interpretation of the cosmic future of the United States. The faith in Manifest Destiny was the faith that natural history had dictated the Anglo-Saxon domination of the great North American continent. By extension this preferred nation was ultimately ordained to regenerate the whole world. Hence the deeper the American's understanding of the earth, the readier he was to fulfill his peculiar role in history. Therefore, even a remote South American Vesuvius had its

The Evolution of a Painting

justification for existence. It was a parochial universalism that led Church to the presence of this highest and "most perfectly formed" volcano. As such, Cotopaxi was the archetype of its species of earth personalities. Church was never one to settle for second bests.

Cotopaxi, painted in 1862, was the third distinctive interpretation of the subject which Church had painted and of these clearly the most searching.[7] He made a few sketches of the volcano in 1853, but on his second visit to Ecuador, in 1857, he studied the object intensively from Chillogallo, near Quito, and from Tacunga. He made studies of the peaks and topography surrounding Cotopaxi, and took a close look at another erupting volcano, Sangay (FIGURES 32, 34, 38). Quite clearly he intended already in 1857 to produce a heroic picture of Cotopaxi. A number of rather ambitious compositions for a *Cotopaxi* which were never painted exist in pencil and oil. They are decidedly less impressive than the canvas of 1862.

About 1861, some four years after his last visit to South America, Church's ideas for a heroic *Cotopaxi* seem to have been jelling. We reproduce here one of the two pencil compositions and one of the two oil compositions which he had in mind at the time (FIGURE 33; PLATE III). Both show the plume as rising almost directly upward from the volcano's mouth. None of the painter's on-the-spot sketches depict it spouting forth in this manner, for when Church saw the eruption a Pacific wind was ready to set it adrift at once. This more vertical thrust (especially that suggested in the oil composition) is of course grander and more imposing. In the final version Church endowed the eruption with still greater force. The slope of the volcano in these studies was actually less than it had been in the earlier on-the-spot sketches done in 1857 (FIGURES 34, 38). The painter's idea for an intervening cloudbank in the 1861 compositions may have prompted the shallower incline. The striking opposition of the cool, level, moving, white cloudbank against the dusky warm confusion of the smoke was an effect which Church abandoned perhaps reluctantly but wisely in the final painting (FIGURE 31), for the volcano gained in strength and clarity of expression, and in its more pronounced isolation, Cotopaxi was further enhanced as one of the two principals in the drama.

The pencil composition (FIGURE 33) may follow the one in oil

(PLATE III), since in the wider interval between volcano and sun, it resembles the final painting more closely. The spacing of the two features contributes to the grandeur of effect. This black and white study is even more explicit in its allusion to the cross. In the large public picture Church elected to be subtler about his symbolism.[8]

A persistent difficulty for Church was the treatment of the immediate foreground. Finally, he relinquished his efforts to deal positively with the problem, and instead placed his viewer above a canyon. Some of the enthusiasts of *Cotopaxi* criticized Church on this matter. Knowing the alternatives, however, we can be glad that Church begged the question. The omission immediately enabled him to reveal more about the region's geology (two phases of history written in the rock formations fill the lower right quadrant of the picture), and to "firm" the composition with strong and well related diagonals and triangles and reciprocities of light and dark, cool and warm, calm and active. Church's compromises—if they were compromises—certainly resulted in a formal and expressive unity that was denied him in the preceding compositions.

The pencil composition (FIGURE 33) quite patently suggests the influence of the painter who led Church to his artistic maturity: J. M. W. Turner (1776–1851). The effect of light, the general disposition of the topography, and the cosmic breadth of vision point to the example of Turner engravings (FIGURE 82). From the Englishman the American could also have derived the idea of the dramatic opposition of hot and cool atmosphere. In the small oil composition (PLATE III) this contrast was slightly overstated. But the agitated handling of pigments here has more to do with the spontaneity of inspiration than with Turner. In the final version of *Cotopaxi*, Church toned down the exuberance of the brushwork and the riot of hues to tip the scale of his tonal conception a little more heavily on the sublime side. Soberer handling of paint and the preponderance of reds in the final canvas achieve the desired dignity. After all the preliminaries of original sketches from nature and subsequent compositional studies, by a process of selection and elimination Church caught the balance of natural, formal, symbolic, and dramatic tensions demanded of him by this heroic earth-epic.

The Evolution of a Painting

It should by now be clear that *Cotopaxi* is not a specific view in the Andes but a naturalistic and symbolic characterization of a region of the planet. There is certainly no one place where a person could behold at once this vast continental scene. Far off in the distance under the arched bough of the tree to the extreme left is a peak (not visible in the reproduction) that is perhaps intended to be Antisana; far to the right one sees a series of peaks that may be thought to end with Illiniza; possibly Lake Salayambo is the inspiration for the life-giving Easter-calm reservoir. The cliffs resemble Church's sketches made at Grand Manan Island in the Bay of Fundy, ten years before, and the painter in fact compared their structure to that of the palisades of the Upper Mississippi.

Church could invent natural characters, dramas, and episodes at will. The painter was at home on his globe and understood its life well enough to re-create it in paint. He was also at home with the Great Tradition of the Renaissance and understood its principles well enough to adapt them to the painting of natural history. Church knew geology, meteorology, botany—Humboldt combined them as "geognosy"—as well as the greatest of the Old Masters knew the Antique. And like these, his predecessors, Church had the intellect, the practical knowledge, and the technical dexterity to realize the grand conception. Thus he could paint the earth's Genesis as the sixteenth century genius could paint the Bible's Genesis. That is why Mr. Church's grateful compatriots called him "the Michelangelo of landscape Art." [9]

New York Artist Leaves Stocks Valued at $474,447.72. The largest estate that has come under the jurisdiction of the Probate Court of this district for some months has lately been admitted. Frederick Edwin Church, the artist, who died some weeks ago in New York, was formerly a resident of this city, and his father lived here. (Unidentified newspaper clipping, Connecticut Historical Society)

CHAPTER III

The Puritan Businessman's Son

MR. CHURCH began life as Frederick Edwin, the son of Joseph and Eliza Janes Church, on May 4, 1826, in Hartford. His original American ancestor, Richard Church, had been one of the founders of this old settlement on the Connecticut River. Joseph Church (1796–1876) was "a gentleman of respectability" whose "energy as a businessman" was much valued in that enterprising New England community. He was a businessman of all sorts. He was "concerned" with the family paper-mill in South Lee, Massachusetts. In the 1830's he and his brother Leonard "made money quite rapidly for a while" in the manufacture of the then fashionable Navarino bonnets. Through the years of Frederic's (in his early twenties the painter dropped the "k" from his name) childhood his father also owned a jewelry store. In middle age Joseph Church sought wider horizons in the business world. His knowledge of money and real estate (he owned important property in downtown Hartford) led to his becoming a bank director, a savings society officer, and adjustor for the Aetna Insurance Company. The painter's father emerges from his obituary as a "wealthy and respected" citizen, a man of "the strictest honesty and integrity," a man of "Christian consistency, during a long, active, and useful life."

But from Charles Dudley Warner's unfinished biography of the son, Joseph emerges as a paradigm of the Puritan businessman, suspicious of art as a dependable means of livelihood or as a worthy pursuit in life.[1] Only grudgingly did he allow his son to enter his chosen "business." (The father consistently alluded to Frederic's career as his "business," for he thought of it exclusively as a means of making money.) Joseph would have had his son be a physician, but the youth was not interested. Before Church elected to become an artist he once told his father that he would like to be an "inventor." This was but one degree less pleasing to the parent, for in those days an inventor inevitably began his

The Puritan Businessman's Son

career as a mechanic, and a family of such easy circumstances could hardly be expected to encourage a son to begin his adult life beneath his birthright rank in society. Soon after Frederic commenced his two years with Thomas Cole, his father urged him to suspend his art studies and get a "collegiate education." This, Joseph Church argued, would be an advantage to Frederic if he were still determined on painting as a business. It would also better prepare the young man for the foreign study that would be essential to his acquiring proficiency. Frederic was panicked by the very thought. His father agreed to reconsider if his son showed good evidence of progress.

Upon leaving Cole, Frederic painted in Hartford for a few months but then moved to New York. Some weeks after he took a studio in the Art Union Building, his father wrote him "I have no money to spare in this unprofitable business." Even painters' sons from poor homes fared better with their fathers. Still, Joseph Church had paid Thomas Cole well to instruct Frederic. (The sum was six hundred dollars.) Although Frederic's parents appreciated Cole more for his moral virtues than for his artistic ability, they enabled the son to study under him, and this was perhaps the greatest favor that anyone could have done for a young aspirant to landscape painting. Church was so well prepared to support himself at twenty that he was soon making good money from the sale of his pictures. In the spring of 1850 he sold three to the American Art Union for a thousand dollars. By 1853, when the Art Union was disbanded, Church had sold the organization some twenty-nine paintings. As time went on and dollars rolled in, Joseph Church became reconciled to his son's career and even offered "assistance from me in the way of capital in your business."

As for purely moral reservations about painting as a career, the mother was as much concerned as the father:

> God's world is pleasant. There are a thousand things that are worthy of our love and attention and which show the wisdom and goodness of our Heavenly Father. And when with pencil you imitate the work of His hand let your heart praise the giver, but let not the pleasure of the world, the vanities, fill your mind and you lose the pearl of great price.[2]

Whether such admonitions had any specific effect is a matter than cannot be answered. But his mother's words are symptomatic of an atmosphere which had surrounded Frederic his whole life.

The Puritan Businessman's Son

Church was described as "indeed a nineteenth century type of the old Puritan" by Warner, who knew the moral tenor of Hartford, as an editor of the *Courant*, and of Church, as a long-standing intimate friend. Frederic's parents were children of the eighteenth century, not the eighteenth century of Boston Unitarianism, but of hard-core, resistant, Trinitarian Congregationalism. The son had the more liberal, freer attitudes of the new century. Warner describes him as more tolerant, more open, more catholic. This is indeed the Frederic Church we know today through his paintings and his extraordinary residence, Olana. Frederic was enough interested in Hartford's light of Transcendentalist Unitarianism to include in his library the sermons of Asa Bushnell. The painter's own minister in the same city had been the Reverend Joel Hawes, a rather dour Calvinist judging by his *Lectures to Young Men on the Formation of Character*.

When Church migrated to the greater freedom of New York, however, he found a more liberal Christianity being preached by the Reverend G. W. Bethune. When the minister moved to a new pulpit in Brooklyn, Church took the ferry across the East River every Sunday to hear his friend preach. Another clergyman of much the same stamp was Louis LeGrand Noble, Thomas Cole's pastor at the Catskill Episcopal parish (and Cole's biographer), whom Church met in 1844. The two became fast friends. Noble, it will be recalled, composed a pamphlet to accompany *The Heart of the Andes*, and he was also Church's companion in the North Atlantic in 1859. The minister recounted the adventure in a book, *After Icebergs with a Painter*, published in 1861. It is probably safe to infer that Noble's version of Christian faith, infused with the optimistic tonic of Transcendentalism, vibrated in close sympathy with Church's peculiar Christian faith. He writes as though his God were vaguely personal yet immanent in the forces of the universe. Like Church, Noble confronted nature with confidence and joy.

Daniel Wadsworth wrote to Thomas Cole in May of 1844, in the hope of persuading the painter to accept Joseph Church's son as his

Thomas Cole, "The Father of American Landscape"

pupil.[3] Frederic, just turned eighteen, was characterized as a young gentleman of "prepossessing personal appearance and manner," who had "received a good education," shown "considerable mechanical genius," and "considerable talent for landscape painting . . . and a strong desire to pursue [that] art." He was already the refined and intelligent man whom we recognize in later photographs (FIGURE 47) and in the biographies his contemporaries wrote of him, and already the socially adept and whimsically entertaining wit described by his future friends. When Wadsworth wrote to Cole, Frederic was already receiving instruction in drawing and painting from two Hartford artists, Benjamin H. Coe and Alexander H. Emmons. However, they have little to do with what their able pupil eventually became.

THOMAS COLE, "THE FATHER OF AMERICAN LANDSCAPE"

The great moment for Church of course came when Cole replied in the affirmative to Wadsworth's request; he had never before accepted a pupil. Thomas Cole (1801–1848) was clearly the outstanding landscape painter on this side of the Atlantic. Only the previous winter there had been a one-man exhibition, a rarity in those days, of Cole's works at the National Academy of Design in New York. There were good reminders of his importance close at hand too in the Wadsworth Atheneum, including the newly painted *Mount Aetna*, which had just been purchased for five hundred dollars. There was probably no painter in the world who could then have offered Church more. The young man, in the neatest letter he ever wrote, was well aware of the privilege:

> My highest ambition lies in excelling in the art. I pursue it not as a source of gain or merely as amusement. I am sensible of the unusual advantage I enjoy in being allowed to look to you sir as an instructor.[4]

In the mid 1840's Cole stood first in American landscape. There was a significant gap between him and the painter Asher Durand who occupied the number two position. Durand's landscape is basically pastoral in character. His views of the rural agrarian northeast consistently evoke the memory of the seventeenth century classical landscape. And

those of untamed nature (FIGURE 5) are informed with the same sense of peace. His humanity expresses itself in nature's dignity and grace. There is nothing impetuous or threatening in Durand's landscape. It is lovely, softened, good. Durand's style had few of the qualities that brought about Church's mature art. He did not handle oil so as to suggest the natural structure and movement of form, and his nature lacked vividness and drama. Contrast, for example, Durand's treatment of water with that in *Niagara* (PLATE I, II). Church might not have been able to paint a *Cotopaxi* if he had started his career with the nation's second landscapist.

Thomas Cole, "The Father of American Landscape"

Cole was the master of heroic landscape. His grandly conceived series, *The Course of Empire*, 1836 (New York Historical Society), or *The Voyage of Life*, 1840 (Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute), were achievements beyond the capacities of a Durand or any other American landscape painter of the day. These were history paintings in which figures, buildings, and natural features were coordinated as theatrical presentations of the painter's moral view of the world. They betray a grasp of the nature of art and a facility of invention that was then unique in America. However, to mid-twentieth century observers, Cole's less ambitious subjects show him to better advantage. *Schroon Mountain* of 1838 (FIGURE 4; in recent years it has borne the erroneous title *The Catskill Mountain*) illustrates well his peculiar genius. The whole scene has a vitality and wildness unknown to the tamer Durand. The power and energy of the Adirondack forest and mountain have been preempted by the artist to express his own aspirations to become free of the burdens of a sinful world. The trees seem to struggle for release. The mountain peak appears to soar into the heavens. It is the picture of a private experience of nature, the expression of a tormented soul longing for the Hereafter. Inevitably Cole imposed the image of his own body and emotions on the inanimate world:

> My attention has often been attracted by the appearance of action and expression of surrounding objects, especially of trees. They spring from some resemblance to the human form. There is an expression of affection in intertwining branches. [Trees] assimilate with each other in form and character. Expose them to adversity and agitations, and a thousand original characters start forth, battling for existence or supremacy. On the mountain summit,

exposed to the blasts, trees grasp the crags with their gnarled roots, and struggle with the elements with wild contortions.[5]

Thomas Cole, "The Father of American Landscape"

Cole's initial impressions from nature are thus humanly preconceived. His mind was steeped in the history of art. Indeed, he was ever ready to discover sylvan Laocoöns or Borghese Warriors in the landscape. When he came upon a prospective character-tree for a foreground, he sketched it as though he were looking at a plaster cast in the generalized light of the Neo-Classical studio (FIGURE 8). Cole's handling of the pen, pencil, or brush combined emotional impulsiveness with sympathy for natural form. It was the manner of the *Sturm und Drang* romantic.

Both the style and the imagery of Cole's art were assertions of a subjective involvement with nature. Church would objectify Cole's handling to make it express nature's own life. Contrast, for example, the whitecaps in a Cole *Niagara* with the whitecaps in Church's *Niagara* (FIGURES 54, 55). The teacher's waves are impulsive responsive renderings; the pupil's are objective records. It took only a transcendentalist temperament to convert the older man's brushwork into "the life and movement of nature." For the pantheist Thomas Cole, nature was a treasury of moral emblems, postures, and moods—reflections of an unseen and better spiritual realm. His paintings are staged dramatizations of himself as man tragically imprisoned in the substance of this world. He protests and warns against the evils of a materialistic civilization. He points the straight and narrow way to God through communion with His nature. Cole is a sermonizer, a Jeremiah with a brush. *Schroon Mountain* is an other-worldly landscape painted by a heroic pessimist. *Cotopaxi* (FIGURE 31) is a new-worldly landscape painted by a heroic optimist. Cole's art could be adapted—with the help of other influences—to the dramatization of the succeeding generation's millennial hopes. The pupil never forgot his debt to his teacher.

THOMAS COLE'S PUPIL

Church arrived at Cole's studio in Catskill on June 4, 1844, a date that marks the beginning not only of his formal instruction in landscape painting, but also of a close friendship which was prematurely cut short

in February of 1848 by Cole's death. At the prime of his career, Cole, who might have painted for another quarter century, had succumbed to pneumonia. The year after his teacher's death Church expressed his grief in a now lost painting, *Memorial to Cole;* the same year Asher Durand painted his famous *Kindred Spirits* (New York Public Library), showing Bryant and the lamented Cole in the Catskill Clove.

The numerous sketches of 1844 and 1845—some in oil, most in pencil—inform us implicitly of Cole's instruction. They reflect the experience of the older man systematized. Cole made studies from nature—practically all of them in pencil or ink, only a handful in oil—of those many features and effects which might be used for landscape poems and dramas: a pastoral landscape, a lake in the woods, the spiky silhouette of a piney ridge, a cliff, a sunset or sunrise, farm buildings or a mill, cows and horses, gnarled roots and blasted stumps, a tree or a portion of a tree (FIGURES 8, 23). The pupil took up the master's methods right away. His early pencil sketches are faint or hesitant reflections of Cole's characteristic stencil-flat draughtsmanship (FIGURE 6). By the time of Cole's death in 1848, Church had already shown promise of that pristine clarity of vision that was to characterize his mature draughtsmanship. The teacher said his pupil had "the finest eye for drawing in the world."

Within a year of his arrival at Catskill, Church was producing landscapes that no other American youth of nineteen could match. They seem to be Coles painted by another temperament, at least this is so with the views of Catskill and Connecticut landscape. The teacher judged them fit to be shown at the National Academy exhibition in 1845. Church actually moved further toward Cole's style in the next year or two, to the point that some of his paintings came to be confused with the older man's. He seems to have divided his energies between actual American landscapes and subjects from the Old Testament, Pilgrim's Progress, and Paradise Lost: *The Deluge* and *Moses Viewing the Promised Land* (1846); *Christian on the Borders of the Valley of the Shadow of Death* (c. 1847); *The River of the Water of Life* (c. 1848); *The Plague of Darkness* (c. 1849). These are all subjects of peculiar relevance to his mature work.[6] Church's first ambitious landscape, *Hooker and Company Journeying through the Wilderness*

from Plymouth to Hartford, in 1636—even the title is ambitious—was exhibited at the National Academy in the spring of 1846 (FIGURE 2). Conceived after Church had completed most of his formal instruction from Cole, it is a kind of *summa* of everything the young painter had been learning. What the subject meant to him is suggested in the text of a history of Hartford, of which the engraved frontispiece, "The Hooker Party," is adapted from his painting:

> What was this band, now composed, that thus ventured through the wilderness to found a Town, and aid to found a state? One of exiles from their father-land for faith and liberty—a band of serious, hardy, enterprising hopeful settlers, ready and determined to carve out, for themselves and their posterity, new and happy homes in a wilderness—there to sink the foundations for a chosen Israel—there to till, create, replenish, extend trade, spread the gospel, spread civilization, spread liberty—there to live, act, die and dig quiet sepulchres, in a hope and happiness that were destined to spring, phoenix-like, from the ashes of one generation to illumine and beautify the generation which was to succeed.[7]

One could hardly hope for a better proclamation of the painter's own belief in the unique destiny of New England. Richard Church, his ancestor, had been of the elect band of Hartford's first settlers. The painter, enlightened by modern science's professed insights into the mysterious workings of the Providential Plan, must have looked upon *The Hooker Party* as a religious picture. Indeed, he has suggested a second flight of the Holy Family into an idyllic wilderness of safety and promise. In this rather overstaged and cardboard-planed landscape, the sharp and pure vision of the previous landscapes has been pressed into a rather clumsily classical composition. The painting is a motley of studies which have been brought together into a whole which is neither convincing as nature nor harmonious as art. But *The Hooker Party* is to be respected as a juvenile attempt on Church's part to be a Claude Lorrain in the American wilderness.

In 1846, after his two years with Cole had ended, Church made a brief stab at setting up a studio in Hartford, but by autumn he had left home for New York. There he apparently painted in a room at 497

Broadway, the address of the Art Union Building. This seems to have been his place of work in the city until he moved, in 1858, into R. M. Hunt's new Studio Building on Tenth Street.

Church, tall, handsome—indeed, judging by his passport description, his contemporaries must have thought him a Greek god—quickly became involved with the life of the city's art world. He soon joined the Sketch Club and the Century Club, "musts" for a successful artist in those days, and in 1849, not yet twenty-three, he was elected to full membership in the National Academy of Design. Church was the youngest Academician in the country. He was by then a prominent enough artistic personality to have been honored at his studio by a visit from Edgar Allan Poe and to have been sought after as a teacher by William James Stillman, who later became better known as a journalist and photographer. Within another year Church had his second pupil, Jervis McEntee. Stillman felt that he had learned nothing from Church. It is not hard to explain why. Church seems to have scorned theories about art. Indeed, once when asked what his methods were, his reply was that he "had never looked upon himself as having any." "I believe that an artist should paint what he sees" is his most eloquent statement about art.[8] Good pedagogy for American Adams but not for anyone else.

By the early fifties Church himself had made great strides as a painting student of nature. His annual routine—it was the annual routine that all painters of landscape were adopting in this country—was to spend the months of October through April or May in the city busy working on canvases in the studio. The summer months then would be passed sketching in the out-of-doors at points remote from civilization. After two summers in the Catskills or in the vicinity of Hartford, during his apprenticeship with Cole, Church spent the summers of 1846 and 1847 in the Berkshires. Then in the next five years he explored western New York (1848), Virginia, Kentucky, and the Upper Mississippi (1851—including the Natural Bridge and Mammoth Cave), Vermont (1848 and 1849), the White Mountains (1850), and Maine. There, during the years 1850, 1851, and 1852 he visited Mount Desert and the Katahdin region, and in 1852 also Grand Menan Island (Canada) in the Bay of Fundy, then virtually unknown places. Church may actually be the

first painter to have visited Katahdin. Doughty and Cole had already been to Mount Desert, but neither had returned to the island, which is an interesting reflection both on them and on Church, who visited the island at least seven times. His own enthusiasm for Mount Desert came across in his paintings. They were in effect advertisements for the island. Church thus played a role in the creation of one of New England's great resorts.

The trip to Maine in 1850 is the first of a number of Church's excursions to have been recorded in writing as well as in sketches. Church did not share Cole's introspective compulsion to record all his thoughts and experiences in words; but he did, on several occasions, keep journals of his travels. They are without fail entertaining as well as revealing documents, enlivened by a boyish exuberance and an irrepressible humor. These qualities, indeed, betray Church as the anonymous author of a series of letters published in the *Bulletin of the American Art Union* (November, 1850). In the first of these we read a description of Church and his unnamed companions (Kensett and Gignoux?) sketching in the White Mountains, "muffled up" with white handkerchiefs and keeping a "bunch of shrubs actively playing about our heads" to ward off "the swarms of mosquitoes and black flies." However, Crawford and Franconia notches were only preliminaries on the way to Mount Desert, reached in those days from Portland by a sequence of steamer, sloop, and schooner. Arriving at the island, the painter wondered why "some shrewd Bostonian" had not erected a hotel on it. Primed with his fresh reading of Humboldt's grand theories of geography as the determinant of civilization, and inspired by the national optimism of the moment, Church was in his element:

> We have not come thus far to be disappointed . . . There is an immense range of mountains running through the island, one some two thousand feet high [inflated 25 per cent, in keeping with the style of expansionism], of admirably varied outline—in some places covered with forest, and broken with rocks and precipices overhanging gems of lakes, and in others showing nothing but bare rock from summit almost to base.

Mount Desert was a magnificent hunk of natural history existing on a scale that the painter had never known before:

From the highest peak . . . we could easily see Mount Desert rock, twenty-five miles off in the ocean; and the mountain on which we stood is seen sixty miles at sea . . . Far out in the offing, the soft, hazy, blue floor of the ocean was studded with nearly a hundred white sails of fishing smacks.

Church was living in the first space age. There were equal but different exhilarations in store for him and his companions at a lower altitude:

It was a stirring sight to see the immense rollers come toppling in, changing their forms and gathering in bulk, then dashing into sparkling foam against the base of old "Schooner Head," and leaping a hundred feet into the air. There is no such picture of wild, reckless, abandonment to its own impulses, as the fierce, frolicsome march of a gigantic wave. We tried painting them, but cannot suppress a doubt that we shall neither be able to give actual motion nor roar to any we may place upon canvas.

Cole had never addressed nature with such sympathetic gusto.

Church's oil and pencil sketches were tracing his maturing as an artist and his quickening engagement with nature. The oil studies of this period are painted on millboard with a salmon-buff colored ground. The effect of this underpaint was to give warmth and solidity to the light and form sketched over it (FIGURE 12). Most of the pencil studies are on sheets of cream-white, straw, olive, or pale gray paper, exceeding the dimensions of the oil studies. They range in size from six by eight to fourteen by eighteen inches. With a dark paper Church might sketch in white gouache alone (FIGURE 11). Ordinarily this gouache, or Chinese white, served as an adjunct to the pencil. The actual manner of sketching from nature at this time reflected the painter's changing conception of nature. Church was discovering himself as the intelligent inhabitant of a vast unconscious organism. The land and the ocean are beheld as the rigid or fluid records of elemental processes (FIGURE 12). A snapped tree is perceived as the *datum* of a storm that must have passed by only hours before (FIGURE 1).

Cole was ever ready to discover his own anatomy and emotions in the landscape, even to the point of interpreting the forms of mountains or trees as he sketched them from nature. But the mountain or the tree, as Church sketched them, kept their own anatomy. For him interpretation began not in the out-of-doors but in the studio, and even

in the easel painting he strove to re-create nature's anatomy. By the early 1850's Church was beginning to conceive of landscape as self-sufficient harmony, a flux of momentary interrelationships rather than separate passages of generalized light and local color. The action and expression of form and atmosphere cease to depend upon the subjective observer and instead become naturally consistent. The sky, the land, the water now exist visually with reference to one another. The harmony is derived, not from man's will, but from nature's life.

Church was adapting his master's style to the nationalistic sensibility. The American was attracted to the new, the fresh, the vivid. Church's sketches show a consciousness of his time both in subject and in style. He had forsaken the English picturesque which suggested age, decay, and—however pleasantly disguised—death, in sum the past. A typical example is the work of the English illustrator William H. Bartlett. We reproduce here a detail of one of his plates in *American Scenery* (FIGURE 22). Cole, too, out of Old World habit, preferred the rotting stump, the decrepit mill and bridge. The sketch shown in FIGURE 23 typifies Cole's way of seeing. It suggests a pencil tracing of the scene. There is no effort at creating the illusion of a perceived reality. The landscape exists in but two dimensions, without that atmosphere which postulates actual space and time. Only in the rickety bridge and structure beneath it is there a hint at depth. In oil Cole came closer to his pupil's effect of the window on nature, but in the final analysis the teacher's landscapes reflect the lack of spatial vividness of this drawing. The respective styles of drawing of Cole and of Church are graphic indexes of their responses to the reality of nature. To compare the younger man's drawing of a similar subject is to contrast the vision of the introverted pantheist Neo-Classicist with the vision of the extroverted transcendentalist New Adam (FIGURE 17). Church must actually have smelled sawdust as he sketched that lumber mill. In this drawing of his early maturity, this American artist combined the keen watchfulness of a self-reliant eye with the Jacksonian penchant for the raw and rugged. Brother Jonathan's answer to the picturesque of John Bull was youth, vigor, and life: the picturesque of the present and the future.

Another comparison between the pupil and the teacher reveals still

more of this New World transformation of art. Though in a finished painting Church would endow a tree with humanly meaningful "action and expression," his immediate impressions of nature were undistorted by his will. He did not suggest to nature: nature suggested to him. Contrast trees sketched by Cole (FIGURE 8) with a group which Church sketched at Mount Desert (FIGURE 10). The one is a half-human event, a projection of the artist's consciousness. The other appears to us as an event which takes place unconscious of man. It is the exact historical record of a corner of nature up to this moment, say 10 A.M. on August 30th, 1850. The sketch tells us that the artist himself has lived in sympathy with natural history, just as he lived in sympathy with those splendid waves at Mount Desert during that same summer.

Church had made the transition from Cole's style to his own. In *West Rock, New Haven* (FIGURE 3) he had already expressed enough of the new art spirit to have created a sensation at the 1849 National Academy of Design exhibition. The praises of the painting were "in everybody's mouth": Church "had taken his place, at a single leap, among the great masters of landscape." It was a "subject of universal interest" which, like another of his paintings of the same year, had been represented with "the accuracy of a daguerreotype." This idyllic benign, characteristic American scene obviously embodied what the critics had been calling for: the combination of "The Ideal and the Actual." It was this picture which gained Church full membership in the National Academy. And from now on he was a watched painter. "The works of none of the younger men have attracted more attention," said one observer of the American art scene in 1851. Exhibiting each year at the Academy and the American Art Union (an organization which bought works of art to distribute by lottery) Church was steadily attracting the notice of the critics who had singled him out to "become a leader." "We doubt if the artist lives whose conception of individual fact is so distinct and correct"; "He has the true feeling for art"; "He owes it to himself and to his country to mark out an original path." These are comments made in the early fifties.

Church was being coaxed away from subject landscapes, like *The Deluge*. "Had Mr. Church seen the deluge, he would no doubt have painted it to better advantage." (The figures in the painting actually

Arcadia in the Present Tense

must have been comparatively good; see FIGURE 7.) There was "more imagination" in his *Beacon off Mount Desert Island*.[9] This was one of the first pictures to "reproduce the experience in nature," to quote a favorite American quotation from Ruskin's *Modern Painters*. Here Church was anticipating that "triumph of the Real" which cultural nationalists later proclaimed as the democratic victory of the living present over the dead conventions of the past. That was in 1857, but at the beginning of the decade observers of the art scene were less of one mind. *Twilight*, shown at the Academy in 1850,[10] was commended except for one feature: the sunset sky was "a phenomena [sic] and a prodigy" which "needed a certificate of genuineness." This was the complaint of at least one viewer. But another defended Church against such criticisms:

"We exhort Mr. Church to entire boldness in his attempts. Why should he hope always to please those who have only a vague susceptibility of natural observation for their standard of criticism?" [11]

A few years more and the "rare spectacle" would be accepted as the rule with "Mr. Church." The extraordinary effect in nature was the revelation of the divine imminent in natural history. In the Era of Manifest Destiny all expected the cosmic event.

ARCADIA IN THE PRESENT TENSE

The Great East—the greatest—for was it not the enterprise, energy, brain, and cash of the East that made the West as we know it? (Frederic Church to Charles Dudley Warner, July 23, 1888)

The masterpiece of Church's youth, *New England Scenery*, painted in 1851, serves well as a conclusion to the beginning of the painter's career (FIGURES 16, 19). The painting resumes the intentions of the juvenile *Hooker Party* (FIGURE 2) and presages *The Heart of the Andes* (FIGURES 29, 30). *New England Scenery* is the opening gun of almost three decades of cosmic landscape. In this painting Church undertook to characterize and to idealize the portion of the globe that had created the very kind of man he was. It is composed of paraphrasings of vi-

gnettes of the northeastern United States. The waterfall suggests western New York (FIGURE 11); the mill and hillside beyond, and the cliffs, Maine (FIGURES 12, 17). Other features bring to mind studies made in the Green and White Mountains or clouds sketched heaven knows where. *New England Scenery* is several pictures in one composition. Church was more or less following Humboldt's advice here, which was to present the typical features of a region according to the principles of ideal classical landscape. The painter had of course learned these principles from Cole. Indeed, it appears that Church, throughout his career, had the habit of making ideal compositions in ink and ink wash, perhaps to keep himself in classical trim. In the two illustrated (FIGURES 13, 14; there are four others in the same series) he seems to have been practicing his paces in depicting landscape at rest and landscape in action. *New England Scenery* is the result of similar experimentation. Though its forms are energetic and bounding (expressive of the national mood) it is a slight toning down of the boisterousness of the preliminary study he made for it the previous year (FIGURE 18).

Church's feeling for solidity and activity in the forms of landscape was instinctive. But he was clearly encouraged in this sensibility by his study of landscapes of the Dusseldorf School, which had just begun to pour into the United States. A typical example of this German landscape style is illustrated in FIGURE 15. It combines photographic accuracy with vitality of form. *New England Scenery* obviously owes some due to this imported foreign style, but Church was careful to avoid the school's affectations. According to one report, he was first inspired to go to Mount Desert after seeing the marine landscapes of Andreas Achenbach (FIGURE 61). Years later, in 1863, when he painted waves crashing on a rocky Maine coast (FIGURE 64), Church was still remembering this Dusseldorf master. Landscape, for these pot-boiling German romantics, was seldom the vehicle of deep conviction. Church's strong faith in nature enabled him to transcend Dusseldorf's mannered realism. The contrast between Church's and Achenbach's treatment of water makes the point succinctly.

To return briefly to the relationship between *New England Scenery* and the preliminary composition for this painting (FIGURES 18, 19), there is another significant difference between the two. In 1851 Church

Arcadia in the Present Tense

thought better of his first intention to include the sea as well as everything else that characterized New England. A vista to the east drawing one's thoughts back to Europe was an anomaly. After this the painter would only look that way to behold the "promise" of a new day.

New England Scenery is more cosmic in ambition than in realization. Though Church was as well prepared as any painter to invent natural history, the result, contrasted with later paintings, strikes us as somewhat contrived. His reliance upon a tradition that did not understand nature so well accounts, in large measure, for the deficiency. America had still not developed its own pictorial ideals. At this point the artist was having to make something new out of something old. There was no other alternative. Even in this painting we are actually looking simultaneously at several scenes in several perspectives. This is unclassical, and so too is the expanding openness of the landscape. (The openness would increase in the next paintings.) A Claude Lorrain or a Nicolas Poussin would have condemned Church's realism as vulgar. Sir Joshua Reynolds, the interpreter of Grand Style art to eighteenth century England, would have regarded the emphasis on facts as incompatible with grandeur of conception. This American was pouring a new mentality into an old formula which was about to crack.

The metaphor applies to the content as well as the style of *New England Scenery*. What Church imagines is a pristine Yankee Arcadia: a thriving agrarian paradise peopled, not by grimy peasants or elegant shepherds who live from generation to generation in history's limbo, but by motivated yeomen who are the backbone of a new nation in the making. Evidences of their industry and culture suggest their enterprise and the harmony they enjoy with a benevolent nature which exists for them. The scene is blessed in the golden glow of late afternoon light. And into that light, to the west, goes a Conestoga wagon which will carry New England to Ohio, Wisconsin, or Oregon. In 1846, Church had painted *Moses Viewing the Promised Land*. Now, in 1851, he was making that Promised Land out of the newness, the vastness, and the beauty of his native land. But it was still a half borrowed land, half borrowed from the seventeenth century's nostalgia for an irretrievable paradise. Church had translated the nostalgia into the present tense and turned it toward the future, something Cole had

not thought to do. But the dream was still Arcadia. Church was stuck between Europe—it was Europe's idea of America he was painting—and the real America. The pictorial mythologizing of the New World was only half born. Pretty good for a twenty-five-year-old!

THE ARTIST IN AN AGE OF BUSINESS AND PATRIOTISM

The spirit of the age, the spirit of the nation, should form the soul of the artist; the light shed, and the inspiration breathed from the productions of the past, should purify his taste, and quicken his perceptions of beauty. Beauty and harmony are the same in all ages, but to give the highest pleasure must be applied to those subjects in which are the hearts of the people; and therefore the artist needs to know and feel with his age. (*Home Journal*, February, . . . 1853)

These words typify *New England Scenery*. In fact they were inspired by the painting. *New England Scenery* had just been sold for thirteen hundred dollars at the disbandment sale of the American Art Union. It was probably the highest price that had ever been paid for an American landscape painting. Even Church, who had sold it to the organization for a mere five hundred dollars, felt it "wasn't worth it." When he said that, he was more the Puritan's than the businessman's son. But Church, so an admirer wrote years later, "presently grew into a more ample estimate of his work."

New England Scenery, after all, expressed the material incentives as well as the religious inspirations of the Puritan Yankee. Church had himself been industriously raising his prices from year to year. Indeed, in a letter dated December 14, 1854, the painter obligingly spelled out for a prospective patron the former price and present price of his paintings, illustrating the latest increase in cost per square foot of Church canvas: [12]

size of picture	*former price*	*present price*
2′ x 3′	$400	$500
2′8″ x 4′	$600	$700
3′4″ x 5′	$800	$1000
4′ x 6′	$1000	$1200

Unlike Thomas Cole, who seems to have been pained and embarrassed by the necessity of discussing money matters, Church went about them with the same detachment with which he looked at nature. In Chapter I we mentioned his contract with Blodgett for *The Heart of the Andes*, a business agreement which certainly suggests Church had a flair for the "hard sell."

Though the painter was a prophet he did not object to profits. When, with the showing of *Niagara* in 1857, he found he could go it alone outside the walls of the National Academy, he ceased sending important paintings to its annual exhibitions. He did so well on his own in getting his work before the public that supporters of the Academy complained that *The Heart of the Andes*, "hurt" attendance at the Academy in 1859. Church's business manager, John McClure, and his dealers (Goupil's, the present Knoedler's, was the principal one) relieved Church of nine-tenths of the job of promoting his work. His own chief responsibility, apart from being prime mover, was to show up at "artists' receptions" at the Studio Building and at "first views" at the galleries. McClure and Goupil's would look after the newspaper notices, the posters, broadsides (Church generally wrote part of the text) and pamphlets, invitations to previews, display of subscription books for engravings, accounts of attendance receipts, arrangements for shipping paintings around the country and abroad, etc.

With the new emphasis on the isolated sensation-picture which was to be seen by a crowd, the size of the canvases increased while the number of canvases decreased. "Church obtains his own price, for he paints only one picture where a hundred are asked." *Twilight in the Wilderness* (1860) was one of the smallest of the "big" pictures: it measured forty by sixty-four inches. *Niagara from the American Side* (1867) [13] was apparently the largest: it measured nine and a half by seven and a half feet.

New money (the Civil War helped this along) as much as the spirit of expansionism, was the cause of the new dimensions. The business mind and the patriotic mind—these were identical among Church's patrons who were nation builders—called for landscape. New land to be developed and produce wealth contributed to the taste for the great piece of nature on canvas. But then, too, there was the millennial ex-

pectancy to inspire these enormous cosmic windows. Small wonder that landscape, which constituted barely one out of ten entries at the Academy exhibition of 1842, rose so rapidly in the mid-century and came to dominate the exhibitions of the fifties and sixties.

The mythology of science, as we have seen in the discussion of *Cotopaxi*, is the essential clue to the triumph of landscape in this Era of Manifest Destiny. Science was the means of exploiting nature for man's good, and the means of interpreting the will of the universe. This is why painting, which then in America meant landscape, became "a rage."

In this rare moment of our history the American painter was called upon to "embalm the genius of a country":

> Into the hand of Art is committed dominion over the passions not only of the individual, but of the masses composing the body politic, and he who fails to comprehend or to appreciate the magnitude of the trust reposed in him, lacks the primary qualifications for his profession, and must, therefore, content himself with an obscurity commensurate with the delusion of his own vision.[14]

Never before or since has the American painter been so essential to his country, at least in the consciousness of his fellow-countrymen. Art, to be collective, "art for the millions," had to be based upon the practical experience of any man. In a utilitarian society this meant that art had to be based upon "facts." Without these "we are merely polishing pebbles."

"He respects us, and we respect him for it." These words were said of Church when *New England Scenery* was still fresh in the public mind. In 1851 America was about to call for "a bold genius," for "a series of national paintings," and at least one American painter had already begun "to know and feel with his age."

CHAPTER IV

An Epic of the Tropics in Color

All the organisms and forces of nature may be seen as one living, active whole, animated by one sole impulse. "Nature," as Schelling remarks . . . , "reveals herself as the creative force of the universe—before time, eternal, ever active, she calls to life all things, whether perishable or imperishable." (Alexander von Humboldt, *Cosmos*)

Here is the very painter Humboldt so longs for in his writings; the artist who, studying, not in our little hot-houses, but in Nature's great hot-house bounded by the tropics, with labor and large-thoughted particularity parallel to his own, should add a new and more magnificent kingdom of Nature to Art, and to our distincter knowledge. (*Art Journal*, London, September 1, 1865)

DURING the period before Church's eminence as a landscape painter it had been assumed that travel, to an American artist, meant going to Europe. Indeed, an American could hardly expect to become an artist unless he went to Europe, and that before he had matured. Most of the other leading painters of Church's generation did this: Kensett, Cropsey, Inness, Bierstadt, to name a few. Their aim abroad was to study the Old Masters, learn the techniques of painting in the schools, and make the Grand Tour. Few had ever questioned the necessity of the practice. Those who did question it argued this way: if we are to become a new people, we must become independent of the culture of the Old World; if the artist is to create American art, he must guard against merely copying foreign art; there is only one safe way to avoid this pitfall, and that is not to go to Europe until one has found oneself in one's own country. The plight of the man who painted was much more difficult than that of the man who wrote. The writer took no risk in staying at home, the painter did. The schools where one could learn to paint, and the great works of art which one should know were on the other side of the ocean. How could the painter learn his art without that art to emulate? Yet how could he become an American artist if he imitated the European artist? Jefferson had warned his compatriots not to go abroad in their youth; they would lose their American virtues. This is what one critic, in 1859, said had happened to George Inness: he

had become too French. And Worthington Whittredge, another American of this same generation, immediately upon his return from ten years of study and travel abroad, found himself almost helpless in the presence of the Catskills:

> The forest was a mass of decaying logs and tangled brush wood, no peasants to pick up every vestige of fallen sticks to burn in their miserable huts, no well-ordered forests, nothing but the primitive woods with their solemn silence reigning everywhere.[1]

He was not the only painter to have been embarrassed by such an un-European landscape.

