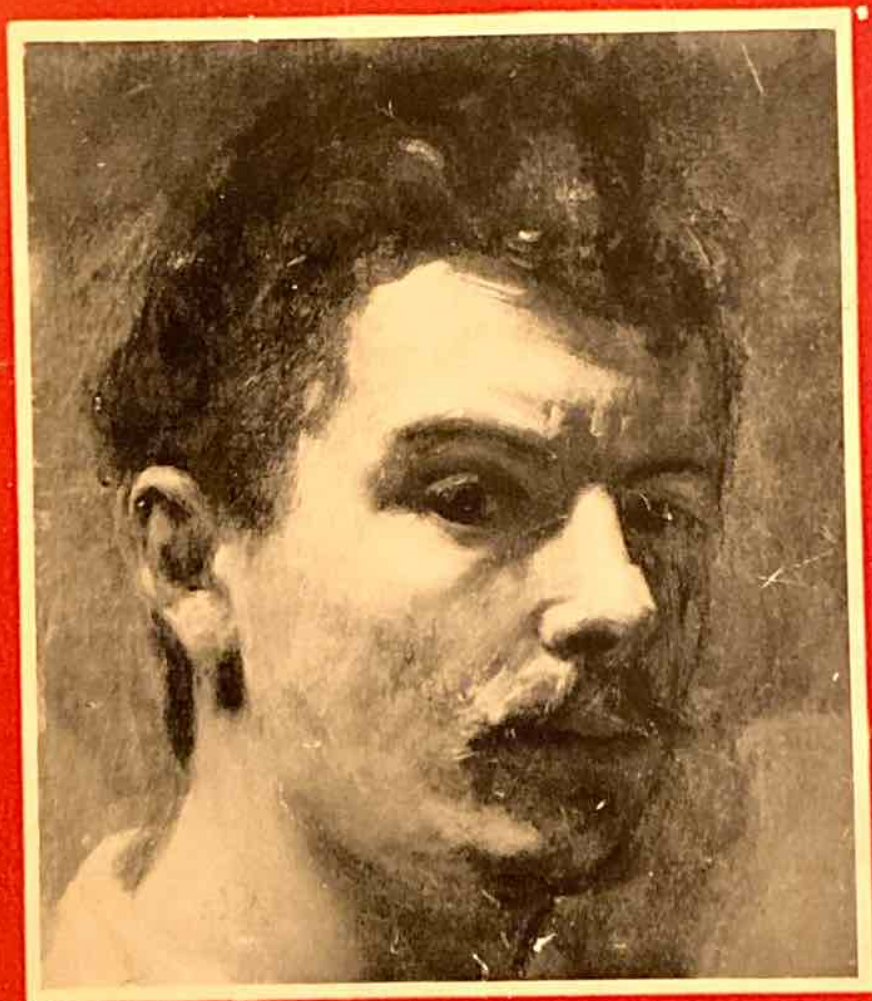


DENNIS MILLER BUNKER



Dennis Bunker's untimely death in 1890, at the age of twenty-nine, cut short a career which promised to be one of the most brilliant in the annals of American painting. Many considered him to have been the most naturally-gifted painter ever born in this country.

R. H. IVES GAMMELL

Dennis Miller Bunker

by R. H. IVES GAMMELL

Coward-McCann, Inc. New York

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To Mrs. Charles A. Platt

Preface

To those of us who were art students in Boston during the early years of the century Dennis Bunker seemed an almost legendary figure. Our teachers referred to his paintings in terms of praise which they accorded few modern pictures, and we knew those men to be severe critics of an art in which they were themselves competent practitioners. We were familiar with a few of Bunker's canvases, and to them we went to study the brilliant solution of technical problems with which we were struggling. Occasionally, too, we heard references to this young man's fascinating personality, to his brilliant and varied gifts, and to the extraordinary promise of a career cut off suddenly by death at the age of twenty-nine. It all pieced together to create a figure more like the typical genius of storybooks than anything to be encountered in real life.

As a result of the change in esthetic fashions which took place after the first world war the artistic aims and achievements of painters highly considered in the later nineteenth century fell into disfavor among art critics and museum curators. An era which belittled or ignored artists of great and seemingly well-established fame represented in the museums of two continents easily forgot the less known Dennis Bunker. For a time, only two or three of his canvases remained on public view, but these continued to attract the attention of people who understood and cared for fine painting. No painter at all cognizant of his own craft could examine the "Jessica" in the Boston Museum, the portrait in the Metropolitan, or the magnificent landscape in the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston, without realizing that here was work of exceptional distinction. The

more curious could not fail to wish for further knowledge of the man who had painted these delicate and lovely things, or to wonder what other pictures by him might be in existence.

Unfortunately no one set out to satisfy this curiosity systematically until the most favorable time for getting the needful information had passed, so that a great deal which we should like to know is irrecoverably lost. However, when I belatedly undertook to gather data for Bunker's biography, I was still able to obtain the help of his widow, Mrs. Charles A. Platt, who had preserved a large number of her first husband's letters. A few of the artist's acquaintances were living and from these sources, as well as from what the artist has revealed of himself in his paintings, there emerged a well-defined personality fully as remarkable as the legendary Bunker of our student days.

We have already witnessed a revival of interest in the social and intellectual life of America during the decade which coincided with Bunker's all too brief career. His letters add a few touches to our picture of a period now being studied for the first time in historical perspective. As he passes across the comfortably upholstered stage of Boston in the eighteen-eighties the unconventional silhouette of the young artist provides a revealing foil for a background with which he was deeply out of sympathy.

But the importance of Dennis Bunker lies in his contribution to American painting. The time has not yet arrived when the era which used to be called the Golden Age of American art can be studied without bias and its painting properly evaluated. The danger is that when that time does come much invaluable information about the painters of that time will have been forgotten during the interval of their eclipse. Even today the artistic aims of those men are remembered and fully understood by only a handful of their pupils. This book is an attempt to record the life of one of the most talented of the group and to interpret his pictures in their own terms as those terms are understood by a painter who studied with Dennis Bunker's most eminent pupil.

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DENNIS MILLER BUNKER

The Story

DENNIS MILLER BUNKER was born on November 6, 1861, the son of Matthew Bunker and Mary Anne Eytinge Bunker.

The Bunker family had long been associated with Nantucket. The name does not appear among those of the settlers to whom, in July 1659, Thomas Mayhew, first Colonial purchaser of the islands south of Cape Cod, sold "all his rights and interest in the island of Nantucket . . . for and in consideration of the sum of Thirty pounds of current pay . . . and also, two Beaver hats, one for myself and one for my wife." There were five Bunkers on the island at the time of this transaction but the oldest bearer of the name, William Bunker, was only eleven. His mother, the widow of George Bunker, had only a few weeks earlier married Richard Swain and moved to Nantucket bringing William and his four little sisters to the island.

Richard Swain was one of the original ten settlers who purchased the land from Thomas Mayhew. By a subsequent arrangement these ten purchasers were each authorized to invite a partner to join the enterprise. William Pile, another of the ten, then sold half of his interest to John Bishop and the other half to "the Bunker children." This second transaction took place in 1667. From then on the name of Bunker figures constantly in the annals of Nantucket.

George Bunker had lived in Dover, New Hampshire. By his wife Jane Godfrey, he had five children: William, Elizabeth, Mary, Ann, and Martha, all of whom grew up and married in Nantucket. The origin of the family was French. Dennis Bunker

used to tell his friends that his name in the original spelling was Boncoeur. This is plausible enough, but the idea has the flavor of Dennis' whimsical fancy and he may very well have suggested this etymology with his tongue in his cheek.

Hard times came to the island of Nantucket after the Revolution, and a number of the islanders moved to New York State in search of better conditions. In 1784 some thirty of them bought land by the Hudson River, founding the settlement of Hudson on the site of the present city of that name. Three Bunkers are listed among these first settlers: David, Solomon, and Elihu. It was a Hudson ship, commanded by Captain Solomon Bunker, which, in 1797, brought home the largest cargo of sperm oil ever brought to America.

Dennis belonged to the Hudson branch of the Bunker family, being directly descended from Elihu Bunker. His genealogy, drawn largely from the records of the Nantucket Historical Association, is as follows:

1. George Bunker, of Dover, N. H. Birth not recorded. Married Jane Godfrey, who after his death married Richard Swain. Died 1658.
2. William Bunker, son of George. Born 1648, at Dover, N. H. Moved to Nantucket in 1659. Married Mary Macy, 1669. Died 1712.
3. Jabez Bunker, son of William. Born 1678. Married Hannah Gardner, 1706. Died 1750.
4. Samuel Bunker, son of Jabez. Born 1711. Married Priscilla Coleman, 1731. Died 1786.
5. Elihu Bunker, son of Samuel. Born 1748. Married Phebe Starbuck, 1768. Moved to Hudson, N. Y., about 1784. Died 1822.
6. Reuben Bunker, son of Elihu, married Abigail Barnard of New York in 1792.
7. Paul Bunker, son of Reuben, born 1805. Married Almira Starbuck, 1829, and seems to have been the Bunker who moved to Brooklyn.
8. Matthew Bunker, son of Paul, and father of Dennis, the subject of this biography. Born 1830. Married Mary Anne Eytinge in 1858.

The Bunkers became ardent Quakers when that faith was brought to Nantucket in the first decade of the eighteenth century. One hundred and fifty years of Quaker discipline in his forebears may account for the excessive scruples of conscience which plagued Dennis Bunker throughout his life. Something of the spirit of the Quaker sect in the early part of the last century is suggested by a story told of Paul Bunker, the father of Matthew and grandfather of Dennis. That gentleman, it seems, had, to use Quaker terminology, "married out of meeting." In accordance with Quaker custom he was promptly "read out of meeting" himself. But Paul Bunker continued to show his profound devotion to the faith in which he had been brought up by attending the religious gatherings, open to all who chose to come for worship, absenting himself, of course, from the business meetings. He also brought his children up as Quakers. Nevertheless when his non-Quaker wife died at the age of sixty-three and the elderly Bunker remarried, this time duly taking to wife a Quaker, the uncompromising body proceeded to "read" the second Mrs. Bunker "out of meeting" as well. Almira Starbuck, listed above, was the first wife and the mother of Matthew and of five other children. The second wife, Phebe G. Leggett, married Paul Bunker in 1869. He had been a widower two years.

Quakerism grafted onto New England Puritan stock suggests a rather formidable blend of austere simplicity and rigid discipline. And the Bunkers, as a family, seem to have possessed the admirable, if somewhat unbending, qualities one might expect from such a background. Dennis' father, Matthew Bunker, however, broke with the family traditions to the extent of traveling around the world in his youth, apparently even getting as far as Australia, a remarkable adventure in those days. The trip, made on a sailing vessel, was taken in search of better health. But to the younger members of the family, who remembered Matthew as a quiet, retiring man, secretary-treasurer of the Union Ferry Company, which provided ferry service between Brooklyn and

Fulton Street, this youthful odyssey took on an almost epic character.

On settling down, Matthew Bunker married Miss Mary Anne Eytinge, a lady whose French extraction perhaps accounted for her effusive vivacity and her expansive nature. At any rate, her animation contrasted strongly with her husband's quiet demeanor. But they formed an agreeable couple, and friends were attracted as much by the wife's kindness and warmth as by the keen sense of humor which twinkled through the husband's unobtrusive manners. Four children were born to them: Paul, on November 5, 1859; Dennis, November 6, 1861; Mary, October 25, 1866; and Ruth, January 21, 1870. The second daughter, Ruth, subsequently became the mother of General Matthew Bunker Ridgway.

Almost nothing is known about Dennis Bunker's boyhood. The family apparently were comfortably situated but, with four children to bring up, they necessarily lived simply. Dennis seems to have spent most of his boyhood in Garden City and to have attended school there. During those years, the Bunkers lived on the corner of Stewart Avenue and Hilton Street. As a result of the family association with Nantucket Dennis made occasional visits to that island in the summer.

Like all boys intended by nature to develop into painters, Dennis drew constantly from early childhood. A few undated drawings and water colors still exist which were presumably made while he was a young boy. They show talent, but are not remarkable. An oil study preserved in the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum might well have been painted when he was not more than seventeen. In default of any record about this study, we may assume that he came across it among his things one day when he was living in Boston and that he gave it to his friend and benefactress, Mrs. Gardner, half-jokingly, as an example of his boyish efforts, perhaps his first serious attempt to paint a still life.

He was about seventeen when he started to attend art classes regularly in New York. He worked both at the Art Student's

League and at the National Academy of Design. William M. Chase taught painting at the League in those years, and it was doubtless under his instruction that Bunker developed his innate flair for handling pigment, a quality which gives distinction and charm to his earlier pictures. The brownish tonality of these pictures also suggests the Munich tradition, which Chase was introducing in New York. Years later, Chase was heard to refer to Bunker as one of his most gifted pupils. But the sound foundation in drawing which the boy acquired before he went to Paris seems to have come from another teacher. In these pre-Paris years, too, he at some point studied landscape with Charles Melville Dewey and there is some ground for supposing that he may have come under the influence of Eastman Johnston during his visits to Nantucket. At any rate a picture in the L. D. M. Sweat Memorial Gallery at Portland, Maine, (Plate 1) which Bunker painted towards the end of his student years in New York, shows that the training he received during this period was extremely sound.

It was probably in the art classes in New York that Bunker made the acquaintance of Joe Evans, although the friendship may have begun earlier, in Nantucket. In a letter to Evans, Bunker jokingly remarks that the beginning of their friendship was lost in the night of time. It was a friendship that certainly played a very important part in Bunker's life. Evans * was the elder of the two by four years, a hunchback sadly handicapped by his deformity, but fired by an inexhaustible enthusiasm for the arts, especially painting and acting. His special genius, however, was for making friends. Throughout his life Bunker remained devoted to this comrade of his earliest art-student days, and the Evans family always treated him as one of themselves. Joe Evans fortunately preserved many of the letters he received from his talented friend, and these letters are the chief source of information about Bunker's life and ideas before the year 1888. It would seem that Dennis spent the summer of 1881 living with the Evans family at Nantucket, though Joe himself

* See Appendix 1. (Note on Joe Evans by C. C. Burlingham)

was traveling in Europe during at least a part of that season.

In the eighties New York had little to offer a prospective painter. American art and artists were poorly thought of in the growing metropolis. The teaching to be had in the Academy schools was for those days mediocre, though Bunker's own development in their classes demonstrates the fundamental soundness of their methods. But the atmosphere could not have been inspiring. And the commercially minded community offered very few fine pictures from which a student could learn the broader aspects of painting. Inevitably young Dennis' thoughts turned to Paris, the city which at that time held undisputed leadership in artistic matters. The Bunkers, with their severe Quaker traditions, must have found it difficult to accept the idea of the boy's going off to the gay French capital. But we may surmise that Matthew Bunker remembered his own trip about the world before he had settled down, and, after all, Mrs. Bunker was of French descent herself. Whatever the uncles and aunts may have said, and it is fair to suppose they said a good deal, Dennis was allowed to go. In the summer of 1882 we find him writing to Joe Evans that he plans to sail in the early fall. And a few weeks later he was established at 34, rue de la Victoire. This was to be his home until June, 1884, at which time he moved to 25, rue de Laval, where he remained during the rest of his Paris sojourn.

The records of these Paris years are disappointingly meager. Bunker seems to have spent a few months working at Julian's under Hébert, before entering the atelier of Jean Léon Gérôme at the École des Beaux Arts. He probably selected Julian's as the most convenient place in which to draw and paint from the model while complying with the lengthy formalities then required before admission to the École. He could hardly have been attracted by the mannered art of Hébert and indeed the latter had little to give to this already accomplished student. On the other hand, Gérôme was one of the great teachers of his time, or of any time, for that matter, and Bunker always referred to the *patron* and to his criticisms with the greatest respect.