The best answer to this American dilemma, so went the logic of the cultural nationalist, was for the young artist to remain at home, to study those few Old Masters and good foreign works of art which were available, or, next in preference, engravings after them, and to go straight to nature, "the best of all teachers." This is what Church elected to do. As Cole's pupil he had the unique advantage of the best instruction possible for any landscape painter on this side of the Atlantic. Also Church was a passionate devotee and consummate observer of nature. He was determined to be the most American of painters. To his contemporaries he seemed "impervious to European influences." After Church finally did visit the Old World, he wrote: "apart from Syria, I have no desire to return." [2]

Church's first trip abroad was a new departure for a landscape painter. South America had been the primary setting for the great theories about natural history which Humboldt had formulated in *Cosmos*, *Personal Narratives*, and *Aspects of Nature*. Church owned the popular editions of these works published by Bohn and had read of the scientist-explorer's discoveries about the life of the earth in this vast yet concentrated laboratory of natural history. There could have been no better course to follow than that of the great scientist across the "New Continent." It would be a Grand Tour of the monuments of geographical determinism: just what a would-be citizen of nature most needed. Indeed, his going to South America, so it must have seemed to this young Puritan Adam, was almost preordained. He was to prove himself the very painter that Humboldt had called for:

An Epic of the Tropics in Color

Are we not justified in hoping that landscape painting will flourish with a new and hitherto unknown brilliancy, when artists of merit shall more frequently pass the narrow limits of the Mediterranean, and when they shall be enabled far in the interior of continents, in humid mountain valleys of the tropical world, to seize, with the genuine freshness of a pure and youthful spirit, on the true image of the varied forms of nature? [3]

In 1853 there were no obstacles to prevent Frederic Church from embarking upon his artistic destiny in the tropical world. He had the time; he had the ability; he had the money. All he needed was a companion, and he would head for the equator. As luck had it, his friend Cyrus West Field was ready for an exotic detour in an already fabulously successful career (he was later to become famous as the projector of the Transatlantic cable).[4]

And so it was that the painter and the capitalist arrived at the mouth of the Rio Magdalena in Colombia at the end of April, 1853. A diary kept by Church (the first two months are written in self-taught Spanish) informs us that they followed the river as far as navigation would permit, and then cut across the mountains to Bogotá. Near that city, with a company of peons at their command, they visited the Falls of Tequendama, which had been made famous by Humboldt's *Personal Narratives*. After a lot of scrambling over rocks and pushing through vines, Church surmised that the vantage point was right for a good view and ordered the peons to hack away a section of jungle for the sake of art. In a few minutes "a magnificent view disclosed itself" to the party. Even these "simple" Indians gasped in amazement. Church pulled out his pad and sketched the falls from this spot for the first time in history.

By mid-July the painter was retracing Humboldt's steps through the Quindio Pass into the broad concave of the double-spined backbone of the "New Continent." He had entered a five-hundred-mile-long Alpine gully populated along its edges by mountain individualities and in its center by plantations and villages. After four weeks on foot or on the backs of burros and mules, the two Americans crossed the border from Colombia into Ecuador. Within a matter of hours the very vision which had attracted Church to this unknown part of the world materialized before his eyes:

After a disagreeable journey across an elevated plain with a cold piercing wind and a sprinkling of rain we finally came to the edge of an eminence which overlooked the valley of Chota. And a view of such unparalleled magnificence presented itself that I must pronounce it one of the great wonders of Nature. I made a couple of feeble sketches this evening in recollection of the scene. My ideal of the Cordilleras is realized.[5]

Church and Field spent about a fortnight in Quito, then headed on south past the volcano Cotopaxi and around two sides of Chimborazo which reared its "white and lofty head most grandly from the paramo," or plain. On the twentieth of September their route was marked by a "sudden transition from a cool to a warm climate" which signalized their descent from the Andes. They were soon to emerge from the continent riding the tides on the Rio Guayas.

Back in his New York studio, intoxicated by the experience, but drinking only hot chocolate (a newly cultivated taste) and coffee, Church, to use one of his own expressions, "wielded the bristles" madly for the next two years. He hardly left the city except to go to Maine for two brief respites in the summers of 1854 and 1855. But the public did not see the results of his distant explorations until the spring of 1855 at the National Academy. There, the diarist George Templeton Strong tells us, "Church's beautiful landscapes are the chief attraction." The best of these, Strong thought, was *The Cordilleras*.[6] This tropical paradise, a dreamy South American pendant to the more restless North American paradise represented in *New England Scenery*, was indeed one of Church's finest landscapes.

But another painting shown at the Academy two years later, *The Andes of Ecuador*[7] of 1855 (FIGURE 20, facetiously called *The Thousand Mountains*) is a more significant work. It combined the energy of form of the Dusseldorf school of landscape with the antediluvian sublimity of the English painter-illustrator John Martin and the light-filled atmosphere of Turner (FIGURES 15, 21, 82). *The Andes of Ecuador* was an ideal mirror of the moment's collective urge:

Wonderful hazy ridges of mountain-peaks, flooded with tropical sunlight. Sharp pinnacles, just tipped with eternal snow, soaring like white birds to heaven. Vast distant torrents, dashing over rocky ledges into bottomless

ravines that gape for the silver waters. Faint gleams of tropical vegetation reddening the foreground, with all detail, all shape lost in the neutral bloom over lonely places. Grandeur, isolation, serenity! here there is room to breathe. One feels the muscles grow tense gazing over that great Alpine panorama.[8]

The Andes of Ecuador "caught and conveyed a new feeling to the mind. His canvas lives."

A SECOND LOOK AT SOUTH AMERICA

The painter's design . . . is evidently nothing less than an epic of the Tropics in color. If the artist is fortunate in the selection of a subject so suggestive, so magnificent, so effective, and practically untouched, the public is not less happy that the theme has such an interpreter. (*Harper's Weekly*, April 4, 1863)

In the spring of 1857, while the American public was viewing twenty square feet of Andean splendor at the National Academy, the painter was on the high seas, headed for a second look at the reality and heeled with commissions to paint more and better of the same. This time the destination was solely Ecuador, which had received short shrift four years before. Church's expectations now had more substance and his inspirations were grander and more vivid. The first trip had "enlarged" his "capacity and conceptions," Noble tells us. But also Church had grown as a man and as an artist. He had, it should be recalled, just produced *Niagara*. In the sketches for that painting and in those made in Ecuador during this second trip, one can detect the influence of a new intellectual force. Humboldt had referred his hypothetical painter to the model of the seventeenth century classical landscape, most specifically Claude Lorrain. But it was a model that lacked the necessary scope and vitality. The strong hints of John Martin and Turner in *The Andes of Ecuador* suggest that Church was seeking better exemplars of cosmic art. John Ruskin, the brilliant expositor of Turner, was the new intellectual influence on Church. In Church's sketches of the mid and late fifties, there is ample evidence that he had studied carefully his copies of Ruskin's *Modern Painters*. Through the English

critic's extraordinary analyses of Turner's grasp of natural history—illustrated with engravings—the young American must have been helped immeasurably toward a fuller mastery of nature. For every sentence of advice to the landscape painter offered by Humboldt there were a thousand offered by Ruskin.

Church seems to have arrived in Ecuador knowing exactly what he was going to do while there and exactly what he was going to attempt when he came home. The complexion of the sketches is therefore noticeably different from those of 1853. Those of the earlier trip tend to be detached vignettes of vegetation on the one hand and self-composed ideal views on the other. There were still in 1853 many reminders of Cole's sketching method. From the second trip there are again many such sketches, but there are now also numerous others which are not vignettes or views of the essentially picturesque or beautiful, but rather studies of the processes of natural history. And still other sketches of 1857 show that Church was consistently seeing nature on a larger scale. The breadth that his art needed was to be based on the scale of continental history.

In the four years since his first trip to South America, Church had become still more aware of the relationship between man and nature. A journal written during a brief trip to the volcano Sangay (see map, FIGURE 32) differs markedly from the journals of the 1853 trip.[9] In his stance before nature the painter was becoming less the ingenuous youth and more the aware adult. Church was seeing the earth in truly cosmic terms. He instinctively interprets Riobamba as a city in a bowl created, nurtured, and protected by the mountains El Altar and Chimborazo. At thirteen thousand feet, in wet snow, in "the pathless wilderness," removed from "all signs of man," and dependent upon Indians and horses who had over centuries adjusted to this environment, he experienced the reduction of civilized man to bare subsistence. Think back to the young Frederic Church who stood before the Valley of Chota in 1853 and then contrast his eyewitness account of a confrontation in 1857 with the volcano Sangay:

I knew I could get no view of [it] that night without a scramble and as there was still a couple of hours of day light I grasped my sketch book and

commenced ascending the hill which rose between us and the Volcano. The exertion of working my way through the tangled grass was tremendous. I toiled and toiled while every little eminence which I gained revealed still more elevated ones above, but my perseverance was rewarded finally, and I planted my feet on the summit. Dense clouds hung over the mountain tops everywhere and I looked in vain for a glimpse of Sangay or its smoke. Its proximity, though, was evident enough from the regular, impressive shaking of the earth and the tremendous peals which marked each explosion. Turning my back, I commenced a sketch of the picturesque mountains at the Southwest where the clouds did not hang low enough to cover the snow line. Gradually the clouds broke away, the sun shone and gilded with refined gold every slope and ridge that it could touch. Patches of open sky revealed the most lovely blue in contrast to the rich coloring.

My sketch finished, I turned my face, and Lo! Sangay, with its imposing plume of smoke stood clear before me. I was startled.

Like the poet Whitman, Church would "front" the "strange." The episode continues:

Above a serrated, black, rugged group of peaks which form the crater, the columns arose, one creamy white against an opening of exquisitely blue sky, delicate white, cirrus formed, flakes of vapor hung about the great cumulus column and melted away into the azure. The other, black and sombre, piled up in huge, rounded forms cut sharply against the dazzling white of the column of vapor and piling up higher and higher, gradually was diffused into a yellowish tinted smoke through which would burst enormous heads of black smoke which kept expanding, the whole gigantic mass gradually settling down over the observer in a way that was appalling.

I commenced a sketch of the effect, but constant changes rapidly followed and new beauties were revealed as the setting sun crested the black smoke with burnished copper and the white cumulus cloud with gold. At intervals of nearly four in five minutes an explosion took place; the first intimation was a fresh mass of smoke with sharply defined outlines rolling above the dark rocks followed by a heavy, rumbling sound which reverberated among the mountains. I was so impressed by the changing effects that I continued making rapid sketches; but all the time I had from the moment I saw the first of them until the sun set was twenty minutes. Dense clouds again settled over the mountains and night took the place of day. The curtain had dropped.

"It is in the dispassionate statement of plain material facts," wrote D. H. Lawrence, "that Dana achieves his greatness." In *Two Years Before the Mast* the Pacific is "chief actor in the play of [the author's] own existence."[10] Lawrence could just as well have been writing of Church and his volcanoes: *Cotopaxi* (FIGURE 31) is the corresponding epic.

A Second Look at South America

Through his scientific detachment Church became involved in cosmic life. Cole would have found Church's newly discovered life forbidding. Cole's own words reflect a very different attitude toward a similar event:

> A sudden darkness enveloped the scene, which a few moments before was beaming with sunlight, and thunders muttered in the distance. It was necessary in a few moments to seek shelter, which I found beneath an overhanging rock. . . . Here, thought I, as I paced the rocky floor of my temporary castle, I will watch, unharmed, the battle of the elements . . . Expectation hung on every crag. A single pass of one long blade of lightning through the silence, followed by a crash as of a cloven mountain, with a thousand echoes, was the signal for the grand conflict. A light troop of raindrops first swept forward, footing it over the boughs with a soft and whispery sound; then came the tread of a heavy shower: squadrons of vapour rolled in,—shock succeeded shock,—thunderbolt fell on thunderbolt,—peal followed peal,—waters dashed on every crag from the full sluices of the sky . . . Then came up a thousand fancies. I fancied everything and everything. I thought myself careering, in a chariot of rock, through airy wastes beyond the reach of gravitation, with no law but my own will.[11]

For Cole nature exists as the foil for his imagination; he remains aware of his own sensuous presence, projecting himself into nature's movements. For Church nature exists as the means of sloughing off an old humanity; he sees, unconscious of his own physical humanity, and his mind merges with nature's very being. The same conclusions can be read from the sketches of the two men. Cole the unreborn descendent of Old World art could not help but recognize himself in nature's life, and thus his first-hand impressions of nature already look familiar. But Church's look "unfamiliar." His nature exists before and after man. "How little this fair globe would miss mankind!" said his companion in the Maine wilderness in 1856.[12] The painter's attitude before Sangay

"Mountains—the Most Signal of Earthly Facts"

is the same: "the great Volcano has no rival on earth due to the fact that from time immemorial its terrible eruptions have continued without cessation." Church saw nature undistorted by human fancy; he saw nature pure. These visual records of Church's contact with elemental nature are transcendentalist impressions: the drawn equivalent of Thoreau's ejaculation atop Katahdin, "Contact! Contact!"

"MOUNTAINS—THE MOST SIGNAL OF EARTHLY FACTS"

The mutations of the old earth may be read upon her rocks and mountains, and these records of former changes tell us the infallible truth, that as the present passes into the future, so will the form of Earth undergo an important alteration. The same forces which lifted the Andes and the Himalayas are still at work, and from the particles of matter carried from the present lands by the rivers into the sea where they subside in stratified masses, there will, in the great future, be raised a new world, upon which the work of life will go forward, and over which will be spread a vast Intelligence. (Robert Hunt, *The Poetry of Science*, London, 1854)

One of the paintings Church was anticipating in 1857 was *Cotopaxi. The Heart of the Andes* (FIGURES 29, 30) was another; the hero of this famous painting was the great mountain. The "Dome" as it was christened was the archetypal Andean mountain, "each and every one of the Andeas." It was El Altar and twenty other peaks; but most of all it was Chimborazo, for Chimborazo was the great personality of the New Continent. Aconcagua, a thousand miles south of it, and an unknown number of Himalayas were higher, but they were then mere altitudes with unknown bodies. Chimborazo had been made sacred by the prophet-scientists Condamine and Humboldt. On its flanks they had measured the earth. Nature had placed the mountain in their path as a revelation to man. At least that is how Church appears to have regarded this great natural presence. And that, too, is how Church was to make it the hero of *The Heart of the Andes*. He studied Chimborazo from east, south, and west (it was inaccessible from the north). The village of Guaranda (see map, FIGURE 32) was the center of the best views, and Church made dozens of sketches in the vicinity of this

place. In the pencil and oil records of the many-faceted Chimborazo we can recognize the painter's conception of the mountain (FIGURES 24, 27, 28, 74). It was the first cause in the unending cycle of terrestrial life. It was the creator of man and civilization: the Earth God. But as God-immanent this mountain was the archetype of man. To those who saw Chimborazo idealized in *The Heart of the Andes* it had a head and shoulders; it was strong and beautiful; it aspired to the eternal and the infinite; it joined heaven and earth. Hence it was a fit image for American "demigods" and "immortals." Through "the power of Art" mountains could be molded "into satisfying expressions of man's yearnings towards the boundless," and "Mind" could thus be united with "Nature." [13]

"Mountains—the Most Signal of Earthly Facts"

And so, in 1857, Church withdrew into this beautiful Andean wilderness to pierce Nature "to the core" and "Lead her beauty forth for the world's wonderment, to dazzle and inspire." Church's mind was already at work on the great objective. Some of the on-the-spot pencil sketches were being more or less completed with foreground devices and staffage. The process of digestion had begun. But these views were in a matter of days subsumed in a larger, grander conception, whose general outlines were in turn suggested by the sketchiest of notations (FIGURES 27, 28). On June 5, 1857, Church had already begun *The Heart of the Andes*. The exercise served the purpose both of jelling his ideas and of suggesting what yet remained to be done while the inspiring reality was in sight.

Back in the United States Church found his compatriots waiting for him to paint "an epic of the tropics in color." The literary analogy is surprisingly appropriate. *The Heart of the Andes* alone prompted enough writing to fill a thick nineteenth century volume (see Chapter I). This painting was the first full-fledged opus to appear, unless one considers *The Andes of Ecuador* a mature creation. *Cotopaxi* (1862), *Chimborazo* (1864), *Rainy Season in the Tropics* (1866), *The Vale of St. Thomas, Jamaica* (1867), and *Morning in the Tropics* (1876) are the major works which carried the epic through to its conclusion. They made a generation's mental picture of the tropics.

"A Fairer Creation than We Know"

Hence [art's] legitimate action is not seen in creating an imaginary world, as some suppose, but in revealing the deep meaning of the real creation around and within us. (*Crayon*, June 6, 1855)

[The Artists] must . . . not only tell us that flowers exist, but that there is a perfect type of the flower, more fully beautiful than any which we see—free from all imperfection and accident and circumstance. (*Crayon*, April 4, 1855)

For more than a year after his return from Ecuador, *The Heart of the Andes* was taking form in Church's mind. Sometime in 1858 he composed what was clearly a much advanced preliminary for the great painting. The chief difference between this eleven- by sixteen-inch oil study, which is at Olana, and the painting of 1859 is to be noticed in the right foreground. Where "old aristocrats of the woods" rise above the pool in the painting, there are in the study three quiet palms. These were lovely when less than a finger in height, but enlarged to the scale of the five- by eight-foot painting now in the Metropolitan, they would have been monotonous, like the rather too conspicuous palms to the left in *The Andes of Ecuador* (FIGURE 20). On a sheet of paper which is larger than the 1858 oil study Church conceived the basic configuration of the final imposing group. Without relinquishing altogether the beauty of the palm, he gained much in grandeur of effect by imagining more virile sylvan characters. Indeed the painter made them into good Yankees. "These prodigies of labor," wrote Noble, "beam with an expression of the sappy, elastic, ringing wood, with a bold, free, noble action, at home in the breeze, in the sunshine and the calm."[14] Whitman, who professed that he would like to be a Louisiana oak, might have settled for these trees instead. In the creation of such arborescent heroes Church was exercising his facility at "Invention," a facility necessary to all academic history painters. "Invention," as Sir Joshua Reynolds had interpreted it to the eighteenth century, relied upon a broad knowledge of the great masters of the Renaissance tradition and the monuments of Greece and Rome. His ideal was that "naturalized" citizen of Antiquity, the great French Classicist, Nicolas

Poussin. Church, well-groomed by the example of Thomas Cole, and given invaluable cues by John Ruskin, was quite capable of adapting the Grand Manner to the painting of natural (instead of human) history. The entire *Heart of the Andes* is conceived as is the group of trees: each feature has its peculiar "character" and "expression." The gray woodland in shadow is "forceful quiet." The nearer mountain is "manly energy." The whole landscape is in an equilibrium of "Power and Repose," expressive of the benign harmony which the painter had studied in Andean nature. There is as much idealization in the scene as there is in the Old Masters with which Church surrounded himself at Olana. Notice, for example, the youthful and purely beautiful tree that seems to rise with gentle exuberance from the hillock beyond the cross. It is an idealization of a tree sketched in 1853 (FIGURE 26).

Church could have read in his own copy of Reynolds's *Discourses* that the artist should correct the imperfections of specific nature with his knowledge of general nature. The Academician of course was thinking of the human form, but the idea was equally applicable to the nature known to the nineteenth century. In the volumes of *Modern Painters*, John Ruskin was elaborately "naturalizing" the Grand Style. The whole accumulated system of the Renaissance artist was being transferred to nature. High Art follows faith, and in the century of Ruskin and Church that meant landscape.

"WHY PAINT THE TROPICS?"

Every zone seems to have paid tribute in climate, scenery and productions, and to confess that in the empire of nature, there is her metropolis, her palaces, and her throne. (Louis Noble, *The Heart of the Andes*)

"Oh! how grand and beautiful it is! Whenever I look at it, I feel exactly as I did on Easter-Sunday." (Augusta Evans, *St. Elmo*, New York, n.d.)

Why paint the tropics? every passionate soul longs to be with Nature in her fervor underneath the palms. (Theodore Winthrop, *A Companion to The Heart of the Andes*, 1859)

The artist, we read in *The Crayon* in 1857, should restore things "to what they were at Creation." Or, on another page of the same journal,

he should paint "the image of the World Redeemed." Church came to "master the type forms" of nature, as Phidias mastered the type forms of nature. The Greek created a human God. The American created a natural God. Church used the method of a Raphael or a Poussin to invent the perfect Creation. And so *The Heart of the Andes* "surpassed the fondest imaginings of the soul." To its viewers the picture was "Arcady," "Elysium," "Eden," "Paradise." To borrow a line of Emerson's quoted in praise of the painting, it was "a fairer creation than we know." It was a natural "Easter."

Spectators equipped with binoculars (or a paper rolled into a tube) could isolate themselves from the crowd in front of the canvas and in their imagination wander through the painting discovering the "strange," the "new," the "beautiful." The combination of "stereoscopic" illusionism and multiple perspective (to some *The Heart of the Andes* was three pictures in one, to others, five in one) made it possible for the spectator to become a bodiless eye exploring the landscape as a free migrant spirit. In his imagination the spectator "wanders," "climbs," "leaps." Frederic Church was the first American cosmic action painter, the Jackson Pollock of the 1850's. *The Heart of the Andes* rewarded the engaged viewer with endless discoveries and satisfactions. Mark Twain continued to find "a new picture—you seem to find nothing the second time which you saw the first." For twenty-five cents anybody could behold an "unsullied bird" soar into the "sinless sky," in short, experience earthly-heavenly Paradise. The mountain's struggle and final triumph in "Transcendent Holy Calm" was the promise of immortality. The ductile vapor wisps of snow swept up into the heavens were "evanescent spirit incarnations."

The painting declared that the divine and the material are one and the same, not twain as Cole had painted them. Life, in this world which Church had created, went "a-Maying all its days." Here there is no real death, only "that death which is but the commencement of a new state of being." Regeneration is immanent in the processes of nature. The great mountain is "the Alpha and the Omega of the picture." Its pure white snow, sixty miles away and four miles up, brings water and therefore life to all that exists below and nearer. Each tree, each plant is exuberant with its own vitality. The colors are vivid, jubilant, "emer-

ald green," "sapphire blue," "flaming gold." They are "pure," "rich," "deep," "prismatic." They are "pearly," "opalescent," "iridescent." The elemental palette of Paradise, in the glory and the flux of the millennium. This is the visionary art of the uncommon common man. All is hope. The "genial" light of the sun cheers and gilds the landscape. It warms the paramo where cattle and sheep graze, the forest where one can find refreshment, the village placed just right by nature, and the Cross, the symbol of earth's and man's redemption. The cataract completes the cycle implied by the Cross and the "Dome." Water, giver of life, will pass on to the sea and thence again to the mountain summit. Or its spray will straightway ascend. No matter. The cataract, white pendant to the "Dome," is the at-hand promise of immortality:

> The river is transfigured before us. Motion flings itself out into light. Green water snows down in a glimmering belt of white. Every drop dashes away from every drop. Each one has its own sunbeam . . .

Then the water eddies for a moment in the mirror-calm pool below, before it commences its glide "down the steps and rapids of a new career." [15] God is in Nature. Nature is in God.

This, in a cosmic nutshell, is what the painting meant. In *The Heart of the Andes* Church had "condensed the condensation of nature." Since nature was "the Interpreter of God" and art was "the Interpreter of Nature," Church had shown "what the world is worth." He had given "to each and every man a vision of glory." *The Heart of the Andes* had revealed the hidden spirituality of the universe. And that is why it was the "rage" of 1859. It was the right painting, at the right time, at the right place.

Cotopaxi followed *The Heart of the Andes* as the next chapter in the epic of the tropics. In this painting of the volcano, the concurrent spectacular natural action was a ready-made drama tailored to the national temper in 1863. It was the image of long wakefulness, of violent struggle, of ultimate victory: the natural Armageddon. Next in the series came *Chimborazo*, painted in 1864 for William H. Osborn, President of the Illinois Central Railroad. When it was seen for the first time by the American public, in 1876, the country's mood had

changed radically. If the painting meant much to the viewers in that year, they said surprisingly little about it. *Chimborazo* combines at once the shores of a sea-level river, supposedly the Rio Guayas, lush in the tropical growth suggested by that clime, with the high and remote hovering presence of the snow-dome appearing as "a thing entirely pertaining to heaven." The painting was Church's ultimate in cosmic pastoral landscape.[16]

"Before the World Was, I Am"

"BEFORE THE WORLD WAS, I AM"

A domestic affliction rendering a change of scene desirable, Church . . . embarked for Jamaica, and passed many weeks of the summer among the mountains of that picturesque island. (H. T. Tuckerman, *The Book of the Artists*, 1867)

Nothing at the present day can convey to us an idea of the prodigious and immense extent of never-changing verdure which clothed the earth . . . In the depths of these inextricable forests parasitic plants were suspended from the trunks of the great trees . . . like the wild vines of our tropical forests . . . But we might ask, for what eyes, for whose thoughts, for whose wants, did the solitary forests grow? . . . Its solution rests with Him who said, "Before the world was, I am!" (Louis Figuier, *The World Before the Deluge*, 1865)

About 1865 Church's interest in the tropical world seems to have changed slightly in its intellectual and emotional complexion. The "domestic affliction" which Tuckerman refers to was the death from diphtheria of the painter's two children in March of that year. It is a tragedy memorialized in a pair of small paintings at Olana of a wilderness sunrise and an ocean moonrise. It was a loss that might well have broken Church's spirit had not Church been such a fundamental optimist. Instead, the loss seems to have impelled Church to a deeper involvement with nature. There he could escape from pain and find a kind of reassurance. Certainly he must have wanted something that suggested life inextinguishable, life eternal. Jamaica as the setting for the renewal of hope was a logical choice for Church, if only because it was so readily accessible. But Jamaica may have recommended itself for some quite specific reasons in 1865. Church owned a copy of Louis

Figuier's famous classic, *The World Before the Deluge*, printed that same year. It is a book written by a man who assumes that a Divine Architect presides over a nature whose history is a sequence of eras punctuated by cataclysms. On the pages of his book there is not a hint, not a suspicion, that one species may evolve into another. According to Figuier all nature's history is a preparation for the supreme form of creation: man. The text, written in almost Biblical cadence and illustrated with hypothetical landscapes, reviews the epochs one by one, from "The Beginning" all the way up to the "Asiatic Deluge" (FIGURE 42). Figuier repeats again and again that, more than any other known landscape, the tropics recall for us the appearance of the primitive earth. A tropical island like Jamaica, stormy, mountainous, and rich in flora (and in comfortable tourist facilities) was a plausible living illustration of *The World Before the Deluge*. There both the grief-stricken Frederic Church and the Adamic Frederic Church might find themselves present bodily and psychically in Genesis.

"Before the World Was, I Am"

Church arrived at Kingston in April, 1865, and passed almost five months among the surrounding hills and mountains in a frenzy of inspired observing of the life of this near pre-historic island. Tuckerman suggests the range of subjects which Church sketched in Jamaica.

> The studies which he brought home . . . are admirable effects of sunset, storm, and mist, caught in all their evanescent but characteristic phases; the mountain shapes, gorges, plateaus, lines of coast, and outlines of hills: besides these general features, there are minute and elaborate studies of vegetation—the palms, ferns, canebrakes, flowers, grasses, and lizards; in a word, all the materials of a tropical insular landscape, with every local trait carefully noted.[17]

Never before nor ever again did the painter approach landscape with such peculiarly complex motivations as those which impelled him in 1865; for mingled with the tragic personal loss was the profound relief that every believer in the preservation of the Union experienced after Appomattox. Church lost himself in the most intense and unrelenting confrontations with nature which he had yet sketched. His mind, eye, and brush were infallibly attuned to the earth's pulsation. He realized the ultimate possibilities of the correspondence between lead and oil

"Before the World Was, I Am"

and nature's light and color, atmosphere and form. The modern mind marvels at "these miracles of observation." But these sketches are also poetic as well as factual "miracles," for they suggest revelations of an exquisitely beautiful and ordered creation recorded by a wondering first man. In this scientist's Eden, Church discovered a nature which, unconscious of human sin and suffering, ever renews itself. Church's nature was not allegory; it was life. It did not merely console him; it regenerated him.

Late in 1865, after an invigorating and inspired autumn look at Vermont, Church returned to his studio. His sense of renewal must have been enhanced by the national mood and by his private joy in knowing that his wife was to give birth to another child. We can discern his own overcoming of sorrow in *The Rainy Season in the Tropics*, a work of the next year, that drew rather generally upon his tropical experiences (PLATE IV). The geology suggests the Andes; the atmosphere, Jamaica. The vegetation belongs to both locales. In Tuckerman's description of the painting we can read the evidence of Church's state of mind:

> Athwart a mountain-bounded valley and gorge, floats one of those frequent showers which so often drench the traveller and freshen vegetation in those regions, while a bit of clear, deep blue sky smiles from the fleecy clouds that overlay the firmament, and the sunshine, beaming across the vapory vail, forms thereon a rainbow, which seems to clasp the whole with a prismatic bridge; a scene more characteristic of the season and the region it is difficult to imagine, and one more difficult to represent on canvas could not be selected . . . All [its features] wear the tearful glory of *The Rainy Season in the Tropics.*

The painting depicts the earth regenerated. A magnificent rain-cleansed landscape is beheld through a perfect double-arched rainbow: the sign of God's, or shall we say Nature's, Covenant with Man suddenly and palpably before us. A mighty and new "flame-born" rock seems to surge forth from the bowels of the earth. In the vapory atmosphere the effect is of steam and cooling granite. The condensation and fresh soil have made possible the ancient forms of tropical life. All this accords with Figuier's theories. Before the painting the spectator feels as

though he were witnessing the ever-present climax of an everlasting Genesis. In this Jamaican-Andean Shangri-la, the peon and the village by the lake exist forever in a nether world of terrestrial beauty. *Rainy Season in the Tropics* is the *ne plus ultra* of hope.

"*Before the World Was, I Am*"

In 1867 Church painted *The Vale of St. Thomas, Jamaica* (FIGURE 43). *Jamaica*, as the painting is more familiarly titled, is a less resplendent but more convincing picture than *Rainy Season in the Tropics*. Virtually every one of its features can be related to the sketches which Church made on the island. The tree fern is an exact quotation from an original sketch which fitted his intentions so perfectly that no improvement of the kind observed in *The Heart of the Andes* was deemed necessary. The reflecting surface of the river appears to be an effect that Church specifically noted in the Caribbean (FIGURE 88), an effect which would have satisfied a Whistler, who probably did not think twice about geographical determinism or becoming a new man. The rain and the topography are explained by any number of Church's on-the-spot impressions (FIGURES 37, 39, 40). The whole scene characterizes Jamaica with the authority of first-hand experience and scientific probability.

Rainy Season in the Tropics, appropriately for its suddenness of effect, evoked the excited sublimity of Turner's Alpine conceptions. In *Jamaica*, however, in order to convey the benign order of cosmic life as he had witnessed it in 1865, Church referred himself to the serener sublimity of the English landscapist. *Prudhoe Castle, Northumberland* (FIGURE 82) illustrates well Turner's genius for evoking ideals of an ordered universe. Imbued with the spirit of such landscape, Church was able to communicate his own visionary responses to the tropical island. But *Jamaica* differs significantly from the Englishman's landscape. Turner's Northumberland has the countenance of familiarity: cattle and castle have belonged there since time immemorial. And cattle and castle are insistent features in the conception of the scene: the landscape seems scaled to them. *Jamaica*, on the other hand, has an unfamiliar look about it, while the one overt sign of man's presence, a monastery on a prominence above the river (a mere dot in the reproduction), is overwhelmed by the scale of nature. In his ideal landscapes, Turner did not seek to break down the picture plane in order to put his

spectator in the scene. But in *Jamaica* Church made sure that his spectator felt himself actually present in the landscape. The plants in the right foreground seem to live in the same air that surrounds the canvas.

In *Jamaica* as in *Rainy Season*, the chosen moment is the just-passing storm which leaves a primitive landscape steaming fresh and lush in the profusion of tropical life. Few landscapes that Church might have visited would have accorded better with Figuier's lofty and idealized descriptions of the appearance of our planet in its earlier ages (FIGURE 42). Primed with such mental pictures of pre-history, the painter and the spectator before *Jamaica* could recognize themselves as Noahs or as Adams confronted by a new creation. Indeed, a passage borrowed from Dr. Sommerville's pamphlet on *The Heart of the Andes* suits *Jamaica* to a tree:

> Do you behold that stately fern? When examining the plant one's thoughts go back to the gigantic growths of the pre-Adamic periods, and to the times when the foundations of the globe were shaken more terribly by the violence of the earthquake, and the mountains were lifted up out of the sea! [18]

Jamaica is the logical outcome of such youthful New Beginning landscapes as the *Deluges* of 1846 and 1851. These early works had been second-hand statements about the American condition. *Jamaica* is merely one of many examples of the solution to the dilemma which had faced Church at the beginning of his career. If the American was to find himself in his New World, he would have to stop seeing himself through Old World eyes. He was obviously not the same Adam or the same Noah or the same Moses a second time, a mere imitation of an ancestor who could thus represent himself in the same old way. The American was a new version of these archetypal persons, made new by nature's suggestion, a suggestion which comes from a divine immanence who is ever ready to reveal himself to those who seek him in his terrestrial incarnation. The painting is more than a metaphor; it is a revelation to a New Israelite from a New God. This is a strange blank God created in the image of nineteenth century science, a divine impersonality into whose unconscious natural life the artist and spectator merge to be re-created free of Old World memory. D. H. Lawrence

described hopeful American man as a "beautiful blank." This was an "inhuman" kind of landscape which would have repelled the psychically unreborn. They could only regard such paintings as too intellectual and too Puritan: emotionless abstractions. *Jamaica* is Turner saying something Turner never dreamed. It is a far American cry from the humanized landscape of the Englishman. Ruskin, the interpreter of Turner, said Church had "a gift of his own," but he doubted that Church would "ever know what painting means." [19] Ruskin could not see that these extraordinary American paintings were cultural erasures: icons for forgetting the past, icons for returning to the beginning. Unlike *New England Scenery*, *Jamaica* is not an idea born in Europe: it is the invention of the American man who wants to discover himself "real" in a landscape that even Adam had not seen. With the help of science (and steam travel) Church put himself and his fellowman right down on the soil of their own mythology.

CHAPTER V

Archetypes of North America: Niagara, The Wilderness, The Arctic

Within the last fortnight we have encountered two new sensations. One of them was the thrill of witnessing a splendid regiment, sweeping down Broadway to a quick step, through one hundred thousand shouting citizens, and under a floating cloud of starred and striped banners . . . The other new sensation—milder indeed than the first—was a visit to the Arctic world at the bidding of the greatest of American painters, CHURCH. We went up to the exhibition room . . . with intense expectations, and yet thoroughly prepared for a disappointment. At the door we spied a notice—"for the benefit of the Patriotic Fund." This was characteristic; and we felt thankful too that there was an artist so rich in worldly gear that he could afford to make so munificent an offer at the call of patriotism. (From an unidentified clipping in a scrapbook at Olana)

CHURCH was thanked by a grateful public for giving to his fellowmen a mental picture of the tropical world which few of them could ever hope to see in person. His special gifts were needed by a people hungry to know the world beyond their horizons. It was an era of the popularization of knowledge, and Church as much as any painter played the role of popularizer. School children in Boston had been taken by their teachers to learn of another continent standing before *The Heart of the Andes*. Church accepted the demands of American society which were both mystical and utilitarian. Every man could appreciate Church's paintings according to what he himself could bring to them, the simple urge to learn something new, or the complex urge to envision transcendent glory or be psychically regenerated. These tropical paintings were extensions of experience. At their most naïve they were the day's equivalent to our travelogue movie. At their most profound they were the pictorial equivalent to the global epics of Dana and Melville.

Church's own life was both travelogue and global epic. In his passion to "embrace the universe" (a phrase from Emerson's description of Goethe which Mrs. Church quoted in her notebook), the painter touched all continents and climes. The trips to South America and Jamaica were interspersed with intensive explorations of North America and its arctic seas. By blood and birth Church was a New Englander. He saw the tropics "through northern eyes." He was a spiritual native

of the earth in general, rather than the tropics in particular. The sultry humidity of the Magdalena jungle and the rarefied air of the Andes were not the environments to create the best man. Humboldt and Ruskin were of a mind on this. So too was Church. According to the scientific cosmology of his breed of American, there was no better place for man than the northeastern United States. And "the Great Architect" had seen to it that the Old World's best had followed the divine instinct to move west to these new shores. *The Hooker Party* and *New England Scenery* are declarations of this faith.

Archetypes of North America: Niagara, The Wilderness, The Arctic

Frederic Church and the United States of America were one. He exemplified the American mind. The painter believed in his country's destiny. He cared about railroads and elections. He lived in an age "not only of thought but of action." His paintings expressed the excitement of the present moment. Though he did not go West, like Whittredge, Kensett, and Bierstadt, Church felt the westward pull. Tuckerman described him as "energetic" and "intrepid," but the painter's health was actually not robust. This may be one reason why Church did not choose to face the hardships which the traveler risked once he had left the Mississippi behind him.

Health may also explain why Church did not participate directly in the other great national experience of his generation, the Civil War. But his pictures show that he was as much involved with the preservation of the Union as he was with its expansion. His *Icebergs* was exhibited to raise money for the Patriotic Fund in April and May of 1861. *Niagara* and *The Heart of the Andes* did similar service in 1864. And Church served his country by painting nature's revelations to believers in the Union's cause. One dawn, during the first weeks of fighting, he beheld streaks of red and white cloud around a deep blue firmament dotted with stars. The effect "suggested" to him soon appeared in the form of a chromolithograph entitled *Our Banner in the Sky*. A natural flag waving from a branchless eagle-topped tree trunk was Church's closest brush with patriotic Pop Art. The message was apparent to him and other loyal citizens: Union victory was ordained by natural history. The old Calvinist idea of predestination has seldom so explicitly been stated by a landscape painter. Another celestial phenomenon, several years later, was similarly translated into art. On Decem-

Archetypes of North America: Niagara, The Wilderness, The Arctic

ber 23, 1864, millions of Americans witnessed an extraordinary display of northern lights. Melville was one who saw it as a portent of triumph and peace. Church traced the effect in his pocket sketchbook, then painted *The Aurora Borealis* (FIGURE 69). Believers in America's unique destiny were alert to nature's promises.

With the conclusion of hostilities there was a quick burst of optimistic landscape. Inness painted *Peace and Plenty*. Cropsey painted his radiantly cheerful *Wyoming Valley*. And Church painted in 1865 a new *Mount Desert*.[1] An English visitor to his studio that year described this scene as "the earth at dawn." *Mount Desert* is a cosmic annunciation of the New World preserved; it heralds what Americans hoped would be the advent of a new era.

Church's symbolism is not always so readily related to political events. Another painting inspired by the coast of Maine, *Storm at Mount Desert* of 1863 (FIGURE 64), seems no special augury. Rather, it is the image of the exuberant and rugged vitality of New England nature which has helped make New Englanders what they are. Here the energy of inanimate life challenges the spectator to match its spirit.

Even the literal transcripts from nature and the on-the-spot sketches of this geographical determinist were informed with poetic meaning. *Winter Scene, Olana*, c. 1870 (PLATE V), is an accurate sextant reading taken at Longitude 74°, Latitude 42°, in January. In this view Church's inborn optimism dictates his choice of nature's moment; here the sharp, cold atmosphere and sullen hues of a winter day are rescued from gloom by the newly arrived cheer of high luminous sun-struck clouds. *Above the Palisadoes, Jamaica* (FIGURE 88) is also an accurate sextant reading. It, too, is a hopeful moment. Here Church seems to have been witnessing a chrysalid pause in the life of creation. Further north and east of these global data Church sketched a strikingly suggestive effect which suddenly confronted him one morning in Maine (FIGURE 81). He must have felt himself standing atop some Ararat or still earlier hill, suddenly out of nowhere surveying a diluvian or even antediluvian world transfigured in a blaze of silvery gold light. Nature for this symbolic realist was instinct with the poetry of the universe. These first-hand impressions are records of an American transcendentalist's sense of wonder before the world. Even the style of Church's quotations

from nature implies a faith in her essential harmony. In his day it was still assumed that the classical landscape of the seventeenth century was based upon an aesthetic harmony which existed in nature. Church's own perceptions of landscape were conditioned by this faith. This view sketched in Maine evokes the vision of Turner (FIGURE 82), while Turner had patterned himself on Claude Lorrain, Nicolas Poussin, and Gaspard Dughet. *Winter Scene, Olana* is a ready-made classical composition, a carefully balanced landscape. Church's "realism" has little to do with the "Realism" of the Frenchman Courbet, who deliberately rejected the very tradition that was the foundation of America's Hudson River School.

Archetypes of North America: Niagara, The Wilderness, The Arctic

Church's realism was an improvement upon his artistic inheritance rather than a rejection of it. He worked, it was said, with the "method and manner of nature." *Winter Scene, Olana* illustrates the point. Church had by now abandoned Cole's usage of a salmon-buff underpaint for the outdoor oil sketch in favor of a thinly spread cream-white ground. He thereby sacrificed the somewhat artificially imposed unity of a dark ground in order to catch the unity of nature's own atmosphere. Then, over this light base he brushed in, seemingly without effort, the right convention for the object seen: a half-empty dab of brown for each tree of a range of trees in the mid-distance; thicker-loaded oil and juicy squiggles individualized for distinctive foreground trees; turning and undulating brush-strokes coordinated with the planes of the topography. Varied intensity of hue and clarity of form assign everything to its proper place. *Winter Scene, Olana* is ten cubic miles put down on a square foot plus of millboard. It is nature painted in harmony with itself.

Living in ideal rapport with nature (he went to "her" as a "lover") Church could paint nature's minor episodes or nature's major epics. The sketches were the episodes. The finished paintings were the epics. In his own half hemisphere, he found three epic themes: Niagara, the Wilderness, and the Arctic–archetypes of North America.

Niagara, "Nature's Grandest Scene"

Mr. Church has painted the stupendous cataract with a quiet courage and a patient elaboration, which leaves us, for the first time, satisfied that even the awful reality is not beyond the range of human imitation. (*Crayon*, September, 1857)

If there was one single landscape that was America it was Niagara Falls. It was the national Mecca in the Era of Manifest Destiny. It was visited, described, photographed, and painted more than any other scene on this continent: the most "suggestive" natural spectacle in the New World. Almost every American painter who had ever set brush to landscape had attempted the subject. But in 1856 when Church visited Niagara to study it in order to paint it, Niagara as fact and spirit had never been transferred to canvas (PLATES I, II, FIGURE 44). Niagara had been painted in full length panorama and also in cabinet-size easel paintings. The panorama was unsuited to the integrated, proportioned artistic statement; it belonged with the side show. On the other hand, the subject was really too big to receive justice from the traditional easel painting. Vanderlyn, Trumbull, and Cole all painted Niagara, but they did not say what it potentially signified. They could not forget classical landscape as they looked upon the scene. They dared not stand close enough to the Falls to experience its reality. They knew neither nature nor the American spirit well enough to step up to the brink and seize the picture there. Niagara was a million water incidents, each with its own peculiar cause and effect. In view of such statistics, traditionalists chose to stand at a safe artistic distance from the Falls, from which vantage point it made a good Old World picture.

About 1804 John Vanderlyn painted two of the early century's finest versions of Niagara. An engraving after one of these was in turn copied in oil by Samuel F. B. Morse. This copy by Morse of 1835 (FIGURE 51) can serve as a model contrast to Church's painting of twenty years later. Most revealing about Morse's painting is that it was not based upon first-hand study of the subject. In view of this fact he did surprisingly well in suggesting the action of the water. But in terms of American democratic art he perpetuates two common fallacies of conception. He places the spectator outside instead of inside the scene, pre-

cluding contact between man and nature. And he limits space: one can count the number of trees on the Canadian shore; the earth seems to reach into the distance without bending; the whole composition functions as a self-contained decorative area; the light-dark distribution, structural diagonals, and comparatively unhorizontal proportions all mitigate against the expression of an unlimited continent. This is a landscape formula that had been invented in the confined and long-inhabited environment of seventeenth century aristocratic or monarchist Europe, and had hardly been altered to fit the needs of a forward-looking expansionist democracy.