We can only imagine what his life in Paris must have been like. He had sailed with the intention of living on a dollar and a half a day "exclusive of clothes," a rate of expenditure which seems fantastically small today, but which was not beyond the bounds of reason in the Paris of the eighties. Regardless of whether he was able to keep his expenses down to this low figure, the boy certainly lived modestly. His work at the atelier took up most of his days, as well as many of his evenings, while the remainder, when not devoted to reading or drawing, were presumably spent after the manner of the *rapins* who gathered in the studios and cafés of Montmartre. His two intimate friends were Charles A. Platt * and Kenneth Cranford, and with the two he made excursions into the French countryside during the summer months. The many landscapes which he brought home to America prove that these trips were not spent in idleness.

In the letters which Charles Platt wrote to his family from Paris during these years, there are a few references to Bunker. On June 5, 1883, he wrote:

In company with a couple of friends, Bunker and Cranford, I left Paris for the summer. . . . I think you know who Bunker is—a New Yorker, nephew of Mr. Gifford. I used to know him in New York and have seen a good deal of him this winter. He is small and rather handsome and is, I believe, one of the strongest draughtsmen in Gérôme's atelier. He had a studio in New York before he came here and he painted some very nice and carefully finished pictures.

A letter of the following year speaks of Bunker's departure for America, by way of Dresden and London. It is not clear whether the trip to Dresden was actually made or was abandoned at the last moment.

Dennis Bunker had carried to Paris a letter of introduction to the American minister, Mr. Levi P. Morton, from the President of the United States. Chester A. Arthur was an old friend

* Three years after Dennis Bunker's death, Charles Platt, himself a widower, married Mrs. Bunker, the former Eleanor Hardy.

of the Bunker family and his letter was something more than a stereotyped recommendation. But there is nothing in Dennis' correspondence to suggest that the President's introduction led to his making any contacts with the fashionable American colony. The boy was eager for freedom to work at painting and to lead the bohemian existence that was so congenial to his temperament. It is even possible that he did not bother to present the letter. Later on he was to see a good deal of conventional society in Boston and New York, but he never really liked it. After the drab and colorless routine of his student years in New York, he could not but have been fascinated by the easy ways of Montmartre, to which he refers entertainingly in some rhymes written to his brother:

Here in the land of shaved poodles
Of the lightest fleas e're seen,
'De ces petits soupers à minuit
En face de Berthe ou Céline'
Midst gallantry, Art and *'pommes sautées'*
In studios, studies or wine . . .

which is the most vivid glimpse we are likely to get into Dennis Bunker's student life in Paris.

In later years his yearning for the great city crops out in his letters, as when he writes to Joe Evans from Boston, after a French theatrical performance had recalled

so many pleasant nights, Paris, the boulevard, the door of the Variétés where we used to come out to smoke between the acts and listen for the bell in the café alongside. And as I walked up Boylston Street with its prim elegance, strange and deserted, with a ghastly electric light here and there, nothing bright nor familiar—*eh bien, mon cher, j'ai eu quelques regrets.*

Bunker's rapid mastering of the French language is a typical example of his extraordinary facility. The boy had no knowledge of French when he left New York. After two years in France he had so assimilated the foreign idiom that throughout his life he would lapse into French, in letters to his intimates,

apparently for the sheer nostalgic joy of using the speech of his beloved Paris. Apart from an occasional slip in spelling or gender, these paragraphs are thoroughly French in their phrasing and easy style. His command of their language enabled him to enter into closer touch with his French comrades than is usual with Americans studying abroad and also gave him an access to the literature of France, in which he became widely read. He remained fascinated by France and French culture. The spell which those Paris years cast over his mind is demonstrated by his persisting for a time after his return to America in signing his name with the French spelling, Denis, instead of the American name, Dennis, which he had received at baptism.

Some years later, writing to his friend, Mrs. John L. Gardner, he refers to 34, rue de la Victoire, as a place where he spent many years of his life "happy and otherwise." The "otherwise" recalls the melancholy side of Bunker's nature from the shadow of which he seems never wholly to have emerged. But we can assume that, by and large, these Paris years were happy ones. The homesickness which he continued to feel for the magnificent city and the efforts he made to return there sufficiently attest to this.

And, indeed, how could the place have failed to delight the young man? Nineteenth century Paris was the most fascinating spot in all the world for a student of painting. The monumental aspect of the great capital was not essentially different from that familiar to tourists before the world wars. But the picturesque side of the city had not then been sacrificed to *confort moderne*, or to the still more devastating demands of the automobile. In the eighties no influx of American tourists had as yet aroused an antagonism causing Frenchmen to withdraw among themselves, closing their doors to foreigners, as they did for a time after the turn of the century. The Louvre held out its vast store of treasures to the eager student, and the Luxembourg exhibited pictures far more representative of what was best in contemporary art than the canvases to be seen there in more recent years. Furthermore, the celebrated artists then working and

teaching in Paris were recognized throughout the civilized world as the greatest masters of the day. In the eighties Paris was the capital of the art world, in fact as well as in name.

Before he left for America Bunker's fellow students gave him a farewell dinner at which his friends Kenneth Cranford and Charles Platt were present. That Gérôme himself attended this dinner testifies to the impression made by the young American. Years later Cranford mentioned the occasion in a letter to his brother, recalling a speech Gérôme had made in the course of the evening. He had warned the American students that they were leaving a city where painters lived and breathed in an atmosphere of art for a land in which that stimulating atmosphere was lacking. He told them that it would take all their courage to hold to their objective under those conditions. This prophecy was to prove only too true for Dennis Bunker, who never ceased to grumble at the artistic aridity of life in America, and especially in Boston. From that city he wrote a few months later, "I am before all a painter, and I'll be hanged if I see how the charming verses of Mr. Longfellow or the essays of Mr. Emerson can make up to a man for the loss of the Louvre, or in fact for a single good word from the *patron*."

In Boston he found himself settled, nevertheless, in the fall of 1885. He seems to have worked in New York for a short time before going to the New England city, which suggests that he left Paris in the winter or early spring of that year. At any rate Charles Platt's sister later remembered visits to Bunker in a New York studio at about this time. In fact, the Platt family once gathered in this studio to see a portrait of Charles, painted in Paris by Kenneth Cranford, which had recently arrived in America. This picture they one and all heartily disliked and they were grouped before it in embarrassed silence when a magnificent lady armed with a lorgnette swept into the room and joined them in examining the portrait. Dennis Bunker failed to introduce the newcomer but one of the Platts filled in the silence by saying that they found it hard to judge the likeness, as their brother had been away in Paris for two years.

"Well," retorted the unknown lady, her lorgnette still focused on the portrait, "you know Bulwer says that two years in Paris would civilize an orang-outang." This more or less ended the conversation and the Platts presently took their leave. Days later they discovered that the resplendent stranger was Lillian Nordica.

Bunker did not choose Boston as a place to live in because the city attracted him. He had been asked to take charge of the drawing and painting classes of the newly opened Cowles Art School and financial considerations compelled him to accept the offer. The school was installed in a building at 145 Dartmouth Street, approximately on the site of the present Back Bay railroad station. Bunker made one of the studios in the building into living quarters, and there he also worked, to the sound, as he so frequently comments, of the Boston and Albany trains.

This art school was run after the pattern that was to become familiar everywhere a few years later. It was based on the principle of the ordinary educational institution. That is to say, it was directed by an administrator who divided the various tasks of teaching among his staff of instructors. Although these latter were supposed to perfect their pupils in all the elements of the painter's art, their chief duties were to attract and to retain the largest possible number of students. While it would have been very difficult to impart any great amount of the complex art of painting to even a small group of very talented students through this divided authority, the fact that the classes were necessarily filled chiefly with young people quite devoid of talent made the task utterly impossible. The almost universal adoption of the art-school system as a method of transmitting the knowledge and skills necessary to a painter's development was, more than any other single factor, responsible for the rapid decline of the art of painting which characterized the first three decades of the twentieth century. It is notable that the twenty-four-year-old Bunker immediately recognized the absurdity of the system. His contemporaries were to waste their energies

throughout their lives in fruitless efforts to turn out trained painters by instructing students at art schools. In their later years many of these artists realized that their teaching had failed to develop competent painters, but Howard Pyle was apparently the only one of that generation who placed the blame for this failure squarely on the art-school system and publicly expressed his view.

From the very start Dennis Bunker perceived the absurd character of the position into which he had been forced. "The school opened yesterday," he writes to Joe Evans (October 3, 1885), "and I have been busy enough trying to squelch and out-talk some dozen or sixteen old maids and the usual complement of raw boys. . . . I feel like flying the place. 'Budge,' says the fiend. 'Budge not,' says conscience." And a month later he writes, "I see no possibility of making a strong school of it. What they care about more than anything else is to get the place full, indeed I don't think it would run otherwise, and they don't care who they take in. Of course, I feel bound to treat them decently no matter what they do, but it's hard work sometimes. One has no liberty, because if they don't like the place they simply go to the Museum." This strain runs through his letters. He did not realize that he was struggling with a small and comparatively well-run example of the kind of institution which, in the short space of fifty years, was to bring about the collapse of that very art of painting which he so loved. But he felt that his efforts were wasted, as to a great extent they undoubtedly were. Had he lived to see the development of his best pupil, William Paxton, he might have considered the sacrifice of his time justified. Howard Cushing was another pupil who later received recognition as an artist, though we have no knowledge of how much he felt he had learned from Bunker. This is also true of Lucia Fairchild and, in a lesser degree, of her husband, Harry F. Fuller, a son of George Fuller, the Deerfield painter. Certainly Paxton always believed that he owed a great deal of his own sound craftsmanship to Bunker's teaching and said so throughout his life.



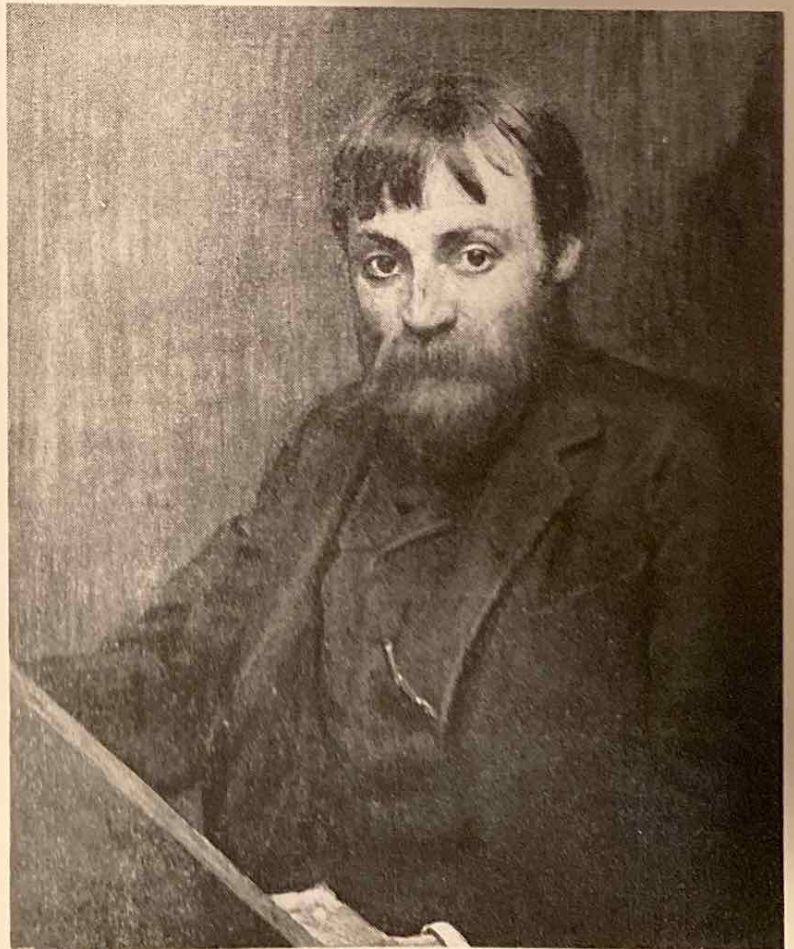
Joe Evans

BY ABBOTT THAYER

Joe Evans

BY ALFRED G. COLLINS

COURTESY OF THE ART STUDENT'S
LEAGUE OF NEW YORK CITY



Although he hated the situation in which he found himself, Bunker's sense of humor was equal to the occasion:

I feel as if all the rain in the sweet heavens would not wash my conscience clear after this winter. I find a certain comic element in this teaching. When I come into the room they all—I mean the women—look about in a sort of scared way which makes me feel like rolling around on the floor with glee. I sit down before the first drawing and solemnly blow my nose, and then, in the dead silence that has fallen on them all, my voice sounds strangely even to myself—and way down in my fundamental regions I can hear the demon of laughter shaking with a kind of suppressed fury. *Ah! Joseph, mon cher Joseph, c'est insensé.* I feel that, were I for a moment to relax, they would all become horribly familiar, and I have got so I can say things about their drawings which make the whole room laugh, without changing a muscle of my face. I am going on the stage next year and I've no doubt that I will be in a very proper state to do Malvolio.

The young ladies who gathered about Dennis Bunker in the classes at Cowles little suspected the thoughts that passed through his mind while he criticized their work. These girls were completely fascinated by his personality. Though they lived in terror of his caustic criticisms, they were devoted to their teacher. "What he said was cruel, but his tone was kind," they were wont to say in describing his visits to the studio, visits which often left more than one of the pupils in a state verging on tears. The truth is the girls were half in love with him. They wove a legend about his past, of which they knew nothing whatever, a legend filled with amorous adventures, duels, and such like. One of the girls could not bear to think of him as Dennis, a name she felt was far too prosaic for his personality. She dubbed him Claude, and to her and to her family, with whom Dennis Bunker developed a real intimacy, Claude he was throughout his life, and as Claude he remained in their memory for years after his death.

Bunker was certainly a fine teacher of his art and, had he

lived longer, he might well have become a great teacher. He had a rare gift for putting into clear and unforgettable phrases the fundamental principles on which the art of painting is based. To make these simple truths cogent realities to the student is perhaps the most important part of teaching. It is certainly the most difficult part, because their essential meaning can only be grasped by a person whose esthetic perceptions have been developed to the degree necessary for the understanding of their application to the concrete problems of painting pictures. The validity of certain axioms becomes apparent to the art student only as his eye becomes trained to perceive visual facts which are imperceptible to the layman. His awareness of these facts is developed by two things: by the actual practice of drawing and painting from nature and by hearing from his teacher restatements, in diverse applications, of the general principles underlying visual phenomena. Perception and understanding develop together. A good teacher of painting never loses sight of this fact and has the ability to adjust his generalizations to the growing understanding of each student. This is just what Bunker did. Taken from their context a teacher's comments lose most of their point, but a few examples may serve to give an idea of his ability to go to the heart of a matter in a simple and direct statement. "Why don't you paint what you see? It's just as easy and twice as interesting," Bunker would say to bring home to his pupils the esthetic justification of truthful representation. "Keep on preparing your picture, and some morning you'll come in and find it finished," was an axiom of his, a rather dark saying the profundity of which is increasingly apparent to the mature artist the longer he paints. Of painting in water color he said what seems to many of us the last word on the subject, "Water color is an excellent medium for those who know nothing whatever about painting—and for those who know everything." That is to say, water color is the most difficult and refractory of media for those who know precisely what they want to set down and are not satisfied with anything less than an exact notation of it. But, as a wash of water color on white

paper is of itself an attractive thing, pleasant results are often achieved in this medium by the most inept beginners, as well as by facile painters having learned a few tricks but whose ignorance and lack of perception is immediately revealed when they use oil paint. This curious fact, which makes the relative difficulty of oil and water color such a puzzle to beginners and to amateurs, is admirably spotlighted by Bunker's dictum.

Former students at Cowles remembered two charcoal drawings hanging in one of the halls. These drawings, which Dennis Bunker had made in Paris, were studies of casts in the gallery of the École des Beaux Arts, one of them representing the figure of Day from the Medici tombs, the other the torso of Ilissus. On the latter drawing Gérôme had written: "*Ces torses sont la base de l'éducation. Il faut être nourri sur ces choses-là dans la jeunesse.* J. L. Gérôme." The document is of considerable interest, bearing, as it does, a message embodying one of the fundamental principles of nineteenth century academic art teaching. After Bunker's death, Mrs. Gardner bought the drawings and they are still to be seen at Fenway Court, hanging on the door of the small gallery in which "Chrysanthemums" (Plate 15) and "Medfield Meadow" are exhibited.

During these initial weeks in Boston, Dennis started a portrait of Mrs. Gower, a lady better known as Mme. Nordica. This great artist, one of the few singers of her time whose name is still remembered, whom he had come to know in his boyhood days at Nantucket, did much at first to enliven his time in the strange city, which he found so little to his liking. Besides the hours they spent together in the studio while he worked at the portrait, they went often to the theater, of which Bunker was passionately fond. Whether the portrait was ever finished we do not know, but the friendship between the young painter and the temperamental singer ended abruptly in a quarrel. "*J'en suis bien aise,*" is his comment to Joe Evans. "*Elle est bien trop exigeante.*" It does not appear that they ever met again.

Early in November he had a small exhibition of his pictures

at the Noyes and Blakeslee galleries, which he describes quizzically as follows:

I've had an extremely curious exhibition of my "works" here in Boston. It was calculated to turn the stomach of any honest man, but the guileless Bostonians seemed to like them, not to the point of buying them, for your true Bostonian is above all things prudent, but to the point of putting half columns of strange matter in the Boston papers.

Bunker never tired of making fun of the New England city. Still writing to Joe Evans, he exclaims, "My dear boy, its perfectly amazing the way people troop to church here Sunday morning, the streets are black with 'em, it looks like a fire and makes me as melancholy as a gib-cat, as Jack Falstaff remarks." No, this place decidedly was not to his liking!

Bunker's natural taste for a bohemian sort of existence had been strengthened by nearly three years spent in the free atmosphere of Montmartre. Like many other young Americans returning home after a few years in Europe he found life in the United States painfully stilted and drab. During his student years he had seen very little of the social world outside of his particular circle of friends, and he resented the demands made on his time and energies by the conventional formalities of society. Boston, however, was ready to welcome the attractive newcomer and he was scarcely settled before we find him writing:

I have already been asked to dine and spend the evening at the St. Botolph Club by a man I've never seen but once in my life, Mr. A. V. S. Anthony, the Engraver. Is there no way for a fellow to be let alone? What on earth am I to do in a club? ... I'd like to get back to some place like Paris where people would know what a damn bad painter I was.

But in a few weeks he was himself a member of the St. Botolph Club, as well as of the newly founded Tavern Club, then established at 1 Park Square. He immediately appreciated the quality of the men he met at these places, speaking of them as a

clever crowd of men who "all do something and most of them do it extremely well." But at this point he has a wry smile for the cordiality of the New England city:

I am generally introduced to people something after this fashion: "Brown: do you know Bunker? No. Ah! Brown, this is Mr. Bunker, a man by jove, sir, who has come here from New York"—Brown here evinces a kind of stupid astonishment and evidently thinks I'm insane—"and is one of the cleverest men in Boston today."

This he writes to Joe Evans. And he concludes: "'Pon my soul, Joe, it's very embarrassing."

For all that, he rapidly became an integral part of the Tavern Club and made warm friends there. He could not have found such an atmosphere other than congenial. There were comparatively few painters in its membership at the time. The most distinguished of the ones then present was Frederick Porter Vinton, an artist insufficiently appreciated today. Others were Benjamin C. Porter, Ignaz Gaugengigl and Henry O. Walker. From its beginnings, election to the Tavern Club was based on a candidate's capacity for congenial comradeship rather than on accomplishment. But it is obvious that a young man like Bunker must have enjoyed the company of such men as William Dean Howells, then president of the club, Charles Eliot Norton, Owen Wister, Dr. Morton Prince, and musicians like Wilhelm Gericke, Charles Martin Loeffler and Clayton Johns. There is abundant evidence that very many of these men became deeply attached to Dennis Bunker.

During one or two of his winters in Boston, Dennis Bunker gave private criticisms to Mildred Howells, the daughter of William Dean Howells. She was about fourteen at the time and her health did not allow her to attend the classes at Cowles. Regularly on Tuesdays and Fridays, when he had finished criticizing in the school, Bunker repaired to the Howells house at 302 Beacon Street, corrected the work of his young pupil and stayed on to lunch. The entire family became devoted to the

young man. Howells himself took a great fancy to him, enjoying his whimsical turn of mind and gay humor, as well as his literary flair. Both men were indefatigable theatergoers and attended many performances together. Nor did they disdain the dime museums then in vogue, affairs not dissimilar to the side shows we now associate with country circuses. Bunker's intimacy with the novelist undoubtedly contributed to the broadening of his literary taste. Miss Howells once heard him say that the gesture of the hands in the Anne Page portrait (Plate 18) had been suggested to him by the description of a young girl in a story of her father's.

Years later Miss Howells still remembered the severity with which he criticized her girlish efforts. While the criticisms lasted he remained the stern and rather forbidding teacher, changing into a gay and charming companion when they turned from her work and went down to lunch. Bunker had brought to America the conception of the relation between master and pupils existing in the great French ateliers of the time. In those studios the teachers were treated with profound respect and absolute silence reigned whenever the master was present. That so young a man was able to inspire a similar attitude in his American students is indicative of the strength of his personality and of his authority as a teacher. A pupil of his, who remained at the Cowles Art School after Bunker's departure, has mentioned the disintegration which set in immediately under the instructor who succeeded him.

In due course, many of the men who met Dennis Bunker at the Tavern Club and the St. Botolph Club invited the promising young man to their homes and the hostesses of Boston were quick to extend invitations to so beguiling a newcomer. It opened a new world to the young painter through which he moved with an amused smile, half-regretting his independent studio life. He writes to Evans in December, 1885:

I have been following Mr. Benjamin C. Porter about town much like a tame bear. In the kindness of his heart he evinced a desire to take me with him into the *grand monde* of Boston

and I have seen gallons of the blue blood of Beacon Street. It's not so chilly as I thought, but in our late afternoon rambles through this atmosphere of wealth and respectability, thawed by an occasional cup of tea, I sometimes feel supremely ridiculous.

... I have just come from what is said to be the most beautiful house in Boston and indeed I don't think I ever saw a more delightful place. I talked to the daughter of Julia Ward Howe, who is herself a delightful and sympathetic person... she is solid on St. G. [St. Gaudens] and likewise on Thayer, so I naturally froze to her at once.

But after a certain amount of this sort of thing his gorge rises against it. And he refers to Henry O. Walker as "about the only man in Boston to whom it is possible to talk about pictures and things... and the only one of my Boston acquaintances who has 'worn well.' I am very tired of this place and I'm certain it's a bad place for a painter." Still disparaging Boston he exclaims: "W. M. Chase has got a show going across the street which is altogether interesting, although I think the Bostonians are too damned stupid to know it." And he goes on to give his estimate of Chase's art, which is a remarkably detached opinion coming from a still young pupil judging the work of his former master:

They [Chase's pictures] seem to me to have a singular lack of concentration but they are much stronger than I thought and I think his portrait of Miss Wheeler is a very handsome canvas. Also some small landscapes which seem very beautiful to me. Many other things, like the one of Miss Gill and Whistler, that seem quite thoroughly bad.

This deep-seated dislike of Boston finds expression again and again in Bunker's letters:

Would I could burn it, it wearys [sic] me to death and when I have once shaken the dust from my feet at the foot of Beacon Street I pray that I may never set eyes on the blasted place

again. Doubtless God could make a more deplorable place but doubtless God never did.

I wish I could live in New York, I hate this place and I want to see you all a lot. I don't belong here at all.

I want to go and live in Europe to that extent that it makes me quite ill when I think that I can't do it. I don't like it here.

Such outbursts could be quoted from the letters indefinitely. Why did he so hate the place? In Boston, Bunker spent four winters of his brief career. In that time he made himself a position very remarkable for so young a painter. He executed a number of portraits for the most prominent families of the city. The most delightful houses opened their doors to him and he formed many strong and lasting friendships. Why was it that he found the place so odious? The reason that he gives, writing from New York after he had left the New England city, is illuminating but does not adequately account for the bitter quality of his hatred. In the fall of 1889 he writes to Eleanor Hardy:

It [New York] is not a bit like Boston, where every one knows you and where you are a "personage." Here one is nobody until he does something. It is very delightful to me and, to tell you the honest truth, that is really the reason I came away from Boston.

The distinction he makes between the two cities is, generally speaking, a true one and has been noted by many others before and since. It justifies a preference for New York over Boston, or the reverse. But it does not quite explain the tense animosity so continuously evident in Bunker.

It is reasonable to suppose that the causes of his dissatisfaction with life in Boston lay in himself, rather than in the place. The young man was still intoxicated with the atmosphere of Paris, which he had been forced to leave against his will and against what he considered the best interests of his art. In contrast to the brilliant capital, crowded with works of art, saturated with

historical and literary associations and teeming with a colorful and varied life, no American community could have seemed satisfactory to him. It was natural, too, that an independent spirit, such as his, should have been irked by the new responsibilities connected with making a living through teaching and portrait painting, entailing, as these things did, the necessity of discharging certain social obligations. To all this can be added his increasingly frequent bouts of ill health, which usually came in the form of splitting headaches or persistent indigestion, causing him to write: "the man who said that money was the root of all evil was a triple fool, 'tis the stomach." And, finally, in this city where he lived among the rich, he was more than ever before conscious of his poverty. By the time he moved to New York in 1889 he had become acclimated to these things, but he continued to associate their early impact on his life with Boston.

Oddly enough, after his death, Boston was to claim Bunker for her own. And, indeed, to a student of American painting, Dennis Bunker appears to be the forerunner of the group of painters who worked in Boston in the nineties and early nineteen hundreds, producing pictures of high quality and of a very individual character. The men who were to be the leaders of this group, Joseph DeCamp, Edmund C. Tarbell, and Frank W. Benson, were already in Boston during the last years which Bunker spent in that city. Neither their personalities nor their work seem to have interested him particularly. He would join Joseph DeCamp and Charles E. Mills of an evening to draw from the model in their studios, then located in Mechanics Building on Huntington Avenue. Mills described Bunker as affable enough on these occasions, but aloof and impersonal. These two young men had no suspicion of Dennis Bunker's intellectual interests or of his poetical turn of mind.

In this connection it is important to remember two things. In the first place Bunker's precocious development at this time made him appear to belong artistically with a group older than his own contemporaries. While he was already an accomplished

painter at twenty-five, the Boston painters of his own age did not reach anything like artistic maturity until they were well into their thirties. And, secondly, it is impossible to deny that the group of Boston painters was conspicuously lacking in general culture and intellectuality. While their attitude towards culture was doubtless fundamentally a temperamental one, these particular men virtually made it a tenet of their artistic creed, contrasting their strictly painterlike approach with the literary art of the Academicians in France and the later Pre-Raphaelites in England. This limited and questionable attitude was subsequently adopted and exaggerated by some of their pupils and followers, who often made the quite justifiable view that painting should be based and judged primarily on its own intrinsic qualities into a justification of intellectual laziness, and even of downright ignorance. This narrowness of outlook was largely responsible for the rapid decline of the influence exercised by a group of painters once greatly appreciated and perhaps better equipped than any other Americans of their time to transmit to their pupils a sound body of craftsmanship.

Their intellectual limitations probably explain Dennis Bunker's indifference to their company. In his letters to Joe Evans, which give so vivid a picture of his Boston life, none of these painters is once mentioned. The cultivated Henry O. Walker, very much less talented as an artist than they, is the only painter who settled in Boston of whom he speaks with enthusiasm as an individual and one of the very few whom he mentions at all. He writes (1886) of collaborating with Frederick Porter Vinton on a large copy of Flandrin's "Adam and Eve," the original of which is in the Church of St. Germain des Prés, at Paris. The man's figure in the copy, which hangs at Bowdoin College, was painted entirely by Bunker. Vinton was the outstanding portrait painter in Boston at the time, a fine painter by any standard. Dennis Bunker does not seem to have cared for him a great deal, though the portrait of Samuel Morse (Plate 7) has qualities which suggest Vinton's influence. He evidently derived more enjoyment from the companionship of young scholars like

Charles T. Copeland and of musicians like Loeffler and Gericke. It is therefore all the more interesting to note that these same Boston painters gave their wholehearted admiration to Bunker's art. And, indeed, Bunker's pictures are as impersonal and as essentially "painter's pictures" as these Bostonians could desire, showing no trace of their author's literary interests or of his fanciful imagination, facets of his mind the existence of which his colleagues apparently never suspected.

During this period of his life Bunker came nearest to happiness in the summer months. The first of these summers, that of 1886, he spent at South Woodstock, Connecticut, with Abbott Thayer. Bunker had been acquainted with Abbott Thayer for some years, having met him once or twice before going to Paris. From the first he deeply admired both the art and the personality of the older man and considered him the greatest figure in American painting. He was therefore very happy to renew and strengthen his ties with Thayer, when the latter passed through Boston. He wrote to Joe Evans, who was himself a personal friend of Thayer's: "Thayer is certainly one of the kindest men I know but I can't help feeling utterly insufficient when he's talking. One should be enormously intelligent just to listen to such a man." (June 1, 1886.) And a few days later: "Thayer wants me to go to Woodstock with him, and by my faith I don't know why I shouldn't."

To South Woodstock he went and Henry Walker joined him there. The months that followed were happy and, except for some minor eye trouble, apparently healthy. The country itself he found thoroughly to his taste and Abbott Thayer entertained and fascinated him. Thayer exerted a very marked influence on Bunker's art, an influence which seemed to increase as Bunker grew older. Some of us find it surprising that a young man already in such full command of his craft should have been so completely absorbed by a painter of Thayer's caliber. Many have felt that this influence was unfavorable to Bunker's development. But the judgment of a painter of Bunker's intelligence

and artistic perception should not be lightly dismissed. It is interesting to read what he says of his idol to Joe Evans.

"I am just about finding some small remnant of myself," he writes at one point, "after having been for several weeks completely lost in Mr. Thayer, lost and swallowed up. He is a most extraordinary creature."

And later:

He [Thayer] has been doing (in sundry strange positions) some sketches of flowers for his nude, or at least with a view to that, and he is good enough to look occasionally with a kind and friendly eye upon my thin and deadly landscape.... It's an inspiring thing, however, to feel the influence of a mind that's really trying to do things in a sound way. Thayer's the first great man I ever saw and I can't quite get used to it, you see.

This last sentence may perhaps give us the key to the riddle, for the first strong influence that reaches a young painter usually marks him for life.

Still later he writes:

Thayer has recently painted one of the sweetest heads that I ever saw anywhere, a most astonishing piece of work. I don't know any one who could make it as well, I mean way up among the swell French painters. I suppose they could do it as well, but they couldn't put the Thayer into it, could they?

Perhaps the companionship of Abbott Thayer during this peaceful summer among the Connecticut pines helped him to arrive at a fuller realization of his own aims as an artist. It was from Woodstock that he wrote to Miss Anne Page:

I think at last I am beginning to be glad that I am a painter. I begin to stop asking myself, at least, why I am one and recognize my right to make pictures. I begin to see that the love, the simple love of the beautiful things of nature, the way things look, is enough to give any one the right to be a painter and, as I think now, it seems to be the secret and keynote of the whole thing. But one must love something else or, be he ever so skillful with paint, he will just miss the charm. I have said this to myself

for a good many years, but I never have felt it so strongly as I do now—I have never been so content to be a painter and nothing else. I begin to feel so strongly that one's own approbation is the only reward ever to be had for one's work, that the opinion of the world as to what I am doing becomes more and more indifferent to me.