American art would have to be created out of authentic American experience. There was a lot that a Claude Lorrain or a Turner could offer the American, but it would have to be radically transformed and enlarged. To be nationalized, Niagara would have to be disengaged from the conventional thoughts and feelings which the Old World entertained about the New. There is nothing in Morse's colonial Niagara to enable the American to discover himself as an American, no live reality, no cogent drama, no compelling symbol. In 1835 when Morse was painting his *Niagara*, no one had heard Emerson's call to the American artist to create art worthy of a continent, art to reveal the hidden spirituality of the universe. But by 1857 the call had been heard by every American artist.

Church, already in 1855 when he painted *The Andes of Ecuador* (FIGURE 20), had created a "new" kind of painting. Yet it was still an experimental painting. Two more years would be needed to spell out the New World art to the last letter of its radical originality. *Niagara* was Church's first unchecked prophetic utterance. D. H. Lawrence would have called it the very picture of American "art speech."

THE POETRY OF WATER

Of all inorganic substances acting in their own proper nature . . . water is the most wonderful . . . [It] is to all human minds the best emblem of unwearied, unconquerable power. (John Ruskin, *Modern Painters* II)

We believe that as man's knowledge widens, every form of natural beauty . . . will be found to be regulated by laws as severe as those which regu-

late the revolution of the planets or the growth of man . . . The flower casts its seed in a prescribed curve; the wave tosses its spray in an arch regulated by a thousand necessities of use and beauty. Nothing in Nature is accidental or alone, but is of causes existing thousands of centuries ago. Nature is all harmony and order. (*Crayon*, April 11, 1855)

If there is a single reason to explain why Church was able in 1857 to capture on canvas the continent's one scene that had been "created to teach art its impotency," it must surely be the publication early in 1856 of Volumes III and IV of Ruskin's *Modern Painters*. It would appear that Church immediately devoured these volumes and then reviewed Volumes I and II. No one else writing about art and science and poetry could have taught this still young American more at this particular moment. He seems to have absorbed like a sponge Ruskin's brilliant discussions of Turner's representation of water. Church must have read or reread these chapters in the winter of 1856, for it is difficult otherwise to account for his sudden dashing off to Niagara in March to sketch the Falls. He simply had right then and there to make the pilgrimage to America's ready-made encyclopedia of water. One passage from *Modern Painters* will serve to illustrate what Ruskin was helping Church to discover in Turner (FIGURE 50) and in nature:

In the water which has gained an impetus, we have the most exquisite arrangements of curved lines, perpetually changing from convex to concave, and *vice versa*, following every swell and hollow of the stream bed with their modulating grace . . . We see why Turner seizes on these curved lines of the torrent, not only as being among the most beautiful of nature, but because they are an instant expression of how the torrent has been flowing before we see it . . . We know how far it has come, and how fiercely.[2]

Ruskin understood water as natural history. He also understood it as human expression: to paint water, Ruskin wrote, is "like trying to paint a soul."

Humboldt had never written this way. However, the ideas of the two writers actually meshed well. The scientist had asked for a painter who would study a region and then characterize it in an ideal landscape. The art theorist had advised the painter to visit a region and then re-

turn to his studio to "reproduce the experience in nature." Church observed their advice, or, just as likely, found confirmation in their advice.

Niagara Painted for America's Millions

In his two trips to the Falls in 1856 Church observed his subject in every way imaginable. His winter sketches reveal the advantages of studying geology stripped of forest foliage. They reflect Church's sensing of the vast, gradual tilting slab of the rock over which a continent is drained. In the late summer he stood at the foot of Goat Island to paint whizzing shafts of water sounding for the bottom and exploding into volleys of spray. He caught the exuberant, wild energy of the gorge with the keen affinity of a kindred spirit as his quick brush traced his own involvement with the river's vitality (FIGURE 48). Nature was here expressing well the spirit of this early American action painter:

> He paints standing, and with every minute progress inspects his picture from a distance. His gait, manner, and use of brush, all alike are indicative of the characteristic energy that has marked his life. In his painting he often walks between ten and fifteen miles a day.[3]

Church had surely looked intently at fine engravings after Turner, such as the one illustrated in FIGURE 50, to have grasped the logic, the beauty, and the expression of this complex water episode. His penciled conventionalizations of rapids above the Falls (FIGURE 56) point to this intelligent learning from the engraving. Turner, transmitted by the steel plate and the understanding of Ruskin, was the only artist by this date who could teach Church anything new about natural history.

NIAGARA PAINTED FOR AMERICA'S MILLIONS

> Even our painters catch the spirit, and Mr. Church has embodied it in his *Niagara*, perhaps the finest picture yet done by an American; at least, that which is the fullest of feeling. The idea of motion he has imparted to his canvas, the actual feeling you have of the tumble of the falls, of the glancing sunbeam, of the tossing of the rapids, of the waving of the rainbow, of the whirling of the foam, of the mad rush of the cataract, I take to be the great excellence of his production; and surely this is akin to the influence which I describe as paramount in American art . . . If it is inspired by Niagara, it is grand and sublime; it is natural to the nation, since nature

herself, has given the type; it is wild and ungovernable, mad at times, but all power is terrible at times. It is the effect of various causes; it is a true development of the American mind; the result of democracy, of individuality, of the expansion of each, of the liberty allowed to all; of ineradicable and lofty qualities in human nature. It is inspired not only by the irresistible cataract, but by the mighty forest, by the thousand miles of river, by the broad continent we call our own, by the onward march of civilisation, by the conquering of savage areas; characteristic alike of the western backwoodsman, of the Arctic explorer, the southern fillibuster, and the northern merchant. So, of course, it gets expression in our art. (Adam Badeau, *The Vagabond*, New York, 1859)

Though Church's painting suggests a scene studied from a specific spot, Church never sketched the exact view. *Niagara* is actually a composite. FIGURE 56 is the sketch which most closely resembles the foreground of the finished painting. FIGURE 52 supplies the basis for the opposite side of the Horseshoe right down to the foamy water that resumes the river after its tumble. Another sketch fills in the details of Goat Island. And so on, with more or less particularity for each feature of the picture. The finished work of art is conceived as all the individual features integrated naturally, dramatically, and symbolically into something greater than the sum of the parts. FIGURE 52 illustrates the point well. It is an informative vignette that told the artist a number of characteristic things about Niagara, but in the painting the corresponding area reads simply as a chapter in a book. *Niagara* is a work of art which is experienced by the intellect in time and on more than one level of consciousness. Lawrence would have found it as appallingly abstract and metaphysical as he found Melville.

The composition evolved, as was typical with Church, through several steps. Two pencil compositions at Cooper Union may be preliminaries. They show both Falls, American and Canadian, with a foreground line rather like that suggested in FIGURE 56 and a double rainbow arc spanning the full width of the scene. An oil study seems to pick up from these, but it does not include the sky or the rainbows. These schemes were weak as compositions. It took courage and genius to omit the whole American side of the Falls, which is just what Church did in the next oil study. This idea was followed through in the final

canvas. *Niagara* is a superb coordination of the specifics of a single landscape.

Niagara Painted for America's Millions

The artist had to revolutionize traditional principles if his painting was to capture the unlimitedness and the immediacy of this vast and virgin land. Church made Continental art continental with a small "c." *Niagara* is an easel painting which observes the uncanonical proportions demanded of art by the New World's space. The old ratios of height to width—almost never more horizontal than two units of height to three of width—are rejected as too confining for Americans. The new ratios that accord with the realities of new spaces are proclaimed in Church's *Niagara:* three and a half feet in height, seven and a half in width. "Here," to borrow the response of a spectator before *The Andes of Ecuador*, "there is room to breathe. Here the soul expands."

Church places the viewer right by the water's edge, so close that he can see individual droplets of spray or the exact color and texture of rock under water (PLATES I, II). One can make out the consistent flow of natural history at his very feet. Each unique incident is the consequence of the last and the cause of the next. Each has its own peculiar beauty. Grace and delicacy prevail in this foreground, since this is appropriately the most intimate portion of the scene. Here alone water does a thousand things. It is subtle inanimate poetry that bespeaks the rational order of a benevolent universe and expresses to the last droplet the individuality of each and the interdependence of all. It illustrates well how Church engaged himself and his fellow-men in the time and tide of cosmic history. It was said of this painting, "Every square inch of canvas is full of thought." All this foreground variety of pause and push is arranged with an eye upon the totality. Water enters from the right, implying the effect of forces beyond the frame while containing the firm diagonal accents which structure the composition. On the opposite side of the foreground, where the water rushes to plummet, a few upward leaps of spray and the lively thrust of the bounding picturesque tree trunk—it surprises with fresh scale and perspective at this point—direct the eye to the far face of the cataract. There, nature considerately obliges art by framing the scene in insubstantial mist. The whole view is a vortex of tremendous lateral impulses expanding to proclaim a continent and contracting to focus upon the drama of "nature's

Niagara Painted for America's Millions

grandest scene." Church suggests the infiniteness of nature in the finiteness of the work of art. The foreground is a close and immediate intimation of the whole, an accessible fraction of a promising New World. The near and vigorous profile of the Falls boldly subsumes the foreground and explains it as but one of several giant turns that make the Horseshoe. The rest of the Niagara story is spelled out in a million inevitable and interminable incidents that will never repeat themselves identically. Every act of nature tells of more than just itself. The breathtaking, animated, white-capped sweeps of the rapids above the Falls step out of sight between Goat Island and the vast forested geological shelf on the Canadian side (FIGURE 55). The perspective in the close parallel lines of the rapids determines the exact height of the viewer's eyes above the earth's crust. Church specifically relates himself and his spectator—they are one and the same, for Church, like Whitman, felt with *all*—to the minute and the vast in nature.

There is but one sign of man's foothold in this landscape: Terrapin Tower, at the edge of the Falls near Goat Island is just visible as a tiny but sturdy American stake on the continent. Only by stepping up close to the picture or by viewing it through binoculars can one make out the figure on the balcony of the tower or the farms on the Chippewa shore. Man is but a very late comer upon the scene. Quickly the mind is overwhelmed by cosmic scale and time.

The sky, which is of subordinate interest to the Falls, plays its supporting role in this earth-drama. Ragged clouds in the upper right tell us that a thunderstorm has ended within the past quarter-hour. The now peaceful mood of the sky is expressed in the serene sweeps of the more distant clouds over Canada. These clouds reiterate the horizontal breadth of the rapids. The atmosphere over the American shore is that which follows immediately upon the thunderstorm. Beyond, miles away over Lake Ontario, a cumulus cloud tells of the storm's recent passing. Its lower part, cut off by the horizon, helps us to sense the continuing roundness of the earth. The primary atmospheric event is the beautiful broken rainbow which seems suddenly to have appeared after the passing of this September shower. The lower arc, seen against the fresh white glory of the Falls, is cheerful evanescence; its upper arc, seen against the remnant gloom of the deluge, is spectral transcendence.

The Falls embody the power and beauty of a continent given new impetus and vitality by the rain. An infinity of natural life in green and blue and white with here and there a fleck of red or orange is transfixed in radiant splendor in the new clear light. Beneath the Falls pearly-hued, air-filled water now begins its course anew. The sun, "god of day," has regenerated earth, air, water—and Man.

Church presented his fellow-men with the "soul" and "spirit" of Niagara, this "most suggestive" of nature's spectacles: this archetype of the universe. *Niagara* is the substance of a great American metaphor; indeed, for its original viewers, a certain something more than a metaphor. Those *Deluges* which Church had painted in his youth were quotations from the Bible and Paradise Lost, which he was examining in a peculiarly American sense. They were the derivative beginnings of the mythologizing process. He was imbibing the spirit, not the letter, of that subject. Nature and its Bible, the Science of Design, would unfold the transcendent truth of the universe to the New Chosen People in the New World. Nature in the Era of Manifest Destiny was prophecy, and Church as the "interpreter" of Niagara was therefore painting as American prophet.

Niagara is the American's mythical Deluge which washes away the memory of an Old World so that man may live at home in a New World. The painting is an icon of psychic national purgation and rebirth. Poetically a New World emerges as the waters of a flood subside. The rainbow, sign of the "God of Nature's" covenant with man, transfixes the beholder. The whole radiantly beautiful and gloriously alive spectacle is there in all its reality before him, like a sudden creation of divine fiat. *Niagara* is a revelation of the cosmos to each and every man. Before this greatest of American landscapes the self-reliant, democratic American becomes his own prophet: he stands and sees as a New Noah. Thus through the work of art did Mr. Church help his fellow-men to discover themselves in their New World.[4]

THE WILDERNESS

Nature designed that men here should be free and great, and act the bravest history. She invites them to equal her own majesty, and frowns upon all

slaves and cowards. High thoughts and heroic deeds are the only moral harmonies that well keep time and tune with the matchless orchestra which she celebrates in her woods, prairies, valleys, and mountains. Hence we look to far-off generations for a still greater American People than any we now know, and for a civilization which shall be the supreme expression of what power and grandeur is in the human soul. For here, as we believe, the final destinies of the human race are to be wrought out . . . To travel over these United States and see with eyes that look before and after . . . is to anticipate American history, and read it in a kind of apocalypse. (*New York Illustrated News*, July 29, 1861)

Our country is a wilderness, or at least only half reclaimed. Untamed nature everywhere asserts her claim upon us, and the recognition of this claim constitutes an essential part of our Art. (*Crayon*, April 11, 1855)

The most radically distinctive and most profoundly experienced landscape of the New World was the wilderness. It was a landscape totally without Old World precedent. It was virgin. It was, to Americans like Whitman and Thoreau and Church, both benevolent and challenging. It was neither haunted by demons like the wildernesses of an Altdorfer, nor infested with bandits like the forests of a Salvator Rosa.

Thomas Cole was the first American painter to attempt to make the wilderness into poetic art (FIGURE 4). He spoke of the "purity" and the "wild witchery" of the forest-locked lakes of the Catskills, Adirondacks, and White Mountains. They were American nature's happiest retreats for him. But Cole nonetheless felt "the want of associations such as cling to the scenes of the Old World. Simple nature is not quite sufficient. We want human interest, incident, and action to render the effect of landscape complete." [5] The White Mountains, one of Cole's favorite haunts, had been "hallowed" by history: "War's shrill clarion once walked the echoes from their now silent hills." [6] And there was no place that had not at least been visited by the legends of the Indians. This noble savage, we may judge from Cole's wilderness landscapes, had always been there first.

With Cole, the wilderness was the setting for autobiography rather than for experience, the premise from which to anticipate life in the Hereafter rather than find new life in the here and now. Cole's pictured wilderness is the isolated stage of a lonely man's poignant longing to

be freed from time and place. In a word, Cole was not a painter of natural history; he was a painter of natural histrionics.

The Wilderness

Church transformed his teacher's system to make it expressive of every New World Adam's experience and faith. His earliest wilderness scenes are rather too benign, too innocent, and too accessible to be heroic. The first attempt to present the wilderness monumentally was *The Hooker Party* of 1846 (FIGURE 2). For the next eight or ten years Church seldom came to grips with this most difficult national artistic problem. But in time the country's ethos demanded that the wilderness be made into high art. *Sunset*, painted in 1856 (FIGURE 57), was Church's announcement that he had accepted the imperative of the hour. The door was ajar to a non-derivative depiction of America's archetypal landscape.

Ruskin, though he never suspected he was doing it, had certainly assisted the painter to this threshold. But Church had arrived here primarily because he was at last becoming a true citizen of nature. His companion in Maine in 1856 surely helped negotiate his naturalization in the wilderness. Theodore Winthrop (1828–1861) might have been one of our distinguished writers had his life not been cut short at the age of thirty-three by a Confederate bullet. *Life in the Open Air*, Winthrop's account of their joint "Columbus voyage" through the Katahdin region, is a literary parallel to Church's paintings which are the fruit of the same experience. Like the artist, the writer was striving to invent a new mythology. A visit to "the wildest wild to be had on this side the continent" becomes a psychic odyssey in a "fresh world." Winthrop declares their intention: "Up in the strong wilderness we might be re-created to a more sensitive vitality"; "the Antaean treatment is needful for terrestrials." Winthrop presents the wilderness rite as the way to elemental selfhood, and the way to elemental art:

> It is such influence as this that rescues the thought and the hand of an artist from enervating mannerism. He cannot be satisfied with vague blotches of paint to convey impressions so distinct and vivid as those he is forced to take direct from a Nature like this. He must be true and powerful.

In these wilds Church and Winthrop slept on spruce boughs, drank "pure" water, ate wild berries (better than any that could be bought).

"The Birch" is the ceremonial accessory, the explorer-discoverer's efficacious medium with the unconscious. "Maine's rivers must have birch canoes; Maine's woods, of course, therefore, provide birches." Launched in this "artistic vessel," one discovers, "as if he were the first to know it, the truest poetry of pioneer life." Converts of the primeval, they must coordinate mind and muscle with birch and water. One unnatural move, and nature would be ready to punish such laxity. All of this is written half in jest. The American, Tocqueville said, had to joke when he was serious. The birch canoe taught Winthrop and his companion the poetry of water's calm and water's turbulence. Every one of nature's acts, not only in stream and lake, but in lifting morning mist and crashing thunderstorm had its practical and moral (but not moralizing) influence upon the two. So, a glorious sunset, which Church jotted down "with cabalistic cipher" at its "bel momento," is a "reconciling pageant."

The chief object of all these "educating preludes" was Katahdin, "large and alone," "the distinctest mountain to be found on this side of the continent." Like Chimborazo in Ecuador, it was the recurring presence, the abiding natural personality of this odyssey—always "there" but not always in sight, for it would hide itself behind nearer peak or under cloak of fog. Katahdin was the god of the wilderness, rarely permitting itself to be seen in its full glory and yet the object which both men must climb and know and conquer. From out behind the forest to the north of Millinocket it suddenly revealed itself: "lo, Katahdin! unlooked for, at last." Later atop Katahdin, in the clouds, in "Chaos" they found themselves suddenly in "Nowhere." But a lower ridge offered what was needed. There they could survey all Maine: "Not that it makes a Maine less, but that it makes a man more." Their last morning before their return to civilization was the consummation of the New Earth rite:

> BEAUTIFUL, beautiful, beautiful is drawn in the woods . . . All its golden glow of promise is tender and tenderly strong, as the deepening passions of a dawning love. Presently up comes the sun very peremptory, and says to people, "Go about your business! Laggards not allowed in Maine! Nothing here to repent of, while you lie in bed and curse to-day because it

cannot shake off the burden of yesterday; all clear the past here; all serene the future: into it at once!

Vital poetic experience of the wilderness was the means of psychic regeneration. Church and Winthrop had lived in natural history, had become, as Thoreau would have said, "part and parcel" with nature.

ON THE THRESHOLD OF THE WILDERNESS PICTURE

The landscape painter should get all his material from the most striking and characteristic in Nature, and study such forms and combinations as may make an interesting impression upon his mind. The trees, rocks, water, mountains—all his materials he should arrange upon the same principle that an historical painter observes in composing from living models. (*Crayon*, April 11, 1855)

This deep draught of Maine was a heady tonic. It would take almost four years before Church could portray the experience to perfection. Still, *Sunset* (FIGURE 57), painted immediately upon Church's return to his studio in the autumn of 1856, represents a bold step forward into an un-Arcadian wilderness. Experience—"eight days of fine, vigorous, manly life,"—rather than pictorial convention, dictated the form of the work of art. The painter was committed to slough off all the irrelevancies of the past. He was enough the master of tradition not to be intimidated by its precepts. Obviously he was aware of the classical principles of composition, but they were not going to intervene between himself, man, and nature. He made them subservient to the interpretation of his subject. *Sunset* observes, with modifications, the time-tested practices of pictorial construction. Pyramids, horizontal and diagonal struts, and carefully distributed areas of light and dark hold the wilderness in place. In contrast to *The Hooker Party* (FIGURE 2) painted ten years before, the sky is no longer a backdrop to the landscape, but rather the principal focus of interest. We are looking at tangible atmosphere because Church had come to know nature. The painter's hard-won knowledge of form and expression has enabled this spectacular sky to assume its intended role as chief performer in the scene. And where nature was only half suggesting, art is fully stating: *Sunset* is

based upon a sketch at Bar Harbor which shows an indecisive sweep of cloud to the upper left (FIGURE 60). In the studio painting this sweep is resolved into a positive and forceful thrust which secures the composition and the drama. Where strict adherence to the past conflicted with the experienced realities of American nature the past had to give way. The conventional disposition of framing features and limited landscape would not allow Church to re-create the wilderness which he had just visited. Thus the foreground trees and rocks were placed further from the picture frame and the horizon dropped lower than custom ruled. The result is a new openness of view to correspond with the outlook of a continental people. Church was changing landscape into earthscape.

Sunset is a somewhat self-conscious work, a good work for understanding the still-learning Church. The painting betrays his aims rather mechanically. The sky is perhaps the most successfully realized feature. It is a convincing episode of natural history scaled to nothing less than a continent. Its motion and penetrability have been superbly rendered. Any Maine-trained eye can recognize in it the effects of an oncoming cold front. It is "alive" as American art must be. And it is hopeful as American art must be. This overpoweringly brilliant twilight sky has not the melancholy countenance which mourns day's death, but the glad countenance which promises a glorious tomorrow. Good American that it is, this Maine heaven anticipates the future. The whole darkening wilderness responds naturally and expressively to the influence of the sky. The intense (enthusiasts might have said "passionate") reds, green-golds, and blues overhead are echoed on water, trees, grass, and rocks. The harmony of nature is almost—but not quite—perfectly respected. This harmony must be respected if painted landscape is to be "real." If it is not real, then someone other than God made it, and that would not be fitting for God's "Chosen People." The viewer can determine his own presence in the landscape by the logic of the light reflections which place him *in* the scene. The illusion of real space (admirers liked to call it "stereoscopic" space) serves further to break down the imaginary picture plane. Alongside *Sunset*, Cole's *Schroon Mountain* (FIGURE 4) appears somewhat flat. It looks so because the painting is in essence a projection not of reality but of Cole's mind.

Church reinforces the impression of life by subtly hinting at the stirring of a fresh squall on the otherwise virginally calm water. Thus nature whispers intimately to the attentive spectator. The effect prepares him for the wondrous message of the twilight wilderness.

On the Threshold of the Wilderness Picture

The more aware the spectator, the more he becomes engaged by the picture; the reward is an ideal experience of nature. The slight opening between the foreground rocks articulates his closeness to the spot. Beyond, if he is alert, the spectator will discern a remote summit at least thirty miles away (barely visible in the reproduction), which breaks the horizon to imply subtly the earth's convexity. The continental aspect of the landscape is enhanced. Above that distant peak a glowing atmosphere bespeaks a beautiful, unknown, unlimited realm that waits to be discovered by man. A Thoreau confronted by the scene might well have said: "Between west and southwest. The future lies that way to me." Church was developing an iconography not of the Hereafter but of the future.

The foreground theme is the confrontation of civilization's furthest outpost with the unclaimed wilderness. The sheep and rustic road are self-explanatory props. The rounded glacial rocks, it will be observed, seem worn and inert; they are to be contrasted with the vigorously individualized form of the imposing distant peak that might be called "Katahdinness," for it is the configuration of what that inspiring wilderness-presence meant to the painter and his author companion. It is the reconstructed mountain. On the left we see the two principal foreground actors in this drama: a stunted wreck of an aged pine, the symbol of the breaking off of an Old World, curiously poised, as though rapt in wonder; beside it, its youthful New World successor rises exultantly. This lively spruce is the natural posture of Church's and every New World man's enthusiasm in the presence of such earthly-heavenly glory. Compare the expressive top of this tree with its prototype sketched five years before (FIGURE 59) and see how Church has taken his cue from nature's latent suggestion. Like Thoreau, this sylvan American is "the liveliest evergreen." Like Whitman, it "sings the American continent."

In *Sunset*, Church was groping toward epic landscape; it was still a tentative work. The whole foreground is cluttered and over-contrived.

The eighteenth century line of beauty has interfered with the natural growth of the trees. These and the path, sheep, and rocks are too stagily arranged and too patently emblematic. This part of the picture smacks of Cole's literary approach to painting. The spectator is, as it were, being told too much by an artist who intrudes between him and the real scene. It is an indecisive compromise between pictured allegory and pictured experience. And the dramatic unity of the cosmic moment is further diluted by the excess of particular activity in the landscape and in the sky. The clouds are suitably glorious, but Church's over-conscientious attention to details has dissipated their potential force of expression. The topography is demonstratively exuberant but too picturesquely so to be grand. In these defects we see some reflections of the strengths and limitations of Dusseldorf influence: factual accuracy without topographical breadth.

THE ADVENT OF THE WILDERNESS IN ART

Just before sunset, from beneath a belt of clouds evanescing over the summit, an inconceivably tender, brilliant glow of rosy violet mantled downward, filling all the valley. Then the violet purpled richer and richer, and darkened slowly to solemn blue, that blended with the gloom of the pines and shadowy channelled gorges down the steep. The peak was still in sunlight, and suddenly, half-way down, a band of roseate clouds, twining and changing like a choir of Bacchantes, soared around the western edge and hung poised above the unillumined forests at the mountain-base; light as air they came and went and faded away, ghostly, after their work of momentary beauty was done. One slight maple, prematurely ripened to crimson and heralding the pomp of autumn, repeated the bright cloud-color amid the vivid verdure of a little island, and its image wavering in the water sent the flame floating nearly to our feet . . . Such are the transcendent moments of Nature, unseen and disbelieved by the untaught. (Theodore Winthrop, *Life in the Open Air*, 1863)

With *Sunset* an archetypal American experience was first translated into an archetypal American landscape. In this painting Church was emerging from conventional stereotypes of the wilderness. Four years later, in 1860, he painted *Twilight in the Wilderness* (PLATE VI). This

picture was his final solution to the heroic representation of the New World's classic image. *Sunset* reveals that Church had learned what he could from Cole and from the Dusseldorf painters. Turner, Ruskin, and the Old Masters were the influences which would henceforth guide Church to his maturity. *Sunset* is a somewhat awkward effort at painting natural history in the spirit of the Renaissance. But in *Twilight in the Wilderness*, Church for the first time presented this all-important American subject at the level of history-painting in the Great Tradition —an Adamic Poussin. He caused the trees in this painting to act like the figures in the Old Masters he collected; yet the trees appear to be perfectly natural. The sky is conceived in the same manner. To create it, Church may well have heeded Ruskin's counsel that the artist should respond to the spiritual message suggested in nature's transcendent moments. A plate in *Modern Painters* seems to illustrate the point (FIGURE 62). A spectacular dawn over the Lombard Apennines appears to have struck Ruskin as a natural metaphor of the Sistine Ceiling, a sky Michelangelo might have painted had he been a nineteenth century Englishman. Church would have approved the intention but not the realization. Indeed, a sketch that was painted the summer after he first saw the plate may be an explicit critique of Ruskin (and perhaps of Ruskin's Old World God). Church proposed a similar effect but without the blatant distorting. According to American doctrine, pure nature's "transcendent moments" should be accessible to all: no need for an Anglican "High Priest of Nature" to intercede between man and his universe. Church's portentous sky in *Twilight in the Wilderness* is as authentic as the photographs of clouds which he studied (FIGURE 63). As New World man and therefore "Nature's favorite," he was quite content with nature as she was. Her meaning was self-evident to the initiated. His responsibility to humanity on this side of the Atlantic was not to manipulate but to re-create nature, quintessential nature.

The problem posed to the mid-century landscapist was the pictorial reproduction of real and transcendent experience of nature. *Sunset* had gone well beyond *The Hooker Party* or *New England Scenery* in conveying the authentic experience, but it was still no more than a bold experiment in a new direction. *Sunset* is an enthusiastic, but immature, painted equation of the psychic climax of the wilderness ritual. A new

grandeur of conception and a new level of comprehension of natural history were necessary to Church if he and the spectator were to confront the challenge of the fundamental New World landscape. Turner's cosmic breadth could offer a corrective against fussiness of form; his sympathy with natural history, a corrective against artificial mannerisms.

The beneficial effect of Turner's influence is startlingly demonstrated in *Twilight in the Wilderness*. The graceful yet vigorous, vast sweeps of topography and clouds, the pervasive light which unifies instead of divides, and the foreground trees with valid independent histories all emulate the English master. The character-trees of Cole's landscapes too readily betrayed their seventeenth century pedigrees to be true citizens of nature. They evoked the wild anthropomorphic types of Salvator Rosa. A defoliated branch from one of Salvator's trees was illustrated in Ruskin's *Modern Painters* (FIGURE 9, upper branch). Ruskin says of this bough: it "has got no sense; it has not been struck by a single new idea from the beginning of it to the end; it dares not even cross itself with one of its own sprays." This is a criticism Ruskin would doubtless have made of Cole's trees. With this bough of Rosa's, Ruskin contrasted a bough quoted from Turner (FIGURE 9, lower branch). This Ruskin considered the perfect record of the unique actions of real life; "the fits of enthusiasm . . . yielded [to] in certain delicious warm springs; the disgust at weeks of east wind, etc., etc." [7] Already in 1850 Church was sketching trees that would have been praised by Ruskin (FIGURE 10). In *Twilight in the Wilderness*, however, there is some bold foreshortening in the nearest bough which shows a daring not seen in the 1850 sketch or in *Sunset*, where we still detect some of Cole's two dimensionality. This unprecedented perspective foreshortening serves at once to make nature more alive and the spectator feel more truly present. And in the agitated tracery of the dead bough which seems convulsed in the spasm of a thousand new ideas is an exquisite fullness of incorporeal life.

Twilight in the Wilderness is the ultimate wilderness landscape—high art rooted in the depths of American experience. This painting is the descendant of those early confrontations with reality and those early, borrowed, world-purgation subjects that Church painted in his youth. Its unusually low horizon and untraditional proportions of forty inches

in height to sixty-four in breadth state the final adjustment of traditional principles of composition to American space. The spectator of 1860 found himself face to face with the wilderness. He stood beyond the last human being. The only sign of animate life is a bird perched comfortably atop a withered stump. A fallen trunk, barrier to a pathless wild, assures the spectator that this is untouched nature. There is no suggestion of the contrived. The trees themselves act in perfect accord with natural history and with the emotions of those who would affirm their "kindred alliance with primeval things." The phrase is borrowed from Bronson Alcott's description of the Concord Seer: "Something of the forester stirs within Thoreau, as if men were trees transformed, and delighted to claim their sylvan ancestry." These trees embody the psychic postures of regenerate sons of nature. They have been endowed with the aesthetic attributes of the picturesque, the beautiful, and the sublime, to express self-reliant individuality, hopeful youth, and heroic resolution, as these human ideals have been transformed by the primeval. These arborescent actors assume a principal role in the drama. Beyond them, etched against the horizon, a spikey ridge of pines suggests an exultant chorus keeping "time and tune with the matchless orchestra" of American nature. The compacted hills to the extreme left effect an impulse toward the depth of this darkly mysterious landscape. Farther off the silhouettes of prehistory perpetuated in the bounding forest, ripple exhilaratingly across the view and into the distance, implying the terrestrial curve. These definers of a virgin earth play the gestures expected of a continent at such a moment as this. The river, too, fulfills its peculiar role as it attends the wondrous event in inscrutable stillness. The water's quiet, serene surface reflects the ineffable, heavenly glory that has just now revealed itself. The whole earth responds in perfect physical and metaphysical harmony to the extraordinary influence that has occasioned this dividing pause in nature's history. The sky is the hour's anticipated Archangel, come to proclaim "a great turning point." This fleeting incarnation of the spirit of the universe declares the New Era in sublime flourishes: across the low and remote horizon bursts a flash of cosmic grace; in the high heavens arcs a visual hallelujah of the world's fulfillment.

The meaning of the work is implicit in the words of its first viewers:

> No lover of nature on this continent, no one who has bivouacked in the Adirondacks, explored the hills of New Hampshire or the forests of Maine, will but imagine he has beheld the very scene. The time is about ten minutes after the disappearance of the sun behind the hill-tops. The air is clear and cool; the whole of the landscape below the horizon lies in transparent shadow; but the heavens are a-blaze. A-blaze, except the horizon gradually varying [in] tint, which passes from the silvery white to the faintest blue and the tenderest apple green; and into which the distant mountains thrust their broad, rich purple wedges. From this clear zone of tender light the clouds sweep up in flaming arcs, broadening and breaking toward the zenith, where they fret the deep azure with the dark golden glory. The pines show here and there their sharp black points against the sky; the stream gives back a softened vague reflection of the splendor which glows above it; the stillness of the twilight, and the solemnity of undisturbed primeval nature brood upon the scene; and that is all the picture.[8]

Ecstatic agitation and profound calm. Celestial purgation and earthly peace. Absolutely here and now before us. The spectator engaged in the supreme moment of cosmic time. *Twilight in the Wilderness* was the natural apocalypse.

The three tree-characters respond in human fashion to the mythical event. The grandest and most distant reaches up aspiringly. The next nearer, and the most beautiful, bows as a Virgin of the Annunciation. The closest and most individualized appears to have died naturally. It does not strike us as a melancholy object; it suggests one of the saved on the Day of Judgment rising in ecstasy from the slumber of death. D. H. Lawrence would have seen this tree as the image of the resurrected new man: it enacts "the myth of America": "She starts old, old, wrinkled and writhing in an old skin. And there is a gradual sloughing off of the old skin, towards a new youth."[9] Thoreau once uttered the exact words for such a painting: "In the wilderness is the preservation of the world. Every tree sends forth its fibres in search of the wild." *Twilight in the Wilderness* was itself the final sloughing off of an old artistic skin toward a New World art. Here at last was the radically democratic painting that put any man "face to face" (Whitman) with elemental nature so that he might discover himself as native in the myth-

ical landscape of his own soul. In *Twilight in the Wilderness*, Church denied the substance and preserved the essence of the great tradition of painting. Out of nature experienced and art re-created he produced the very picture of his time and place. It was original. It was radically new. It was America as the Second Beginning.

ICEBERGS TO THE NORTH

Delightful change! It is clearing up. The noonday sun is showering the dark ocean, here and there, with the whitest light. And lo! an iceberg on our left. Lo! an iceberg on our right. An iceberg ahead! Yes, two of them! —four!—five—six!—and there, a white pinnacle just pricking above the horizon. Wonderful to behold, there are no less than thirteen icebergs in fair view. We run forward, and then we run aft, and then to this side, and that. We lean toward them over the railing, and spring up into the shrouds, as if these boyish efforts brought us nearer, and made them plainer to our delighted eyes. (Louis Noble, *After Icebergs with a Painter*, 1861)

Church's passion to "embrace the universe" inevitably led him to the Arctic. He was one of those demonically impelled Americans who, as D. H. Lawrence wrote, would "know" all. "Strange supernatural," Church wrote on a sketch of an iceberg (FIGURE 67). These grand, mysterious, elemental creatures of the forces were Church's Moby Dicks. But, as anyone who has read Melville will realize, there is a fundamental difference between the two men. The writer sought to tell his fellow-men that their powers were finite. The painter sought to tell his fellow-men that their powers were infinite. It is the difference between profound Irony and profound Hope. In 1859, buoyed by the success of *The Heart of the Andes*, Church's posture before the world was one of absolute confidence. He had re-created on canvas "the world's worth" as one could know it on the Equator. Now it was time for something "new."

Interest in the Far North had been stimulated at the beginning of the decade with the unexplained disappearance of Sir John Franklin's party in the polar region. An American, Elisha Kent Kane, had made two expeditions in vain searches for the lost Englishmen. His efforts were rewarded by the enormous popular interest in his two-volume

Icebergs to the North

Arctic Explorations. Kane's premature death—it was not an arctic tragedy—in 1857 only served to intensify the general curiosity about that relatively unknown part of the earth. By going north in 1859 Church was both following and leading the public mind. The result of that summer's trip was a painting alternately called *The North* and *The Icebergs* (PLATE VII). Church had a democratic genius for embodying the archetype of the immediate and immediately present. His artistic hand responded to the moment's aggregate curiosity.

Happily we can know much about Church's arctic voyage, for his companion, the Reverend Louis Noble, wrote an enthusiastic three-hundred-odd page account of it, entitled *After Icebergs with a Painter*. In addition, there are at the Cooper Union Museum scores of studies of coastline and icebergs in oil and pencil and gouache made on this trip. To chase down these Ishmaels of the sea, the painter hired a sixty-five-ton schooner with captain and crew of six. Noble's description of Church sketching off the Labrador coast is an entertaining verbal cartoon:

> If one is curious about the troubles of painting on a little coaster, lightly ballasted, dashing forward frequently under the press of a sail, with a short sea, I would recommend him to a good, stout swing. While in the enjoyment of his smooth and sickening vibrations, let him spread his pallet, arrange his canvas, and paint a pair of colts at their gambols in some adjacent field.

After Icebergs with a Painter is a sequence of Adamic ejaculations: "New! New! New!" is the essence of the experience. The polar sea was a realm of complete psychic freedom: "all the world was before us, where to choose our way." Icebergs were protean substance, perpetual becomings. They could be anything and everything: Arabias of the north, Gothic cathedrals, Chinese temples, the Colosseum, Jerusalem; they were at one moment Genesis, the next, Revelation. These perfect monuments of natural history were the earth's most suggestive specific fact. They were revealers of the world's till-now-hidden meaning. Nineteenth century America's "spheral" man, a kind of man who could not have existed before this age of steam and newsprint, was prepared to discover the Apocalypse and the Creation—it made no difference

which came first—in the unique spiritual matter that was the iceberg. Noble and Church were on a five-week transcendental journey. The experience as reality and myth would be summed up on thirty-five or forty square feet of canvas.

The Celebration of Man's Imminent Mastery of Nature

THE CELEBRATION OF MAN'S IMMINENT MASTERY OF NATURE

The scene is as if from that day of the creation when the earth was without form and void, and only the firmament divided the waters under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament, and God hung a light in heaven to divide the day from the night. (From a review of *The Icebergs* in *Harper's Weekly*, April 20, 1861)

As I sit and look at this broken work of Divine fingers,—only a shred broken from the edge of a glacier, vast as it is—I whisper these words of Revelation: "and hath washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." (Louis Noble, *After Icebergs with a Painter*, 1861)

Church returned to his studio well equipped with fresh memories and records of icebergs and northern seas and skies (FIGURES 65–68). He was prepared to master nature in its arctic manifestations. The sketches themselves prove his unconditional readiness to handle a new situation on earth. FIGURE 65 catches the crystalline structure of a recently split block of ice. Doubtless his previous sketching of rocks was of help here. The geographical determinist was seasoned to define in paint the endemic color of sea, light, and atmosphere of this cold ocean latitude (FIGURE 66). This seer with pencil and brush was poised to recognize the transcendent revealed according to the peculiarity of the clime.

Church knew art and nature and himself well enough to attempt a *summa* of the North. He worked on his great painting in the winter of 1859–1860 while the public awaited the result, much as it would await a new novel from a famous author. Then Church left *The Icebergs* alone for a while. In the summer he went to Mount Desert to study some water effects which he intended for the foreground of the painting. After another winter, a fateful one, for it ended in Civil War, he presented his arctic epic to the New York public. It was a rather distracted city that April of 1861, and hence it is impossible to measure

the response. *The Icebergs* was the image of what this exemplary Yankee had himself experienced—a visionary collective dream.

The Celebration of Man's Imminent Mastery of Nature

The original painting which was sold in 1863 to Thomas Watson, M.P., has disappeared in England. Fortunately there exists the handsome chromolithograph reproduced here in PLATE VII to give us an idea of Church's splendid *Icebergs*. The picture must have seemed the first and last word on its subject. Everything that might be said about the great unconscious life of the northern seas Church said here in paint. This vast oceanscape is a microcosm of arctic natural history. The record of what typically happens to water, air, and light—and color—is all there on this public canvas. The boulder is a souvenir of the icebergs' origins on land.

There was no evidence of man as Church first envisaged the painting. The derelict mast was not seen by optimistic Americans. It was added, perhaps, as a salute to Sir John Franklin and his lost crew when the painting was shown to their compatriots in London two years later. True New World men did not care to be reminded of human disasters. They wanted their associations to date from before Eden or after Easter. Church conceived of nature as pure, unmarred by mortal tragedy. A Turner or a Caspar David Friedrich would have painted these inanimate beings of the northern seas not as splendid monuments but as vengeful monsters—creatures of an arbitrary nature which willed to punish man for daring too much. But Church "went confidently to nature." He and Noble pretended to feel danger in the presence of icebergs, but they were really only joking. Slipping into a puddle of water on a cake of ice was the worst thing that happened to the painter. When the two found "an ugly berg" they tried to make it interesting by lighting flares near it. And the minister's Biblical fancies were all ones of hope and promise to man, "glorious visions of St. John." The American sublime was rooted in wonder, not terror. Church painted nature in the climax of grace and love: his own description of this picture says as much:

> With the exception of an occasional vein, which is blue as sapphire, or stains from rock, an iceberg is purely white, an opaque, dead white,—ghastly and spiritless in a dull atmosphere; but in bright weather, especially

late in the afternoon, kindling with a varied splendor. The picture aims to represent the berg at that brilliant hour.[10]

Church and His Contemporaries, 1867

Church was commended for avoiding the cheap theatricality which too often characterized such subjects. His eschewal of vulgar melodrama was a recognized hallmark of his art. But after all, wonder and violence do not go together. The spectator must be able to hear "that still small voice of calm" at such a moment as this. The only sound, Church said, was the "low murmur" of the swells "gently rolling in" on the icy foreground. The painting strikes the new aesthetic balance of the new American sensibility: "grandeur with repose," he called it.

The Icebergs was a painting which "expressed the time and country producing it." Before it the New World man confronted nature with complete confidence. "The dread secret of the ages" had been "invaded." Another mystery of the earth had been "revealed"—"known." Thus to believers in the Science of Design the scene becomes simultaneously the ever-present Creation and the ever-present Apocalypse. *The Icebergs* is the celebration of the New World man's imminent oneness with elemental nature.

CHURCH AND HIS CONTEMPORARIES, 1867

All the paintings which have thus far been considered date from before Church's departure for Europe in November of 1867. The painter, then in his forty-second year, was without question the recognized leader of the American school of landscape. For a decade or more his contemporaries had been heaping superlative praises on his name. A fairly safe arithmetical index of Church's relative importance on the domestic art scene as of that moment can be deduced from Tuckerman's *Book of the Artists* published in 1867. Sixteen pages of this mid-century classic on American art were devoted to Frederic Church. In landscape his only close rival was Albert Bierstadt, who trailed behind with only eleven pages.

Notwithstanding the international recognition which Church enjoyed, there were other Americans who were better compensated or better liked for their paintings. Intellectually Church may have rated

highest in the count of words written by appreciative contemporaries, but there were critics who preferred a George Inness or a John F. Kensett, and patrons who preferred Albert Bierstadt. The ten thousand dollars paid for *The Heart of the Andes* appears to have remained Church's top figure for a picture. It was a figure that Bierstadt more than surpassed when he sold *Storm in the Rocky Mountains—Lander's Peak* for an astronomical twenty-five thousand.