The summer of 1887 took him to Newburyport. Here he had as companions Henry Walker and his old friend Charles Platt, *le vieux Platt*, as he affectionately called him. He liked the country and he liked the company of his friends. But it was not a happy summer, for he was not well. "As to me, it goes not at all. I do not work and don't feel as if such a thing would ever be possible." "God is pleased to afflict me with poverty and many adversities." "Figure to yourself one racked with pains and doubts and with an indefinable fear of the future and you have a striking portrait of your friend." "I am mostly occupied with cramps and such." These from letters to Joe Evans.

The letters of this summer are never free from such comments. It would be impossible to arrive at any understanding of Bunker's attitude toward life without a full realization of the extent to which he was tortured by ill health. His own outward appearance did not suggest this to his friends. The melancholy, often verging on despair, to which he was so frequently subject, was unquestionably intensified by his physical condition. And the constantly recurring headaches and bouts of indigestion sadly interfered with his enjoyment of the opportunities that were open to him. It is all the more remarkable that many of his less intimate friends thought of him as a high-spirited and entertaining companion, the Gay Troubadour, as they sometimes called him. Perhaps most remarkable of all is the complete absence in his work of any suggestion of fatigue or moodiness. Serenity and unhurried workmanship are among the characteristic traits of Bunker's art.

For the summer of 1888 Bunker planned a trip abroad with John Sargent. Their original scheme included a visit to Italy

but, due to the illness of Sargent's father, it was decided they should spend some weeks in England, at Calcot, near Reading.

I can find no indication of where Bunker and Sargent first met. It seems unlikely that their paths had crossed in Paris, although Sargent was living there at the time Bunker was in Gérôme's atelier. But Sargent, five years older than Bunker, was already a brilliant figure in the Parisian world, while Bunker was still an obscure and very impecunious art student. It is more probable that the meeting took place in Boston, where Sargent spent several months painting portraits during the winter of 1887-88. It was certainly there that their friendship developed. The two painters doubtless saw each other at the Tavern and the St. Botolph clubs and met frequently at various Boston houses, notably at the Fairchilds' and at Mrs. John L. Gardner's.

In those days this great lady received her friends during the winter months at her home at 152 Beacon Street, moving out to her Brookline estate, Green Hill, for the spring and fall. To these houses came all that was most notable in the artistic and social life of Boston, as well as the most eminent visitors to the city. It was presumably during this winter of 1887-88 that Bunker became a member of her intimate circle, as the earliest letter of his preserved at Fenway Court is dated January, 1888. He was to find in Mrs. Gardner a devoted and understanding friend, as well as a discriminating patron for his art.

It was inevitable that John Sargent and Dennis Bunker, once they were thrown together, should become close friends. Both were completely absorbed by the art of painting and each admired the talent of the other. But, in addition to this, the two painters had a common bond in their devotion to literature and music. Sargent's cosmopolitan culture could not but be fascinating to a young man who had been denied the opportunities of travel for which he so longed. And Sargent became deeply attached to Bunker. Thirty years later, in a conversation with Clayton Johns he told the latter he could remember no one whom he had held in greater affection.

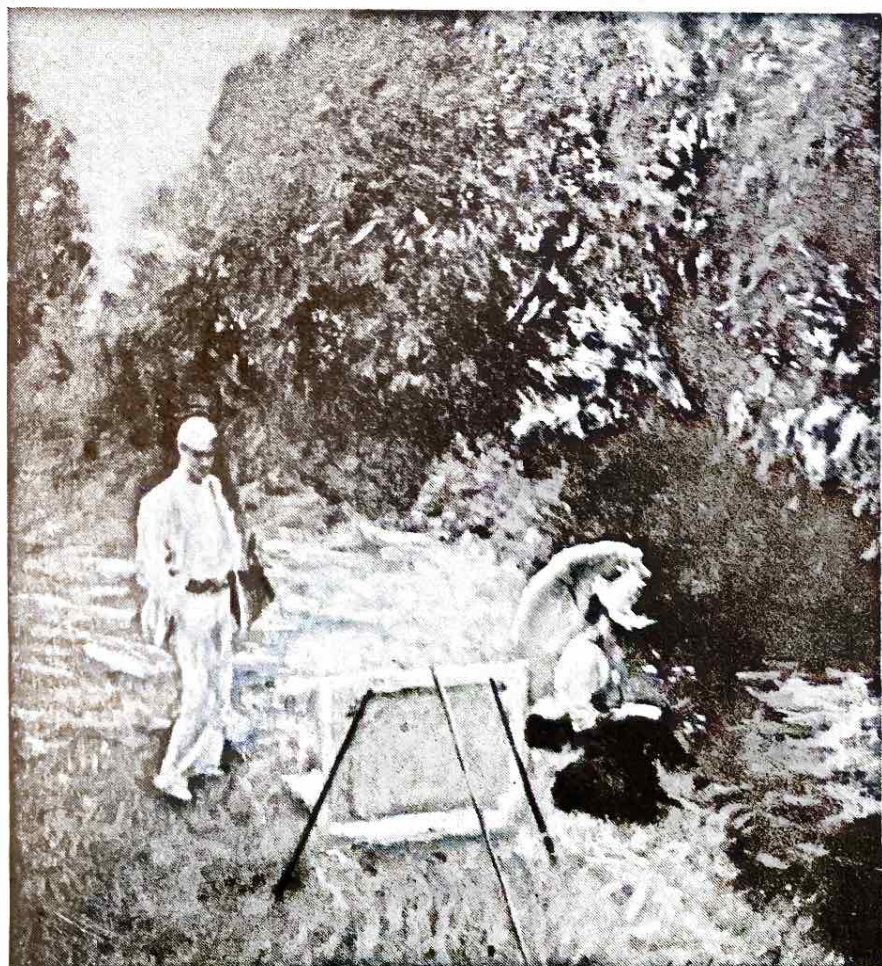


*Portrait of Dennis
Miller Bunker*

BY JOHN S. SARGENT

COURTESY OF THE TAVERN CLUB,
BOSTON, MASS.

*Bunker Sketch-
ing at Calcott* BY
JOHN S. SARGENT



The summer plans resolved themselves into a trip to England, short visits to London, and some weeks spent with the Sargents at Calcot. A scheme to meet Mrs. Gardner at Bayreuth for one of the festival performances fell through, apparently owing to Bunker's reluctance to break up the progress of his work. She also urged him to visit her in Venice, which he refused to do. "I can't come to *Venezia la Bella*, you see. Indeed, I've no real right to go off on this mad musical tour (referring to the Bayreuth project). I ought to be at work painting great works in real oil paint and preparing for a New England Winter."

Again writing to Mrs. Gardner he describes life at Calcot. (September 2, 1888.) "Sargent *filis* is working away at all sorts of things and making experiments without number. He makes them look awfully well—the experiments I mean—and is altogether a wonderful being." And, with a reference to his own laborious days, he continues, "I hasten to add that I have other occupations such, for instance, as lawn-tennis which we play vigorously every evening and which causes us to nod about the drawing-room, while John plays Tristan and Isolde—or the *Gotterdammerung*." This is a brief glimpse into the English visit, but it is sufficiently vivid to give a clear idea of what the summer must have been.

The following year (1889) Bunker decided to spend the summer at Medfield with his friend, Charles Martin Loeffler. The two men lived at Miss Alice Sewall's boarding house and devoted an outwardly uneventful season to hard work at painting and music. This seems to have been one of the happiest interludes in Bunker's life. We get a vivid picture of his Medfield existence from his letters to Mrs. Gardner. At this time Bunker's art was reaching its full development and these letters deserve to be quoted at some length.

In one of them, dated July 23, 1889, he writes:

Do you know what time I go to bed? Nine o'clock at the latest and commonly eight-thirty. I get up at six—you can ask Loeffler—I am painting, in a general sense. Loeffler writes music and plays it, and practices on his violin, and Miss Fay (later Mrs.

Loeffler) practices also and behold! even your slave practices with a bit more method than in the old days, owing to the presence of real musicians in the house. There is nothing like a *real* musician to open one's kitten's intellect to music.

You should see the Charles River here—it has dwindled almost to a brook—and has lost all its Boston character. It is very charming—like a little English river—or rather a little like an English river. It runs here through the most lovely great meadows—very properly framed in pine forests—all very much the reverse of striking or wonderful or marvellous but very quietly winning and all wearing so very well, that I wonder what more one needs in any country. I never see or hear of any of our friends. I am conscious of being a dreadful duffer—and most hugely uncivil, but I can't help it. I somehow imagine that you stand it better than the others. They must think I'm an awful cad. I suppose as a matter of fact that their point of view is the right one. I don't think that I have the least social talent. I don't know how to remember all the necessary things and I'm always supposing that people make allowances for me, as I do for them—but somehow I don't think as I grow older—that my point of view is at all like theirs. I'm glad on the whole you are more complicated than those other people, so you can understand better. . . . I feel more happy and in better courage than in the hurry and countless duties of winter life.

This depreciation of his own capacity for friendship and an insistence that he is constitutionally incapable of adequately fulfilling his obligations to his friends recurs frequently in Bunker's letters. The devotion of his intimates and his popularity among the larger circle of his acquaintances abundantly demonstrate the falseness of his own estimate. But it is impossible to doubt his sincerity. Bunker's attitude toward his own powers as an artist is colored by the same excessive humility, a sense of inadequacy that exceeds the discouragement habitual to most painters who have learned to understand the true nature of the art to which their lives are dedicated.

Writing to thank Mrs. Gardner for a volume containing Browning's "Paracelsus" and "Pippa Passes" he adds,

Those scenes and climes seem very far away and most vision-like, and yet even here in a common and most humble setting I hope to grasp and drag out a little poetry and find in some way the kindred note in my own poor little work. One can but try and fail and fail—and then try some more though as Mr. Keats says “the dull brain perplexes and retards.” . . . I hear Loeffler downstairs working—working over his composition, going over one phrase hundreds of times and days at a time—a most wonderful, patient, slow, courageous work. I wonder if people know what a labor it is—but they can’t.

A few weeks later he refers to Loeffler again, “I even hear Loeffler working downstairs on the same phrase that he began two months ago . . . the country seems more beautiful and tender every day.”

The summer of 1888 at Medfield was a happy season and during it Dennis Bunker painted some of his finest landscapes. He was passionately in love and knew he was loved in return by the girl he was soon to marry.

The last two winters which Bunker spent in Boston, those of 1887-88 and 1888-89, were busy ones. He had now become definitely established as a portrait painter and seems to have had about as many orders as he could conveniently handle. Among the best of these portraits was one of Mr. George Augustus Gardner. The picture now in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts (Plate 11) is the second which he painted of that gentleman. The first one, which represented Mr. Gardner in a light gray suit and was considered by the family insufficiently dignified, he destroyed. The later portrait, which seemed to Bunker at the time to be his best, he refers to as “a second edition, bound in green, *à tranche dorée*.”

He also painted two of Mr. Gardner’s children, John Lowell Gardner, 2nd (Plate 13), and the lovely Miss Olga Gardner, whose portrait (Plate 12) takes its place among the finest things in American art. Other portraits executed during these two winters include those of Mrs. John L. Gardner, Major Henry

L. Higginson, Mr. Samuel Morse (Plate 7), Mr. Samuel Endicott Peabody (Plate 9), Mr. and Mrs. J. Montgomery Sears and Arthur Dixie as a young boy. Others not readily identifiable are referred to in his letters. But this list sufficiently indicates to the Boston-minded how much the leading families of the community were beginning to value the young painter's talent.

Socially, too, he was more than ever in demand and his enjoyment of at least a part of his excursions into Boston society is indicated by these excerpts from letters to Mrs. Gardner:

I dined at the Ap's [Apthorpe's] last night—the night before at Mrs. Tyson's and so the world goes round. What a curious life—the other night grand masquerade at the Tavern—I went in an elaborate costume designed and made by Mrs. Ap—. It was very brilliant and outrageous and shocking—Before the ball a lot of us dined (in costume) at the Sears. Dixie, who was perfectly stunning in his eastern robes—Carter—Sears—Jack Peabody and myself and Mrs. Tyson. . . .

In this brief record of Dennis Bunker's life insufficient stress has been placed upon his friendships. These, however, formed a very important element in his life and he left a deep and lasting impression on those who shared his intimacy. Bunker's singular belief that he lacked a capacity for friendship has already been referred to. While reading his letters one cannot fail to be struck by the references to his inability to make or keep friends and from time to time they reveal a preoccupation with specific misunderstandings, real or fancied, for which he considered himself responsible. The loyalty and devotion of the friends themselves and the affection which they expressed for Dennis Bunker years after his death sufficiently contradict Bunker's estimate of the part he played in their lives.

It is very difficult, after a considerable lapse of time, to recapture the impression made by an individual on those with whom he came in contact. As one pieces together the evidence in Bunker's case one is continually aware of the discrepancy between the effect Bunker made on his intimates and the

opinion of the larger circle of his acquaintances. To the former he seemed an utterly charming figure, lovable, easy, and almost disconcertingly lacking in self-consciousness. But those who met him more casually found him cold, aloof and impersonal, though they too were usually conscious of his charm. A remark in one of his letters to Eleanor Hardy, written while they were engaged, betrays his awareness of this impression and the distress it caused him. "There is nothing," he writes, "I dread more than beginning a new acquaintance and a more humble person is not to be found and to be accused of thinking myself superior or in any way magnificent, it's comic, isn't it?" Intimate friendships he did have however, while most of those who knew him only superficially remembered him as an attractive and extremely likable companion.

The earliest of these intimate friendships, as we have seen, was the one he shared with Joe Evans.* Joe Evans appears to have been a remarkable figure. His father, Dr. J. T. Evans, by profession a homoeopathic doctor, had retired from active practice in middle life on account of ill health. During his latter years he spent much of his time in travel, with New York and Paris as headquarters. In both of these cities the Evans' home was a meeting place for young artists and students, friends of Joe, but warmly welcomed by his family. Throughout his short life—he died in 1898 at the age of forty-one—Joe Evans delighted in the society of artists of all sorts, taking particular pleasure in bringing his friends together and establishing new contacts between them. Here his particular talent seems to have lain, for he made no special mark as a painter. But this tragically crippled young man with dark eyes and blonde hair and beard was held in great affection by those who knew him.

It was through Joe Evans that Bunker first met Thayer, probably the strongest single influence in his artistic development. It was perhaps through Evans, too, that he came to know Mrs. Gower (Mme. Nordica), Robert Taber, and other notables of the stage. But most of all he was indebted to this older friend

* See Appendix I. A Note on Joe Evans by C. C. Burlingham

for his ready sympathy and understanding which made it possible for him to write fully and freely to Joe Evans with the certainty of being understood.

Then, too, there were the two American friends of the Paris years, Charles Platt and Kenneth Cranford. Both remained devoted to the end. Charles Platt was perhaps the most intimate friend of all. Unfortunately only one letter remains out of their correspondence. It was written by Bunker on his hearing of the death of Platt's father.

Only a few days ago I learned by chance of your father's death and I feel almost like an intruder to try and say in words the sympathy that I have felt for you. I can't believe but that you would feel, without any assurance from me, how quickly and deeply I should feel any sorrow of yours, and yet I can't help telling you of it. I can't help saying, what you must surely know, that your griefs could not leave me unburdened, that what touches you, by the quick law of friendship, reaches as far as my heart and makes me impatient that I can't help you in some way, nor lessen your pain. And yet the sure knowledge that one does not bear his sorrows alone must make it easier. . . . I am more glad than I can say to think you have your wife to help you through a trouble that seems helpless—as you must have helped her. I wish with all my heart I could do something for you, old man. Alas! I have been so used these last three or four years to think what you would do, when I am puzzled, and model my own actions from yours that I feel more than ever at a loss now. What comfort and sympathy can I make you feel, I who have been used to so much from you? Take my clumsiness in good part, Chas, and piece it out with all the friendship you know I bear you.

The closest friend of the later years was Charles Martin Loeffler, violinist and composer. Here again we can only regret that we have no letters to give us the particular quality of their friendship. For Bunker, in his correspondence with his friends, adjusted his style to each, writing in a tone subtly influenced by the personality of the individual to whom the letter was

destined. Reading letters addressed to different friends at about the same period, one cannot fail to be struck by the way in which the writer kept the strands of the varied interests of each separate, as a rule only mentioning matters in which his correspondent had some part. There is no written record of his friendship with Loeffler, except the affectionate reference in the letters to Mrs. Gardner, who was also devoted to the Alsatian musician.

But the evidence of their mutual affection is ample. The two men spent the summer together at Medfield, that summer of 1889 which was probably the happiest period of Bunker's life, if we except the brief period vouchsafed to him after his marriage. And no one who ever knew Loeffler could question the delight which his companionship must have given the young artist. A charming companion as well as a musician of great distinction, Loeffler was also a man of broad general culture. His familiarity with French literature must have enabled him to point out many new paths to a voracious reader already eager to travel in that realm of gold. And Bunker speaks in his letters of the way in which Loeffler's musicianship developed his own perception of music. He refers, too, to the long rambles they took together through the Medfield woods, on horseback and afoot, with and without guns.

Something has already been said of Bunker's friendship with John Sargent. This friendship is also connected with a happy summer, that of 1888, at Calcot. John Sargent's culture had much in common with Loeffler's, to whom he also was deeply devoted. Like Loeffler, he had traveled much and read widely, especially in French literature. Both men, incidentally, were enthusiastic admirers of the work of Gustave Flaubert, and it seems probable that Bunker acquired his own admiration for that writer from these two friends. Some of the theories on which he based his own attitude toward painting seem to have been derived from Flaubert. Bunker's belief that art should be kept impersonal, free of the artist's individuality, and, even more, his continual insistence on the necessity of perfection in

workmanship may well have had their origin in passages he had read in Flaubert's *Correspondence*, a book which, by their own testimony, deeply influenced both Sargent and Loeffler. To Sargent music was an avocation, but an avocation which he pursued almost fanatically. Bunker found Sargent a stimulating comrade, quite apart from his painting. The influence of his spectacular talent on the younger man's artistic development requires discussion in another place.

Dennis Bunker's friendship with Mrs. Gardner has already figured in these pages. Throughout the latter years of his life he found in her a confidante who understood many sides of his complex nature. Perhaps more than anyone else she appreciated the conflict between the bohemianism in his make-up and the conventions of the world on which he depended for a living. Many of Bunker's letters to her are preserved at Fenway Court. They reveal how deeply Bunker appreciated the esteem and sympathy of this older woman to whom he found he could write and talk more freely than to other Bostonians. Mrs. Gardner's intuition and her natural gift for drawing out people had been developed by a wide experience of the world and of the social life of many countries. Always happiest in the company of artists, she understood the temperamental qualities which made them different from the average American and readily made allowances for what, to more conventional persons, might seem vagaries. It is clear that she held Dennis Bunker in great affection and it is impossible to read his letters to her without feeling that she took an almost maternal interest in the brilliant young man.

In any chronicle of these friendships a special place must be given to Anne Page. Dennis Bunker owed his acquaintance with Miss Page, too, to the good offices of Joe Evans. In a letter to him written at 145 Dartmouth Street and dated December 12th, 1885, he reports:

Your Miss Page came to see me day before yesterday and we both amused ourselves by cursing you. . . . She seems to have the

same charm that some other of your friends have, I mean your female friends. I am quite at loss when I try to define it and I begin to think it a bit out of my line. I don't know that I am entirely comfortable in the presence of such natures, they seem too fine for me. Whether I have grown too "*grossier*" or was always so, I don't seem to have the capacity to make myself one of them. I can stand one side and admire them immensely, but when I come in contact with them I feel somehow out of my element— Somehow they always make me feel a bit ashamed of myself, and that is uncomfortable and handicaps me at once.

This quotation is another example of that singular self-depreciation which we meet again and again in Bunker's letters and also reveals Bunker's similarly ill-founded conviction that his bohemian nature made him unsuited to the company of delicately bred girls. In this, as in so many other instances, the falseness of these hypotheses was belied by the event, for his acquaintance with Miss Page ripened into a deep and lasting friendship. Only a week later he met her at a reception for Mme. Gower (Mme. Nordica) and the idea of painting the young woman's portrait immediately took hold of him. There are many references to Anne Page in the letters that Bunker subsequently wrote to Joe Evans, all expressing the painter's delight in her charm, her beauty, and the restful quality he finds in her personality.

There are quotations from letters to Miss Page herself elsewhere in this book. These excerpts sufficiently indicate the particular quality of their friendship. They also show that the girl was able to draw out this rather diffident young man and make it possible for him to speak to her of his art and of his professional ideals with a frankness and a depth of sincerity in which those who have known painters well will recognize a high tribute to friendship. But the most perfect expression of Bunker's regard for Anne Page is to be found in the portrait he painted of her (Plate 8). The charm and quiet distinction of that picture and its sensitive rendering of the personality of the sitter make it a memorable presentation.

Dennis Bunker met Eleanor Hardy late in the spring of 1889 and fell in love with her immediately. Never was there a more perfect example of love at first sight. The young girl, then nineteen years old, was strikingly beautiful. Her tall figure and nobly chiseled features were enhanced by a radiant mass of sun-colored hair, the strands of which seemed to have been spun out of various golds ranging in color from ruddy to a yellow which took on an almost greenish quality in certain lights. Miss Hardy had been "coming out" during the previous winter but at the same time she was studying the violin with Loeffler. Her interests were not those of the conventional Boston girl of her day and she cared little for the pleasures of fashionable society. The two young people found that besides being deeply in love they had interests and ideals in common as well as kindred tastes in music and in literature.

It was characteristic of Dennis Bunker that the realization of how much he was in love provoked in him a decision never to see Miss Hardy again. He believed this decision to be imperative for various reasons. In the first place he felt his poverty very keenly. Although he must have known that in time his talent would win him both wealth and recognition, the years immediately ahead seemed to offer little besides struggle and hardship. The mere thought of imposing his restricted way of life on a young girl inured to security was unendurable to him. Very real, too, was his conviction that he was by nature essentially a bohemian, unsuited to the routine and obligations of family life. He had always been irked by the conventions of Boston society, and the Hardys were Bostonians of the stricter sort. Furthermore, being fully conscious, perhaps unduly so, of the somber side of his own nature, he was reluctant to impose his melancholy moods on the only being capable of alleviating them. These torturing doubts, born of an unselfish conscientiousness, did not desert him until after his marriage.

For the marriage of these two was written in the stars and the scruples of his conscience were not to prevail. Although he had announced to the bewildered girl that he was not to see

her again, a freak of chance was enough to prove the futility of all this grim determination and heart-breaking abnegation. For, one spring afternoon, Miss Hardy happening to sit in one of the horse cars which provided public transportation in those days, her conveyance came to a stop by the side of a stationary car headed in the opposite direction. In this second car sat Dennis Bunker. An instant later he had changed cars and the two were deep in conversation. After the weeks of self-imposed separation the surge of their pent-up emotions told them unmistakably that further struggle would be of no avail.

Dennis Bunker had at that time met none of the other members of the Hardy family. The two young people agreed to postpone announcement of their decision until the coming fall, thereby giving it the weight of a step taken after due thought and consideration. They separated on this understanding, Miss Hardy to spend the summer on Cape Cod, Bunker to work at Medfield. In the autumn they made known their plans to Mr. and Mrs. Hardy, who received the news with considerable surprise, as their prospective son-in-law was a man quite unknown to them.

Bunker had decided to spend the intervening winter in New York, planning eventually to take his wife to live in that city. He was eager to leave the provincial atmosphere of Boston, "so small and gossipy that, were the archangel Gabriel to live on Beacon Street, they'd find something to object to in his conduct," and eager to make his place in New York by winning a recognition due solely to his own talent and achievement. Many of his artistic and literary friends lived in the great city and he was glad to break with his social routine in Boston. By October he was settled at 3, Washington Square North, in a studio near one occupied by Charles Platt. In New York he found such men as Thomas Dewing, H. O. Walker, William M. Chase, Stanford White, St. Gaudens, Alfred Q. Collins, and Frank Millet. Sargent was a prominent figure in the city that winter, and Loeffler a frequent visitor. The Player's Club filled the place in Bunker's life which in Boston had been taken by the Tavern.

Always fond of the stage and of theatrical people, Bunker enjoyed the contacts he made there with actors, some of them, like Robert Taber, old friends. It seems to have been a satisfactory winter in many ways, though, separated as he was from the object of all his thoughts, it could not have been a wholly happy one. To her he wrote daily and this series of love letters, too personal and intimate to be fully quoted here, have a rare poetic quality.

From a financial point of view the move to New York was unfortunate. Bunker had become established as a portrait painter in Boston and, though the fees he received for his pictures were absurdly small in view of their exceptional merit, he was able to put aside a fair sum of money. Like many other painters, capable of doing admirable portraits, but irritated by the annoyances attending their execution, Bunker called portrait painting "the most ungrateful work a man can do." But portraiture is the one form of painting for which there is a fairly steady demand and also the one in which a high degree of professional competence, never a frequent phenomenon, is most readily recognized by the picture-buying public. Until a painter's reputation is very firmly established in some other field he is usually dependent on his portraits for making a living.

Although the demand for portraits is quite constant the vogue of a portrait painter in any particular community is apt to start slowly. Once under way it frequently acquires a momentum which makes greater demands on a painter's time and energy than he can meet without lowering the standard of his work. The painter only too often finds portraiture a matter of either feast or famine. And one frequently hears him complaining at one time of the dearth of portrait orders, at another bewailing that the number of portraits he is forced to execute prevents him from painting the pictures he really cares about. These alternating situations sometimes lead him to refuse or avoid portrait commissions when they are plentiful, only to find himself, after a short interval, going to great lengths in order to

reinstate himself as a portrait painter. Such seemingly whimsical shifts are familiar to all who have lived in close contact with painters.

Bunker was undoubtedly glad to be free of portraits for a while at the time of his leaving Boston and in all probability believed that he would soon have others to execute in New York. Considering the imperative necessity of putting aside as much money as possible before his marriage the gamble was injudicious. He did not succeed in getting commissions during that winter and he necessarily drew upon the savings of previous years in order to live. He painted from professional models, a procedure which, when the models are satisfactory, often enables a painter to do his best work. The results, in this case, were "Jessica" (Plate 20) and "The Mirror" (Plate 19). But the artist's bank account became sadly depleted.

Looking back, it is hard to understand how Dennis Bunker could have been allowed to live in such straightened circumstances. His remarkable talent was very generally recognized. Furthermore the merits of his pictures were loudly proclaimed by the leading members of his own profession, praise which meant a great deal in those days of trained artists who could speak discerningly and authoritatively about their craft. Both Bunker and the artists who so esteemed him consorted with very rich people, many of whom prided themselves on being enlightened patrons of art. It seems both tragic and strange that more of these people did not see fit to buy Bunker's pictures and, by so doing, to help a brilliant painter as well as to enrich their collections.

Painting continued to be the predominating interest in Bunker's mind, though its supremacy was now shared by the girl in Boston to whom he wrote each day. Like many another artist, before and since, he feared that his constant preoccupation with painting would not be understood by his future wife, that it was perhaps hardly fair to ask any woman to share a life already dedicated to art.

He writes:

Do you know what it is to live with a painter? Of course you don't! Do you see me getting up at two in the morning with a candle to look at my picture or rising at six to play on the piano, as I did yesterday, in a dressing-gown, with my eyes half open or sitting up all night to fight over something that will seem to you of no importance? Will you care for the species of chimpanzee that we suspect of great talent? Will you feel the pang and the weeks of distress that come when you paint a poor thing? Will you be able to stand the conceit and absurd and idiotic talk when we've done a good morsel of painting? . . . Are you to see me rude to all sorts of swagger people and afraid of the wash-woman?

He certainly overworked. In the early spring his eyes bothered him and for a time he had to give up painting altogether. His oculist assured him his trouble was due solely to fatigue and nervousness, but any enforced respite from painting is always a tragedy to an artist. In June he went on a yachting trip with his friends, the Sanford Pomeroyes, sailing along the shores of Connecticut and Rhode Island. Later he went to Cornish, New Hampshire, with Charles Platt. He was there about two weeks, glad to find his friends St. Gaudens and the Dewings. But he hated the place. He disliked the heat and the mosquitoes. Above all, it was not his kind of country. It did not appeal to him as a place to work in. "A country of great big hills and mountains and ravines, perfectly impossible to paint."

Presently he was back at Medfield, once more at Miss Sewall's boarding house, and very happy to be back. He wrote that he was painting for the first time in nearly two months, but had given up reading to save his eyes. He feels that Medfield is his own element and he adds, "I see a thousand things to paint at once . . . after that other place," alluding savagely to Cornish.

But the summer was not happy like the previous one. Loeffler was not there with him and he found his only companionship among the local farmers, with whom he did get on famously. The eye trouble, though not serious, was annoying for a man to

whom painting and reading were absorbing passions. The headaches recurred to torture him from time to time. And, as his wedding day approached, he was haunted by the old doubts as to the wisdom of allowing the girl he adored to share his shabby existence. His state of mind is revealed in a letter he wrote to Mrs. Gardner towards the end of the summer.

I had no need of your letter to make me blue—as I was already steeped in that agreeable color up to my eyes—I don't know why—but for the last week or so my perceptions have soared to a point where they can look down on myself as an individual, and I confess to you, dear Mrs. Gardner, that it is rather a sorry sight—perhaps not so sorry as insignificant and small—Oh! so very small—I think that hurts me the most, small and dull and of a *banalité*. . . . I am not in fact having that roaring time that might be imagined from my outward surroundings and all that—and I only needed a final assurance of my imbecility and grossness to reduce me to a state of complete collapse.

A letter to Miss Hardy, written at about the same time, betrays the overwrought state of the artist's nerves. It is of exceptional interest for what it tells us of his esthetic creed and of his intimate attitude towards the art of painting.

You must try and realize how dull and monotonous an artist's life is. There is absolutely nothing but work, work, work. And there is nothing in the work of an artist that shows his personality. You are marrying a man whose highest ambition is to conceal his identity, to remain above his work and apart from it, not to appear in it in any way—to be as cold and calm as a machine. Oh! if I only could, I might some day learn to paint! What I am trying to tell you is not to nourish any ideas of an artist people whom you see may expound to you. Don't think, as they do, that the charm of an artist's work must be found also in his own personality. It is always apart, or should be, should have nothing to do with it, and that is what makes it such an infernal trade. Never to play on one's own twopenny flute but to keep the big end in view always; to remain patient and cold and quiet and work like a dog from morning 'til night; there is

no other way of arriving even at talent, unless one is cut out of larger stuff than I am. I wish I could sink myself completely out of sight, so that when people looked at my things they would never think how they were made, never think that they were clever, or never think, above all, that they were personal. Great painting should have no stamp of its maker. I dream of doing a thing that is absolutely stupid—I mean what I say—absolutely stupid in everything but its impression of the truth; not only stupid in style and manner of work but also in subject, and then have it of a truth so gigantic and bare and big that no one will ever forget it. But God knows how such a task is ever to be accomplished! Certainly not by being smart for a few years and glittering in the sun and pleasing the bourgeois. It is so easy to be smart in Art, so easy to catch this and that quality of the time or the taste, the frightful smug taste of the public, so easy to do all manner of tricks of sentiment, of lies that people love and hug and live with and praise! Oh! how differently I can think of it! It costs more courage, more true courage, to do a thing with a *true* sentiment and in a true impression than any form of danger we can face, I think. Never to palliate a line or a tone; to know the precious value of what is human and beastly in us as well as what is great and noble; to see that we can never be but human and not to make of this world a scentless box where people move without passion, or desire, or anything that is true and real—Heaven and Hell! how people deceive themselves and each other, their children and their children's children! The crushing out of real life, the persistent putting under of one whole side of existence of the so-called respectable class is a thing for all Gods and Demons to rejoice at and be merry over for all the centuries to come and the worlds that exist.