Church "leads or misleads the way," James Jarves regretfully admitted, for he found "no reserved power of suggestion" in Church's pictures. *Niagara* was a "literal transcript of the scene": period. Jarves recognized "many of the qualities of the American mind" in Church's work: but for the critic the unhappy truth was that the practical spirit of this country denied the "ideal" in art. George Inness was Jarves's preferred landscapist: he painted his feelings in nature; he offered nourishment to the soul. Years later at the height of his fame Inness produced a large *Niagara*. To compare a detail of that painting with one from Church's *Niagara* is to look at two different worlds (FIGURES 53, 55). Inness meant little to his contemporaries in the millennial hours of Manifest Destiny, as Church would mean little to his contemporaries in the troubled days of the *fin de siècle*. As American iconology, Church's *Niagara* was wasted on the Europe-eyed Jarves.[11]

John F. Kensett, ten years older than Church, appealed to those Americans who loved the light and space of their native land. He was a painter of mid-day cheer which he could find either in a corner or on a prominence of nature. Kensett did not share Church's urge to know the universe. His rocks, trees, and water do not enact the American epic. His boulders are picturesque, lichened light-catchers, rather than records of antediluvian convulsions. Contrast the river in one of his views of Niagara with Church's sketch of Niagara Gorge (FIGURES 48, 49). Kensett hardly found self-expression through living natural history; his mind and eye and hand were not engaged with the forces. His style might have been more purely American had he spent fewer of his early years abroad. Like the academic English landscapists whom he emulated, he steered clear of archetypes. Kensett's paintings recreate the pleasure of the moment, the pleasure of discovering a fresh picture wherever he happened to be.

Church and His Contemporaries, 1867

Albert Bierstadt was Church's real rival in the 1860's. He had been born in Dusseldorf, Germany, in 1830 and came to this country before his second birthday. Bierstadt, after deciding on painting as a career, studied at the Dusseldorf Academy. Eventually, in 1857, he returned to the United States. A trip to the Rockies and California with General Lander lasted the better part of two years. Then in 1861 he set up his easel in the Studio Building on Tenth Street only a few yards from Church's easel in the same building. By 1863, when Bierstadt painted his famous *Rocky Mountains* (FIGURE 70), Church could no longer count on finding his own name printed in isolation or at the head of the list. It was now, more and more, "Church and Bierstadt"—but at least it was not "Bierstadt and Church." The "Yankee of Yankees" evidently never welcomed his joint identity with the German immigrant. However, social background could only in part account for this. A comparison of their work explains enough. Bierstadt had at once the strengths and weaknesses of his Dusseldorf training. Church had learned much from the paintings of that school shown in this country but, through his teacher Cole and through Humboldt and through that synthetic artistic entity Ruskin-Turner, Church became the direct heir of the great masters of the Renaissance. It was not, therefore, an empty convention to compare *Niagara* or *The Heart of the Andes* to Raphael's *Transfiguration.*

In the work of Bierstadt, the Great Tradition was diluted rather than transformed. Ironically the training which he received in Dusseldorf prepared him to paint American landscape but not landscape American. At Dusseldorf he had acquired proficiency in his medium according to the conventions of the school. He could represent detail well enough to satisfy the majority of Church's viewers, while he exceeded his rival in painterly breadth. Those who saw Church as caught in his own fidelity to nature welcomed Bierstadt's broader handling. However, the strokes of the German-trained brush did not move in perfect sympathy with nature's history. A contrast of their style of sketching snow-capped mountains illustrates the difference (FIGURES 72, 74). Church's handling is more suggestive of geological structure. All that the Cole-trained Church needed to do was to put his scientist conscience into his teacher's brush and the oil would re-create the thing

Church and His Contemporaries, 1867

seen. The Puritan American Church substituted spontaneity for his more romantic mentor's compulsiveness and loaded the oil more sparingly on the bristles (FIGURES 54, 55). The result was a style of handling suited to fact. Bierstadt would have had to abandon Dusseldorf handling to do the same. If he did hear the call of natural history as Church heard it, he was not prepared to forfeit years of training. Another price he may have paid by studying at a school distinguished for mountainscape was his early estrangement from the tradition of heroic art. No Andreas Achenbach or Hans Gude could have taught Bierstadt to paint the coordinated inanimate drama. Dusseldorf landscape was essentially scene-painting. Its manneredness and lack of deep conviction would have been liabilities to a prophetic painter-poet. Trees that seem to plod like dinosaurs are no sylvan substitute for Virgins of the Annunciation. Bierstadt's first western trees themselves seem emigrants from a haunted Black Forest who have yet to be regenerated in the American wilderness (FIGURE 71). In time his trees could pronounce New World emotions with a much less heavy accent. Bierstadt became enough a naturalized citizen to be recognized as the leading celebrant of the vastness, the newness, and the wonder of the Great West. The scale and inspiration of his chosen landscape enabled him to transcend the meanness of his school. Our picture of the Rockies a hundred years ago is his picture. But it is not the picture of our prototypal ancestor. Bierstadt never conceived of nature as spiritual drama. He could make Wyoming look like virgin land, look like Eden, but he could not through the window of the painted canvas help his fellow-men to be born into the New World. He was essentially a heroic illustrator, rather than a pictorial myth-maker.

In 1867 the cosmic icon was the most urgently needed painting in the United States. And the only artist who had painted it was Frederic Edwin Church.

I assure you that I shall deem it a happy day when I can once more put my feet on home ground—with the exception of Syria—I think I shall never desire ardently to visit the Old World. (Frederic Church to Martin Heade, Rome, October 9, 1868)

CHAPTER VI

The Past through American Eyes

IN 1841, after Thomas Cole had painted his famous series, *The Voyage of Life*, he felt desperately the need for renewal. It had been nine years since he had seen the Old World, and he longed for the more sympathetic artistic atmosphere that had inspired him years before. He needed again to return to the home of all artists if he was not to die as artist. And so in the spring of 1841 Cole left his family to sail for England and the Continent. He stayed for twelve months.

Some twenty-six years later Cole's pupil—riding on the high tide of his fame—was finally to visit the Old World. The motives and the mode of travel of the two men could hardly have been more different. Cole had visited the landscape of man's past to find comfort in its age and moral lessons in its desolation. He had done this as a lonely wanderer. Church went to the landscape of man's past to study the past in its "pastness" as he had studied nature in its naturalness, and to find in it inspiration and renewal for the present. And when he traveled about the Old World he was accompanied by family, friends, and retinue. Cole's goal was Italy where he wanted his emotions to be stirred. Church's goal was the East—he meant to go as far as India—where he wanted to be enchanted. Italy was not old enough for Church. He alone among his contemporaries found Rome "threadbare." It looked "corrupt and vulgar" to him after he returned from Athens: the Greeks "gave a large and God-like air to all they did." Church cared as little for Rome as did his artistic kin of another American generation, Frank Lloyd Wright. The painter could not abide conventional talk about "the eternal city." From a studio on the Pincian Hill in the winter of 1868–1869, Church sketched magnificent skies over a roofscape that was occasionally interrupted by a dome here or a statue there. What lay below he seldom recorded.

Frederic Church, his wife and son Joseph, and mother-in-law, Mrs. Carnes, began their year and a half Old World sojourn late in the autumn of 1867. By the time they arrived in Rome the following Octo-

ber, they had visited London and Paris, spent five months at points between and beyond Alexandria and Beirut, passed through the Aegean to Constantinople, and thence gone on through the Black Sea and up the Danube to summer in the Alps. In March of 1869 Church left his family (another son had been born in February) in Rome and headed south to Naples, Paestum, and Sicily, and then to Greece. He was in Athens at the best time of the year, April. In another month or two the Churches were taking a last look at Paris and London (where the painter studied Turner watercolors in the basement of the National Gallery). Home by the end of June and never again to cross the Atlantic, Church had had his fill of the Old World, all of it that is but Syria—indeed, he was about to re-create the Near East on the Hudson.

The Old World had been mined visually in a thousand sketches. Syria and the Holy Land; the Austrian, Bavarian, and Swiss Alps; and the Acropolis were the favored subjects. He made one sketch in Birmingham (before it was known for Pre-Raphaelite art), several in the Pazzi Chapel and the Bargello in Florence and none, as far as we know, in Paris. The sketches of Rome, except for the views from the Pincian Hill already mentioned, are quite uninspired. But many of these Old World sketches are Church's perfection of himself. In his early forties, at the full height of his powers, he was the match for any of geography's or history's novelties; these studies combine the freshness of discovery with the totally assured ease of experience. By his brush the Parthenon exists in a glorious spring morning, and a deep Alpine lake continues to live as in the August of 1869 (FIGURES 75, 76). By his pencil, when reality is translated into the abstraction of black line on white paper, we recognize at a glance Constantinople by moonlight and the slow, relentless progress of an Alpine glacier (FIGURES 35, 36).

Frederic Church looked upon man's handiwork with the same understanding that he looked upon nature's (FIGURES 77–80). The sympathetic portrait of a camel surprises us with Church's flare for humorous caricature and expression. His characterization of the beast typifies Church:

> A gay animal is the camel—but they are used to the carrying of everything from timber to dirt—It is a comical sight to see their riders doing solemn

obeisance at every step of their slouching gait . . . About twelve days of nodding on a camel ought to loosen a man's spine into chronic politeness.[1]

The camel was to become one of Olana's themes.

Conscientiously inscribed legends on sketches, and letters and journals written by the painter and his wife, make it possible to study in depth the first five months of 1868 when Church was exploring Syria and the Holy Land. He took a photographer with him to Baalbek, where he was "delighted with the Cyclopian remains of a great past." From Beirut, the party's base of operations, the painter wrote his friend Heade: "Here we are in Syria—all settled and in rare contrast everything is to the new thin shelled City of New York." Church had been converted by the architecture: "a building should have thick walls." It was "a rich country for the figure painters" and a "wretched country"—"a diminutive desert of sand is drifting to swallow up houses —all this could be checked by planting pine trees—but . . . this is a Turkish province and the thing won't be done." Still the missionaries were working a "revolution."

Two cities, one living, the other fossilized, were destined to become the subjects of important paintings: Jerusalem and Petra—Petra, Church said, "that strange mysterious city which few have seen, and that few only glanced at." Hidden in a corner of what is today Jordan, this long-lost real fantasy of Greco-Roman history was unbeatable as pure romance. It was civilization's equivalent to nature's volcano, Sangay. But the environment made this trip to the valley of rock-cut temples and tombs a quite different affair from his trip through the South American uplands. Church, Stuart Dodge, the missionary (whose brother was soon to be the owner of Church's *Morning in the Tropics*), and a Mr. Johnson, the American consul in Jerusalem, each paid "the best dragoman in Syria" two hundred and fifty dollars apiece as fee of all the expenses of the trip. It was hardly a cheap undertaking. Church and his friends were going to travel in style even if this was exclusively a bachelor affair. They had a cook (he was the chef of the Hotel Bellevue in Beirut) and a waiter. The two were to provide the gentlemen "every day at dinner" with "soup, two courses of meat, vegetables, a pudding, nuts, figs, raisins, oranges and Coffee." In a let-

ter to his sculptor friend Palmer, Church described a meal which took place in a darkened tower whose walls "glittered with a jetty soot" and emanated "a strange creosote odor which perhaps was not amiss since it swallowed up more objectionable odors." In this setting the Americans' sense of dignity created the anomalous "spectacle of snowy tablecloth, french forks, knives, spoons, cut glass, a bright silver-plated soup tureen . . . all the appointments of a good table." The caravan consisted of twenty-one men, two horses, and sixteen camels. All this cost money, not to mention the "Backsheesh" for the Bedouins at Petra. These wild Arabs, who were "beyond all allegiance to any power," looked upon *Howadji*, foreign travelers, as prey. To complicate matters more, Church would have to cope with the Bedouins' irrational suspicion of the graven image. One artist, the painter lugubriously reported to his correspondent, had been shot attempting a sketch at Petra. Bribery was to be facilitated by the inclusion in the party of two sheiks of tribes "friendly to the Petra Bedawins," and of brute protection in the persons of "one Robber chief and one other Arab who bristled all over with weapons." Just to get the Bedouins in his own retinue accustomed to seeing him playing his role as artist, Church made it a point to sketch on camel back. Hence unusual diplomacy may account for several rather jerky drawings now at Cooper Union.

Thus prepared, and with an American flag to fly from their tent, the painter, the missionary, and the consul left Jerusalem on February 12. On the twenty-fourth they arrived at the deserted city. They had skirted the Dead Sea, passing through land rich in Biblical associations —associations which Church religiously noted in his journal—and rich in scenic effect. A description of the valley of Yemen catches the excitement of the landscape:

> After passing down a small gorge we came upon a level rock and proceeding to the edge there burst upon us one of the most stupendous views . . . We gazed down into a tremendous valley, narrow but deep, at the bottom of which lay the silvery white bed of the torrents which yearly sweep the valleys—Gigantic mountains rose sublimely from the gorge—[they] presented a very irregular frontage broken into huge amphitheatres, chasms and ravines. They were terraced by majestic precipices and ledges which wound about their irregular fronts and were seamed perpendicularly . . .

We indeed were enchanted–I flung open my pocket sketchbook and drew the scene roughly. We dashed down the path and seized another view, and so on running and sketching until we reached the narrow plain where the camels had long preceded us.[2]

Their second Sunday after leaving Jerusalem, the party rested at the foot of Mount Hor. Here Church, who virtually never sketched on the Sabbath, and his companions "read and discussed passages of Scripture which relate to Edom and the wandering of the Israelites." Since it was "the easiest entrance to Petra" they felt justified in supposing that "the Israelites may have encamped" at this very spot. Their first daybreak at Petra, Church "opened a crevice in the tent and secretly got two or three sketches." After breakfast, accompanied by four Arabs who were armed with "long flint lock guns" and "clubs with large heads," he started out, his largest portfolio in hand. These Arabs had been instructed by the dragoman to move when the Howadji moved and to stop when the Howadji stopped:

We went straight to the famous Khasné, first as being the best of all the temples at Petra–I saw it, was astonished and then deliberately opened my three legged stool, sat upon it, opened my sketchbook, spread out the paper, sharpened the pencil, took a square look at the Temple and an askant one at the Bedawins and made my first line–they made no motion and after a few rapid touches, I felt that the mystery was solved in my favor–I could sketch without let or hindrance, a freedom unaccorded before.[3]

The rediscovered city, which had for over a thousand years existed in limbo, appealed to the child in Church more than to the man. Ornament carved at some indeterminate moment in antiquity (actually the third century A.D.) had in places been untouched by time: "as sharp as if just finished." Edom, the Biblical Petra, Church noted, meant "red," "and the rocks here bear out that name"; the land was the inheritance of Esau, conquered by various powers, and the "object of terrible prophesies." The painter saw the "luminous" reddish-salmon of the temple front "blazing out of black stern frightful rocks . . . rich in sculptured ornament, shining as if by its own internal light." He painted the Khasné as he first beheld it, suddenly coming upon it through a lofty narrow canyon (see painting over fireplace in FIGURE

105). Curtains seem to pull back to reveal an architectural miracle. "Who built it?" Church asked himself, and that is the question the painting asks. When the picture was shown at the National Academy in 1874, the wary critic for the *Nation* accused its maker of indulging in "mere theatricality." *El Khasné* is not a great epic, but it is a marvelous feat of romance—well worthy of a Gustave Doré. Church surely intended a *tour de force*, for he apparently knew from the start where this canvas piece of travel fun belonged: over the mantel in his family parlor at Olana. Indeed, the painting appears to have prompted the decorative scheme of the room; the irregularly outlined salmon marble of the fireplace ties in abstractly with the painting, as do the "dove olives" that dominate the walls.

Church's Old World sojourn was to produce a half-dozen other major works: *Damascus* (1869, destroyed), *Jerusalem* (1870), *The Parthenon* (1871), *Syria by the Sea* (1873), *The Aegean Sea* (c. 1878), and *The Monastery of Our Lady of the Snows* (c. 1879). *The Parthenon*[4] was considered one of Church's major successes. Classical antiquity's perfect monument is interpreted as an architectural Adam. *Syria by the Sea*,[5] a grand concoction of topography and ruins, looked "fictitious" to a critic who apparently did not sympathize with Church's aims. *The Monastery of Our Lady of the Snows*,[6] which is based on the painter's studies in the Alps, lacks the freshness of inspiration which Church experienced in the Andes. Technically it is a competent display of the lessons he learned from studying Turner's oils firsthand. There are passages of paint which clearly echo the effect of glazing of the English master.

The Aegean Sea (FIGURE 89) was "of all the American pictures" of the 1878 art season "the most ambitious, the most striking, the most likely to attain lasting reputation, and to confer glory upon the national name." The picture's right half instantly betrays Turner as the stimulus "but," according to this same review, *The Aegean Sea* had "none of the eccentricities of that painter." Traces of Church's travels, such as the Doric columns in the foreground or the distant Muslim-occupied Acropolis, appear in this painting in new guise (FIGURES 75, 87). Church, who compared a strange tropical tree to the elm (FIGURE 26), the cliffs in *Cotopaxi* to the palisades of the Upper Mississippi, and

the coast of Labrador to the Andes, was able at a glance to recognize nature's repetitions. And so he remembered the Caribbean when he painted the Aegean (FIGURES 88, 89). *The Aegean Sea*, with its "brilliant rainbows spanning the near heavens" and no end of other enchanting effects, is the Old World pendant to *Rainy Season in the Tropics* (PLATE IV). In the one, man has just now got a foothold on the new earth; in the other, man and nature have lived together for centuries or rather millennia. In *The Aegean Sea* Church painted the layers of history that he discovered in the ruins and cities of Greece and Syria. We see a worn and old earth renewed by rain and rainbow. *The Aegean Sea* is a long way from the reverie of a Cole brooding before the evidence of man's folly which man, alas, will only again repeat. Church's painting is instead the reverie of a regenerate American who travels with the flag and condemns the corruption of a humanity whose prophets have long been dead, but sees already, in the work of his Christian compatriots, the promise of revolution. As New World man he was poised to possess and to save the Old World.

Church was generally at his best when obliged to make "the picture fit the subject." *Jerusalem*, which the painter himself is said to have regarded as his finest work, illustrates the point (FIGURE 84). Like *Niagara* it was a subject which offered a well composed view of itself—almost as though nature had intended it as such. Certainly, to mankind in general Jerusalem was the most categorical of all the Old World's sights. And it had a peculiar significance to Americans who saw in the design of the universe the mysterious fulfillment of prophecy. In *The Hooker Party* Church had pictured a small band of "new Israelites" going to a "Promised Land," there to found a "Zion." Perhaps the most significant moment of Church's journey into the wilderness was that Sabbath when at the foot of Mount Hor he and his two fellow-Americans "felt justified in supposing that the Israelites had encamped here." The Holy Land was the Maine of the Old World. Jerusalem, the sacred city on a hill, was history's Katahdin.

The painter's own first impression of Jerusalem was a disappointment: "an appearance of newness prevailed." The Churches had made the mistake of entering the city from the direction of Jaffa. But inside the city the painter was soon seeing "what I had imagined." Systemati-

cally he explored the streets and visited the sights. In those days a tour of the excavations under the city was a must. Archaeologists were convinced they had found "the place from which Solomon procured the stone of which the Temple was made. It seems," Mrs. Church wrote in her diary, "to make clear what is said in the Bible about the Temple being built without the sound of a hammer." The science of the past, according to one of the reviewers of *Jerusalem*, would soon establish with certainty those spots most sacred to mankind. The Churches visited the Holy Sepulchre, the Pool of Hezekiah, the Wailing Wall, the Mosque of Omar. They walked around the walls from Jaffa Gate to Damascus Gate. They went to the supposed sights of the Crucifixion and the Transfiguration and from Olivet viewed Jerusalem: "At sunset all your expectations are realized and Jerusalem is beautiful and you can realize that the Jews might exclaim with true enthusiasm—'Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is Jerusalem the city of our King!' " The painter's wife put down these words the night they camped on the Mount of Olives. A few hours later they saw the city "lighted up by the morning sun."

Church made many sketches in Jerusalem and the surrounding country, absorbing its character as he had absorbed the character of Niagara: expressively poised, gnarled olive trees, scattered in ones, twos, or threes; whitened and worn rocks usurping the light from grass; ancient, overgrazed, terraced hillsides ribboned with low stone walls; domes, minarets, and bleached parapets. Obviously the Mount of Olives was assumed as the point of view for an anticipated painting: Church made three separate large oil sketches, which placed side by side take in the whole panorama from Siloam to Gethsemane. At Olana there are photos of Jerusalem from this hill, which Church probably acquired while there in order to supplement later whatever as conscientious tourist he had missed. Nature's transcendent moments were never wasted on Church. Years before in the wilds of Maine the painter-seer stood atop a New World Ararat (FIGURE 81); now from the hill where the Savior once trod, an American pilgrim witnessed a redemptive burst of heaven's light upon this holiest of cities (FIGURE 83).

The New Jerusalem

The distance stretches away across the dim spaces of the valley, the winding roads mark the changing grades of the hills; hovel and monastery fall into their appropriate places along the rolling hillocks; the shade of the hovering clouds hangs over the foreground, toning down to a grayish olive the tender green of the first grass of Spring, while aloft and afar, on the Holy Hill, lies the city, beautiful for situation, bathed in the full effulgence of the light that strikes through the rift of the tumbled cumuli, and rests like a loving consecration upon tower, and mosque, and portal, the minarets of Islam and the Sepulcher of the Nazarene. (*New York Daily Tribune*, March 31, 1871)

A mind charged with expectations was prepared to receive the cosmic revelation. Through the Bible and Nature in Old and in New Worlds, Church understood the moment as his God had meant him to. That is why like-minded contemporaries had called upon him "to teach us how to see." This too, is why Church would paint, but never write, nature's message. It was there for all to see.

When *Jerusalem* (FIGURE 84) was shown at Goupil's in April of 1871, the crowd standing in front of the picture formed a ring "six people deep," and this went on for days. Church had of course struck a subject even timelier than *The Icebergs* of ten years before. Interest in this world city was always great, but archaeology had been announcing discoveries for a decade, which made the subject still more of the hour. Those who wished to be informed about the particulars of the view were supplied with diagrams of *Jerusalem* which listed some twenty-four major spots of interest in the painting. As to whether *Jerusalem* was a work of genius or only a work "resembling" genius, opinions differed. At the one extreme, there were those who felt it necessary to excuse Church for taking a few liberties with nature to make a point. At the other, there were those who complained that it would be a better picture if Church had taken liberties to make a point. The one group admired the effect of transfiguring light over the city. The other commended Church for so tellingly characterizing the topography of the region.

But to consider the picture apart from the reactions of yesteryear's

The New Jerusalem

New Yorkers: whatever they happened to say, the painting is a superbly developed cosmic drama. The chief event is the explosive natural, or rather almost supernatural, sunburst. The baroque effect proposes the suddenness of a revelation. A storm has passed. The city has been cleansed and is now transformed into a dazzling many-faceted jewel by the descending shafts of radiance. To focus attention on the center of the spectacle, Church has placed the rest of the landscape in various degrees of lesser light, but nowhere is there a vague and unrewarding darkness. Unlike a Monet in which the eye comprehends all instantaneously, *Jerusalem*—like all of Church's "epictures"—was an experience in time. And again in contrast to Impressionist painting the light was not that of a universe governed by physical accidents, but the light of a universe governed by divine purpose. The better the viewer knew his Bible the more he comprehended the painting. People stood "six deep" before the canvas because it required time to study it—time to let it "grow on one." *Jerusalem* was Church's first and second thoughts communicated in oil to the willing spectator.

Rain has brought fresh life to the aged hills about the city. To the left the large tomb of Abel at the edge of the Jewish cemetery catches the life-giving brilliance. In the center foreground man and camel are dramatized as shadows against an illuminated shelf of Olivet. To the figures' right the tree from which the mountain takes its name appears in various postures of awareness of the event which brings with it renewal of body and spirit. As servants of man, these venerable monarchs of their species tell of man's long presence here. On the opposite side of the picture, a village emerges spectrally out of the shadows into the luminous atmosphere of the passing moment. Here and elsewhere we see the delicate green of spring grass in varying intensities of brightness. All the features of the landscape are presented with reference to the city which they surround. In the sketches these features were studied separately, but as they become part of a larger whole they are recast into subordinate incidents. The foreground dips in inclined perspective (one of the hardest effects to paint) to the stream of Kidron half obscured in shadow as is the ascent beyond, which builds up to the great platform. Lines of the slope's natural history expressing the upward thrust and lateral expansion of the great hill comprise one of sev-

eral minor topographical episodes. Obviously, had Church been consistent as to his source of light the slope would have been much brighter. Here, to save the artistic whole he exercised his prerogative as dramatic symbolist. The darkness is both an allusion to the Valley of the Shadow of Death and a foil to the almost supernatural brilliance of the sky above the city. The broad notched wall of the city is varied by the random presence of stains and hanging vines, just enough to avoid mechanical repetitiveness without marring the sublime monotony of the crenelations. The breathtaking sweep of the wall is a striking formal effect which, like the vast steps of rapids in *Niagara* (FIGURE 44), achieves several ends. It is an abrupt, overwhelming climax to the topography, a fiat "And, Lo!" which encompasses the surrounding countryside and suddenly places the heavenly city on earth. The precinct's uncompromising straightness serves to emphasize both the variety of form of the buildings and the strong, gradual bow of Mount Zion. Church has in fact subtly exaggerated the true curve (it can be measured against the sketches and the photographs) of Mount Zion, in order to imply global breadth. Here, Jerusalem is indeed civilization's metropolis: a "city on a hill" to which the surrounding world looks, while from it there emanates the divine elemental presence which is the world's maker and remaker. In this real yet visionary Jerusalem, trees, minarets, and domes are glorified as light breaks upon the city, and the city, with the Mosque of Omar as delegate, breaks into the sky from whence that light comes.

The event which suggested itself to Frederic Church standing on the Mount of Olives in the spring of 1868 is the union of heaven and earth. What better spot to witness the resurrection of man's universe!

CHAPTER VII

Landscape in a Complex Era

WITH the 1870's, a different spirit injected itself into Church's work and into the general American art climate. As the promises of the vision that led the country through the Civil War failed to materialize, the idealism of the mid-century began to dissolve. The painted expressions of relief and gratitude that burgeoned after the close of hostilities proved to be but celebrations of a brief moment. As early as 1866, a critic complained: "The trouble with our art is that our artists have nothing to say." Not only landscape, but art in general, was losing its sense of historic mission. Church was soon to be looked upon as the exception to the new rule: "He is the only painter with anything cosmical in aim and idea."

Restless enthusiasm had been the spirit of the 1850's; troubled confusion was that of the 1870's. Sentiment was replacing thought; mood replacing drama. The artist was no longer asked to inspire: he was now asked to charm. The gauntlet of the new unheroic spirit was thrown down before Church:

> [*Niagara*] appeals to the intelligence, and it is the work of a good, cold understanding. We respect the talent of the artist, we admire the picture, but both are without charm; and, as art, the picture has very little we care for.[1]

It was as a "revealer" that Church had painted this masterpiece. *Niagara* had drawn upon his abilities to the maximum. Now a less believing people was becoming estranged from its own recent self. An uncertain generation did not want to be reminded of what it had lost. Church, it would appear, shared this uncertainty: after 1865 he gave up painting the epic of the United States.

New World landscape was going out of fashion. It is a relief to step into a room which is not surrounded by a "wilderness where the human form was unknown," rejoiced a visitor at the Academy exhibition in 1875. The call was for human interest: genre, or if nature, nature painted with "feeling." With the decline in nationalist inspiration, foreign art, a threat in the sixties, enjoyed a triumph in the seventies. So it seemed, at least. Actually American landscape held its ground, though not so firmly as before. Church and Bierstadt were no longer secure of their places. Kensett and S. R. Gifford struck the norm of the new

taste in this field. Their paintings were quieter, closer views of a more familiar, less epic nature. George Inness, too, was regarded more favorably with the passing of each year, but he was still a bit too French for those who were looking for a less foreign way out of the dilemmas of Hudson River and Rocky Mountain painting. A year older than Church, Inness would be the hero of the eighties when Church was being fast forgotten. The two crossed paths in Georgia in February, 1890. There Church gleefully noted that Inness, who had said "Subject is nothing. Treatment makes the picture," was himself selecting "the most interesting features he can find" for commendation.

Church was certainly not at a total loss with his brush in the 1870's. He, too, was responding (even if not altogether sympathetically) to the spirit of this disoriented age. His Old World paintings in their own way accorded with the reflective mentality of the decade. After all, they did offer "human interest" of an older kind. The vocabulary of Church's critics is a verbal graph of the change in Church's own psychology: "serene," "soft," "velvety," "quiet." *The Aegean Sea* (FIGURE 89) and *Morning in the Tropics* (FIGURE 91) embody the words. They depict more pensive regions of Church's cosmos than those he painted in the fifties and sixties. Within the limits of Church's peculiar idiom, these paintings embody the reverie of the new decade. His drama had formerly depended on more active object characters, such as the rejoicing tree, the aspiring mountain, the rushing cloud. Mood now was mingling with drama; light rather than form was to be the new protagonist.

But the creation of a mood—with Church of course it was still nature's mood—was not the only reason for the growing emphasis on light. The studies of Tyndall and of Chevreul on the shelves of the library at Olana indicate that the painter was caught up in the scientific fascination with light which swept over the western world at this time.[2] Church became as much absorbed with this subject as he had been with Humboldt's "geognosy" twenty years before. His very perceptions and choices in nature were shifting. Compare a sketch of Mount Katahdin of the late seventies with a sketch done in the early fifties at Mount Desert (FIGURES 12, 73). In the later sketch the structure of the mountain has been subordinated to the articulation of light.

An Easter-Genesis on the Amazon

He was now observing effects of atmosphere not only as geographical determinist or as transcendental symbolist, but also as a student of light itself. Church's was a complex eye which is not to be confused with that of Winslow Homer, and much less with that of the Impressionists. These younger contemporaries of Church were not impelled by a sense of the wonder of God's world. Light, Church could have read in his copy of Robert Hunt's *The Poetry of Science*, is the source of all life, the Creator Incarnate. Church's urge to understand light was thus religiously motivated, while the younger American, Homer, and the French Impressionists were instead guided by a new secular spirit.

In the United States of Ulysses Grant and Henry James, the United States of corruption and expatriation, Church could not paint clarion Annunciations to Anyman. *Jerusalem* (FIGURE 84) is an exception. And he did succeed in making an archetype of *The Parthenon*, but such a subject could hardly sound the full depths of the American consciousness. Some Andean scenes of the period are beautiful subdued dramas that make a point in general about nature as self-sufficient material and spiritual harmony. Henry James saw one of these, *The Valley of the Santa Ysabel*, of 1875: "Why not accept this lovely tropic scene as a very pretty picture, and have done with it?" He found it charming, but saw no point in it.[3] Would that he had chosen another year to visit the United States, say 1877, when Church painted *Morning in the Tropics* (FIGURES 90, 91). In this picture the painter proved that he had worked his way through the complexities of the post Civil War psyche, to an ultimate probe. *Morning in the Tropics* is an heroic projection of American man in 1877, as *Niagara* is of American man in 1857.

AN EASTER-GENESIS ON THE AMAZON

It was a fresh world that we traversed on our beautiful river-path,—new as if no other had ever parted its overhanging bowers. (Theodore Winthrop, *Life in the Open Air*, 1863)

This landscape, painted in neutral tones and half-tints, issuing from the darkness like some creation rising into life, had a nameless air of imma-

teriality at once fantastic and charming. (Paul Marcoy, *Travels in South America*, 1875)

An Easter-Genesis on the Amazon

And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. (Genesis I:2-3)
As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world. (John IX:5)

In *Morning in the Tropics* Church's own vivid first-hand experience of living in natural history is re-created in a profoundly original work of art. The painting is the corollary of a life synthesis. The scene relates only generically to the places Church visited in the tropics. According to the descendants of the original owner, William E. Dodge, the painting was at first called *The Amazon*. A perusal of the illustrations in a copy of Paul Marcoy's *Travels in South America* (1875) which Church owned, prompts the speculation that the painter did indeed have that archetypal river in mind. *Morning in the Tropics* suggests a composite impression of Marcoy's vignettes of the Amazon. The painting also quite insistently recalls some of the plates in Gustave Doré's lavishly illustrated edition of Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Any viewer of Church's picture in the seventies would have been familiar with this famous publication. That same viewer would also have carried in his mind's eye a gallery of Turner engravings. He might well have thought of Turner's *Bacchus and Ariadne* as he gazed upon *Morning in the Tropics*. Illustrated books on the tropics, the romantic primitive landscapes of Doré. and the mythological visions of Turner were germinal images for Church. All that culture, science, and experience could generate in the form of meaning at this last hour of faith in nature now materialized for the painter on this canvas.

Before *Morning in the Tropics* (FIGURE 91) the spectator finds himself confronted by the loveliest of life-size landscapes (it measures four and a half by seven feet). He supposedly stands upon an abundantly verdant shore, surrounded by the most exquisitely beautiful forms of vegetation. Immediately below his feet a river, glowing with the reflected greens and silvery golds of land and sky, opens quietly in various directions. Its surface is animated by the faintest stirring of life. In the luminous haze of the distance, for a moment one makes out a thatch

hut on the bank and a person in what must be some jungle-built canoe. Then these signs of man vanish from thought as if they had never been there. Above the water appears at this instant a flight of bright white-bodied birds, dipping and swooping in instinctively held echelon into the cool incandescent mist. Out of this half-distinct scene the emergent trees of a strange forest respond to the miraculous occasion, each according to the expression of its kind. Above, the ascending sun burns through the vapory morning atmosphere, waking the scene from unconscious darkness. An ineffable radiance in the prevailing form of the Cross embraces the world. Close at hand, to the left, we behold an ancient tree; its base is almost lost to view in the subtle maze of serpenting vines. Fallen upon the ground there lies the evidence of death from an unremembered past. Time, "the Destroyer and Renewer," has been here. Out of the punk of centuries there sprouts new and unfamiliar life. Immediately before one's eyes, and seen with immaculate precision, is the most perfect and most unbelievably beautiful plant (FIGURE 90). It faces to welcome. To the spectator all is mystery, "curious to me," as Whitman would have said. One seems to come upon the scene from nowhere, without memory.

Morning in the Tropics is the mystical re-creation and resurrection of earth and man. A fallen Adam and a suffering world are forgotten. This is the second dawn of human consciousness and the second coming of the cosmic savior: an Easter-Genesis on the Amazon. You, remade, redeemed, twice-born spectator, are the first new man to fix his eyes on that beautiful untouched and unnamed plant. You, self-made New World man, are to be its namer. You, American, are the New Adam. *Morning in the Tropics* was Church's last and perhaps his greatest psychic landscape.

THE CURTAIN DROPS

According to Charles Brownell,[4] the spokesman of the younger painters, *Morning in the Tropics* was a "magnificent drop curtain." The simile is valid if one takes it in a way Brownell never intended. Church's eclipse from the American art scene was imminent, though few suspected it in 1878 when Brownell probably saw this work.

Church was still a major figure in the nation's art life. His *Heart of the Andes* and *Niagara*, it will be recalled, had together sold for twenty-two thousand five hundred dollars in 1876. That same year two of his important paintings, *The Parthenon* and *Chimborazo* had been shown in the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition, and eight more paintings were exhibited in a joint exhibition held at the National Academy of Design and the Metropolitan Museum. The painter himself, incidentally, had been a founder of the Metropolitan Museum, and was soon to be re-elected as a trustee. Two of his paintings were abroad in 1878 representing American art at the Paris International Exposition. Also that year *The Aegean Sea* was greeted as the "fulfillment" of Church's early promise. Still, as the eighties drew near, there were unmistakable symptoms of an attitude that Church had said his all: "Our civilization needed exactly this form of art expression at this period, and the artist appeared." [5] Eloquent as evidence that Church was about to lose his once secure position is Earl Shinn's terse "This is not the place to speak of the wonderful works of Church." The comment appears in *The World's Art*. Shinn's account of the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition. Ironically the celebration of the hundredth anniversary of American independence was exactly the occasion to forget Church. This greatest display of the world's art ever to have been held in the United States was the catalyst of a revolution which within five years had swept Church from the public view. A younger generation, overwhelmed by foreign art, promptly and to a man, if funds allowed, took off for Europe.

Nevertheless a critic like Charles Brownell felt it necessary to help keep the new generation's back turned on Church, who had "done a subtle injury" to the "best interests of American art": "The essence of his art is theatricality." Its chief purpose was to excite wonder: "So far as we know, before Mr. Church no painter had ventured to treat nature in this way." He had laid in wait for her "in order to indulge whatever propensities for pure display she may have." Brownell concluded: "It is probably not unfair to treat [Church's] work as imitative art solely." In short, "it is simply not painting." Well into the twentieth century this continued to be the fashionable judgment on Church. At the same time it had a basis in truth, for as the "truth" of Church's world disin-

tegrated in the late nineteenth century, his art lost touch with the professed realities of a changing world.

The Curtain Drops

The eighties and nineties were, for Church the painter, unproductive years. It has been customary to attribute this to the breakdown of his health. Even as early as the sixties the painter complained from time to time of pains in his wrist. An attack of "inflammatory rheumatism" in 1876 made headline news. In another ten years he was severely crippled. Howard Russell Butler, his companion in Mexico in 1884, said that the painter was so lame that he had to be carried on a litter. Church was still able to joke about himself: "Capital idea dividing the leg with a knee: wouldn't have appreciated it so much if I hadn't been stiffened there." But he could not indefinitely keep an upper lip stiffened. Mrs. Church later expressed concern to her daughter about "father's morbidity." In 1893 the painter wrote to his friend Charles Dudley Warner: "I long for youth and strength again." He hoped in vain to paint big pictures. Health unquestionably balked Church's ambitions as painter after his mid-fifties. His work of these years is technically erratic and there are long stretches of inactivity. Some sketches of the mid-1880's are as superlative as anything he ever did, but those of the next decade are often tragic frustrations.[6]

The painter blamed his ailments on his youthful habits of overwork and excessive coffee drinking. Ironically, he had been warned by one viewer of *The Heart of the Andes* that he would burn himself out. But popular medical knowledge today has it that what used to be called "inflammatory rheumatism" may have a profound psychological basis. Whether this is so or not, Church must have been deeply disturbed by the scientific revolution that had by 1880 all but triumphed in the intellectual world. The clue is in a comment the painter made in 1883: "I wish science would take a holiday for ten years so I could catch up." It was no longer possible for a scientist, let alone a painter, to keep abreast of the vast quantity of new knowledge about the physical world which was almost doubling every ten years. To embrace the universe, to be a cosmic man in 1883 was a hopeless undertaking unless one turned to the occult. (There are hints of this on Olana's bookshelves.) But on top of that there was the fundamental intellectual crisis precipitated by *Origin of Species*. *Morning in the Tropics* was

painted less than twenty years after Darwin published his world-shaking theory of evolution. In that Biblical Amazon, Church painted life after its "kind" existing in a world created for man. The Manifest Destiny proclaimed in *Twilight in the Wilderness* was a faith in a providential plan. Church's art was premised on a nature of Design. Man was made to recognize the sublime and the beautiful in Creation, because the Creation existed for him. To cultivate an awareness of these qualities, which were revelations of the transcendence of the universe, was the way to harmony with the universe. Art was the means to redemption in natural history. The implications of Newton's discoveries had been perfectly worked out. The system was foolproof. So it seemed in 1859 when Church painted *The Heart of the Andes*—the same year Darwin published *Origin of Species*.

Obviously the day would arrive when Church could not ignore what was becoming overwhelmingly clear. There was perhaps no Great Design. A doubter cannot be a prophet. Art had changed by 1880 because man had changed. The revolution in American painting which began in the later 1870's was as much the expression of a changing conception of man's place in nature as it was the reflection of influences from Paris or Munich. With the shift from heroic to unheroic content, from emphasis on idea to emphasis on technique, our painters abandoned the traditional in favor of the contemporary. The new kind of American could not help but find something to his liking in the schools of France and Germany.

It is the mature Winslow Homer, however, and not the art-school tyro who offers the contrast that tells the most of the change in American vision in the later nineteenth century. The less metaphysical Homer, who had begun his career as an artist-reporter, was better prepared than Church to express the apparent realities of the post-Darwinian world. His nature does not exist for man. His trees have no "expression"; they do not pose: they are truly unconscious.

George Inness stands between Church and Homer. His Swedenborgianism is the spiritualist face of the coin that bears on its other side the scientific image of Humboldt. As transcendentalist rationalist Church was more threatened by what had happened than was the Christian mystic Inness. Inness was more dependent upon his own feel-

ings and less on nature's moods. Troubled souls, unsure of their universe in the eighties and nineties, looked to him. Church, who was made for confident optimists, was out of place.

Poor health, living at Olana, and traveling in Mexico kept Church apart from the trends in New York. He maintained his city studio well into the eighties, much of the time subletting it to Heade. But finally Church gave it up. He had only distaste for "the new garish displays" in modern collections. "The tide will turn," he thought. Meanwhile he continued to add to his collection of Old Masters.

There were inevitably changes in his art, changes seemingly not affected by contemporary influences in painting. His sketches of this period suggest still more interest in light. They also document his new enthusiasm for Mexican architecture (FIGURE 78). If there is a concession to passing tastes it is reflected in a de-emphasizing of detail. But even in this, as seen for example in *The Mediterranean Sea* of 1882 (FIGURE 85), the method is not that of Paris, but that of the Old Masters of landscape. This painting of "the past in its pastness," the "past which sleeps," to quote a contemporary description, has been stripped of the heroics of *The Aegean Sea* (FIGURE 89). The wistful Claude Lorrain, rather than the cosmic Turner, is the inspiration for *The Mediterranean Sea.* It is one of Church's most unambitious comments on the world and as such is evidence of the painter's growing sense of doubt.

In the winter of 1890–1891, enjoying his newly built studio at Olana, Church had four paintings going at once. He wrote a friend that he was reassessing his art and had made some improvement. He regarded an iceberg picture painted that season as "the best I ever painted and the truest." There is a world of difference between this *Iceberg* (FIGURE 86) and the famous *Icebergs* painted thirty years before. The later picture is only a fraction the size of the earlier, original *Icebergs;* it measures twenty by thirty inches, while the now lost canvas of the original *Icebergs* (of which we reproduce the chromolithograph in PLATE VII) measured somewhere between five to six feet by eight to ten feet. Church was seldom more charming than in this late painting. Gone is the compulsive striving to say the last word about his subject, the passion to know and master the universe. The later painting seems, rather, the pensive memory of an experience. We no longer imagine the

painter and his companion racing back and forth across the deck and climbing the shrouds "as if to get a better view." The physically inactive man of sixty-five seems to be content to stand still and not to say, but only to suggest all. He was no longer moving forward "with the momentum of mankind," impelled by a national enthusiasm of the hour. *The Iceberg* of 1891 is the lonely confrontation of a lonely man who sees himself on that ship of yesteryear sailing for safety from a strangely drifting, isolated and indifferent white creature of the elements. No longer does the painting "have an influence," "excite feelings," "preach a message." Instead of "restlessness" and "exhilaration" and "wild ungovernableness," there is quiet beauty and mystery. There is no world prophecy here but instead the introspection of a man cut off from his time, yet somehow still believing in himself.