The wedding took place, on October 2nd, at Emmanuel Church in Boston. It was an unconventional wedding. There were no engraved invitations, no bridesmaids, no bridal bouquet. The guests had been invited by personal notes or by word of mouth. Loeffler was best man. Most of Bunker's old friends managed to be there, Sargent, Platt, Alfred Q. Collins, Appleton Brown and many others.

The Bunkers went directly to New York, settling in a studio in the Sherwood Building, on the corner of 57th Street and 6th Avenue. The weeks that followed were truly happy ones. They prepared their meals in the studio or went out to eat at restaurants. Their artist friends gave them a hearty welcome. And, as always, Dennis Bunker painted, this time using his beautiful bride as a model. It was during these weeks that he made the fine study of her owned by the Metropolitan Art Museum (Plate 21) and started a larger canvas, of which a superbly indicated head remains as a fragment (Plate 22). He also started work on sketches for four decorative medallions ordered by Stanford White for a ceiling in the house of Mr. Whitelaw Reid.

The young couple returned to Boston for a Christmas visit at the Hardy's. The day after Christmas Dennis Bunker was taken ill and the doctor diagnosed influenza. He died early on the morning of December 28th.

The tragedy of this sudden death, ending a career which had promised such high achievement, was deeply felt by all his friends, as well as by the larger circle who knew only the painter's work. A letter written by William Dean Howells to Mrs. Bunker perhaps most adequately conveys the sorrow of those who had been associated with her husband.

We know we cannot help your grief but we know from our own heartbreak that we shall not hurt it by trying to tell you how truly we sorrow with you. Your husband was our very dear and honored friend and at one time he came and went in our house almost like one of ourselves. We loved him for the goodness we felt in him as much as we admired him for his rare and beautiful gift. I shall never forget the noble seriousness with which he once talked to me of death, as something he had not been afraid to face in his thoughts; and now that he has gone where we shall all follow he has left us the precious meaning of a life full of gentle and patient courage.

The phrase "gentle and patient courage" applies to Dennis Bunker with singular felicity. For him life had been largely a sorrowful experience, though this was due more to a melancholy

cast of his inner being than to adverse exterior circumstances. The fates, which had so lavishly showered upon him exceptional gifts and much outward good fortune, secretly laid upon his spirit the burden of extreme hyper-sensitivity. His delicately adjusted nature vibrated painfully to overtones that a less sensitive person would have ignored or even have treated objectively as material for art. To Bunker the impact of life was too tragic for such treatment. He expressed his attitude himself a few months after his engagement. He wrote to his future wife:

Life is such an actual thing—so harsh and real and mostly so hard and presses so on our poor little beings. It is in all its scheme—whether it be the arrangement of God or the law of nature and only forming a part of some great system of all lives and animation. . . . I suppose it is some horror of this sameness and brutality that turns men of my kind into painters or poets or musicians and forces them to try to do the things that seem least dull and plodding and makes them strive to work towards something distinguished that goes by the name of beauty. You'll know some day what I mean, and I am happier than I can tell you that we can strive together and learn through life how far we can get from the "fat and pury times" and how near we can come to what is rare and distinguished and what will prove when we are gone that, though subject to the same laws as others, we could yet see further and feel more highly than the mass and express, be it ever so weakly, a little of the sense of our revolt and our dim perception of finer things.

Dennis Bunker's conception of his art as a thing which must be kept impersonal prevented him from giving direct expression to his emotional life in his pictures. In these he aimed at poise, perfection of workmanship, and the delicate statement of beauty. He strove to express his "revolt" by an uncompromising effort to paint what he saw as perfectly and as beautifully as possible. In his letters he gave fuller run to his fancy and it is pleasant to close this brief record of his life with another quotation, this one also from a letter to Eleanor Hardy, written a few weeks before their marriage:



Photograph of Dennis Miller Bunker

I wish often for the magic lamp of Alladin and the magic carpet that one had only to speak to to be obeyed. I wish those days would come when we might sit on our carpet and be transported over the seas and mountains and cities wherever we wished to go—where we could ride on the backs of enormous genies with great black and blue wings and fly so fast and far the stars would seem like one stream of white fire—where we would go there would be no cold nor wind but always summer and green—and a white palace with a thousand steps and a thousand domes and a thousand white horses in the stables and many black people with red and yellow gowns to serve us out of ivory and gold and silver. And you'd wear a hundred pearls as big as a robin's egg in your yellow hair and wear a sea green robe with gold clasps and have a great many green parrots who would talk poetry all day. There would be the sea rolling immense and blue all day long and shimmering with stars at night—and we'd sit on a balcony over the water, a balcony of carved sandal-wood, and listen to music. In the morning we'd go hunting with a thousand people and birds and dogs and tigers to catch other beasts. And we'd have a magic room where we could see all the secrets of the world and the past and all that is to come. And we'd be very wise and we'd go sometimes to the bottom of the sea and play with all sorts of strange things and live in a house of green shells and coral, and live on oysters who would open themselves to us. We would be waited on by horse-shoe crabs and many strange people, and the people with long beautiful blue tails would sing to us while we ate—and lots more, only I haven't time to tell it all.

Dennis Bunker never had time to tell it all. He seems to have had a premonition of this for he wrote in another letter: "It is a mistake to have only one life. As for me I am only rehearsing in this one—I might be a painter if I could live again and begin afresh—we ought to be given three tries like the base-ball men." But he was wrong in his estimate of his achievement as a painter. A painter he was and in his brief life he attained a permanent place in American painting.

The Portraits and Figure Pieces

IN ONE OF THE notebooks preserved at Montauban the young Ingres scribbled the following quotation from Montaigne: "*Les abeilles pillotent deçà delà les fleurs, mais elles en font après le miel: ce n'est plus ni thym, ni marjolaine, il les transformera et confondra pour en faire un ouvrage tout sien.*" The lad who was moved to jot this down while he was a student in David's atelier later developed an art as powerfully individualistic as any in the annals of European painting.

Glancing about a room hung with portraits and figure pieces by Dennis Bunker one is reminded of Montaigne's bees. Throughout his brief career Bunker successively adopted the styles of various painters with whom he came into contact and whom he admired. He was often remarkably successful in assimilating the qualities he sought from the objects of his admiration. The very success with which he applied these different ways of making pictures leaves the observer puzzled. For this young man painted with a skill which makes us readily forget that he died at an age when many painters, noted in middle life for their personal styles, were still groping for their way. It was only natural that Dennis Bunker should not have found himself at twenty-nine.

Furthermore, the brief decade of Bunker's artistic activity came at a time when conflicting concepts of the nature of painting made the orientation of a young artist exceptionally difficult. During his most impressionable years he was subjected to the three major artistic trends of the day. The traditional methods of painting, now usually referred to as academic, Bun-

ker learned first from his teachers in New York and subsequently, in Paris, from its leading exponent, Gérôme. A little later, notably through John Sargent, he came into contact with the great contemporary movement which, reacting against the teaching of the academicians and their emphasis on linear drawing, based its practice on the study of nature in terms of tonal relations and chiaroscuro.* And, finally, Dennis Bunker found himself confronted with the revolutionary discoveries and methods of French Impressionists and the *plein air* painters. Each of these three types of painting derives its special character from an emphasis on a different aspect of the visible world, and each type is susceptible of being developed into an admirable medium of expression. The disastrous conflict between the devotees of the three different approaches to the rendering of nature arose from the belief of each group that the method of their choice was the only one capable of producing great painting. Even today it is not generally recognized that these methods are merely dissimilar instruments, each adapted to a particular task.

The young Bunker's understandable indecision in the face of these conflicting ideas and the facility with which he took what he needed from other men should not blind us to the personal quality of his pictures, however derivative the manner or method of their execution. Had he lived out the full span of his life he would probably have evolved a style differing from that of any of the canvases which he painted in his twenties. What that style would have been we cannot safely guess. As it stands, nearly all his work carries the imprint of his delicate and sensitive perception of beauty. Many of his pictures have great artistic merit. All of them are interesting for what they show of the growth of an unusual and distinguished talent.

An early work of Dennis Bunker's hangs in the L.D.M. Sweat Memorial Gallery at Portland, Maine. Dated 1881, this portrait

* He evidently had already developed an aptitude for this type of painting under at least one of his teachers in the New York days, William M. Chase.

of Walter Griffin (Plate 1) was painted when Bunker was only twenty years old, in his New York art-student days.

It is an admirable little picture, judged by any standard. Considered as the work of a boy of twenty it seems little less than a phenomenon. The composition and the placement of the figure in the canvas indicate an intelligent grasp of design, if no particular originality. The execution is remarkably dexterous, showing a fine feeling for paint quality. Although the color leans to monochrome in a brownish tonality, the values are well rendered and the modeling is quite subtly expressed. The drawing is both sensitive and correct.

Dennis Bunker was one of those exceptional beings endowed with an inborn aptitude for the accurate perception of form. Persons so endowed learn to draw fairly correctly after being subjected to but a few months of intelligent guidance, instead of struggling for many years to acquire this essential accomplishment, as many otherwise talented artists are obliged to do. Once in possession of this rudimentary skill, so very difficult of acquisition for most people, these fortunate students can devote their time and energies to the pursuit of the subtler qualities of style and expressiveness by which their stature as draughtsmen is eventually established. The rapidity of their development is greatly accelerated by this particular gift.

The Griffin portrait shows how early in life Bunker mastered this fundamental element of his art. A portrait of his fellow student, Kenneth Cranford (Plate 3), painted in Paris three years later (1884), gives the measure of the progress he made under the guidance of a superb draughtsman and a great teacher, Jean Léon Gérôme. To the correctness of the earlier study there is added a sense of style, a finer perception of the meaning of contours and of the relation of each part to the whole. The difference is slight but, like all such differences in works of art above a certain level of excellence, very important. The advance in color perception is even more marked. The brownish tonality has given place to a truer statement. The

young painter is still working within a formula, but it is a supple formula which he handles with real skill.

Bunker considered the Cranford portrait the best thing he had painted up to that time. He writes this to Joe Evans, quoting Gérôme's comment on the picture. The master had called it "leathery but serious." It is not easy to understand the use of the word "leathery" as applied to this painting. Perhaps the French world would have given us a clue to Gérôme's meaning. Gérôme certainly knew what he was talking about, and this brief but perfectly authentic record of one of his criticisms is of considerable interest, taken in connection with the picture itself.

We have an example of Bunker's ability to assimilate by imitation in a curious and not very successful canvas entitled "Reading Aloud" (Plate 5) which reflects its author's interest in the work of Alfred Stevens. Although dated 1886, it seems questionable whether this picture was executed in Bunker's Boston studio. Furthermore, there is no mention of it in the letters to Joe Evans, which give a pretty detailed account of Bunker's activities during the years following his settling in Boston. The picture may possibly have been painted in the summer of 1885, immediately after Bunker's arrival in America, before he established himself in Boston. It is quite conceivable that he dated the canvas while retouching it a few months later.

The interest of this picture resides in what it reveals of Bunker's admiration for the great Belgian master. In December, 1886, he wrote to Joe Evans: "Pray don't wonder in your mind how or why people can study with A. Stevens. Many young ladies do so. It is not difficult. I also have been presented with his little paper book. I should think everything he says quite sound, but don't know why he says 'em."

This quotation betrays a preoccupation with Stevens, though it does not indicate any great enthusiasm for the man at the time it was written. However, when Bunker was a student in Paris, Alfred Stevens, then at the height of his fame, was a very great figure in the capital. One would naturally expect

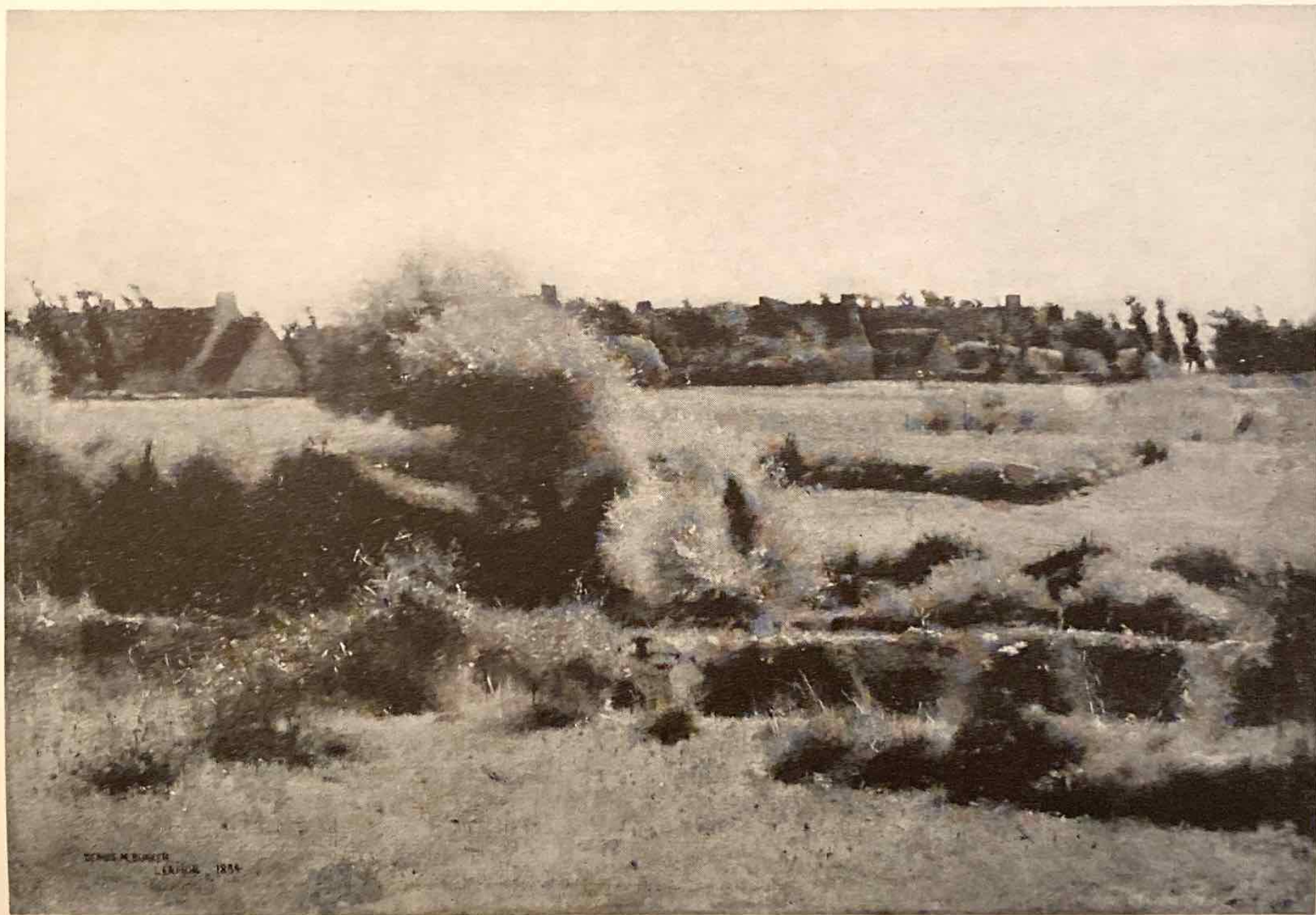
Bunker to be fascinated by the particular qualities which distinguish that painter's work. The young American's natural feeling for fine paint quality must have made him quick to recognize Stevens' incomparable workmanship. It was precisely the Belgian's handling that Bunker was trying to reproduce in the "Reading Aloud," achieving his purpose with quite astonishing success in some passages of the picture. The pastiche is so learned and often parallels its model so closely that one is inclined to believe the maker must have had frequent access to some of Stevens' works while he was painting it. I do not know that there were any pictures by Stevens in Boston in the eighties. "Reading Aloud" appears to have been Bunker's most ambitious figure composition. Though the problem of composing the group is intelligently approached, the result is not wholly successful. Bunker never became a distinguished or an original designer. There is reason to believe he would have developed this element of his art had he been vouchsafed more working years. His single figures are generally well placed on the canvas, and here and there one finds bits designed with genuine felicity. But he never seems to have fully realized the esthetic possibilities of pattern and arabesque, nor to have adopted a method of work susceptible of giving the best results in composition. During the last years of his life his interest clearly lay in another direction. The figure pieces of those years reveal the artist's increasing tendency to use the methods in vogue among the various groups then trying to break away from the so-called academic traditions. These painters favored the practice of establishing the main elements of their pictures on the canvas directly from nature in a provisional sort of way, subsequently making alterations of gesture and detail to improve the pattern of the composition. This method of starting a picture, in very general use at the end of the nineteenth century, is not suited to the development of well-considered design.

A very curious example of Bunker's assimilative skill is the portrait of Samuel Torrey Morse (Plate 7), now in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. The picture was painted and signed in



Portrait of Walter Griffin, 1881

COURTESY OF L.D.M. SWEAT MEMORIAL ART MUSEUM, PORTLAND, ME.



Larmor, 1884

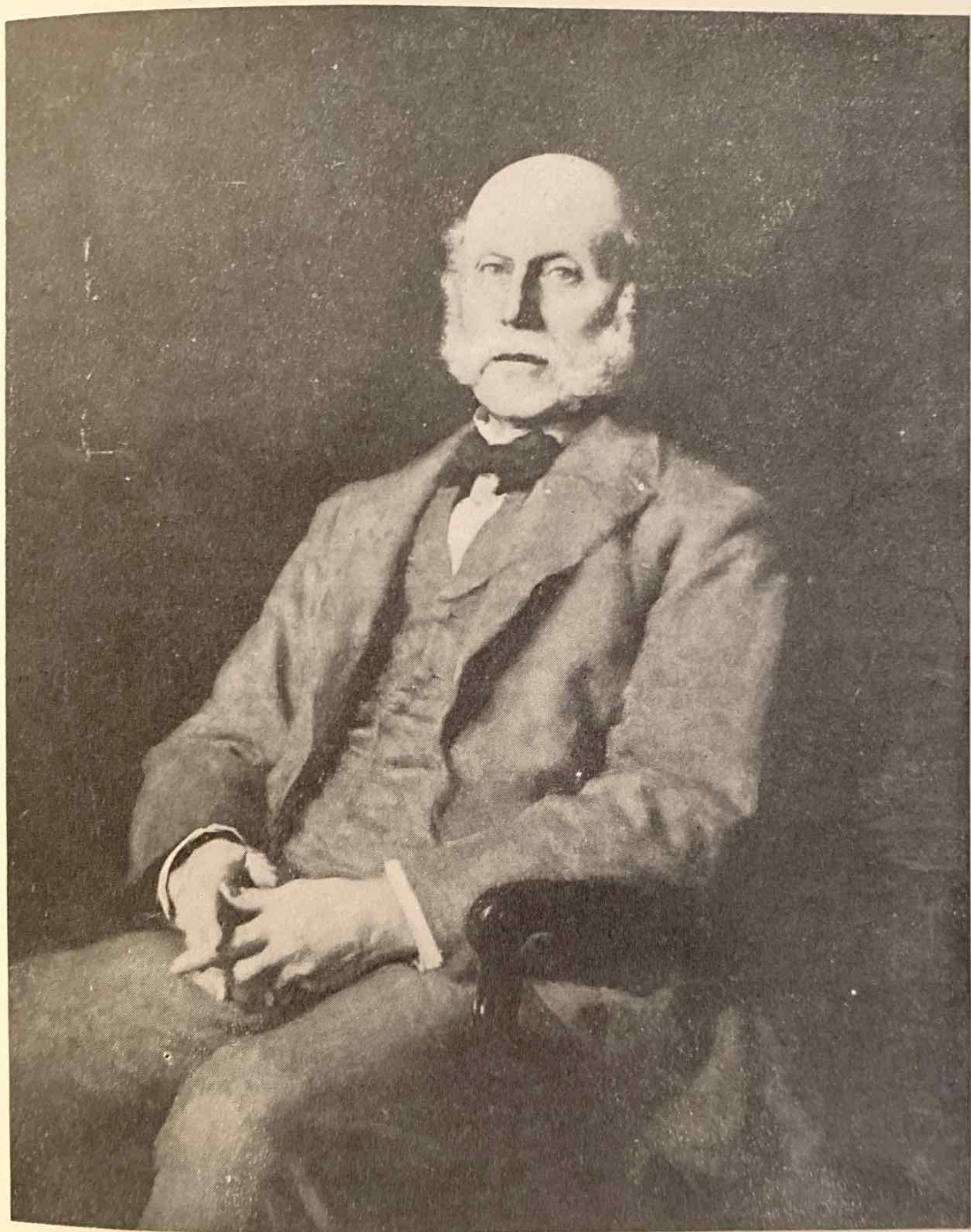
FORMERLY ROBERT C. VOSE GALLERIES



Portrait of Kenneth Cranford, 1884

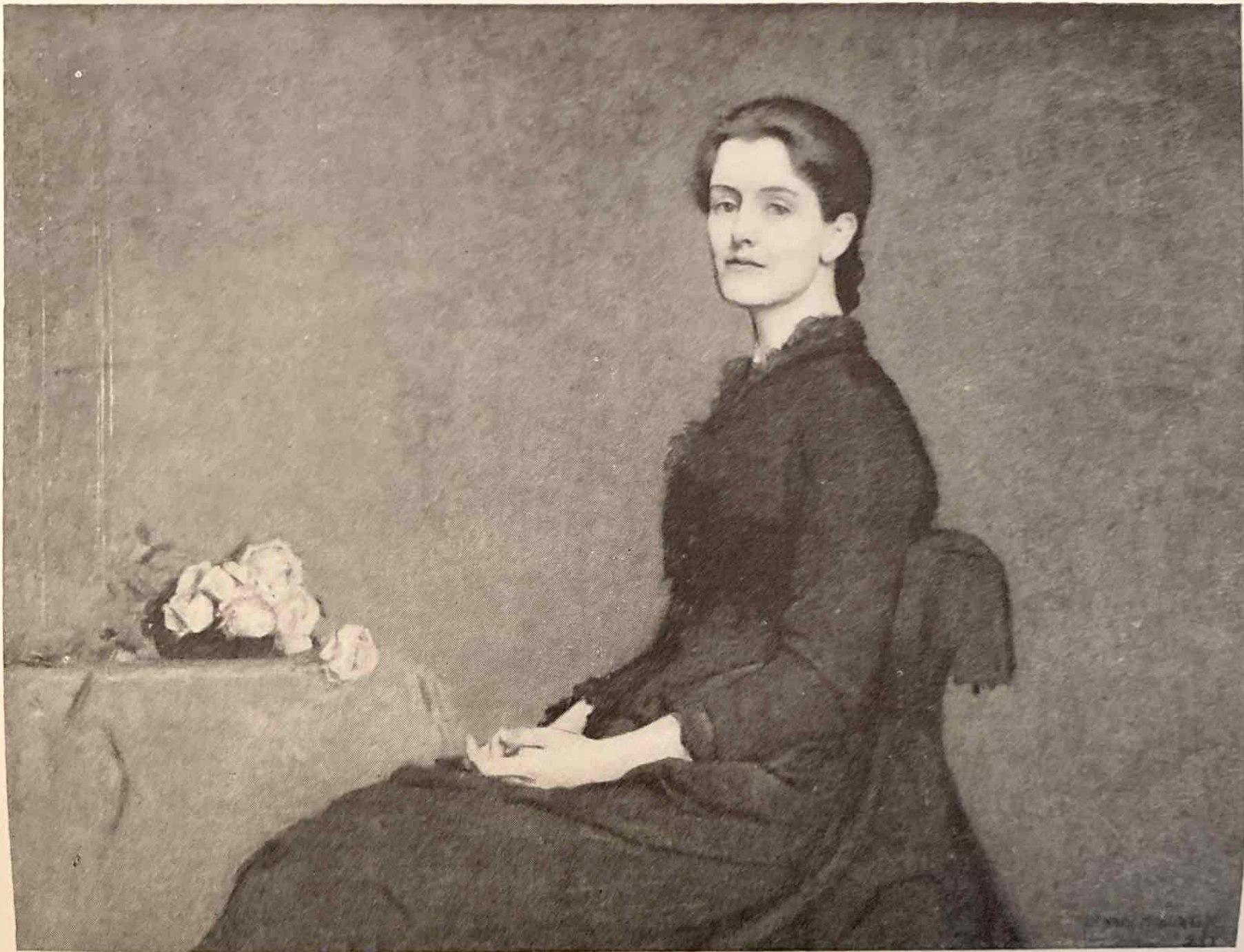


Pines Beyond the Fence, 1886

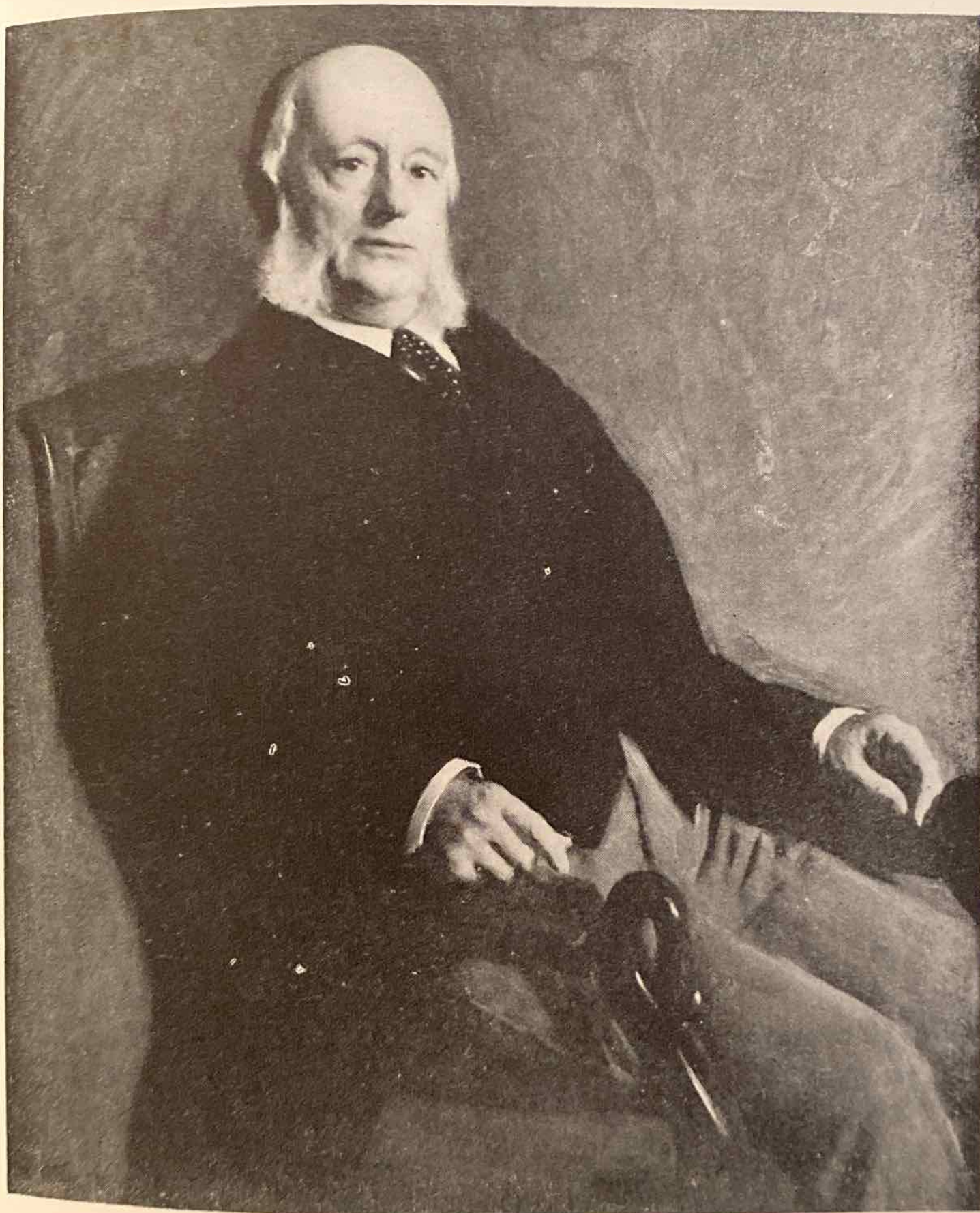


Portrait of Samuel Torrey Morse, Esq., 1887
(HANDS REPAINTED IN 1888)

COURTESY OF THE BOSTON MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS



Portrait of Miss Anne Page, 1887

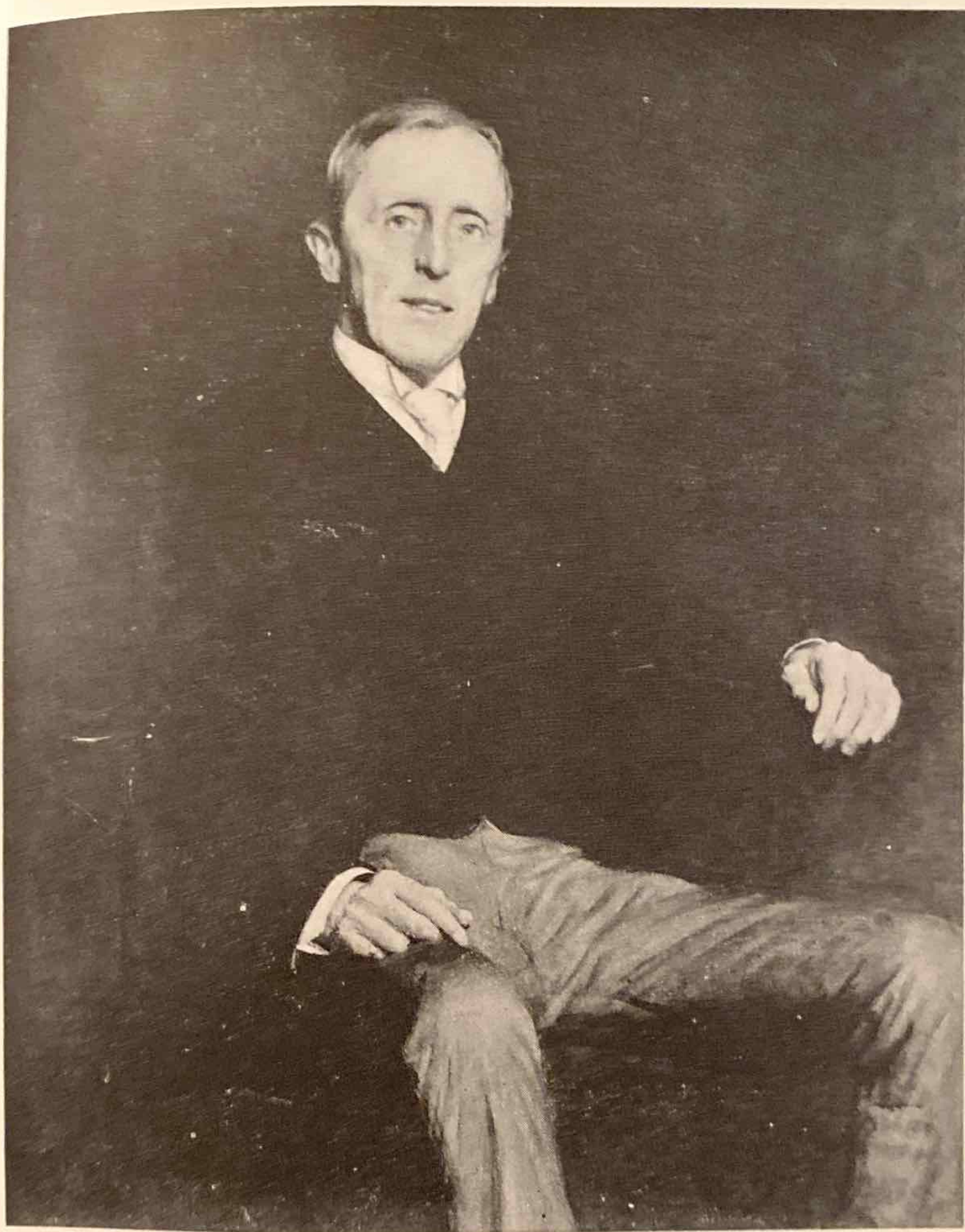


Portrait of Samuel Endicott Peabody, Esq., 1888

COURTESY OF GROTON SCHOOL



Portrait of a Lady, 1888
(ORIGINAL DESTROYED)