Four years later, in 1895, a *Mount Katahdin* was painted in the same spirit. It is Church's last dated canvas.[7] A few pencil sketches of Mexico were drawn painfully in 1897. They tell us a sad story that we can read today from a photograph at Olana. It shows the painter, aged beyond his years and bowed in body, grasping a balcony railing with swollen hands as he looks down upon a street in Morelia, Mexico, his favorite winter haunt south of the border. By the summer of 1899 Church had lost his wife, and less than a year later, upon his return to New York from Mexico, he was himself too feeble to continue on to Olana. Within a few days, less than a month from his seventy-fourth birthday, on Saturday, April 7, 1900, he died at the Park Avenue apartment of his late friend and patron, William H. Osborn. The following Tuesday the painter was buried beside his wife in Spring Grove Cemetery in Hartford, "where lie the remains of many of his blood."

"OUR IDOLS WILL COME BACK"

"Our Idols Will Come Back"

Church saw and felt the divinity of both worlds. (Charles Dudley Warner, Memorial Exhibition Catalogue, 1900)

Church saw nature through a cloud of brick dust, through green gauze window screens, through blue glass pickle jars, through tissue paper. (*International Studio*, September, 1900)

"*Our Idols Will Come Back*"

Church's obituaries and the reviews of his memorial exhibition are a revealing set of documents on the painter from the perspective of the year 1900. He was already a nonentity to the young: "Any painter under 30, will not know who he is or will confuse him with Frederick S. Church." [8] But the older generation, those who had lived through "the sorrow" of the war, remembered Church—and Bierstadt too, who was to live for two more years—with gratitude: "They gave us hope and inspiration." Church had served his country well with his brush, but American art had progressed far since his day; he was a painter of "great talent," whose art had gone "completely out of fashion." As a gesture of respect the Metropolitan Museum held a memorial exhibition in the summer of 1900 consisting of some fourteen important works. For the generation which had only heard of the painter secondhand, these pictures were unrecognized enigmas: "Where is the merit that was Church's?" Illustrations of natural history were out of place in a picture gallery, these "vistas of the earth's anatomy and glimpses of the stone age man" belonged in a "traveling show." "Literary or didactic interest does not compensate for the lack of noble line and succulent color." Church's "*ne plus ultra* of color was the limit of any pure pigment on his palette." In condescendingly recommending these paintings to students of geography and ethnology, the callow were unwittingly betraying their scorn for the previous generation's "narrow profundity." "Chrome yellow" and "emerald green" leaves, condemned in 1900, had belonged in 1859 to the palette of transcendence; these were religiously pure hues. In 1900 "the absence of vibration" in the "forced dark" shadows of *Twilight in the Wilderness* (PLATE VI) was a "clear indictment" against the painter. In 1860 they had to be almost exaggeratedly dark in order to imply the mystery of an unknown landscape; and vibration in these shadows would have destroyed the imperative stillness of the chrysalis moment in cosmic time. In 1900 the mist in *Rainy Season in the Tropics* (PLATE IV) was ridiculed as "steam from a tea-kettle." In 1866 the mist suggested the whirling vapors of the cooling earth. In 1900 *Niagara's* color key was "too sombre" (PLATES I, II). How else in 1857 to convey the grandeur of association evoked by the spectacle? Also to the viewer of 1900 this painting lacked "adequate largeness" in the treatment of "structural form," and wanted the

"big sweeps of color" demanded by art. But in 1857 art came second and nature came first. How else could the painter have made Niagara live on canvas? The dead painter would have had an answer to each post-mortem diagnosis.

"Our Idols Will Come Back"

The Heart of the Andes, which had been a "rage" in 1859, meant nothing in 1900. There was but one painting of the fourteen exhibited that almost gained approval. Although *Niagara* had its faults, "it was not entirely to be laughed at." The same complacent critic invoked the name of the late George Inness. The landscapes of Church's deceased rival were still living as art. The once "living" landscapes of Church had passed on into artistic purgatory. Despite the bleak prospect for these landscapes in 1900, there was at least one loyal admirer who believed that Mr. Church's paintings would survive the ordeal. In Mrs. M. E. W. Sherwood's reminiscences of the painter, which appeared in the *New York Times* shortly after his death, one sentence stands out as prophetic: "If only we hold on to our idols, they will come back."

CHAPTER VIII

"The Center of the World"

I want to secure every rood of ground that I shall ever require to make my farm perfect.

About an hour this side of Albany is the Center of the World—I own it. (Frederic Church to Erastus Palmer, October 22, 1867, and July 7, 1869)

ABOUT a hundred and twenty-five miles up the Hudson River from the city of New York, on a rise five hundred feet above the water and looking off some ten miles distant to the main range of the Catskills, there stands today one of the most extraordinary monuments of later nineteenth century American culture. It is extraordinary in that it is at once the typification of an America that is no more and the absolutely unique creation of one personality. Since about 1880 this remarkable creation of an era's spirit has been known as "Olana." Olana, we read in an 1890 Sunday feature in the *Boston Herald*, is the old Latin name of a place in Persia.[1] The name was chosen by Mrs. Church because it bore a "resemblance in situation" to this fabulous entity which her husband was creating on Mount Merino. It may also be that this Latin name was a corruption of the Arabic "Al'ana," which means "our place on high."

That Frederic Church should combine Orient and altitude is not surprising. The mountain, after all, was for him an elemental symbol of the earth and of man's spirit. Church had painted the Andes as expressions of "human aspiration." And he and Winthrop standing on Katahdin's brow found themselves taking in all Maine: "Not that it makes a Maine less but that it makes a man more." It required will to scale a lofty height, but it was the way to earth-knowledge and therefore earth-mastery. The spectator before *The Heart of the Andes*, Winthrop wrote, became both "demigod" and "Olympian." The edifice on the mountain, the Mosque of Omar in *Jerusalem*, was the meeting point of heaven and earth. Church, like Moses, sought his revelations from on high.

"Persian, adapted to the occident," Church described the style of his house. This is fitting for the man who wrote from Rome that Syria was the only country in the Old World to which he cared to return;

it was there that he had had his best taste of the Orient. Photographs of Persians and things Persian, objects from any point east of Constantinople, books on Islamic architecture and travels in the Holy Land, Arabic dictionaries, Bedouin gowns and guns, and "three white Bagdad donkeys from Beyrout" helped to keep the other side of the world vitally present at Olana. Olana was the meeting of East and West, one of America's myths composed in three dimensions. Whitman, less well supplied with dollars and not trained as plastic artist, strove to realize the same ideal with words. Each, in his own way, sought his passage to India. Indeed, Olana stands above the very spot where Henry Hudson gave up his quest for a real passage. In symbolic terms Church fulfilled the navigator's urge.

"The Center of the World"

Olana, "our place on high," Church's "center of the world," was conceived as an American synthesis of culture and nature. Few sites have been better suited to the realization of this ideal. By the spring of 1860 Church had purchased a large portion of the south slope of Mount Merino.[2] He had good reason then to be buying property, for within a matter of weeks he was to marry Isabella Carnes,[3] a cousin of his friends the deForests, who, it will be recalled, happened to be visiting New York during the debut of *The Heart of the Andes*. As of September 1860, the couple had moved into a newly erected "Bridal Cottage," a rather modest Downing cottage which is still standing. Obviously this was only a way-station, for by 1867 Church had acquired the summit where he was to build the great house. A plan of the estate drawn by his son Frederic Joseph in 1886 indicates the present extent of the property (FIGURE 92). The self-sufficiency of a paradise is implied in the combination of farmed and scenically landscaped areas. On the farm he raised, as one would expect in Columbia County, apples, pears, peaches, and plums, and as one would expect of Frederic Church, some exotic plants. One of these was a kind of corn imported from Mexico which grew sixteen feet high.

As landscape painter Church was well prepared to make the most of the possibilities of Olana's topography. During his late years when he was often unable to paint, he seems to have found the "laying out" of views a major source of satisfaction:

I have made about one and three-quarters miles of road this season, opening entirely new and beautiful views—I can make more and better landscapes in this way than by tampering with canvas and paint in the Studio.[4]

Church built seven and a half miles of road on the property. A spring at the foot of the hill made it possible for him to create an artificial lake that covers some fifteen of Olana's three hundred and twenty-seven acres. These statistics, and the mere dots that indicate the buildings on the plan of the estate (FIGURE 92), should give one a fair picture of the extent of the land which the painter developed. FIGURE 111, a view toward the main house from a promontory on the west side of the lake, conveys an idea of the scope of the property. Old photographs of about 1890 indicate that there were trees all along the edge of the lake and more scattered singly or in clumps all the way up the hill. From the tower, one would have looked at the lake over a woods, an effect Church painted in *The Heart of the Andes* (FIGURE 29). The clearing away early in this century of most of these plantings has meant a reduction in the number of features which had given scale and animation to the prospect between house and lake. This body of water serves several visual purposes. For the south panorama from the house, it offers a much needed spot of light in an otherwise wooded area (FIGURE 109). Within the woods, of course, it provides a foreground to open views like the one illustrated in FIGURE 111. Also, this lake balances the bright and wide expanse of the Hudson which one sees in FIGURE 116 and in *Winter Scene, Olana* (PLATE V). The lake is like a stepping stone cut to the size of a geological landscape: it helps the eye to measure distances and heights.

The water's edge and the roads which wind about the grounds are appropriately serpentined to bring out the natural grace of the topography. Church, whose habit it was to ride about his estate in a carriage, must have relished the truly endless variety of vignettes and vistas which he had engineered. One of these is a road along the east shore of the lake which centers its view directly on the house. Another is an exciting and rapidly changing perspective of the mansion seen through the woods from a road that passes beneath the west wing (FIGURE 109). Imagining the precipitousness of the terrain, one can guess,

as he studies the estate plan (FIGURE 92) the richness of visual incident: surprises and discoveries, concealments and revelations; the foreground engages the eye one moment, the distance the next; one view is close and intimate, another, open and vast. The action which Church suggests in his paintings is realized at Olana in three dimensions.

A New House Placed "Permanently and Suitably"

A NEW HOUSE PLACED "PERMANENTLY AND SUITABLY"

He has spent several hundred dollars on some (for the most part) worthless old pictures which cover the walls of his studio. He says he bought them to furnish a room in his new house—a room which he intends to fit up in the fashion of two or three hundred years ago. (Sanford Gifford, "European Letters," Rome, October 19, 1868)

When I asked Mr. Church if he was himself the architect he replied, "Yes, I can say, as the good woman did about her mock turtle soup, 'I made it out of my own head.'" (*Boston Herald*, September 7, 1890)

The house, the dwelling, is the culminating "improvement" of the site. Church put much thought and money into it. At Olana there is a carefully rendered watercolor elevation with accompanying plans which bears the inscription: "Elevation of Country House for F. E. Church, Esqr." It is signed "R. M. Hunt." The project reflects the fashionable Richard Morris Hunt's taste for the French chateau. According to this drawing, Hunt proposed a combination of large, unquadrangular stones for the walls and brick trim for the openings, with a mansard roof for the mass of the house. The logic of Olana's history would date this design probably to about the year 1867. Once Church arrived in the Near East he must have abandoned any such unoriental ideas as those outlined by the French-trained Hunt. The painter was enchanted by the architecture of Islam. Within a year of his return from the Old World a wholly new set of plans for the house had been worked out by the firm of Vaux and Withers. Calvert Vaux was then, in 1870, one of America's most highly regarded architects. He had come to New York from England to be the junior partner of Andrew Jackson Downing who, until his untimely death in 1852, was the leading landscape architect and designer of rural residences in the United States. Vaux carried

A New House Placed "Permanently and Suitably"

on in the Downing vernacular. By the time Church asked him to work up plans for the villa which was to become known as Olana, Vaux had become well known as the author of *Villas and Cottages* (1857) and the architect of the principal structures in Central Park. In his book Vaux had included some houses in the oriental manner. He was clearly more favorably disposed to exotic styles than was Hunt, and this may be the simple explanation for Church's having turned to him in 1870.

Actually Vaux's role was that of consulting rather than practicing architect. A perspective drawing which is inscribed "by architect 2nd sketch" is illustrated in FIGURE 96. This design from Vaux's office corresponds more or less closely with some of the plates in *Villas and Cottages*. But the evidence of some three hundred architectural studies which are still at Olana confirms the painter's claim that he was the designer. All but a score or two of these drawings are in Church's hand. Samples of his architectural sketches are reproduced in FIGURES 97 and 98. Vaux's most significant contribution may have been the planning of the original portion of the house. Evolving stages of the floor plans, stamped with the firm's name, graphically suggest the demands made of this professional architect by a strong-willed amateur. Indeed, one of the last amendments of the plan is penciled in the painter's style of draughtsmanship; the practical-minded Frederic Church rearranged and enlarged the entire service area to facilitate convenience and circulation.

Church's confidence in his ability as house designer was such that in 1888–1889 he added the studio wing to the west of the main block without going to a "name" architect. The painter obviously took great pleasure in determining all of the details of the visual environment which were within man's control. Perhaps one of his major difficulties was simply choosing between the alternatives which he imagined. He considered at least a dozen designs for the banister of the main stair, the drawing reproduced in FIGURE 97 resembles the final solution. There are a dozen or so studies for the slate patterns and terminal filigree and finials of the tower roof (FIGURE 98).[5] The original structure was near enough completion by 1872 for Church to have already moved into it with his wife and three children,[6] but he was still, in the next decade, incorporating new decorative features into the fabric of

the house. One of these was a Persian-tiled fireplace for the master bedroom which bears an Arabic inscription, the date of which can be translated into 1881 or 1882. In a sense the house was perhaps never "complete," for as late as the nineties, Church inserted bookshelves in the corners of the so-called "court" hall (FIGURE 99). The painter never stopped moving and rearranging the objects that functioned so deliberately in the visual and thematic effects which he contrived. The mass of documentary material in the form of old photographs, bills, checks, contracts, letters, and so on, as well as the wealth of architectural studies, will make it possible some day to trace Olana's history in detail. But Olana's significance can be adequately grasped without having to look much beyond the evidence that is in plain sight.

A New House Placed "Permanently and Suitably"

Architecturally, the house is a fusion of the prevailing styles of the day (FIGURES 93, 94), something one would expect of a man who lived in the spirit of the hour. In the pointed arches, the block-like massing, the steep-pitched roof of the tower, and the "constructional" polychromy of the original house, one can make out the connections with Gothic Revival, Italian Villa, French Mansard, and Ruskinian Venetian stylistic idioms. On the other hand, the studio wing (to the left in FIGURE 94) in its delicacy and lightness brings to mind the later Shingle Style. The entire 1870–1872 structure is stylistically individualized with Church's "personal Persian," which comes off with amazing success. The 1888–1889 addition is less strongly spiced with Persian condiments. Spain's Alhambra and some vaguely Hindu motifs executed in the spirit of late nineteenth century ferryboat dock buildings give this wing a more polyglot flavor.

Between the early seventies and the late eighties Church had ceased to paint with the authority of the prophet. Between these dates, one might also say, he had ceased to design with that same authority. The later portion of the house is not as dramatically cogent as the earlier portion. The original building functions in a variety of expressive roles. Seen from the east (FIGURE 93), its large prismatic simplicity integrates the house with the distant, imposing range of the Catskills (FIGURE 115). Church may well have had at the back of his mind the image of *The Parthenon*, which he was painting while he was building his Hudson acropolis. Within the house's sharp-edged, taut planes, which sug-

A New House Placed "Permanently and Suitably"

gest the careful geometric composing of Church's paintings, there is an over-all vitality of surface texture, effected in brick, stone, and slate. The slates suggest a light shell-like thinness which characterizes their function as a skin. The revealed or implied thickness of the stones (quarried on the property) and bricks connotes their function as weight-bearing elements. Nature's matter is here interpreted in terms of cause and effect, just as it was in *Cotopaxi* or *Niagara*. Thus this edifice is as living and real as one of Church's own paintings. The interrelationships of masses, subordinate masses, and surface patterns are conceived according to principles which Church applied to the depiction of landscape. The predominantly horizontal proportions of the dining room picture gallery block of the east façade express the repose of the lawn before it. The emphatically vertical proportions of the tower block, and the accelerating upward movement and increasing openness which mark each progression in its elevation express in formal terms the power of the vast rising sweep of the south slope (FIGURES 94, 111). Power and repose are balanced at Olana as they are balanced in Church's paintings. In this actual Hudson River scene the house enacts man's interpretation of nature; the house gestures the artist's responses to the landscape, as do his pictured trees, skies, and mountains. The dramatic way in which the house is conceived is another argument in favor of Church's authorship of its design.

Illustrations of the interior of Olana can suggest the sampling of the world's culture with which the painter surrounded himself. The Near East is a favored corner of civilization, but each of the continents is adequately represented, with the exception of Africa south of the Nile. Chinese silk panels, Japanese vases, Greek and Etruscan pottery, Pre-Columbian sculpture and ceramics (half of it authentic, half of it made for tourists) suggest the character of this inventory of the remote in time and place. Hindu India runs a close second to Islam in the count of objects and influences in decoration. There is a considerable amount of wood-carving in the Indian manner which appears to be the work of Mrs. Church's cousin, Lockwood deForest.[7] The stencil patterns on some of the doors have been described as "Indo-Persian." One of these designs (FIGURE 106) was taken almost line for line from a copy of Bourguin's *Les Arts Arabes*, which is still at Olana. Ancient Assyria is

the source of at least one ornamental motif—the panels which flank the foot of the stairs leading off the court hall (PLATE VIII). The shapes and colors of the geology of Biblical lands which Church painted in *El Khasné*, *Petra*, are echoed in the decorative scheme of the parlor (FIGURE 105).

A New House Placed "Permanently and Suitably"

The term "court" for the large—and for that date quite advanced—cruciform living hall is Church's own. With its straight-edged arches and stylized floral motifs in the spandrels, this space does indeed suggest the interior of a Persian palace. Of course, in the prototypes this would have been an open courtyard, but in adapting the East to the West, Church closed the space by putting a bedroom floor above. The grand and imposing dining room picture gallery is perhaps the most Islamic of Olana's carefully shaped rooms (FIGURE 102). Each spatial entity of this house has its own peculiar character, but there is no important room which does not in some way evoke the Orient.

Western civilization, however, was not ignored at Olana. For every table, chair, or bed from Persia or China or India there is something styled according to Duncan Phyfe or Chippendale or Sheraton. For every Mexican Indian sculpture there are several by Church's friend Erastus Palmer. Anglo-America is also represented on the walls, which have been hung with scores of Church's own paintings, along with paintings by Allston, Cole, Heade, and Doughty, to list some of the familiar names. Spanish America is sampled in several provincial Mexican *ex votos* and a splendid, nearly seven-foot-high canvas of a nun. Romney seems to be the author of a picture of *Love and Death* which shares attention in the dining room with some thirty Old Masters (FIGURE 102). Among these are to be counted authentic works by Cigoli, Magnasco, and Monsù Desiderio. Salvator Rosa may well have painted one of the three canvases the frames of which have been labeled with his name.[8] In another room, the studio, a fine David Vinckeboons has been hung as a pendant to Church's *Christian on the Borders of the Valley of the Shadow of Death.*

The butterfly and the exotic bird are the two most oft-repeated motifs at Olana. The butterfly, the symbol of regeneration, appears in a fine eighteenth century Spanish still life, on Chinese and Japanese vases and textiles, on an Aztec ceremonial vessel, on a mirror frame of uncer-

tain provenance, and on the original plate for Audubon's Whippoorwill. About the house are also shadow boxes and glass domes which display impaled butterflies within. Church was drawn to their exquisite delicacy as he was drawn to the exquisite delicacy of a Jamaican tree fern (FIGURES 39, 41). At Olana rare and gorgeous birds are reproduced in bronze, porcelain, and on cloth. In the stairwell, incorporated into a still life arrangement of Persian armor, are two stuffed quetzals which cling to tropical branches (PLATE VIII). When one steps close to these bright-hued, sacred creatures, he is surprised to find mounted with them an opalescent-winged locust.

Olana has the same infinity of incident which Church painted in *The Heart of the Andes* and *Niagara*. In his house the ever-marveling painter surrounded himself with no end of possible discoveries. Through objects and architecture he was expressing "the world's worth." Church's aim was to make his home alive visually and symbolically. The visitor is aware of this at every turn. Upon entering the vestibule, one senses straightaway that he is present in a setting for real, ideal experience. Flanking his line of vision within the vestibule are mirrors which offer glimpses into a reception room on the left and a dining room picture gallery on the right (see plan, FIGURE 95). Directly before the visitor is a long, narrow, telescopic axis which sweeps through the full length of the house, and at the far end a plate-glass window opens onto a distant landscape (FIGURE 99). It is an exhilarating vista. One feels himself on top of the world. He knows immediately that the whole south side of the interior is exposed in a variety of ways to the vastness of the out-of-doors.

The person standing in the vestibule sees on the walls which face him the statuette of a female Christian saint standing in a carved-wood Buddha niche, and opposite this a mirror reflecting a sculpture. The former is a cultural incident which enunciates Olana's fundamental symbolic theme: America is the meeting of East and West. The latter is a visual incident which informs the arriving visitor that the light of nature is Olana's principal actor. The sculpture reflected in the mirror is Palmer's *Imogen*, a bronze bust. As one steps a few paces further into the house he loses sight of this piece of sculpture, only in another moment to behold it sharply silhouetted against a large plate-glass win-

dow. If one proceeds a yard or two more, he views *Imogen* with highlighted reflections (FIGURE 103). Then, when the spectator stands directly in front of it, the bust is seen in a soft modeling light. At Olana, eye and mind are constantly kept alert.

A New House Placed "Permanently and Suitably"

Effects equivalent to those in Church's paintings are encountered everywhere. A table supporting two glass vessels suggests a tropical plant transformed into artifact (FIGURE 104). Church's delight in painting translucent leaves is repeated in these light-catching objects (FIGURE 79). The sudden change of movement in the water which Church painted in *Niagara* is paralleled in the sudden change of movement in the stencil-patterned design of a window (PLATE II and FIGURE 107). The painter had a special liking for pieces of stone and wood which displayed interesting passages of natural history that he might himself have translated into oil; it requires little effort to imagine the wavy lines of a burl table-top as brushstrokes drawn by Church (FIGURE 100).

The dining room picture gallery is a very good example of the workings of this painter-architect-decorator's mind. A photograph of about 1890 is particularly suggestive (FIGURE 102). For one thing, the posing and gesturing figures in these Old Masters remind us of Church's posing and gesturing landscape characters. Indeed, the trees which he planted at strategic points about the grounds were chosen because of their peculiar expressiveness (FIGURE 58). Church's eighteenth century English prototype, the wealthy country gentleman, would have planted a copy of an antique sculpture instead of a posturing birch. Church has arranged the furniture in the picture gallery as a kind of formal episode: chairs, tables, sofas, and chests of several styles, by the very differences of character, call attention to one another. A seventeenth century *cassone* and an Italian Victorian chair combine the sublime and the picturesque. These pieces contrast with the polygonal form and delicacy of scale of the Turkish taboret. A Duncan Phyfe sofa combines dignity and beauty. Thonet chairs from Vienna, harbingers of Art Nouveau, approach pure grace. The time-tested triad of the sublime, the beautiful, and the picturesque shapes Church's conceptions in this room as indeed this triad shaped his conceptions in the tropics and the wilderness. Another effect in the dining room which echoes his paintings is focused on the north wall. Here Church contrived to re-

deem the late afternoon gloom of this underlit area with a brass-fronted, exuberantly shaped fireplace (FIGURE 101), which catches the light shafts coming across the house from windows in the south façade. Its almost iridescent brightness is a large note of cheer against somber surroundings. This effect brings to mind the dramatic contrast of the rainbow and the storm in *Niagara* (FIGURE 44).

The climax of Olana's interior, however, is reserved for the court hall. Stepping into this area from the entrance vestibule, the visitor is overwhelmed with a surprise which greets him like a revelation. To the left, or south, through an enormous plate-glass window set at the back of a recessed porch, one suddenly comes upon a great vista of the Hudson Valley. *Winter Scene, Olana* (PLATE V) shows the view in cloudy winter weather. On a crisp clear day, ridges of mountains break the horizon some sixty miles away. It is the view of expansionist America, an earthscape. Cool daylight pours into the court hall to bring nature's mood of the moment inside and also to meet another kind of light which is filtered into the stairway from the opposite side of the house (PLATE VIII). The glass in the stencil-patterned window on the stair landing is of an amber hue that helps to take the chill from the north light and occasions a dramatic interaction of warm and cool light. The bold juxtaposition of red and blue in *Cotopaxi* is a comparable visual event (PLATE III).

The exotic stairwell, adorned with cultural trophies, is itself a striking foil to the spectacular vast view which faces it. In this deep and high transition to the second floor, Church has used the lines provided by rugs and spears to coax the eye back and up. The still life of armor (and dead life of birds and locust) fills the well as a visual nexus, while it states in formal terms the upward movement of the stairs that wrap around it. Only an experienced artist could have organized this complex episode of architecture, artifact, and nature. Olana's stairwell is a compendium of exotica paralleling the compendium of flora in *The Heart of the Andes* (FIGURE 30).

Through windows and from loggias and decks Church might forget his collector's world as he turned his attention solely to nature's life. From his bedroom on an autumn day of silvery haze he could look down upon his sequestered lake and over the undulating hills beyond to

a luminous nothingness (FIGURE 109); at such an hour he must have felt himself the inhabitant of some floating celestial island. Through another window of this same room he could sense the earth's turn as he watched the sun recede over the Catskills (FIGURE 110). The porch seen to the right in this last-cited illustration was attached to a glazed observation pavilion perched on top of his studio. This pavilion was Olana's natural sanctum, the one spot within the house devoid of reminders of human history. There the painter could lose himself in wonder before the Eternal Genesis of the Cosmos (FIGURES 112–116). He could remain engaged with the life forces of the universe, watching the unending drama of natural history. In this religious box the painter found himself living in his own religious paintings.

A New House Placed "Permanently and Suitably"

Olana was indeed religion, a way of life. It was the sanctuary of Church's mythology, a perfect Eden at the center of the world. It is as much a mirror of Church's cosmos as Saint-Denis was a mirror of the cosmos of the Abbot Suger. Olana is the monument of Emerson's, Thoreau's, and Whitman's America, realized with Church's own personal wealth and artistic flair. It is the cathedral-temple-house of an archetypal New World man.

CONCLUSION

He came of a good artistic pedigree though the line has ended just now and has no successors. Claude learned from Poussin, and Turner, with a century between, learned from Poussin, and Thomas Cole learned from Turner and Frederick Edwin Church learned from Thomas Cole, and that was the end. (*The Philadelphia Press*, April 10, 1900)

OF all the American painters of the nineteenth century, Frederic Church has been the one least fairly judged by posterity. We are emerging from a period in which the standards of taste and art history together conspired to condemn his art. Church was at once a most American painter and a most dated painter. In a land of discontinuity between generations, the man who commits himself wholeheartedly to the spirit of his own age must realize that he risks rejection in the next.

Church's brush with oblivion began when Brownell saw *Morning in the Tropics* as nothing more than a "magnificent drop-curtain." For the generation of 1880 the Grand Tradition was dead. The new young artists of America had no more respect for Church than David's pupils ninety years before had had for Watteau—they threw crumbs at *The Embarkation for the Isle of Cythera*. Like Watteau's painting, *Morning in the Tropics* was the picture of a vanished mythology. In each case the painter has had to become history in order once again to be appreciated.

There was a period in this century when the best thing one could say in Church's behalf was that his sketches anticipated Impressionism. We may still enjoy his sketches in a way that we cannot enjoy his paintings, but we can do so even if they are not premonitions of Monet. It is not necessary that a painter predict the future of art to claim our attention. For a long time Church's combination of classical composition and photographic vision was viewed as something beneath originality and therefore unworthy of our serious regard. He was not a revolutionary artist. "Modern art" came into being unmindful of Mr. Church. Church's claim on our interest is of a less fundamentally aesthetic order. He adapted his Old World inheritance to serve the deepest psychic needs of the New World man. He was never concerned with pure form. Art with him was a means to a non-artistic end. His involvement

with ideas tied him to the methods of the Renaissance. The ideas themselves linked him with the medieval past.

His iconology, in its synthesis of realistic vision and symbolic object, points to Jan van Eyck as a remote spiritual ancestor, while the *mise en scène* of his ideas, or rather beliefs, ultimately refers to Raphael. Puritanism could not express itself without being Gothic. Rationalism could not express itself without being Classical. No American painter fused these dualities of our cultural heritage as perfectly as did Frederic Church. By doing so he created the cosmic history painting, the drama-icon. He made the picture function as a unique means of self-realization for a new kind of man—a man as concerned to discover his identity in a New World as his ancestor had been to secure his salvation in a sinful world. Church's canvases and his Olana are the *ex votos* and ritual accessories of a compulsive optimist. Calvinist anxiety is the foundation of Church's art. It is only sensuous insofar as God approved. As long as he used stone and brick or brush and pencil to define the divine truth in color and form, Church was safe among the Elect. For the appeal to the senses at Olana or in the painting is secondary to the thought expressed. To Church the work of art was basically an abstraction. Hence, his painted visions were almost hieratic presences before the eyes of his fellow-cosmic-communicants in the glorious hours of Manifest Destiny. His pictures were the projections of Transcendentalist hopes. They had "an influence" on the making of America. Few of his compatriots can match the achievement. It was an achievement which required a high order of artistic ability.

If Frederic Edwin Church deserves recognition for what he did, rather than condemnation for what he did not do, then he is surely one of the great painters of this great nation.

CHRONOLOGY

1826: Born May 4, Hartford, Connecticut.

1844–1846: Studies with Thomas Cole at Catskill, N.Y. Sketches in Catskills, vicinity of Hartford, and in the Berkshires. Winters at home in Hartford. Paints a *Deluge*, *Moses Viewing the Promised Land*, and *The Hooker Party on its Journey through the Wilderness* (1846). Exhibits two Catskill landscapes at the National Academy of Design in 1845, his first showing there.

1847–1849: Sketches in the Berkshires, the Catskills and western New York, Connecticut, and the Green Mountains. Establishes studio in the American Art Union Building, New York City, and begins selling paintings to that organization. Elected Associate (1848) and then Member (1849) of the National Academy of Design. Paints *Christian on the Borders of the Valley of the Shadow of Death* (c. 1847), *The River of the Waters of Life* (c. 1848). *The Plague of Darkness* (c. 1849), *West Rock, New Haven* (1849), and *Memorial to Cole* (c. 1849).

1850–1852: Sketches in the Catskills and the Green and White Mountains, in Maine at Mount Desert Island and in the Katahdin region, and on Grand Manan Island in the Bay of Fundy. Trip (1851) to Virginia, Kentucky, and the upper Mississippi River. Paints *Twilight* (1850), *Beacon off Mount Desert Island* (1850), *The Deluge* (c. 1851), and *New England Scenery* (1851).

1853–1857: Two trips to South America, 1853 and 1857. Sketches in Maine in the Katahdin region and at Mount Desert Island, and in 1856 at Niagara Falls. Paints *The Cordilleras: Sunrise* (1855), *The Andes of Ecuador* (1855), *Sunset* (1856), and *Niagara* (1857).

1858–1860: Trip (1859) along the coast of Newfoundland and Labrador. Sketches for last time (1860) at Mount Desert Island, Maine. Paints *The Heart of the Andes* (1859), and *Twilight in the Wilderness* (1860). Begins buying property at Hudson, N. Y., and marries, June 14, 1860. Establishes studio in Studio Building on Tenth Street, New York City (1858).

1861–1864: Paints *The Icebergs (The North)* (1861), *Our Banner in the Sky* (1861), *Under Niagara* (1862), *Cotopaxi* (1862), *Storm at Mount Desert* (1863), *Chimborazo* (1864). Sketches in the Green Mountains (1863).

CHRONOLOGY

1865: Paints *Mount Desert* and *The Aurora Borealis*. His first two children die of diphtheria in March. Trip to Jamaica. Sketches in Vermont. *The Aurora Borealis*, *Cotopaxi*, and *Chimborazo* are shown in London.

1866–1867: Paints *Rainy Season in the Tropics* (1866), *The Vale of St. Thomas, Jamaica* (1867) and *Niagara from the American Side* (1867). *Niagara* is awarded medal at Paris International Exposition.

1867–1869: Sails for France November 1867. In next year and a half visits London, Paris, Beirut, Jerusalem, Petra, Damascus, Baalbek, Constantinople, the Black Sea, Vienna, the Bavarian and Swiss Alps, Florence, Rome, Pompeii, Naples, Paestum, and Athens. Returns to New York June 28, 1869.

1869–1872: Paints *Damascus* (1869, destroyed), *Jerusalem* (1870), and *The Parthenon* (1871). Consulting the architect Calvert Vaux, designs and builds the main house at Olana.

1873–1875: Paints *South American Landscape* (1873), *Syria by the Sea* (1873), *El Khasné, Petra* (1874) and *The Valley of the Santa Ysabel* (1875). Sketches in Vermont.

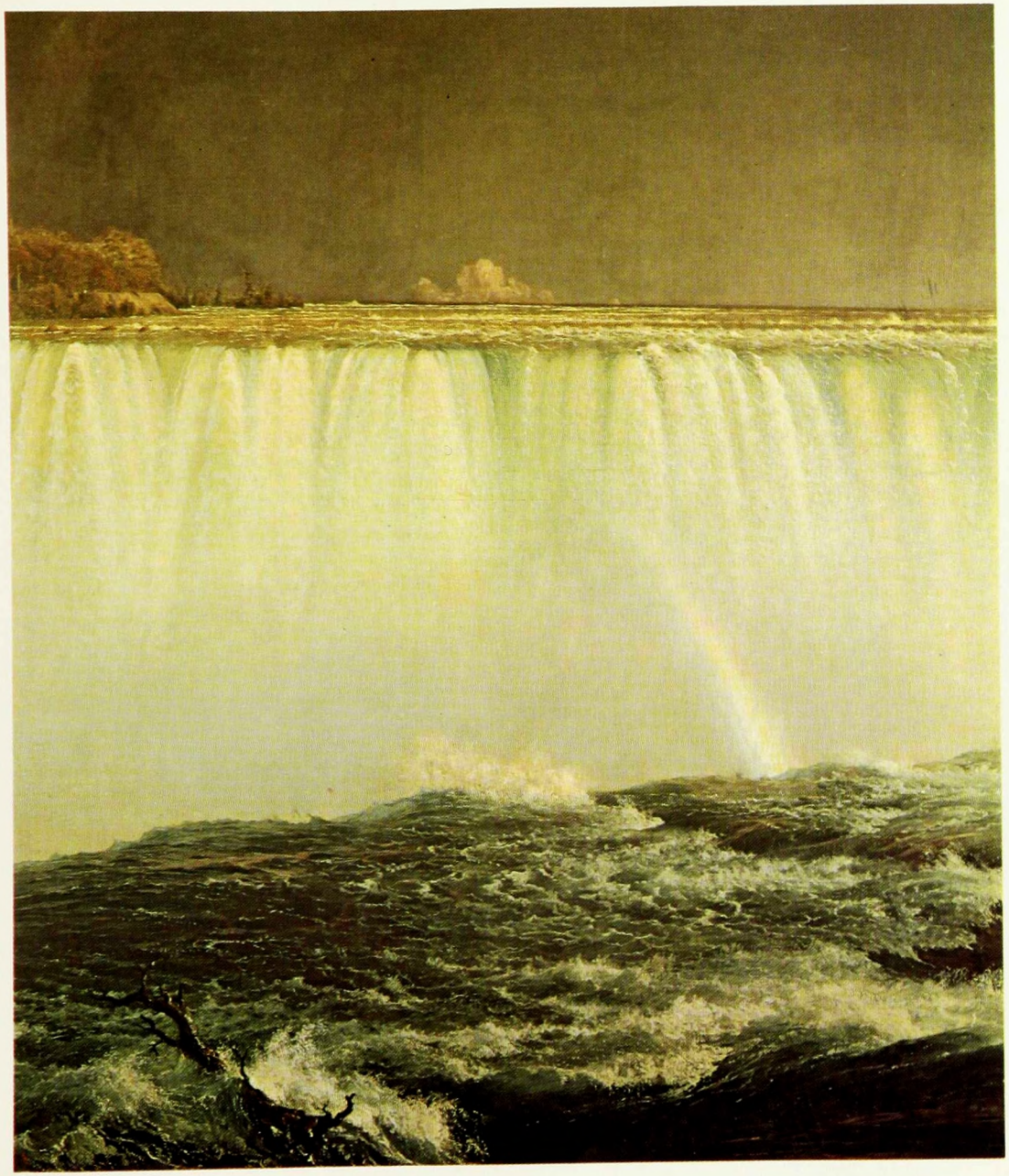
1876: The Parthenon and *Chimborazo* exhibited at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition. *Niagara* is bought by W. W. Corcoran for $12,500.

1876–1882: Sketches in Maine in the Katahdin region, and constructs a permanent camp on Lake Millinocket. In 1880 also sketches at Lake George and in North Carolina. Paints *Morning in the Tropics* (1877), *The Aegean Sea* (c. 1877–1878), *The Monastery of Our Lady of the Snows* (1879), and *The Mediterranean Sea* (1882). *Morning in the Tropics* and *The Parthenon* are exhibited at the Paris International Exposition, 1878. At Metropolitan Museum loan exhibition Church exhibits for the last time in New York City.

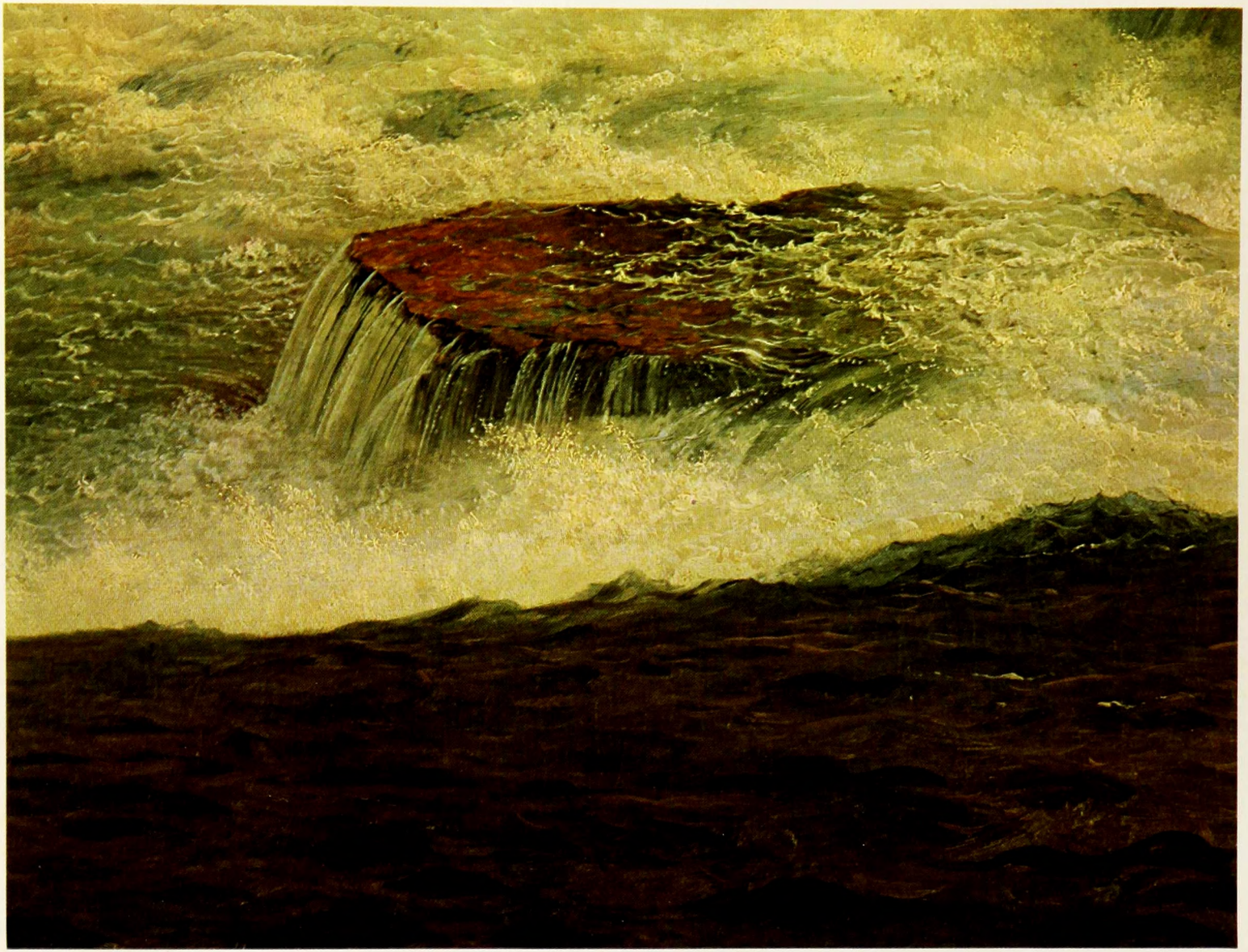
1883–1900: Paints *The Iceberg* (1891) and *View of Mount Katahdin* (1895). Illness diagnosed as "inflammatory rheumatism" makes it increasingly difficult for Church to paint. Spends summers at Olana and most winters in Mexico. Constantly making improvements on his property and adds "Studio" wing to house in 1888–1889. Wife dies, May 12, 1899.

1900: Dies April 7, New York City, after winter in Mexico. Leaves three surviving sons and a daughter. Buried in Hartford, Connecticut. May 28–October 15 a memorial exhibition of Church's paintings is held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The Illustrations



I. *Niagara*, 1875 (detail).
The Corcoran Gallery of Art,
Washington, D.C.



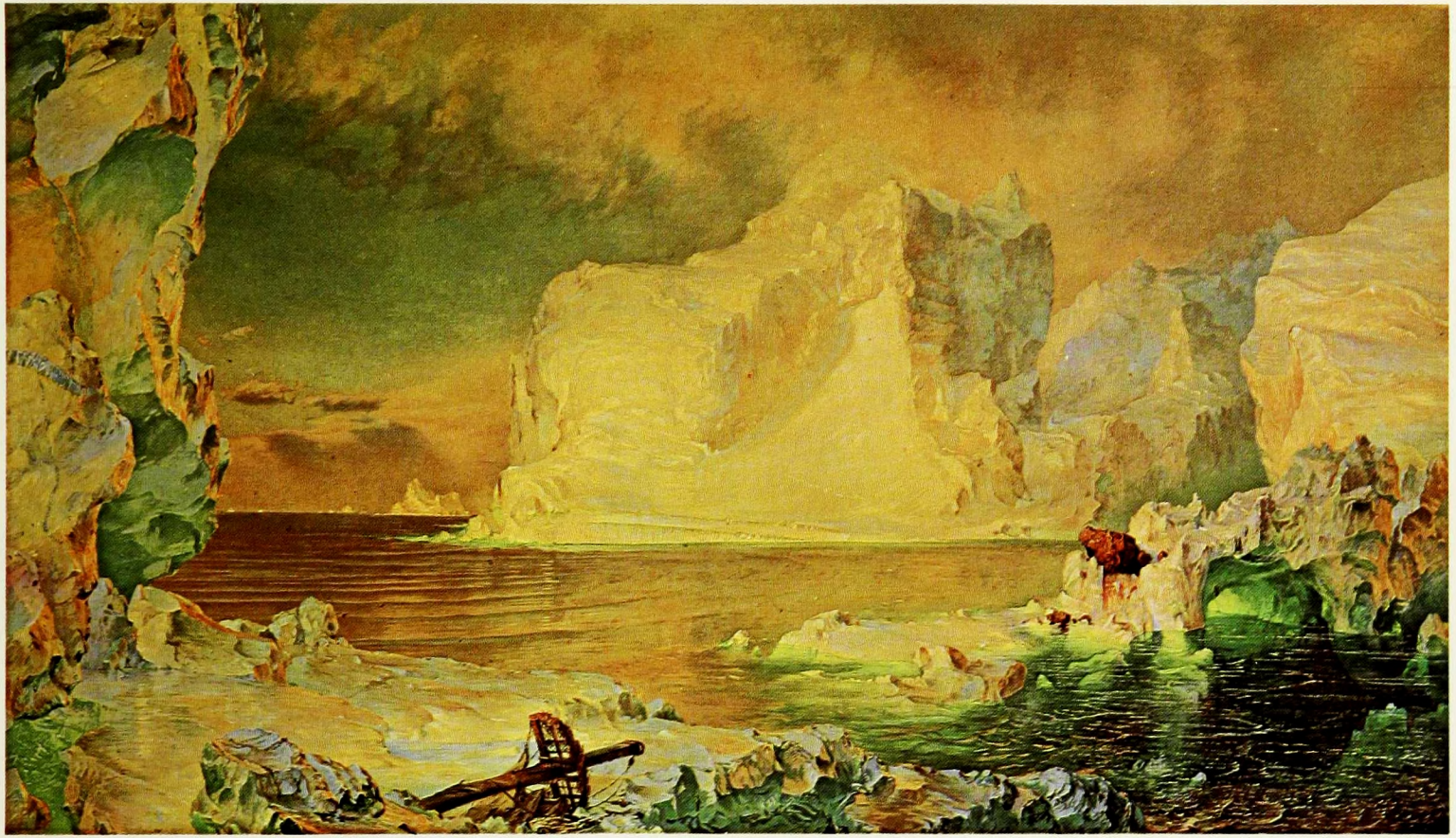
II. *Niagara*, 1857 (detail). The Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

III. Oil study for *Cotopaxi*, 1861. 9 × 13 inches. Collection of Nelson C. White.

IV. *Rainy Season in the Tropics*, 1866. 55 × 84 inches. Collection of J. William Middendorf, II.

V. Oil sketch, *Winter Scene*, Olana, c. 1870. 11 × 17 inches. Olana.

VI. *Twilight in the Wilderness*, 1860. 40 × 64 inches. The Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, Ohio.



VII. *The Icebergs* (*The North*). Chromolithograph by C. Risdon after a lost painting of 1861.

VIII. Olana, view of stair alcove from Court Hall.

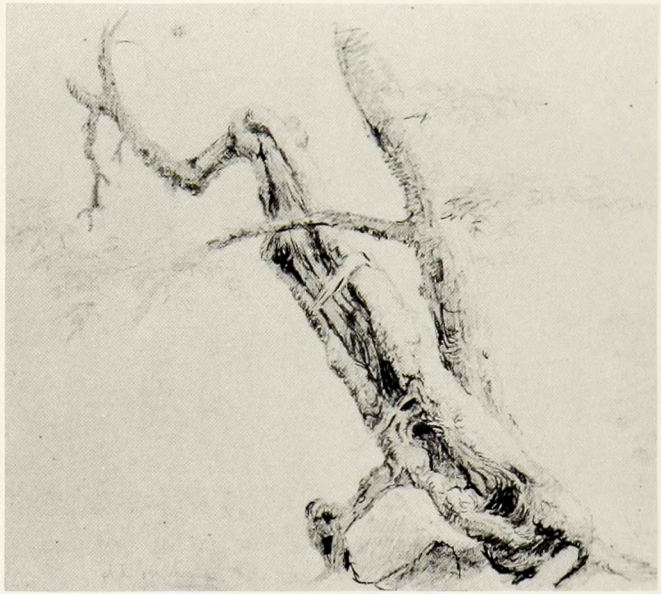
1. Snapped tree trunk, c. 1850. Pencil and white gouache. Olana.

2. *The Hooker Party on its Journey Through the Wilderness, 1636,* 1846.
40 × 60 inches. The Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut.

3. *West Rock, New Haven*, 1849. 27 × 40 inches.
The New Britain Art Institute, New Britain, Connecticut.

4. Thomas Cole, *Schroon Mountain*, c. 1838. 39 × 63 inches.
The Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, Ohio. Hinman B. Hurlbut Collection.

5. Asher B. Durand, *Monument Mountain, the Berkshires*, c. 1851.
28 × 42 inches. Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit, Michigan.

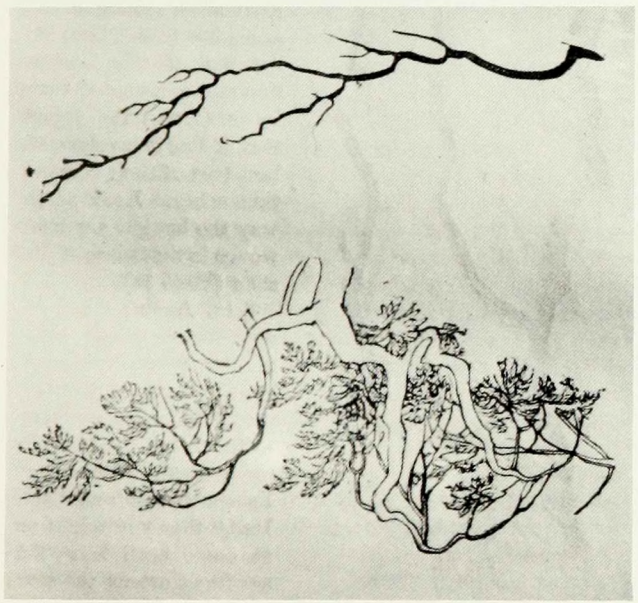


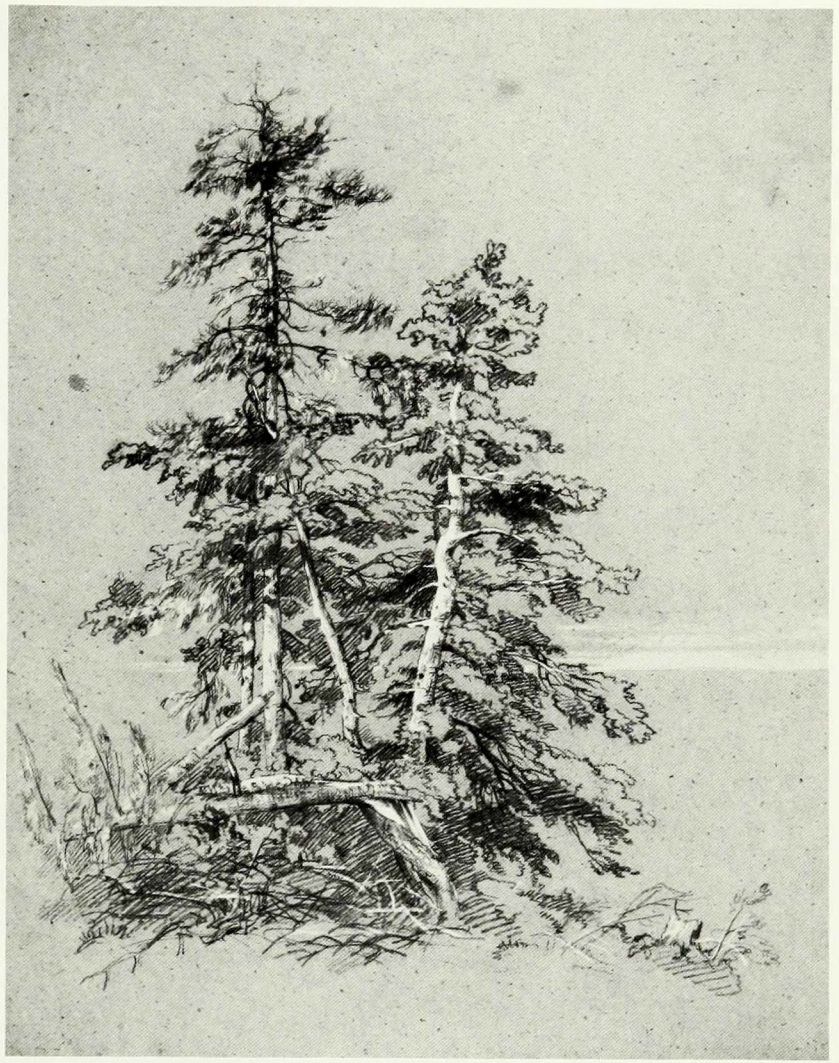
6. (*above*) Study of a tree, June, 1844. Pencil. Olana.

7. (*upper right*) Study of figures for *The Deluge*, c. 1850 (detail). Olana.

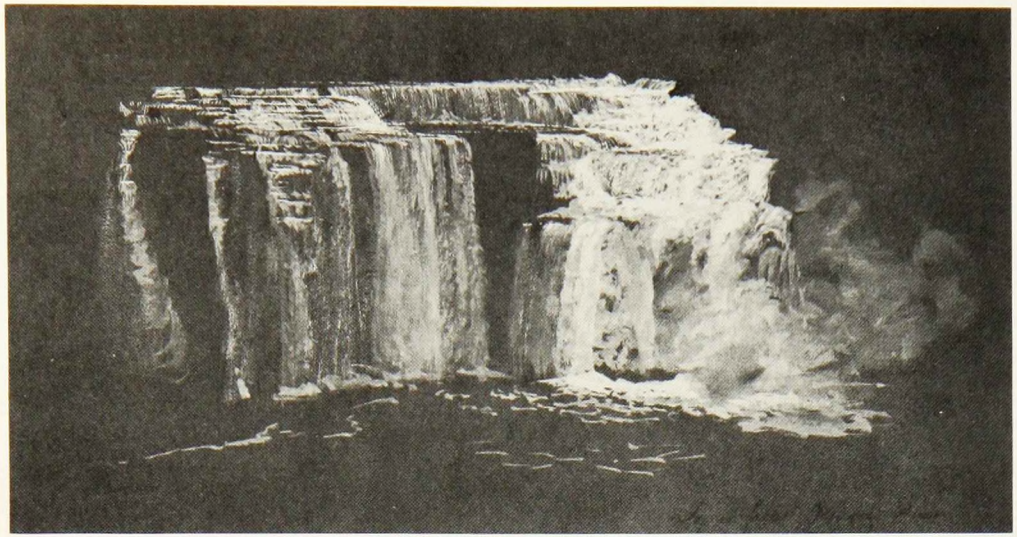
8. (*lower right*) Thomas Cole, Study of trees, inscribed "Old Buckeye." Pencil.
Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit, Michigan.

9. John Ruskin, from *Modern Painters*, Vol. v, 1860:
above, branch of Salvator Rosa;
below, branch of J. M. W. Turner.

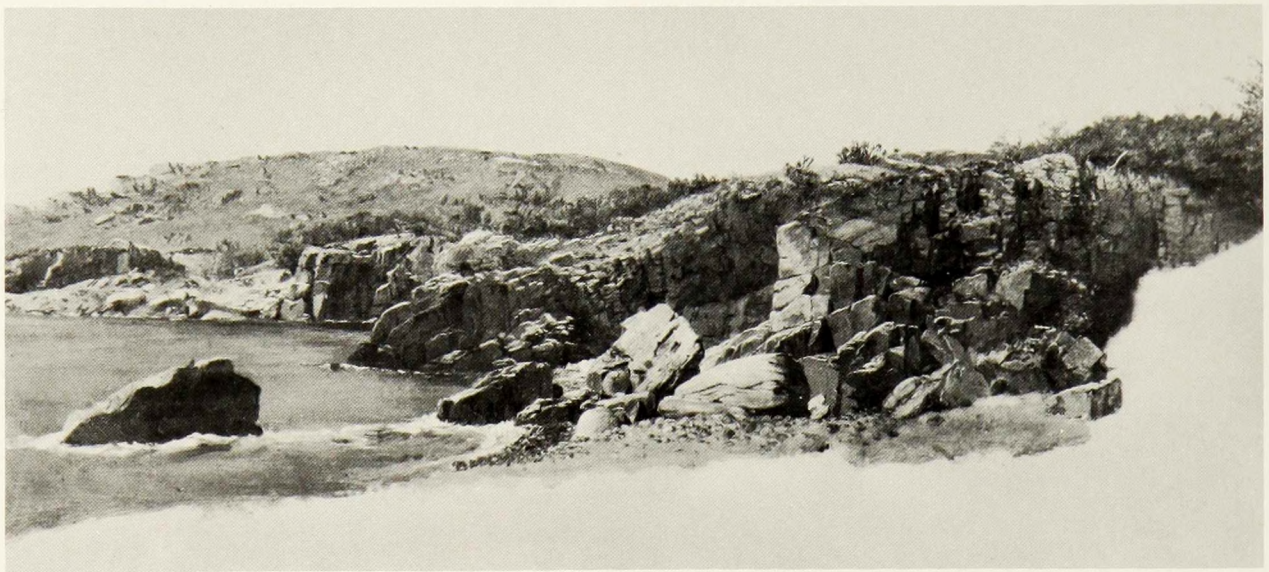




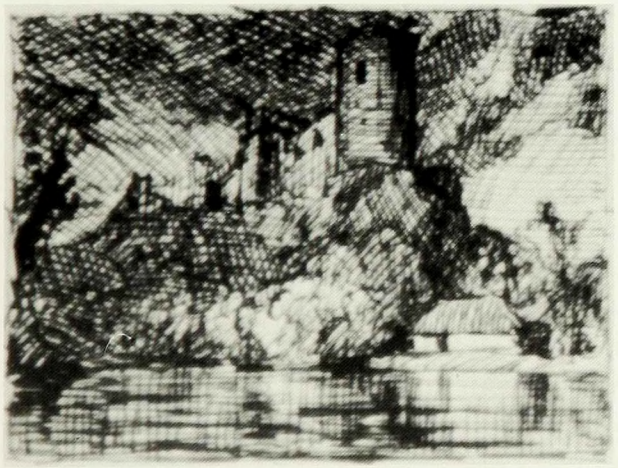
10. Trees at Mount Desert Island, Maine, c. 1850.
Pencil and white gouache. Olana.



11. Sketch inscribed "Lower Falls, Genesee River," Rochester, New York, 1848. White gouache. The Cooper Union Museum, New York.



12. Oil study of coast at Mount Desert Island, 1850. The Cooper Union Museum, New York.

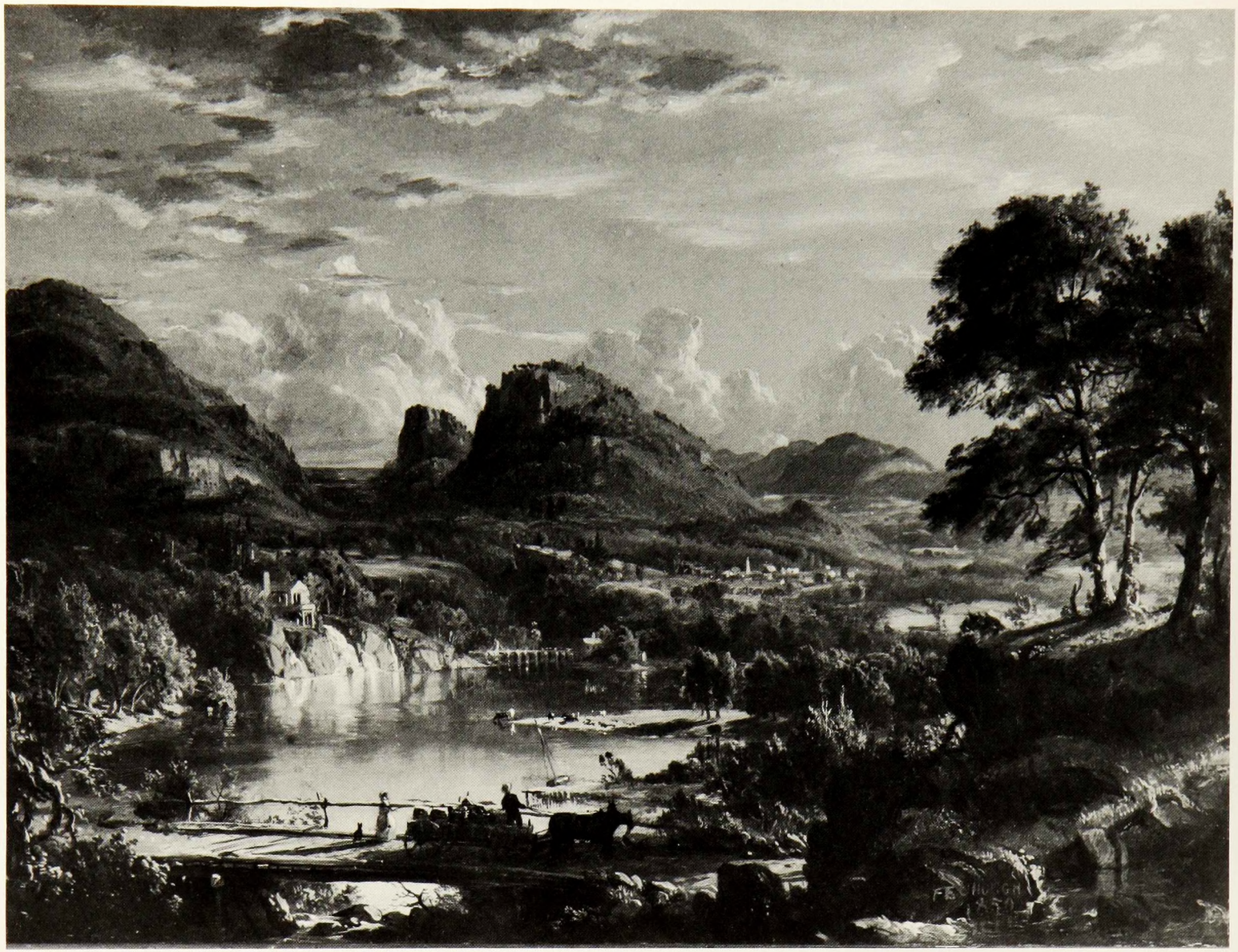


13, 14. Landscape compositions. Ink.
The Cooper Union Museum, New York.

15. Hans F. Gude, *Norwegian Scenery*. Reproduced in *Gems from the "Dusseldorf Gallery,"* New York, c. 1863.

16. *New England Scenery*, 1851 (detail). George Walter Vincent Smith Museum, Springfield, Massachusetts.

17. Lumber mill at Mount Desert Island, c. 1850.
Pencil and white gouache. Olana.

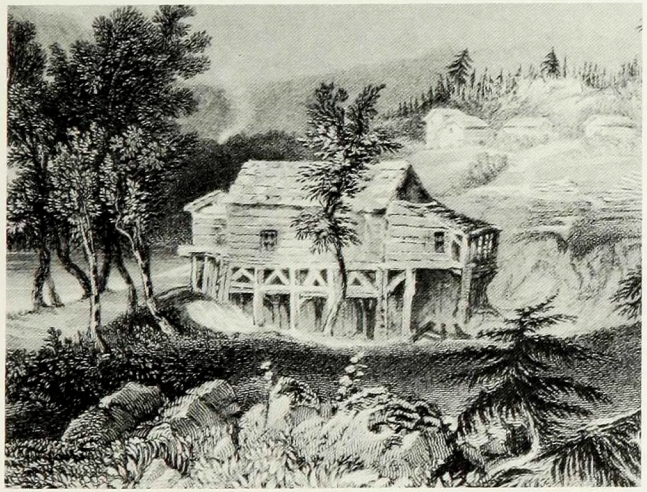


18. Oil study for *New England Scenery*, 1850. 12 × 15 inches.
Lyman Allyn Museum, New London, Connecticut.

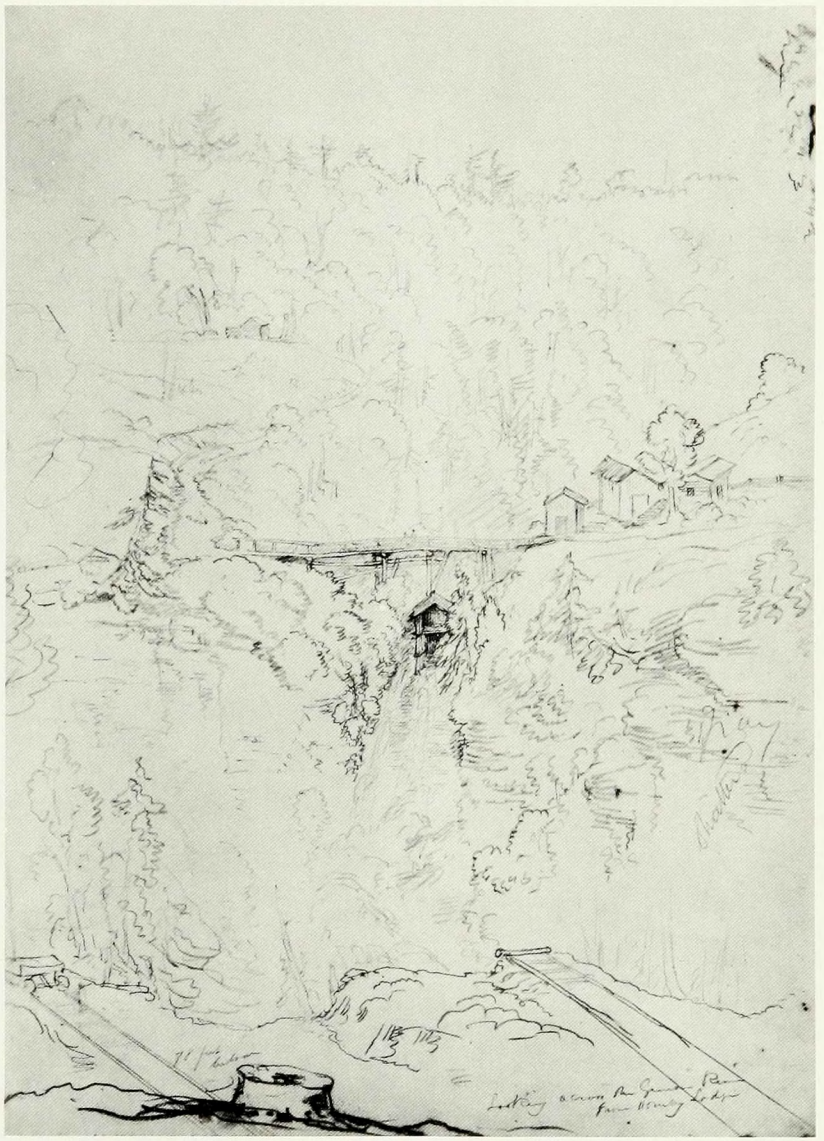
19. *New England Scenery*, 1851. 36 × 54 inches.
George Walter Vincent Smith Museum, Springfield, Massachusetts.

20. *The Andes of Ecuador*, 1855. 48 × 75 inches.
Collection of J. William Middendorf II.

21. John Martin, *The Expulsion* (detail). Mezzotint plate from *The Paradise Lost of John Milton*, London, 1827.



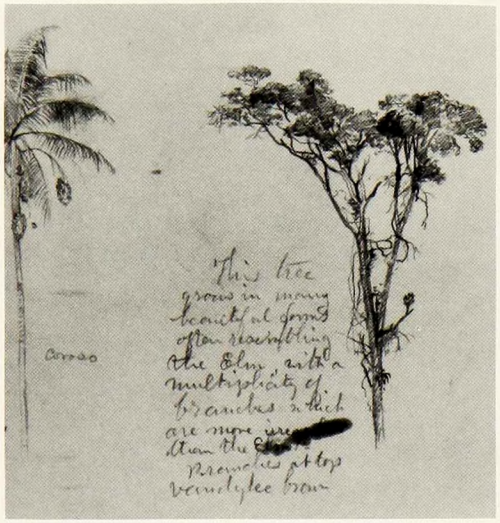
22. William H. Bartlett, *Saw Mill at Center Harbor* (detail), from N. P. Willis, *American Scenery*, London, 1840.



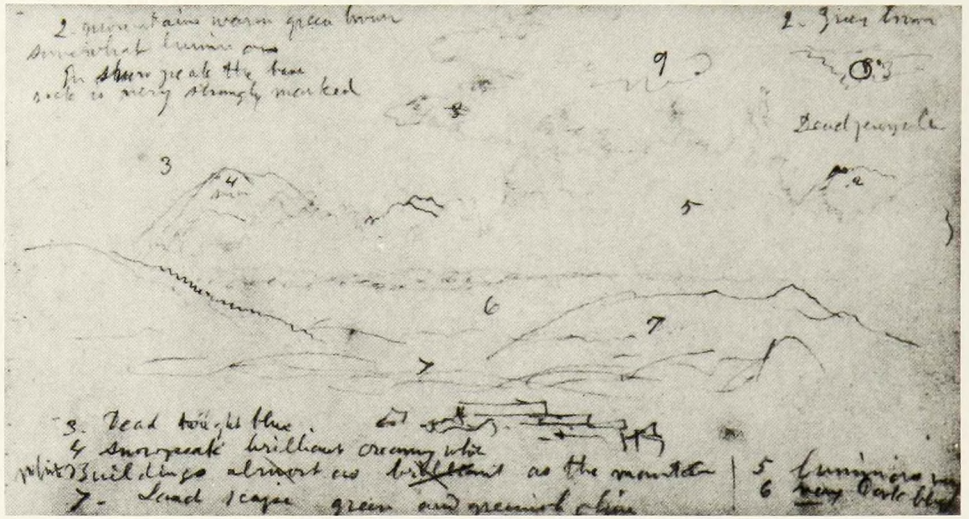
23. Thomas Cole, sketch inscribed "Looking across the Genesee River," 1839 (detail). Pencil. Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit, Michigan.

24. Study of Chimborazo, 1857 (detail). Pencil and white gouache. The Cooper Union Museum, New York.

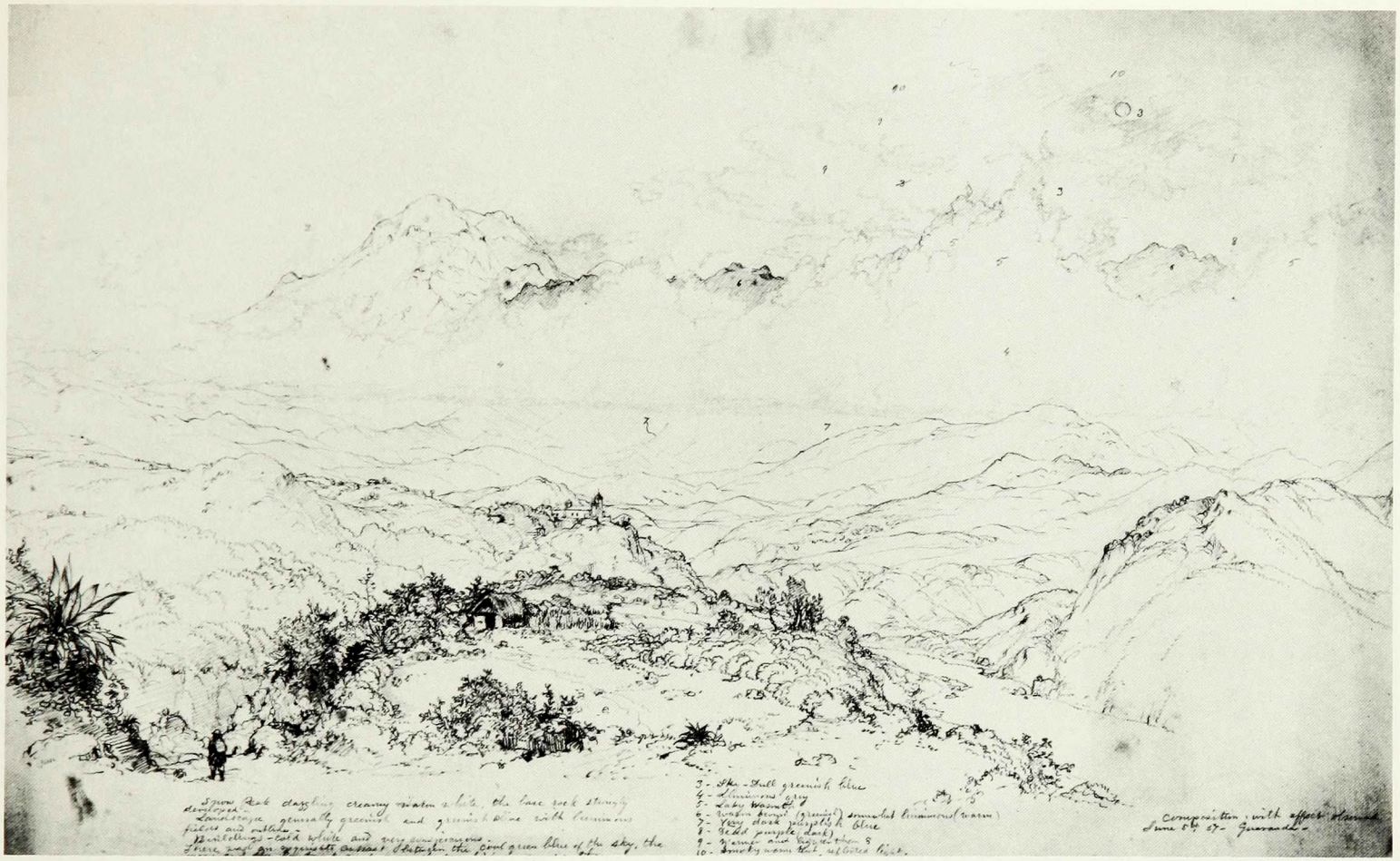
25. Study for a group of trees in *The Heart of the Andes*, c. 1858. Pencil. Olana.



26. Detail of page in South America sketchbook, 1853. Pencil. The Cooper Union Museum, New York.

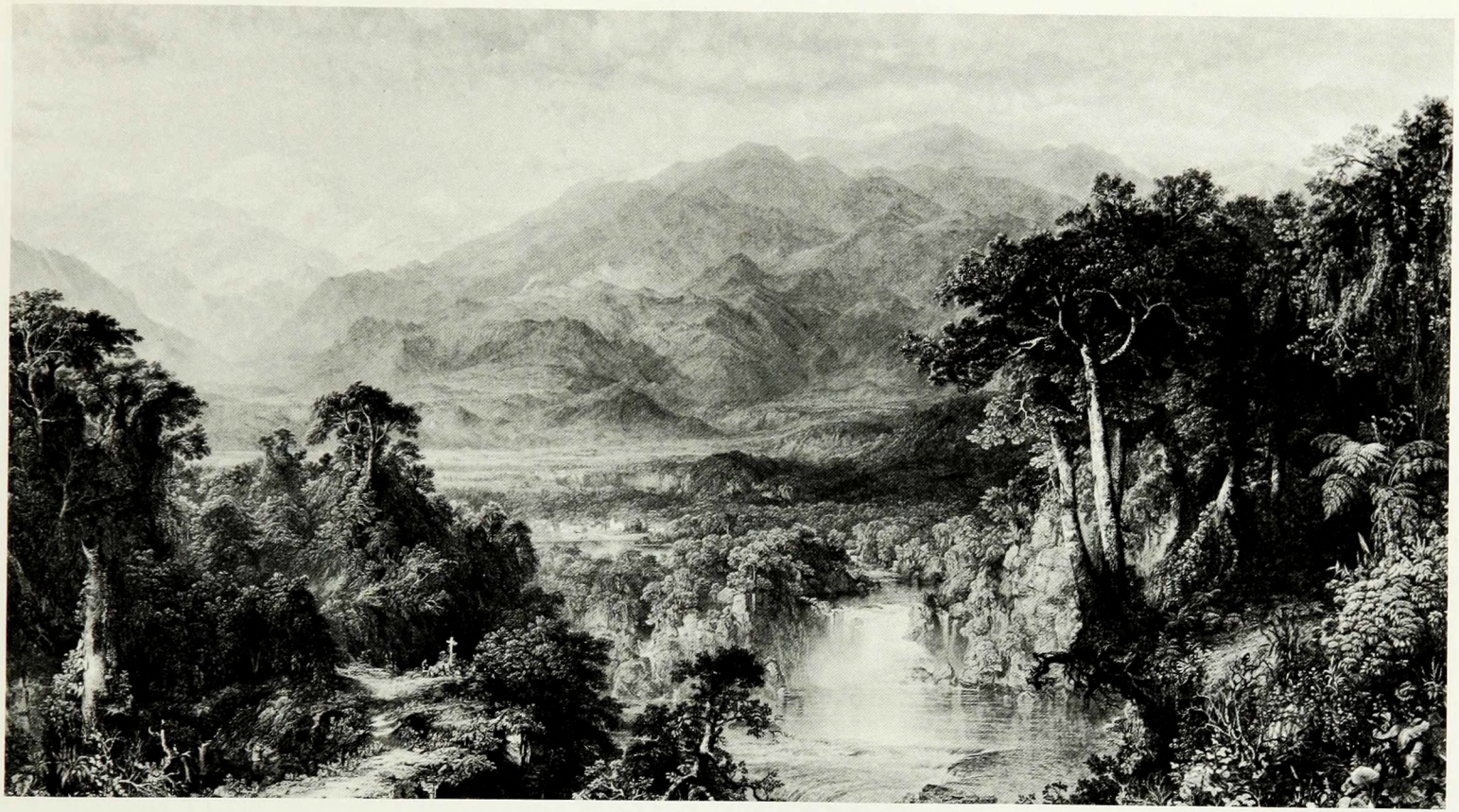


27. View of Chimborazo, 1857. Pencil. From a sketchbook formerly in the collection of Mrs. Theodore Winthrop Church.

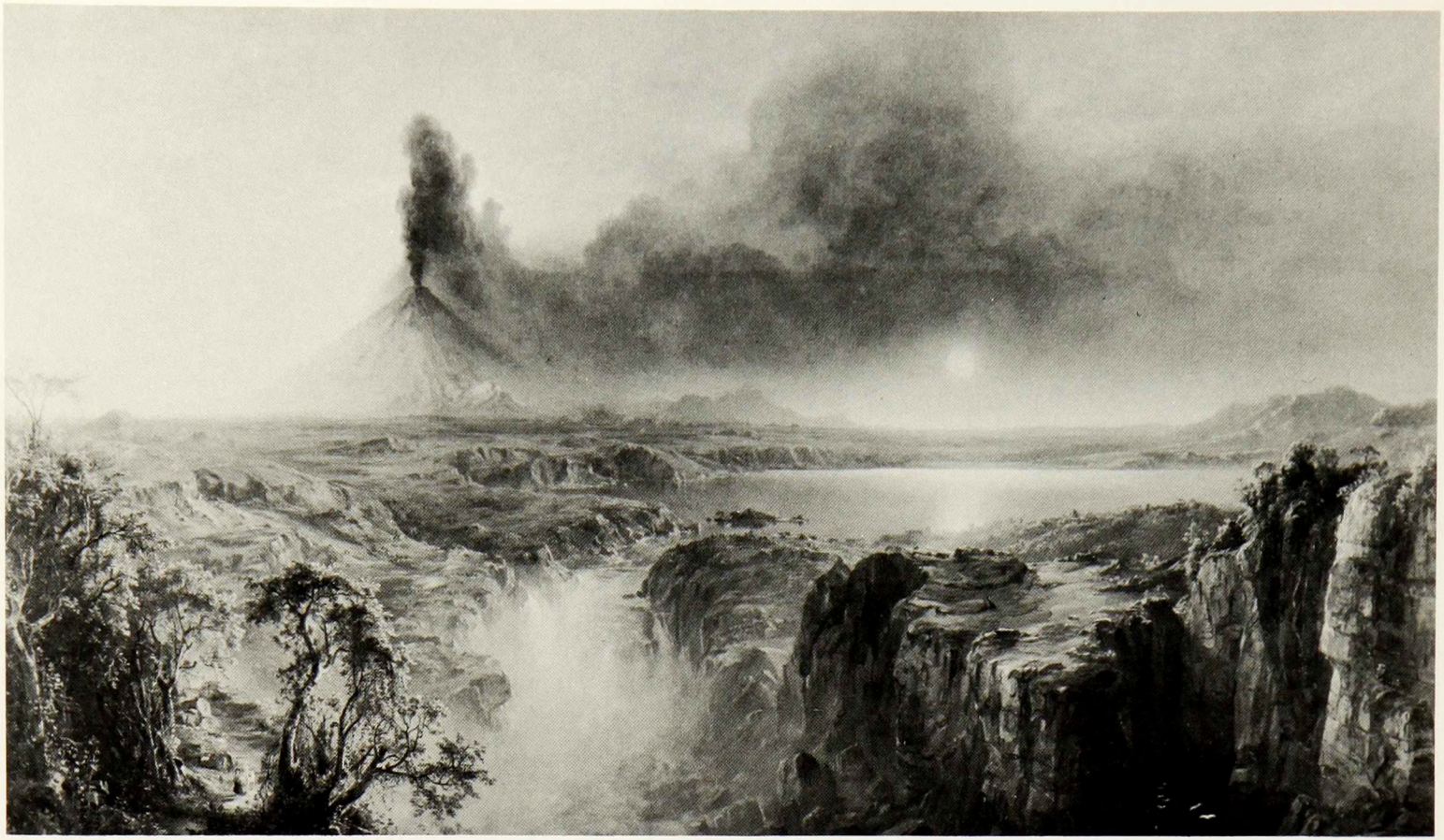


28. Study inscribed "Composition with effect observed, June 5, 1857, Guaranda." Pencil and white gouache. Olana.

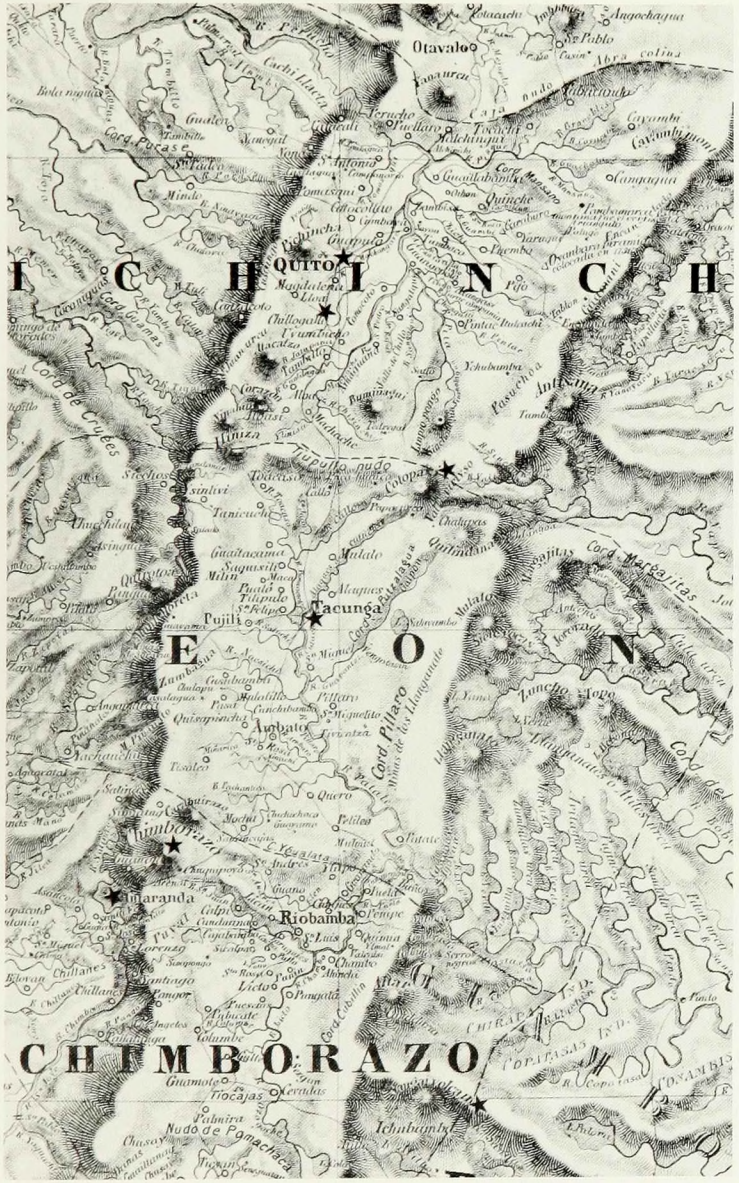
29. *The Heart of the Andes*, 1859 (detail).
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



30. William Forrest, engraving of *The Heart of the Andes.*

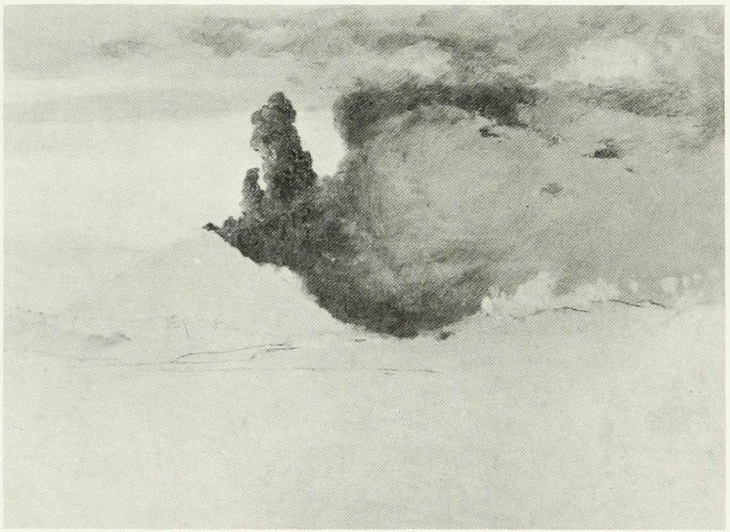


31. *Cotopaxi*, c. 1863. 35 × 60 inches. The Reading Public Museum and Art Gallery, Reading, Pennsylvania.

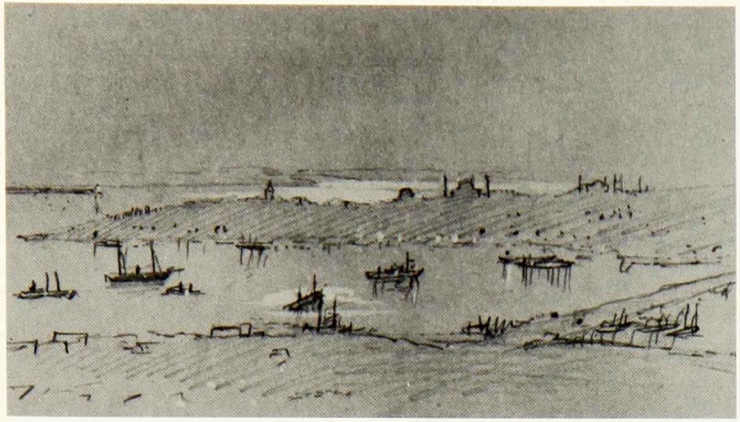


32. Detail from *Carta Corografica de la Republica del Ecuador . . .*, New York, 1858. Olana.

33. Composition study for *Cotopaxi*, c. 1862. Pencil and chalk. Collection of Charles T. Lark, Jr.



34. Oil sketch of Cotopaxi, 1857. The Cooper Union Museum, New York.



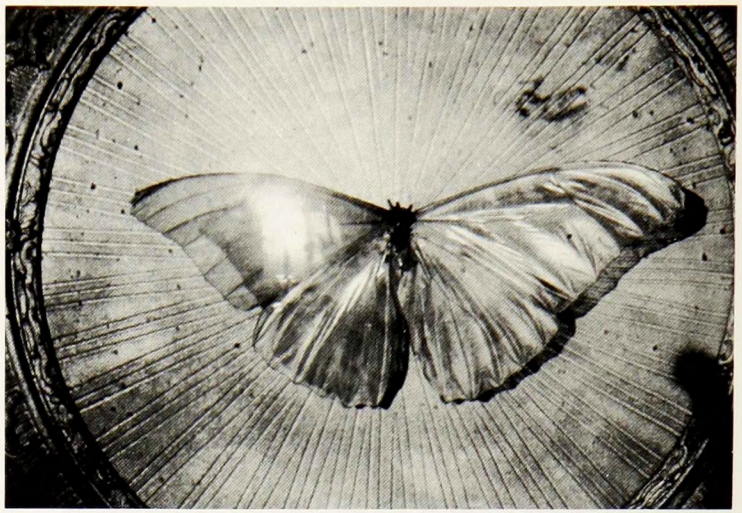
35. Study inscribed "Constantinople in moonlight," 1868 (detail). Pencil. The Cooper Union Museum, New York.

37. Hills of Jamaica, 1865 (detail). Pencil.
The Cooper Union Museum, New York.

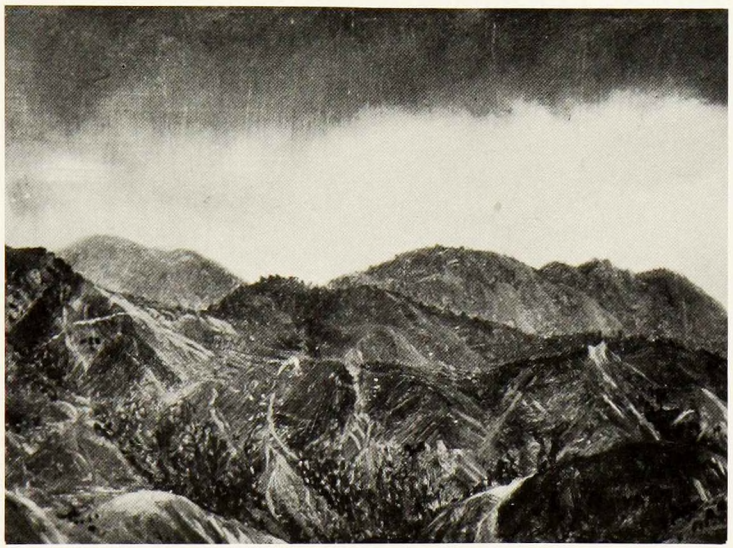
36. Sketch inscribed "The Aletsch Glacier, Switzerland, 1868" (detail). Pencil and white gouache.
The Cooper Union Museum, New York.

38. Study inscribed "Cotopaxi, Chillo/June 26th–57." Pencil. Olana.

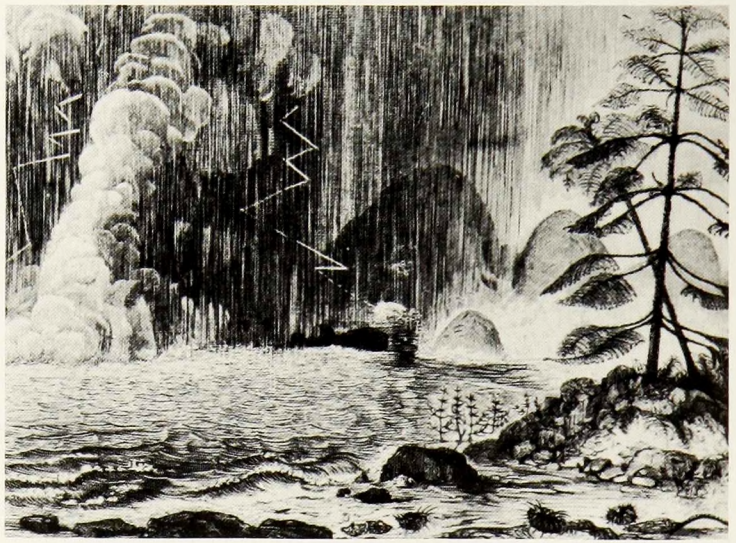
39. Oil study of tree ferns, Jamaica, 1865 (detail).
The Cooper Union Museum, New York.



41. Butterfly under a glass dome. Court Hall, Olana.



40. Storm over mountains, Jamaica, 1865 (detail).
The Cooper Union Museum, New York.



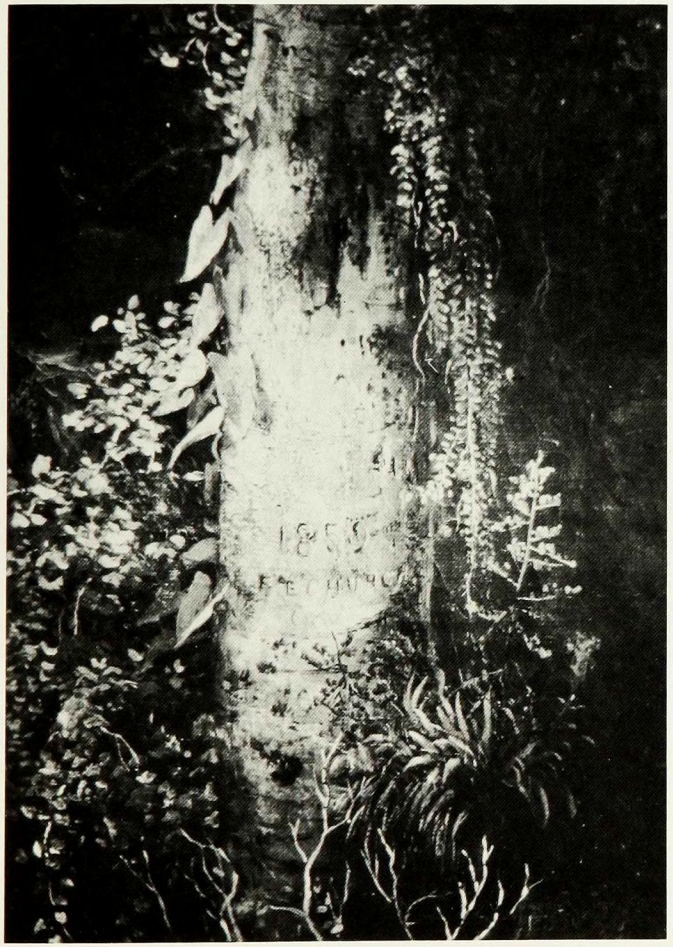
42. *Ideal Landscape of the Permian Period*, from Louis Figuier, *The World Before the Deluge*, London, 1865.

43. *The Vale of St. Thomas, Jamaica,* 1867. 48 × 85 inches.
The Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut.

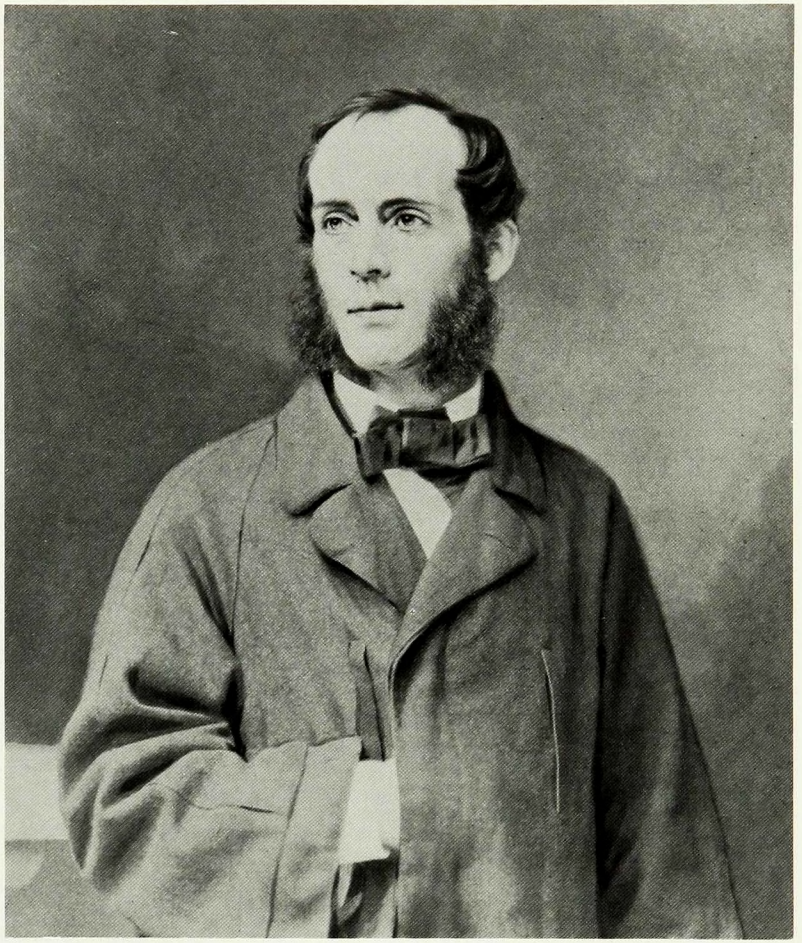
44. *Niagara*, 1857. 42 × 90 inches. The Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

CHURCH'S PAINTING,
"THE HEART OF THE ANDES,"
ON VIEW
AT THE ATHENÆUM,
From 8 A. M. till dusk. Admission TWENTY-FIVE CENTS.
Visitors are requested to bring Opera Glasses. 6t d30

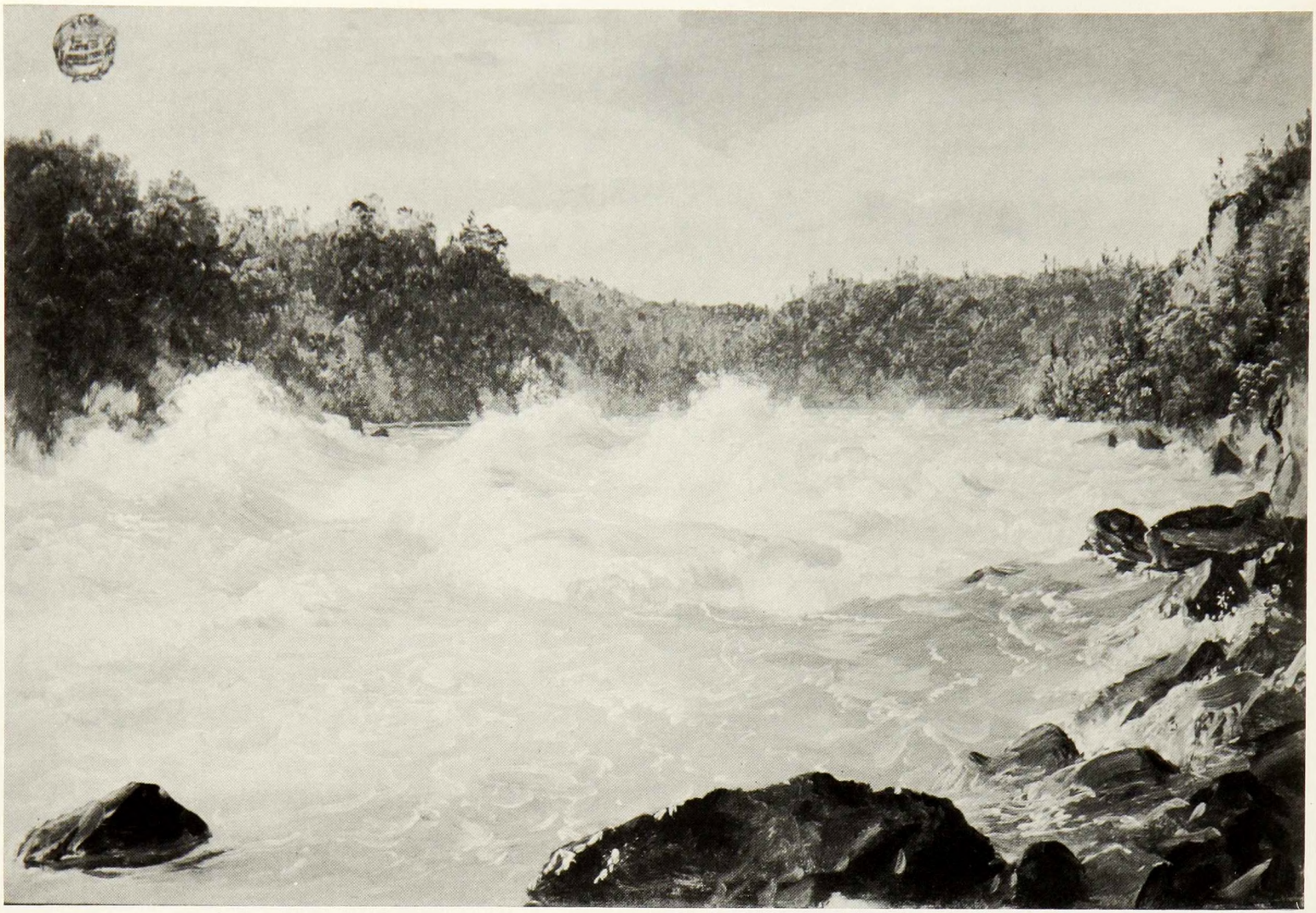
45. Advertisement in the *Boston Daily Evening Transcript*, January 2, 1860.



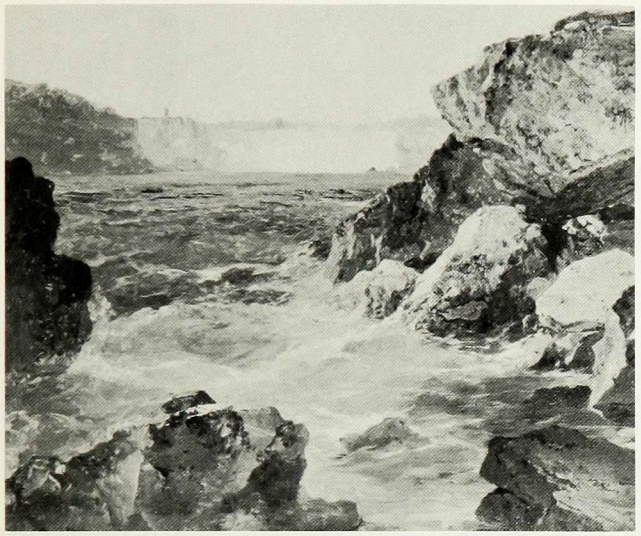
46. The artist's signature from *The Heart of the Andes*, 1859. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

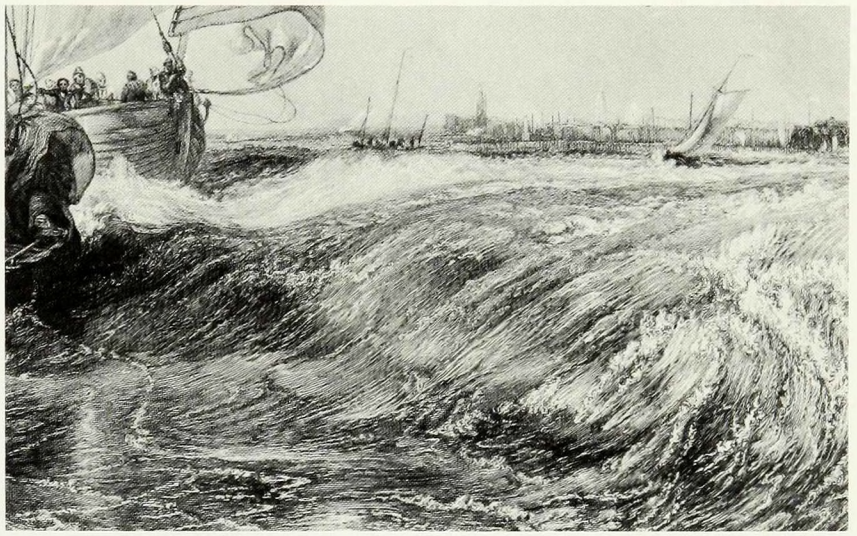


47. Photograph of Frederic Church, c. 1860. Olana.



48. Oil sketch of Niagara Gorge, 1856 or 1858.
The Cooper Union Museum, New York.

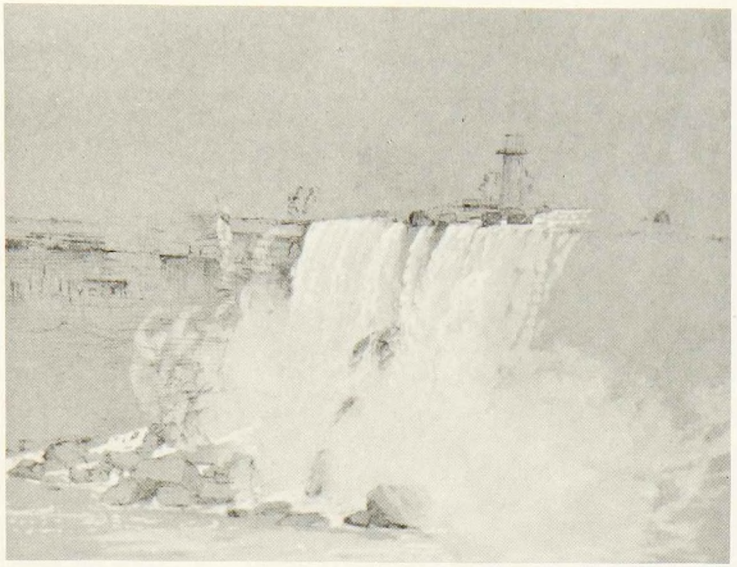




49. (*above*) John F. Kensett, *Niagara Falls*, c. 1850 (detail). Mead Art Building, Amherst College, Amherst, Massachusetts.

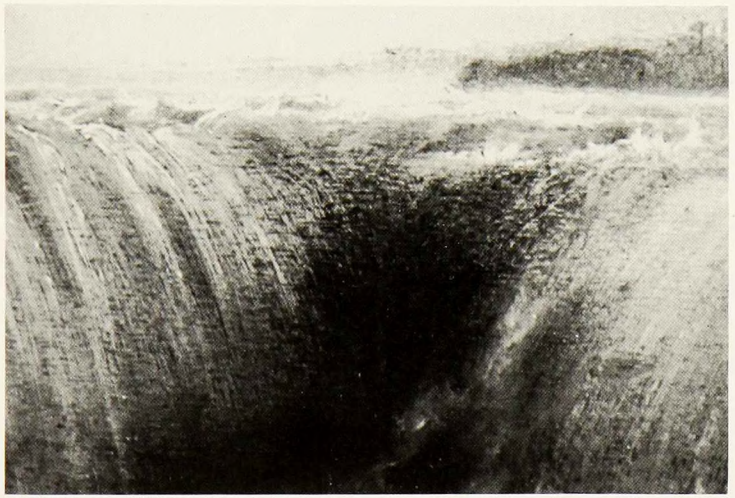
50. (*upper right*) J. M. W. Turner, *Boats off Calais* (detail). Engraving by J. Cousen.

51. Samuel F. B. Morse, *Niagara Falls from Table Rock*, 1835. 24 × 30 inches. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. M. and M. Karolik Collection.

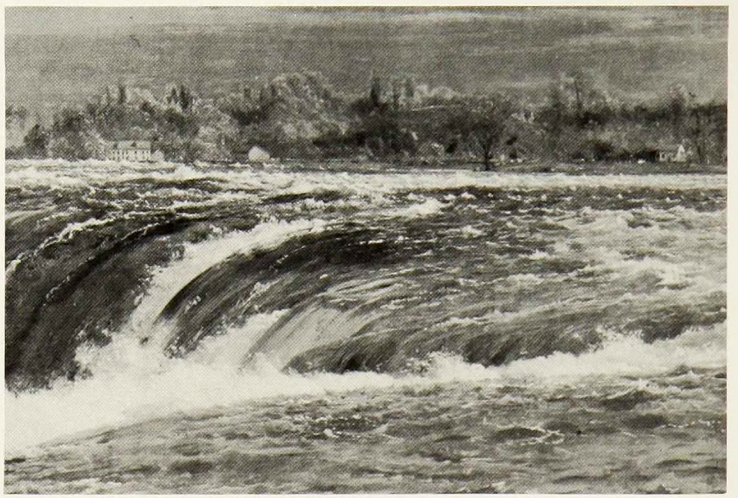


52. Study of Niagara, probably 1856. Pencil and white gouache. The Cooper Union Museum, New York.

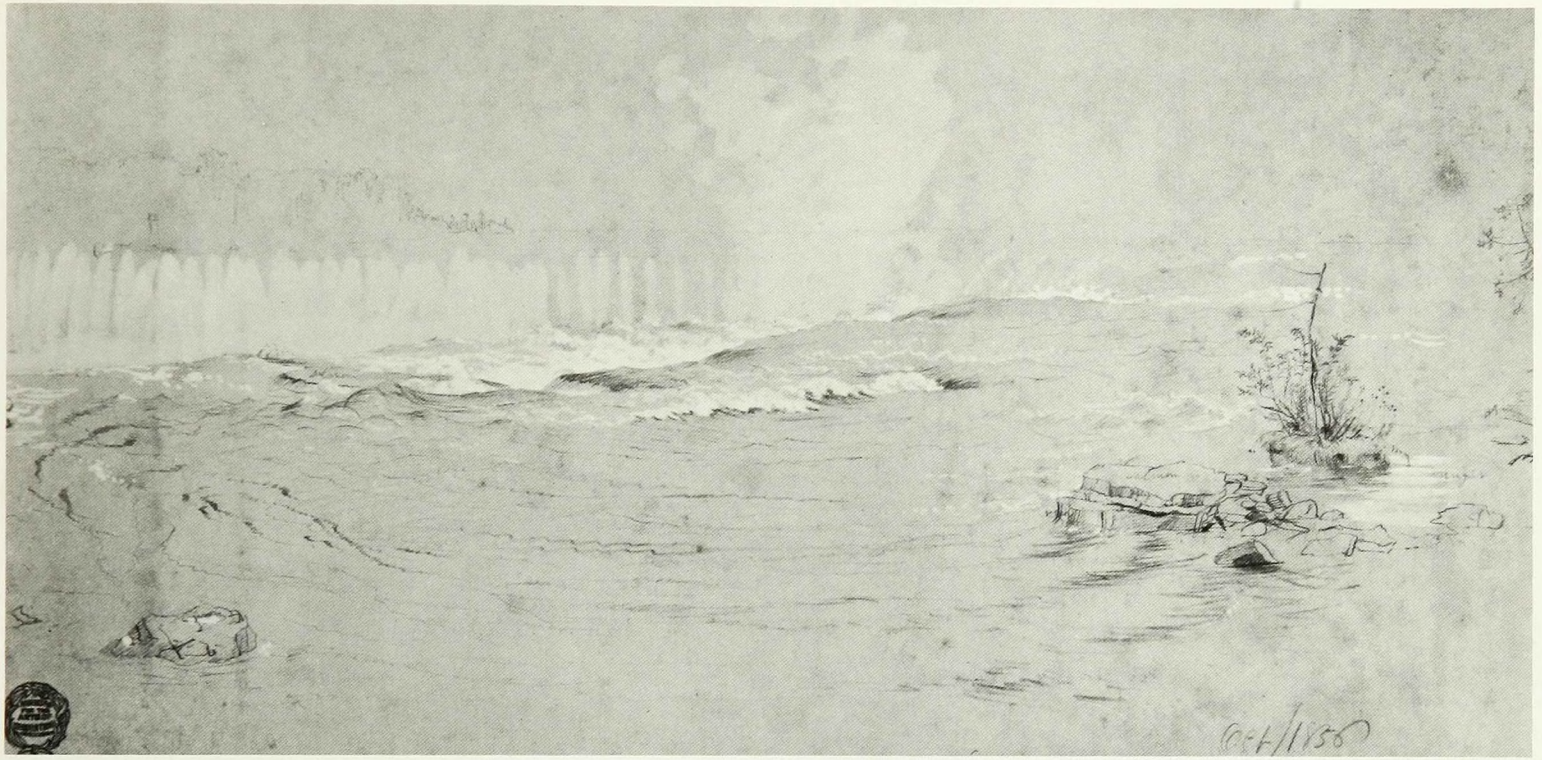
53. George Inness, *Niagara Falls*, 1893 (detail). The Joseph H. Hirshhorn Collection, New York.



54. Thomas Cole, *Niagara Falls* (detail). Galleries of Cranbrook Academy of Art, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan.

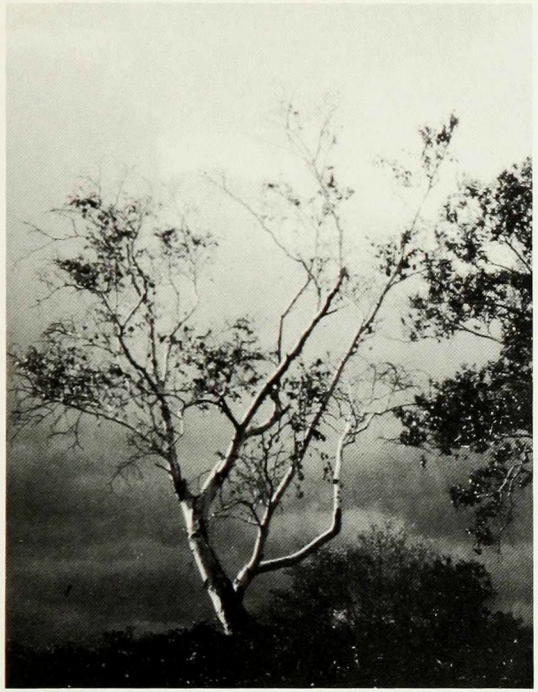


55. *Niagara*, 1857 (detail). The Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.



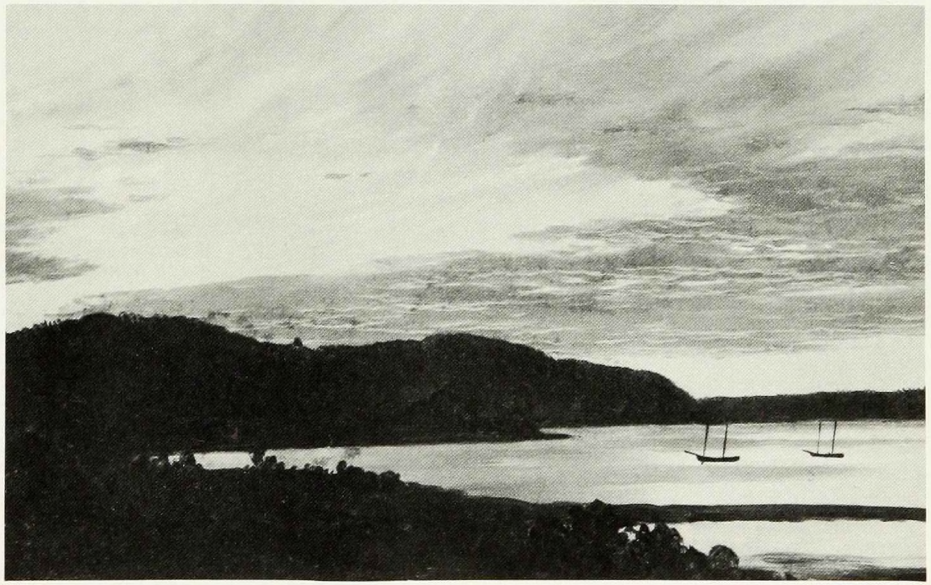
56. Study of Niagara Falls from Table Rock, probably 1856.
Pencil and white gouache. The Cooper Union Museum, New York.

57. *Sunset*, 1856. 24 × 36 inches. Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, Utica, New York.



58. Birch tree on the estate at Olana.

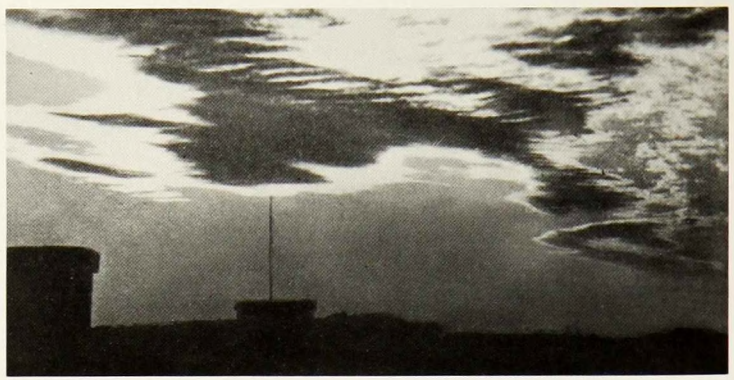
59. (*upper right*) Study inscribed "Spruce, Aug. 1851" (detail). Pencil. Olana.



60. Oil sketch of Bar Harbor, c. 1855 (detail). Olana.

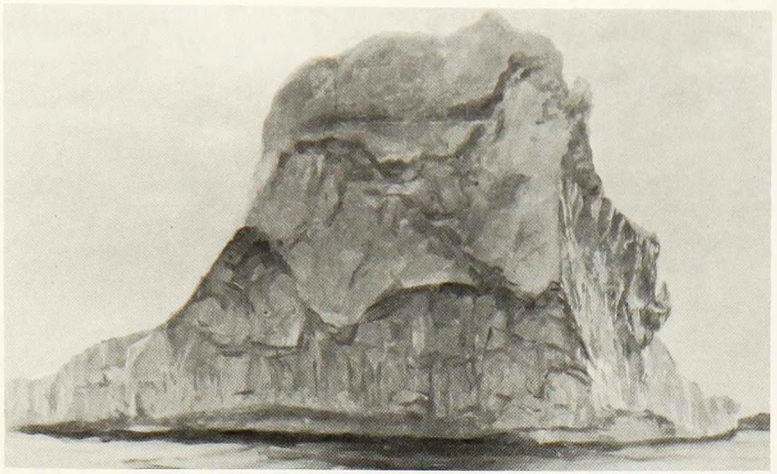
61. Andreas Achenbach, *Sunset off a Stormy Coast of Sicily*, 1853 (detail). Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Bequest of Catharine Lorillard Wolfe.

62. John Ruskin, *The Lombard Apennine*, from *Modern Painters*, Vol. III, 1856.



63. Sky over a city. Photograph in the collection at Olana.

64. *Storm at Mount Desert*, 1863. 37 × 47 inches.
The Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut.



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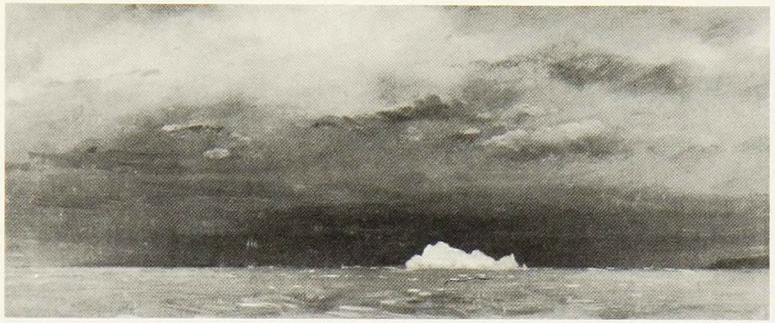

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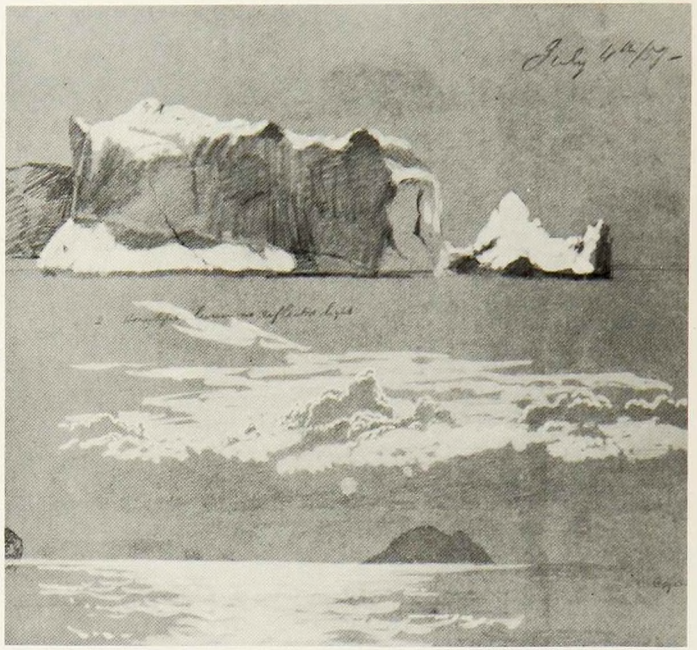
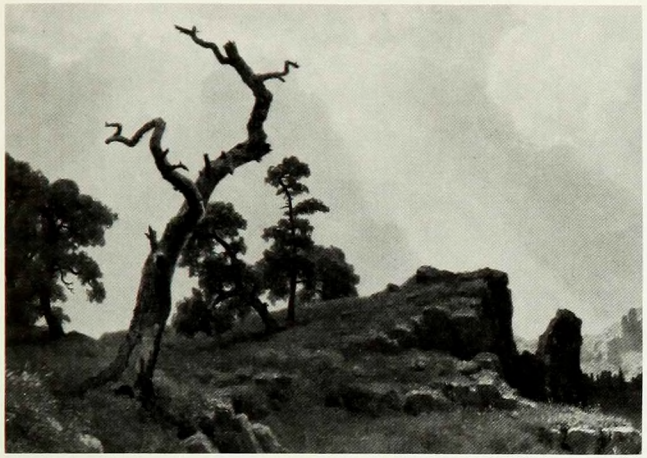


68

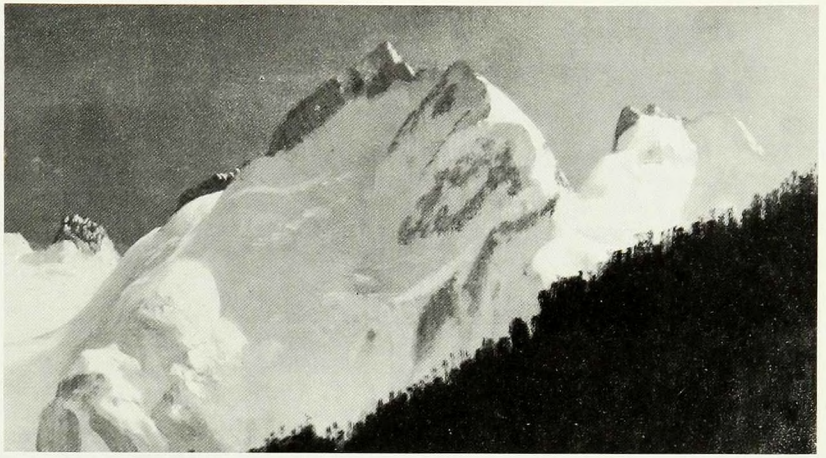
65–68. Sketches of icebergs, 1859. Oil, pencil, and white gouache. The Cooper Union Museum, New York.

69. *The Aurora Borealis*, 1865. 56 × 84 inches. National Collection of Fine Arts, the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. Gift of Eleanor Blodgett.

70. Albert Bierstadt, *The Rocky Mountains*, 1863. 73 × 120 inches.
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Rogers Fund.

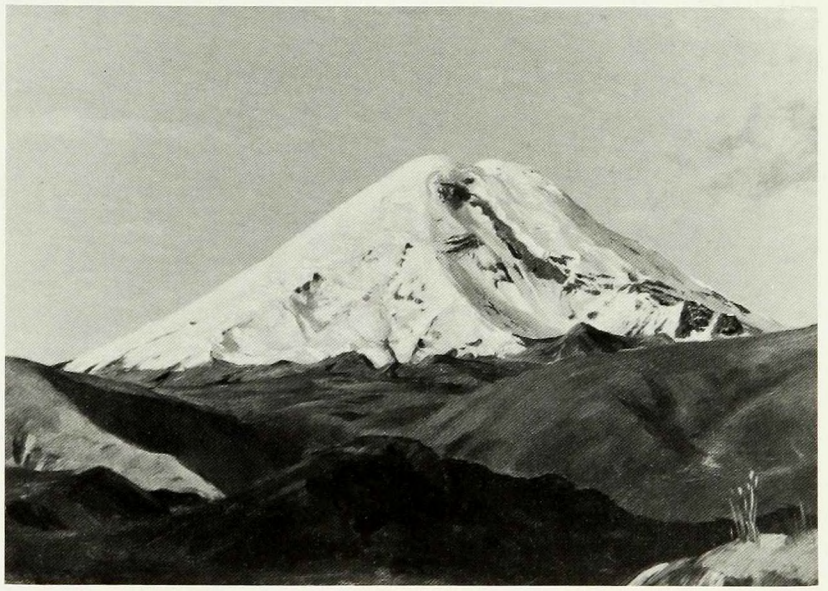


71. Albert Bierstadt, *Thunderstorm in the Rocky Mountains*, 1859 (detail). Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

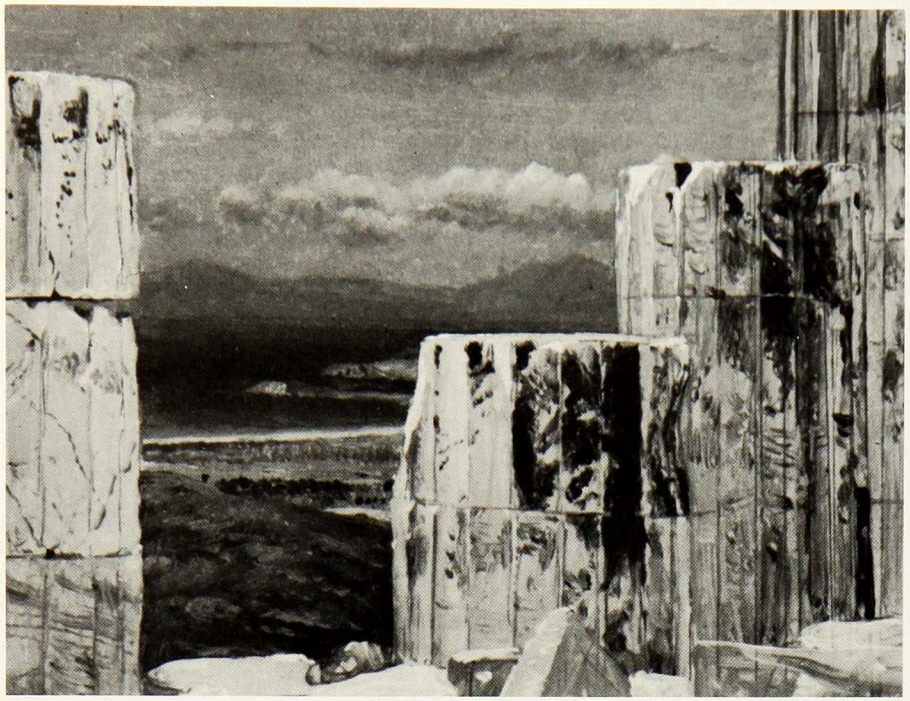


72. Albert Bierstadt, oil sketch of Rocky Mountains, Colorado (detail). Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

73. Oil sketch of Mount Katahdin, the Basin, c. 1875–80. The Cooper Union Museum, New York.

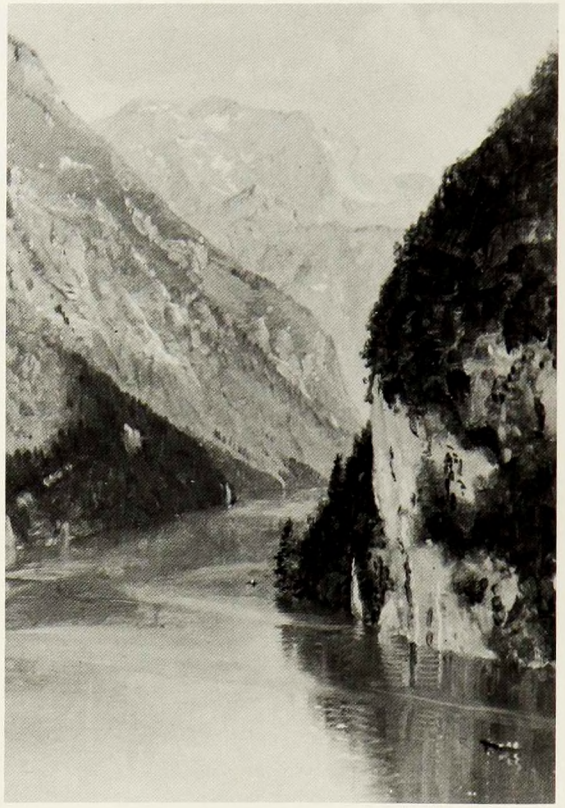


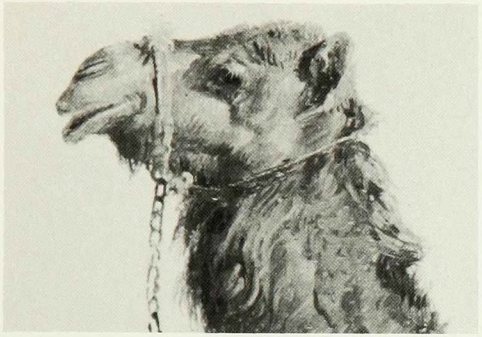
74. Oil sketch of Chimborazo, 1857 (detail). The Cooper Union Museum, New York.



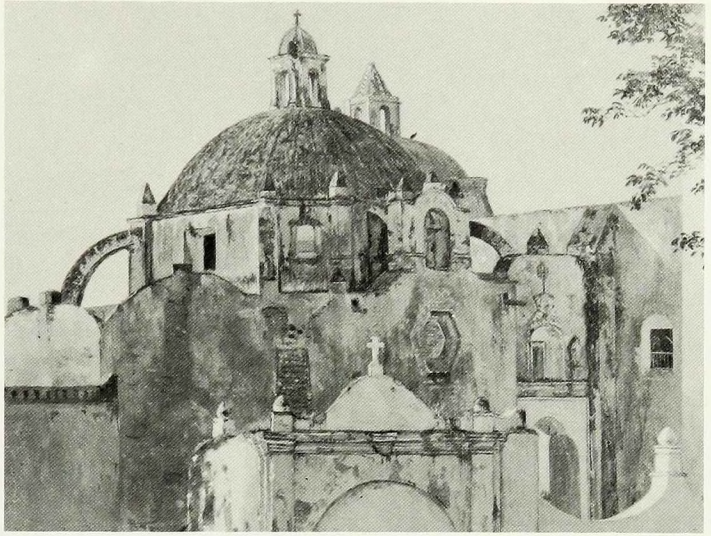
75. Oil sketch of columns of the Parthenon, 1869 (detail). The Cooper Union Museum, New York.

76. Oil sketch of an Alpine lake, 1868 (detail). The Cooper Union Museum, New York.



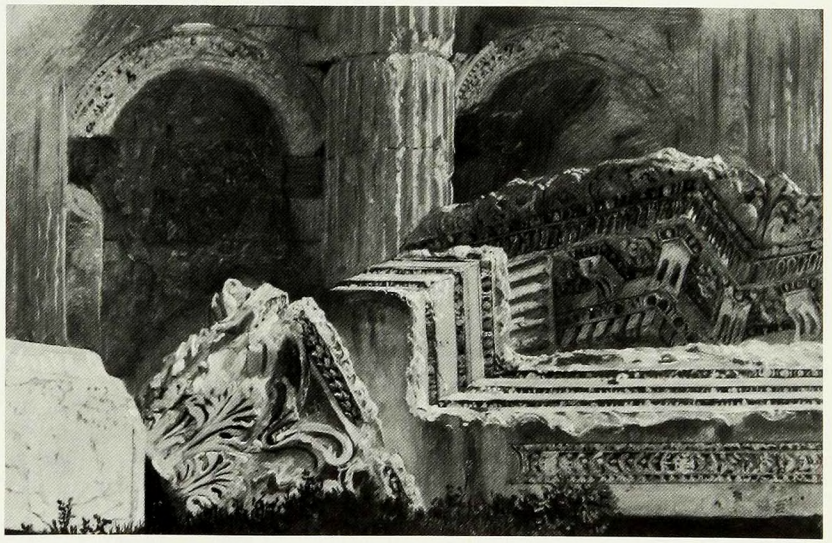


77. Oil sketch of a camel, 1868 (detail). The Cooper Union Museum, New York.



78. Oil sketch of a church in Mexico, 1883 (detail). Olana.

79. Oil sketch of a banana plant, Jamaica, 1865 (detail). The Cooper Union Museum, New York.



80. Oil sketch of ruins at Baalbek, 1868 (detail). The Cooper Union Museum, New York.

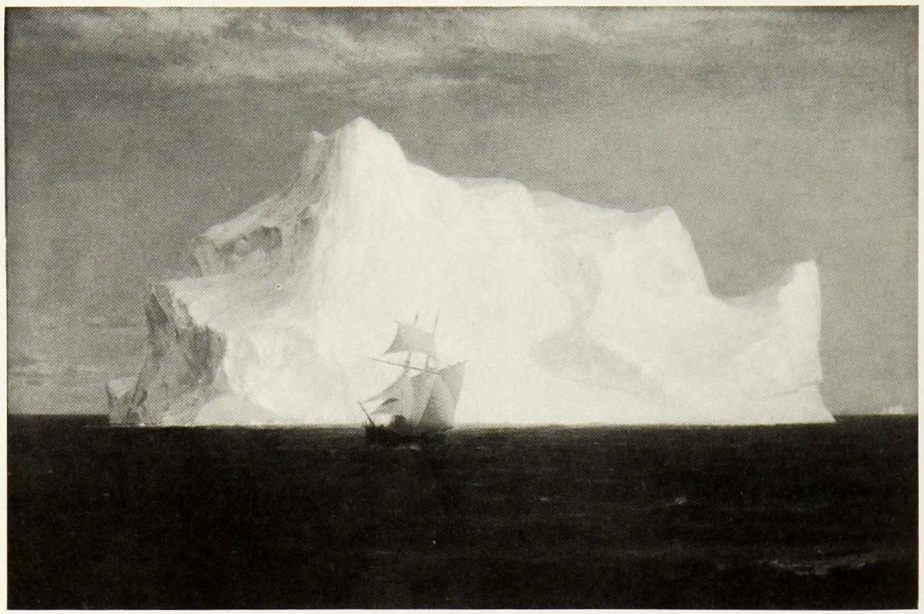
81. Oil sketch of a view in Maine, c. 1855–1860.
The Cooper Union Museum, New York.

82. J. M. W. Turner, *Prudhoe Castle*, Northumberland.
Engraving by E. Goodall.

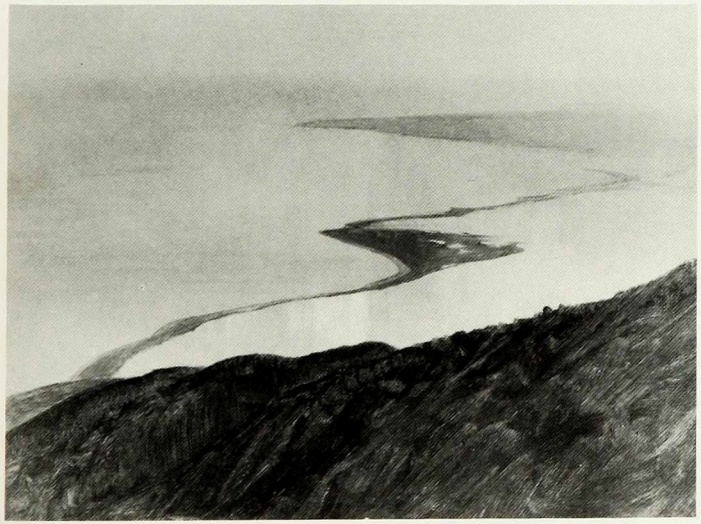
83. Oil sketch of Jerusalem, 1868 (detail).
The Cooper Union Museum, New York.

84. *Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives*, 1870. 54 × 84 inches.
Collection of Harold Ransom and Mrs. L. Dewey Babcock.

85. *The Mediterranean Sea*, 1882. 15 × 22 inches. Collection of Mrs. Iola S. Haverstick.



86. *The Iceberg*, 1891. 20 × 30 inches. Collection of Miss Frances Sauvalle.



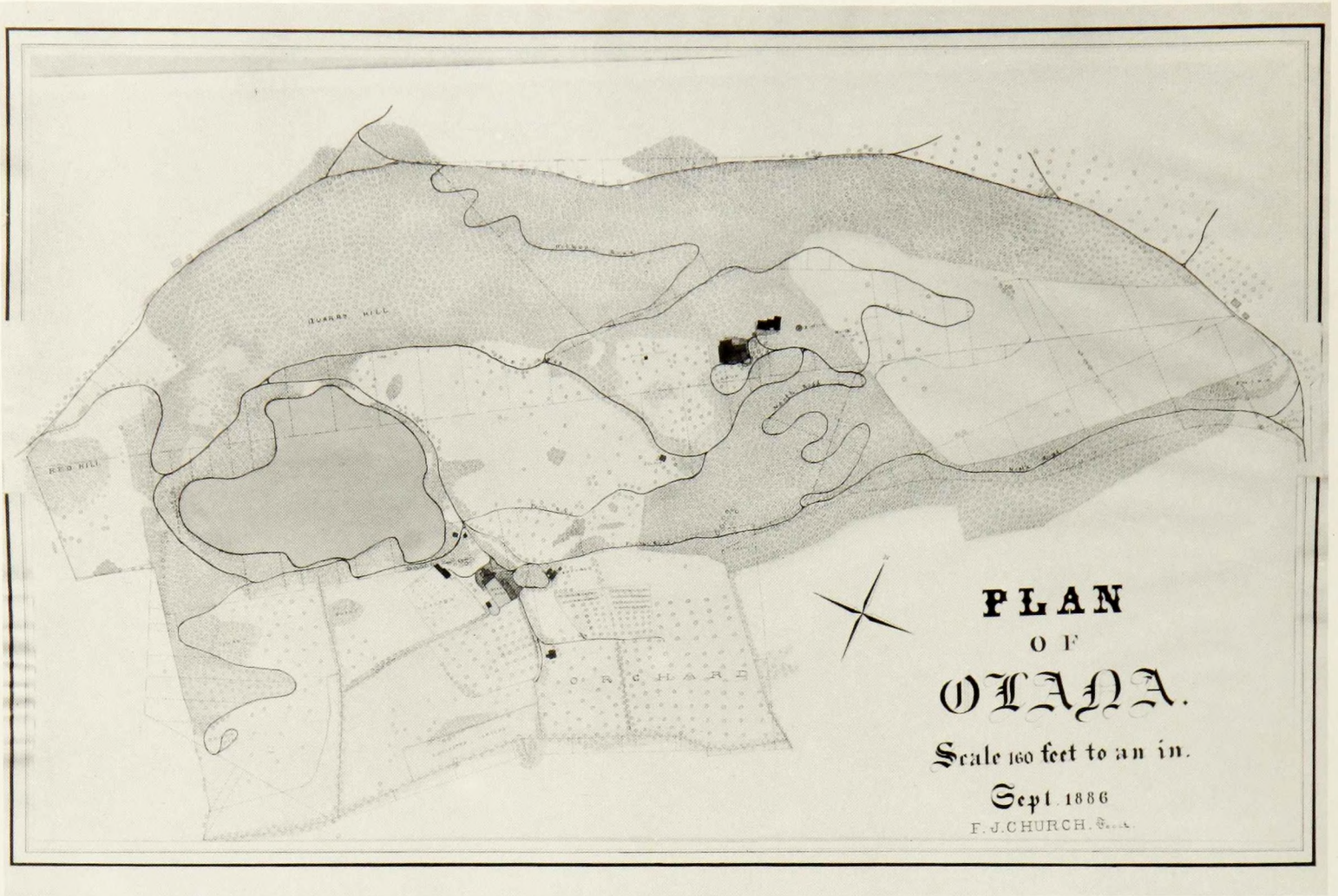
88. Oil sketch above the Palisadoes, Jamaica, 1865. The Cooper Union Museum, New York.

87. (*at left*) The Acropolis, Athens, 1869 (detail). Pencil. The Cooper Union Museum, New York.

89. (*below*) *The Aegean Sea*, c. 1878 (detail). Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Bequest of Mrs. Wm. H. Osborn.

90. *Morning in the Tropics* (detail).

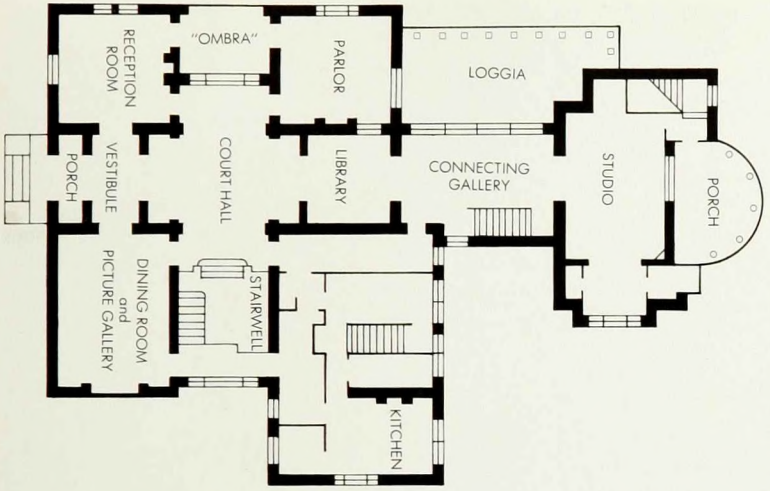
91. *Morning in the Tropics*, 1877. 54 × 84 inches.
The National Gallery, Washington, D.C.



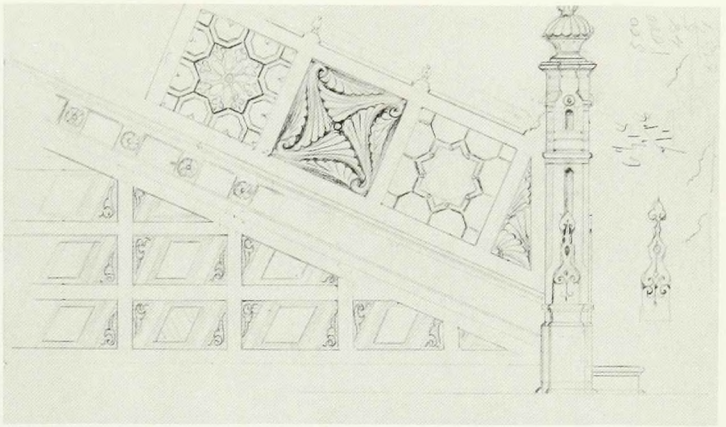
92. Olana, plan of the estate.

93. Olana, east façade, 1870–1872. Photo Wayne Andrews.

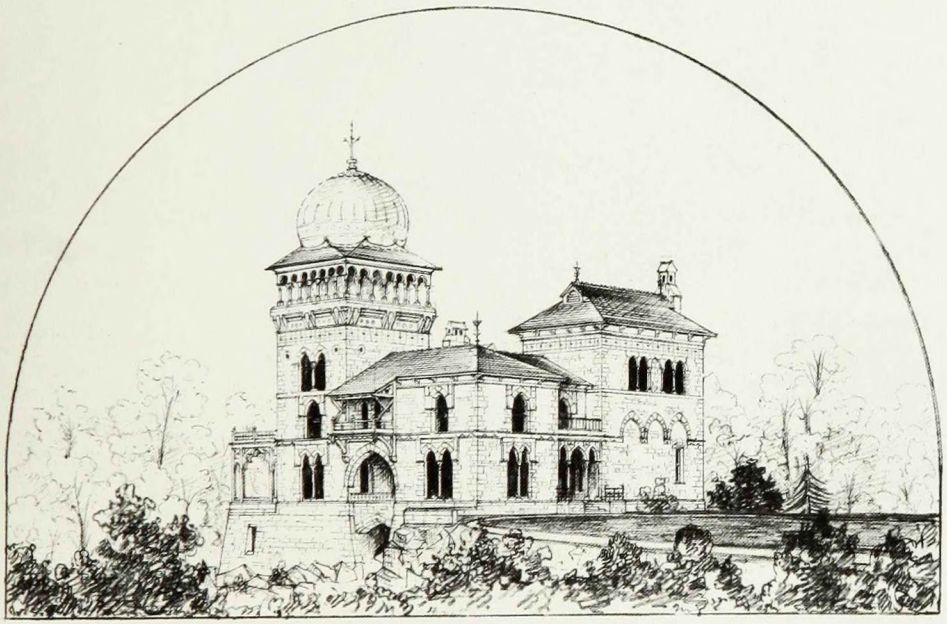
94. Olana, south façade, 1888–1889 and 1870–1872. Photo Wendy Neefus.



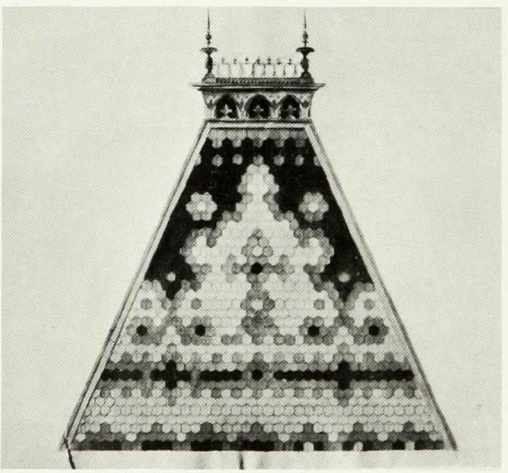
95. Olana, plan of the house.



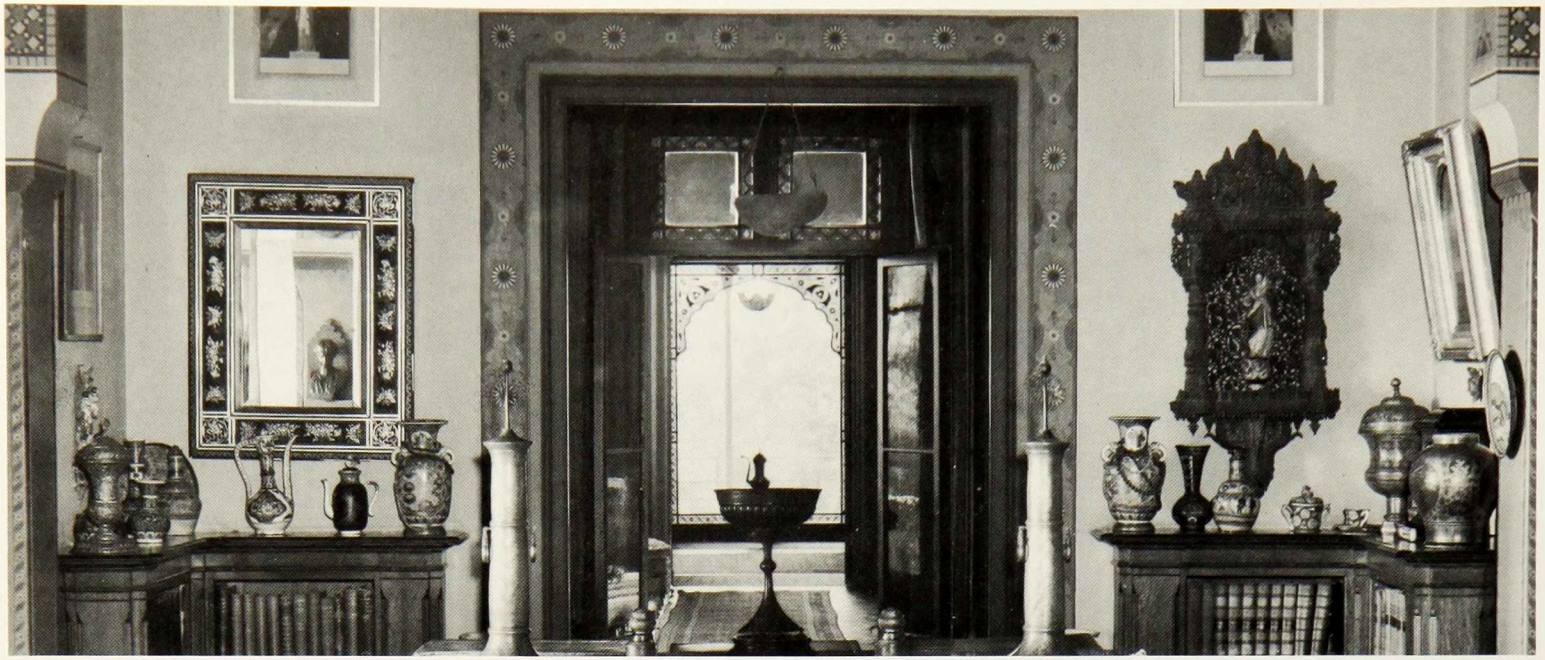
97. Frederic Church, study for banister design.



96. Calvert Vaux, "2nd sketch" of a house for Frederic Church. Olana.



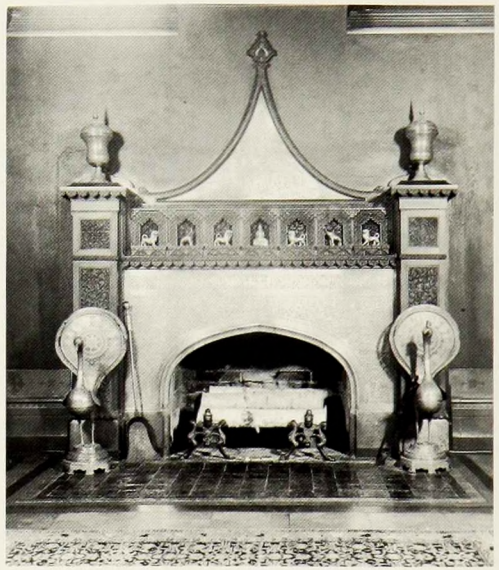
98. Frederic Church, a detail of study for tower roof.



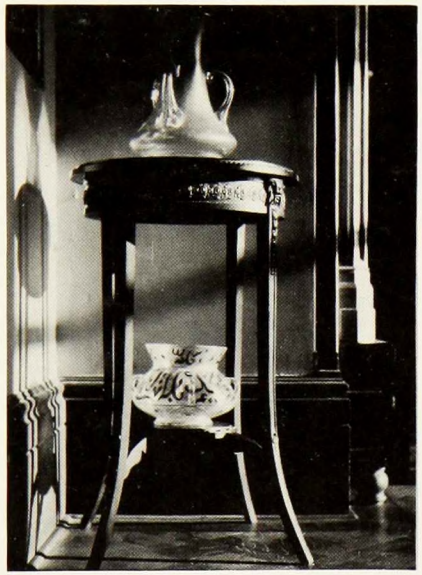
99. Olana, interior from the vestibule looking west along the axis of the house. Photo Wendy Neefus.

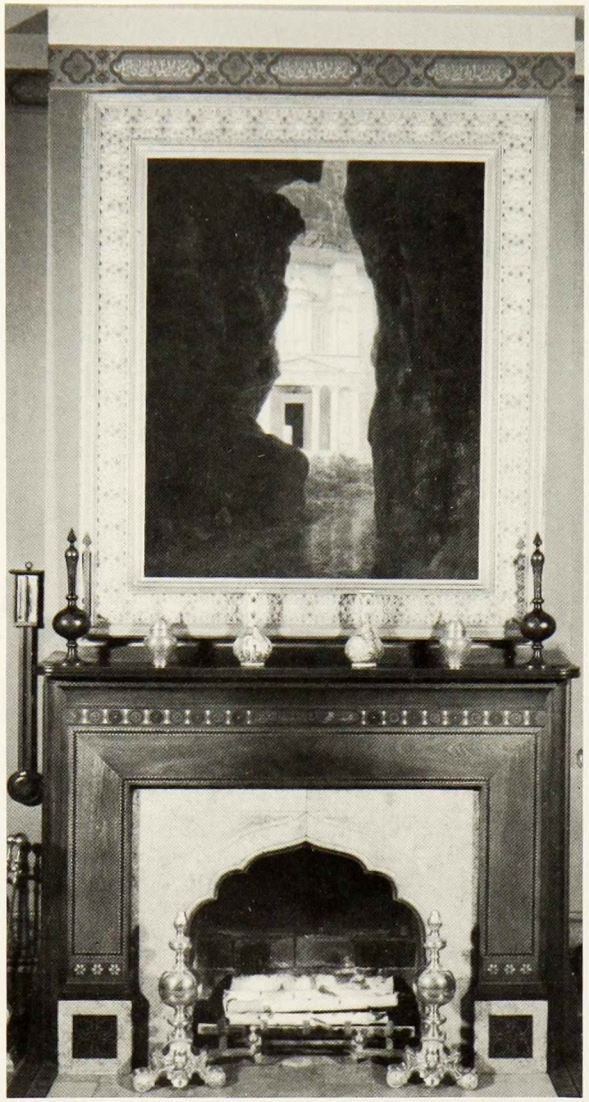
100. Detail of inlaid burl table top, Olana.

101. Dining room fireplace, Olana. Photo Wendy Neefus.

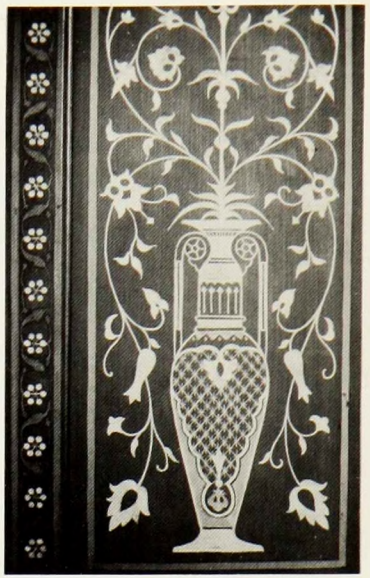


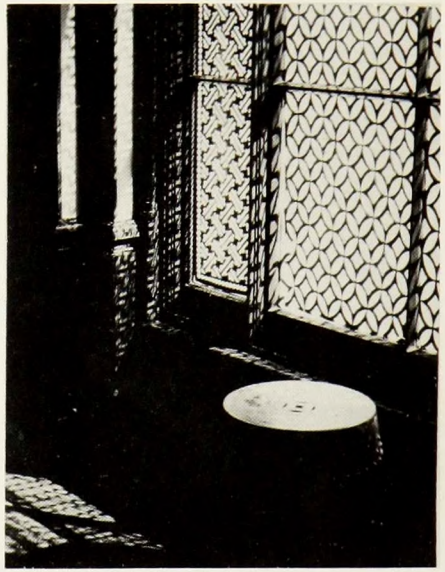
102. Photograph, c. 1890, of dining room picture gallery, Olana.





105. *El Khasné* (1874) and fireplace, parlor, Olana.

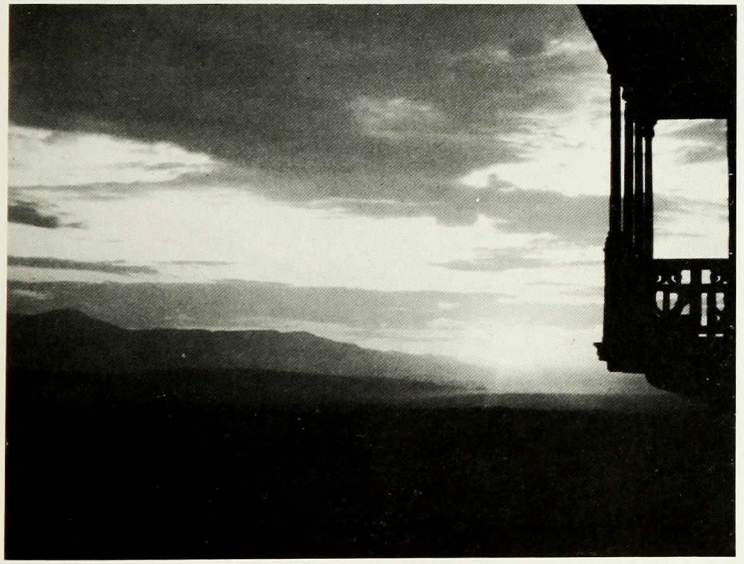




103. Erastus Palmer, *Imogen*, 1874, Olana.
104. Federal revival table, with glass vessels, Olana.
106. Stencil pattern on door, Olana.
107. Window at stair landing, Olana.

108. View of the house from northwest road, Olana.

109. View of the lake from master bedroom, Olana.



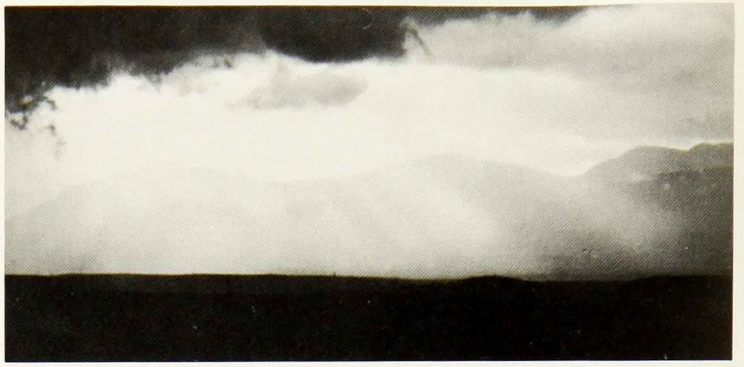
110. View of sunset from master bedroom, Olana.

111. View of the house from lake, Olana.

112. Panorama of Hudson River and the Catskills.

113. Olana, view of island in Hudson River.

114. Olana, view of cloudbank over mountain.



115. Olana, view of the Sleeping Giant, the Catskills.

116. Olana, view looking south over Hudson River.

Notes

NOTES

SEVERAL recent works on American cultural history have been especially useful as background for the study of Frederic Church. Of particular relevance are Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1950, and R. W. B. Lewis, *The American Adam*, Chicago, 1955. Also helpful have been: Charles Feidelson, Jr., *Symbolism and American Literature*, Chicago, 1953; Richard Chase, *The American Novel and Its Tradition*, Garden City, New York, 1957; Marius Bewley, *The Eccentric Design*, New York, 1959; Morse Peckham, *Beyond the Tragic Vision*, New York, 1962; Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden*, New York, 1964. Those who wish to pursue the subject of Frederic Church more intensively are referred to my doctoral dissertation: "Frederic Edwin Church (1826–1900), Painter of the Adamic New World Myth," unpublished MS, Yale University, 1960. A more exhaustive study of the painter and a catalogue raisonné of his works are now in preparation. The Cooper Union Museum in New York has more than three thousand of Church's sketches. Nine hundred more (if one includes architectural studies) are at Olana. At Olana, also, are some fifteen hundred volumes which constitute the painter's library, and a still larger number of photographs. These collections and other archival material in the form of paint boxes, letters, journals, bills, canceled checks, herbaria, rock specimens, etc., along with furniture, bric-a-brac, and works of art have yet to be catalogued.

CHAPTER I

1. Adam Badeau, *The Vagabond*, New York, 1859, p. 123.
2. "Church the Artist," in the *Brooklyn Eagle*, New York, April, 15, 1900.
3. The subscription book is now at Olana.
4. "Frederic Edwin Church," in *Harper's Weekly*, XI, June 8, 1867, p. 364.
5. The painting is in the Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, New York.
6. There is, at Olana, a bronze medal which was awarded the painter at the 1867 International Exposition. But a comment made by Church early the following year indicates a higher award: "By the way it was a gold and not a silver medal awarded to me. It was finally decided that bronze medals should be given to all who received awards and so I stepped up by invitation and pocketed 500 francs as the difference between gold and bronze." From a letter to Erastus Palmer, March 10, 1869, Albany, Institute of History and Art, Albany, N. Y.
7. Benjamin Champney, *Sixty Years' Memories of Art and Artists*, Woburn, Mass., 1900, p. 142.
8. T. L. C.[uyler] in the *Christian Intelligencer* as quoted in *Littell's Living*

Age, LXII, June 1859, p. 64. For another discussion of the public's response to *The Heart of the Andes*, see Albert Ten Eyck Gardner, "Scientific Sources of the Full-Length Landscape: 1850," in *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, IV, October, 1945, pp. 59–65.

9. "Frederic Edwin Church," in *Harper's Weekly*, *loc. cit.*

10. March 18, 1860; *Mark Twain's Letters*, arranged with comments by Albert Bigelow Paine, New York and London, 1917, I, p. 46.

CHAPTER II

1. Adam Badeau, *The Vagabond*, New York, pp. 155–156.

2. Charles Lanman in the *Southern Literary Messenger*, XVI, May, 1850, p. 279.

3. The smaller version reproduced here in FIGURE 31 was probably painted by Church to facilitate an engraving or a chromolithograph. T. H. Tuckerman (*The Book of the Artists*, New York, 1867, p. 373) mentions an engraving, but to my knowledge none exists.

4. Almost all of the quotations in this discussion of *Cotopaxi* have been taken from a collection of miscellaneous items about the painting which can be found in the F. E. Church scrapbook in the Art Department of the New York Public Library.

5. *The New York Times*, March 17, 1863.

6. *Art Journal*, London, XVII, September 1, 1865, p. 265.

7. Earlier versions differing from the Astor and Reading canvases are owned by the Smithsonian Institution (painted in 1854), and by the Art Institute of Chicago (painted in 1857).

8. The studies for *The Cross and the World*, which Cole worked on in his last years, illustrate his explicitness of imagery. The Brooklyn Museum has one of these studies.

9. From a "Sonnet to F. E. C.," which was published when *The Icebergs* (*The North*) was shown in New York in 1861; without identifying the source, Church pasted it into his scrapbook of clippings which is now at Olana.

CHAPTER III

1. Most of the information on this and the next few pages has been taken from Charles Dudley Warner's incomplete and unpublished biography of Frederic Edwin Church; MS at Olana.

2. Warner, *op. cit.*

3. Letter in New York Historical Society, New York, N. Y.

4. To Thomas Cole, May 20, 1844; letter in N. Y. State Library, Albany, N. Y.
5. Louis Le Grand Noble, *The Life and Works of Thomas Cole*, New York, 1853, pp. 65–66. Part of this quotation is cited in Eliot S. Vesell (editor), *The Life and Works of Thomas Cole by Louis Le Grand Noble*, Cambridge, Mass., 1964.
6. *The Deluge*, *The River of the Waters of Life*, and *The Plague of Darkness* are missing. *Moses Viewing the Promised Land* is in the collection of Otto Wittmann, Jr.
7. Scaeva [I. W. Stuart], *Hartford in the Olden Times*, 1853, p. 9.
8. M. E. W. Sherwood, "Frederic E. Church; Studio Gatherings Thirty Years Ago–New York's Former Bohemia," in *The New York Times*, April 21, 1900.
9. The painting is in the collection of Mrs. Vanderbilt Webb.
10. The painting is in the Newark Museum, Newark, N. J.
11. *International Magazine*, III, April–July, 1851, p. 327.
12. Letter to E. P. Mitchell; MS in the Gratz Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.
13. This painting, not reproduced here, is in the National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh.
14. *Cosmopolitan Art Journal*, June, 1858.

CHAPTER IV

1. John I. H. Baur (editor), *The Autobiography of Worthington Whittredge*, New York, 1942, p. 42.
2. Letter to Martin Johnson Heade, October 9, 1868; MS in the Archives of American Art, Detroit.
3. Alexander von Humboldt, *Cosmos*, II, London, 1849, p. 452.
4. For a brief account of Field's sojourn with Church, see Isabella P. Judson, *Cyrus W. Field, His life and Work*, 1896, pp. 50–56.
5. Diaries kept by Church during his first and second trips to South America are at Olana. A set of thirteen letters written to his family from South America in 1853 is in the possession of the Henry Francis DuPont Winterthur Museum, Delaware. For a detailed study of the diaries see my "Landscape and Diaries: The South American Trips of F. E. Church," in *The Brooklyn Museum Annual*, V, 1963–1964, pp. 65–98.
6. The painting is in the collection of Mrs. Dudley Parker.
7. T. H. Tuckerman (*The Book of the Artists*, New York, 1867, p. 376) refers to the painting as *The Great Mountain Chains of New Grenada.*
8. *Harper's Magazine*, I, May 30, 1857, p. 339.

9. *Cf.* note 5.
10. D. H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature*, New York, 1923.
11. Louis Le Grand Noble, *The Life and Works of Thomas Cole*, New York, 1853, pp. 68–69; also Eliot S. Vesell (editor), *The Life and Works of Thomas Cole by Louis Le Grand Noble*, Cambridge, Mass., pp. 43–44.
12. Theodore Winthrop, *Life in the Open Air*, Boston, 1863, p. 68.
13. Theodore Winthrop, *A Companion to The Heart of the Andes*, New York, 1859, *passim*.
14. Louis Le Grand Noble, *Church's Painting The Heart of the Andes*, New York, 1859, p. 15.
15. Winthrop, *A Companion . . .* , pp. 32–33.
16. The painting, not reproduced, is in the collection of Frederick Osborn.
17. Tuckerman (*The Book of the Artists*, p. 386) mistakenly gives the date as 1866. Church's companion in Jamaica was the young landscape painter Horace W. Robbins (1842–1904).
18. James Sommerville, *F. E. Church's Painting: The Heart of the Andes*, Philadelphia, n.d., p. 10.
19. Letter to Charles Eliot Norton dated August 15, 1865; MS in the Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass. Ruskin remained firm in this judgment on Church: see *Appleton's Magazine*, v, March 18, 1871, p. 324.

CHAPTER V

1. The painting is now in the collection of Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri.
2. John Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, II: Part II, Section v, Chapter III, paragraph 25.
3. H. W. French, *Art and Artists in Connecticut*, Boston and New York, 1879, p. 131.
4. Church produced two other major versions of this famous subject. One, *Under Niagara*, painted in 1862, has now disappeared; a study for it and a chromolithograph of it are now at Olana. *Niagara from the American Side*, painted in 1867, is in the collection of the National Gallery of Scotland; a chromolithograph of it is also at Olana.
5. Louis Le Grand Noble, *The Life and Works of Thomas Cole*, New York, 1853, p. 294; Eliot S. Vesell (editor), *The Life and Works of Thomas Cole by Louis Le Grand Noble*, Cambridge, Mass., 1964, p. 219.
6. Thomas Cole, "American Scenery," in *American Monthly Magazine*, 1, January, 1836, p. 11.

7. John Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, V: Part VI, Chapter VIII, paragraph 11.
8. From the New York Albion as quoted in a flyer entitled "*Twilight in the Wilderness.*" *Painted by F. E. Church.* The flyer was published by Leeds and Miner, Auctioneers, New York, in 1866; the passage quoted from the newspaper would date from the spring of 1860.
9. D. H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature*, New York, 1923.
10. *The North, Painted by F. E. Church, from Studies of Icebergs made in the Northern Seas, in the Summer of 1859.* There are two versions of this broadside: one was published for the display of the painting at Goupil's Gallery, New York; the other for the showing at the Athenaeum, Boston.
11. For Jarves' discussion of Church and Inness, see his *The Art Idea*, New York, 1864, and Cambridge, Mass., 1960, and also his *Art Thoughts*, New York, 1871. James Jackson Jarves (1818–1888) was one of America's most articulate critics of the time.

CHAPTER VI

1. Frederic Church to Martin Johnson Heade, January 22, 1868; MS in the Archives of American Art, Detroit, Mich. One of Church's closest friends, Heade (1819–1904), who was also a landscape painter, saved Church's letters over several decades.
2. Frederic Church, journal of a trip to Petra, February, 1868; MS in the estate of the late Mrs. Richard H. Burroughs, the painter's granddaughter.
3. Frederic Church to Erastus Dow Palmer, March 18, 1868; MS in Albany Institute of History and Art, Albany, N. Y.
4. The painting is in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
5. The painting is in the Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit, Mich.
6. The painting is in the Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, Ohio.

CHAPTER VII

1. *Putnam's Magazine*, VI, July 1870, p. 84.
2. M. E. Chevreul, *The Principles of Harmony and Contrast of Colors*, 3rd edition, London, 1859; John Tyndall, *Heat Considered as a Mode of Motion*, New York, 1863; *idem*, *The Forms of Water in Clouds and Rivers, Ice and Glaciers*, New York, 1872. Also in Church's library was Eugene Lommel, *The Nature of Light with a General Account of Physical Optics*, New York, 1876.
3. John L. Sweeney (editor), *The Painter's Eye: Notes and Essays on the Pictorial Arts by Henry James*, Cambridge, Mass., 1956, p. 100.

4. William C. Brownell, "The Younger Painters of America," in *Scribner's Monthly*, xx, July 1880, p. 324.
5. S. G. W. Benjamin, *Art in America*, New York, 1880, p. 81.
6. There is a tradition that Church found it so difficult to paint with his right hand that he had to learn to paint with his left. If this were true one would expect the painter also to have switched to his left hand to write, but Church's handwriting remained basically unchanged.
7. The painting is in the collection of Mr. Volkirk Whitbeck.
8. Frederick Stuart Church (1842–1923) is known primarily as a painter and illustrator of animals. Another name to confuse scholars is that of F. Edwin Church (1876–?), who painted peacock-feathered women languishing in an *Art Nouveau* nether world.

CHAPTER VIII

1. "In Summer Time on Olana," in the *Boston Herald*, September 7, 1890. For other articles about Olana see: *Art Journal*, New York, II, June, 1876, pp. 245–248; James Thrall Soby in *Saturday Review*, XXXI, January 24, 1948; J. Russell Lynes in *Harper's Magazine*, CCXXX, February, 1965; Vincent J. Scully, Jr. in *Progressive Architecture*, XLVI, May, 1965; Wayne Andrews in *Architectural Review*, CXXXVIII, September, 1965; David C. Huntington in *Antiques*, LXXXVIII, November, 1965; Katharine Kuh in *Saturday Review*, November 27, 1965. An erroneous view of the south elevation was published in the *Art Journal*, and the *Boston Herald*, and in M. J. R. Lamb, *Homes of America*, New York, c. 1879, p. 289. Olana is located at the east end of the Rip Van Winkle Bridge, three miles south of the town of Hudson.
2. There is a tradition that Church spent three years exploring the banks of the Hudson before he decided upon his site. This may well be true, but he had doubtless known of Mount Merino since the days of his instruction with Thomas Cole, whose studio was and still is surrounded by trees which can be seen from Olana.
3. On June 14, 1860, Church married Isabella Mortimer Carnes, of Dayton, Ohio. She was born November 10, 1836, in Paris, where her father, Francis Carnes, was United States Naval Attaché. At Olana are some letters written by the Marquis de LaFayette to Francis Carnes.
4. Frederic Church to Erastus Dow Palmer, October 18, 1884; MS in the Albany Institute of History and Art, Albany, N. Y. Church's letters to Palmer are one of the best sources of information on Olana's history. The sculptor, from Albany, was a frequent visitor; Church sought his advice in contriving some of the visual effects at Olana. It has been said that Frederick

Law Olmsted had a hand in the landscaping of Olana, but there is no evidence to support this. However, it was at Olmsted's request that Church was appointed to the Board of Commissioners of Central Park in 1860.

5. One Churchian whimsey awaits the visitor who dares to climb to the mansard platform of the tower roof: what from the ground appear to be architecturally conceived finials at the corners of its balustrade turn out to be teapots!

6. A two-year-old son and infant daughter died of diphtheria in March, 1865. Frederic Joseph was born September 30, 1866; Theodore Winthrop, February 22, 1869; Louis Palmer, April 30, 1870; and Isabel Charlotte, July 17, 1871.

7. The wood surrounds of four fireplaces and the balustrade above a stairwell in the 1888–1889 addition have been carved in the Hindu manner; these are undoubtedly the work of Lockwood de Forest, who had studied woodcarving in India in 1880–1881. He was a cousin of Mrs. Church. The elaborately decorated façade of his own house on East Tenth Street, just off Fifth Avenue in New York City, is still standing.

8. Surprisingly few of the paintings, at most two or three, turn out to be nineteenth century copies or forgeries. But most of the paintings are not by the masters to whom they were once attributed. One of the correctly attributed paintings is a Backhuysen. A panel labelled "Piero Francesca di Capella" [sic] is perhaps a very late work of the shop of Fra Filippo Lippi. Of the paintings shown in FIGURE 102, the history subject to the left is perhaps by Diziani; a small picture below it is Florentine of about 1530 and might fit its label, "Lo Spagna." The young man in a darkened canvas surrounded by a handsome frame is probably a work by Ghislandi. The large painting of St. Rose of Lima (of interest to Church because she is the New World's first saint) is in all likelihood from the shop of Murillo. To its right is an eighteenth or nineteenth century "Claude Lorrain." Next to this forgery is an *Ecce Homo* which reflects the influence of Rembrandt and Van Dyck. One surprise at Olana is a group of watercolor drawings painted by the Impressionist Camille Pissarro, before he left the Island of Saint Thomas.

Index

INDEX

Index

(*continued from front flap*)

Church transformed traditional European landscape painting in order to create a peculiarly American landscape: the painting became "an essential correspondence of the earth itself," "a revelation of the hidden spirituality of the universe." As symbolic-realist he made nature enact the drama of man's and earth's regeneration. *Niagara* is the archetype in fact and myth of a new continent, a second world beginning. His *Twilight in the Wilderness* is a painted prophecy of the millennial promise of the Bible of Revelation. Thus, too, Olana, his residence on the Hudson, was conceived as the meeting of East and West, of Man and Nature. More than any other American painter, Church answered nature's heroic challenge in the era of "Manifest Destiny."

Church's optimism separates him from Poe or Melville or Hawthorne, yet his mind worked on their level. The cultural kin of this transcendentalist painter are Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman. Like them he strove to help his fellow men discover themselves as new Noahs or new Adams in a new world.

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