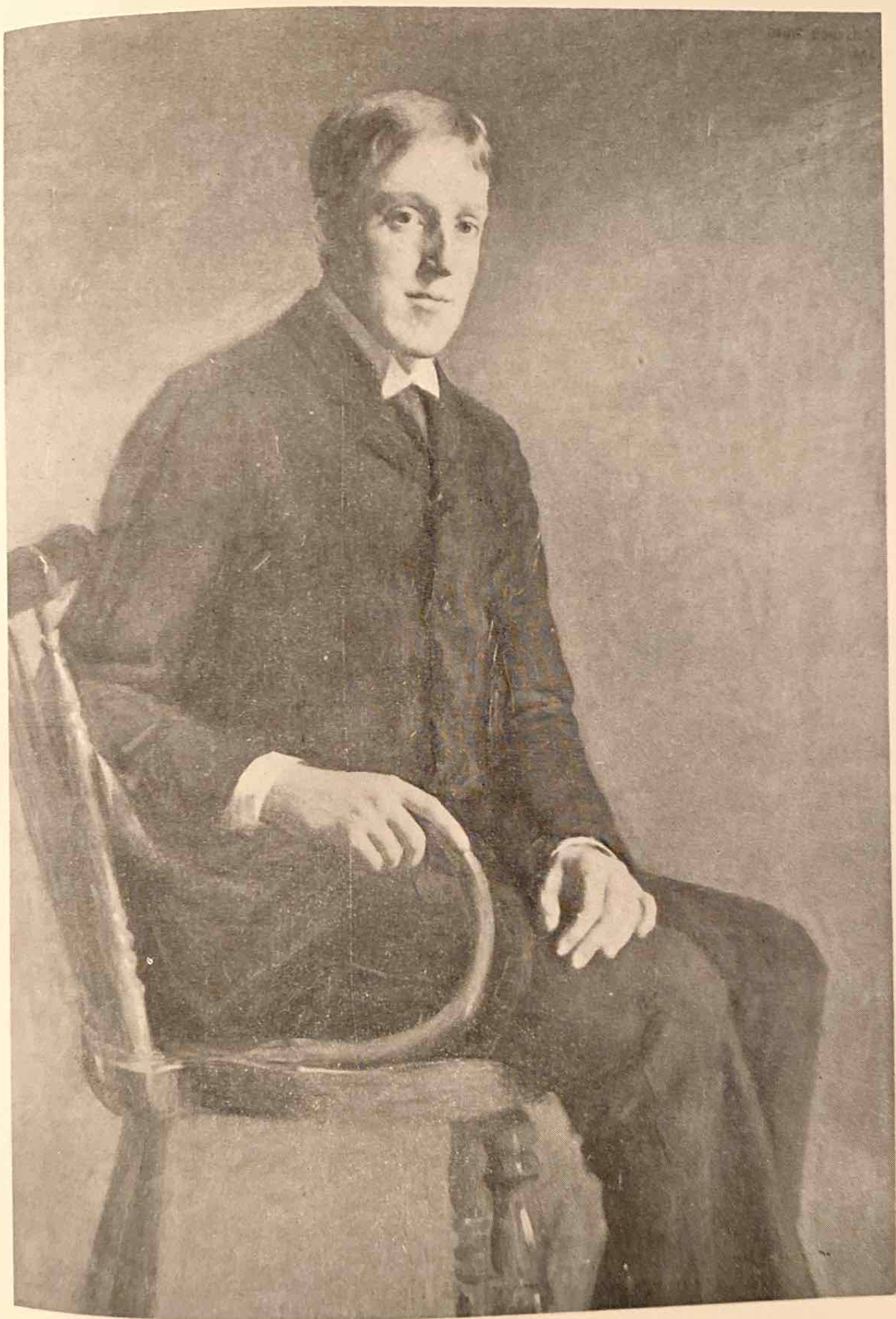


Portrait of George Augustus Gardner, Esq.

COURTESY OF THE BOSTON MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

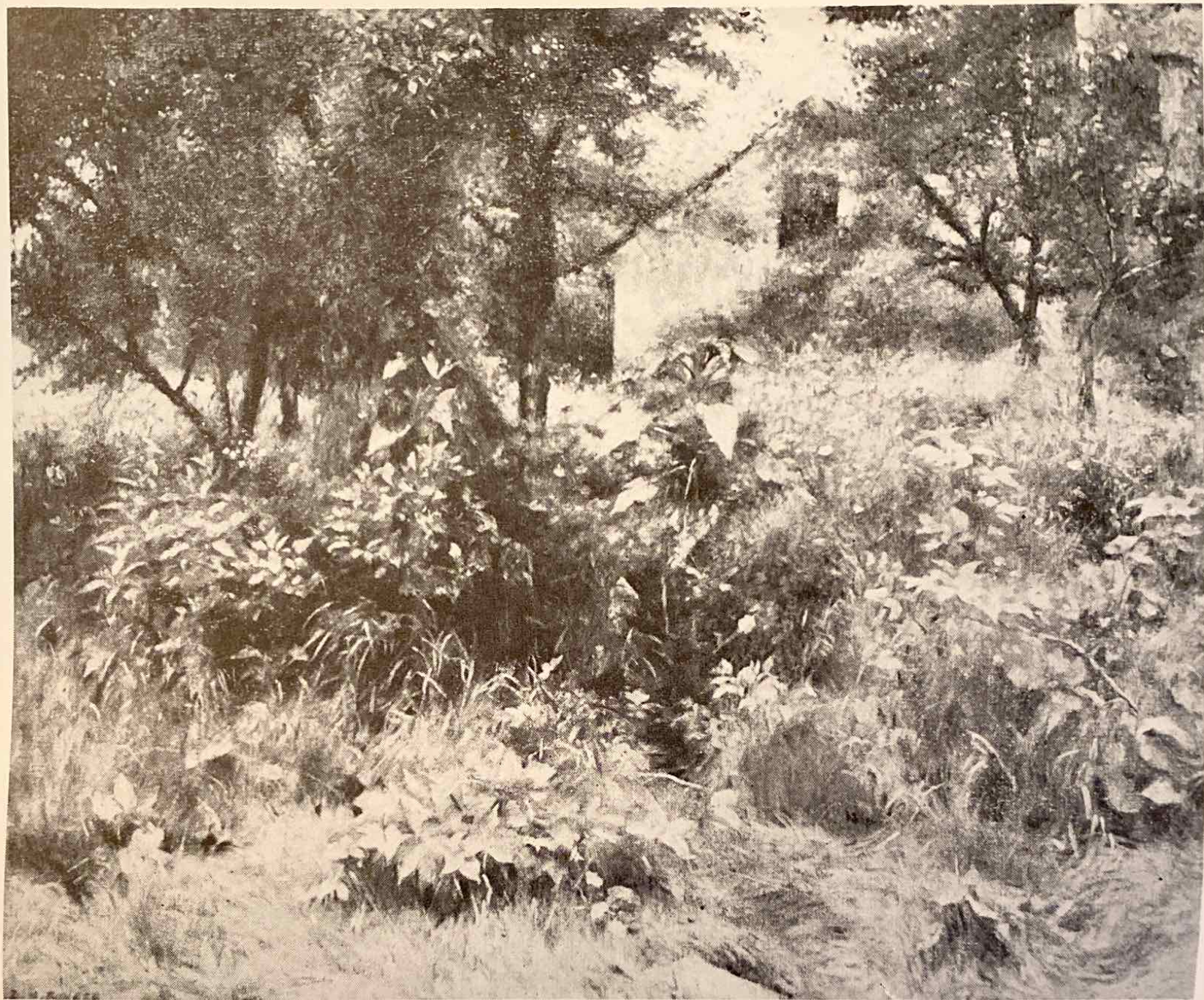


Portrait of Miss Olga E. Gardner, 1888



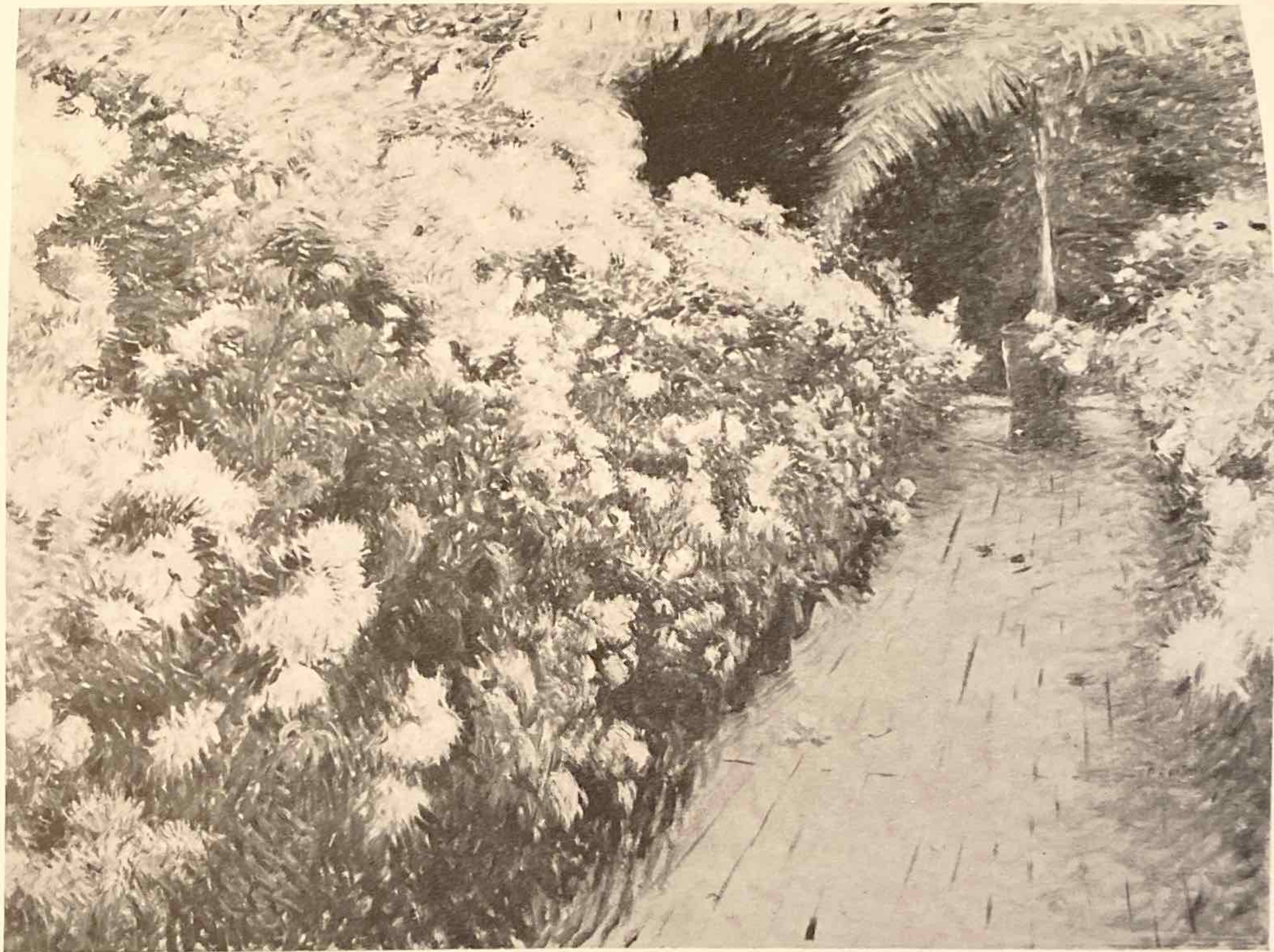
Portrait of John Lowell Gardner, Esq., 1888

COURTESY OF L.D.M. SWEAT MEMORIAL ART MUSEUM, PORTLAND, ME.



A Wild Garden

COURTESY OF THE TAVERN CLUB, BOSTON, MASS.

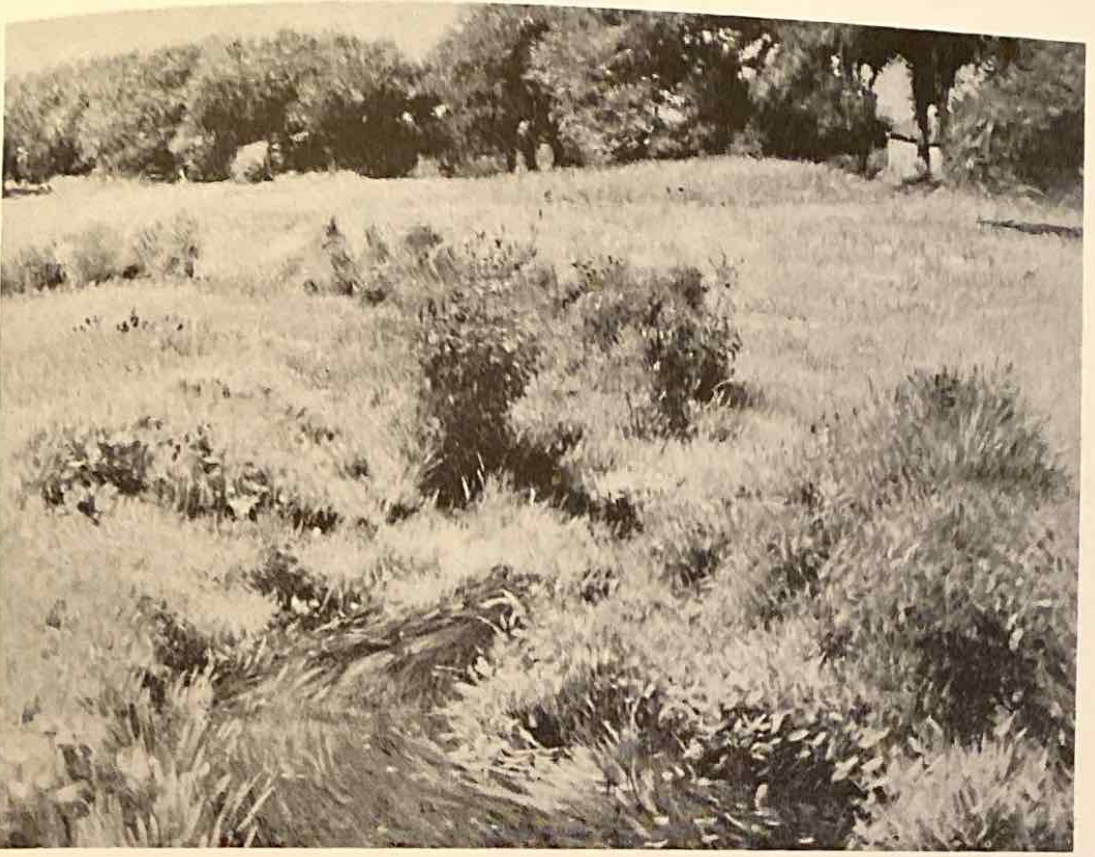


Chrysanthemums

COURTESY OF THE ISABELLA STEWART GARDNER MUSEUM, BOSTON, MASS.



The Brook, Medfield



a. The Pool, Medfield

COURTESY OF THE BOSTON MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

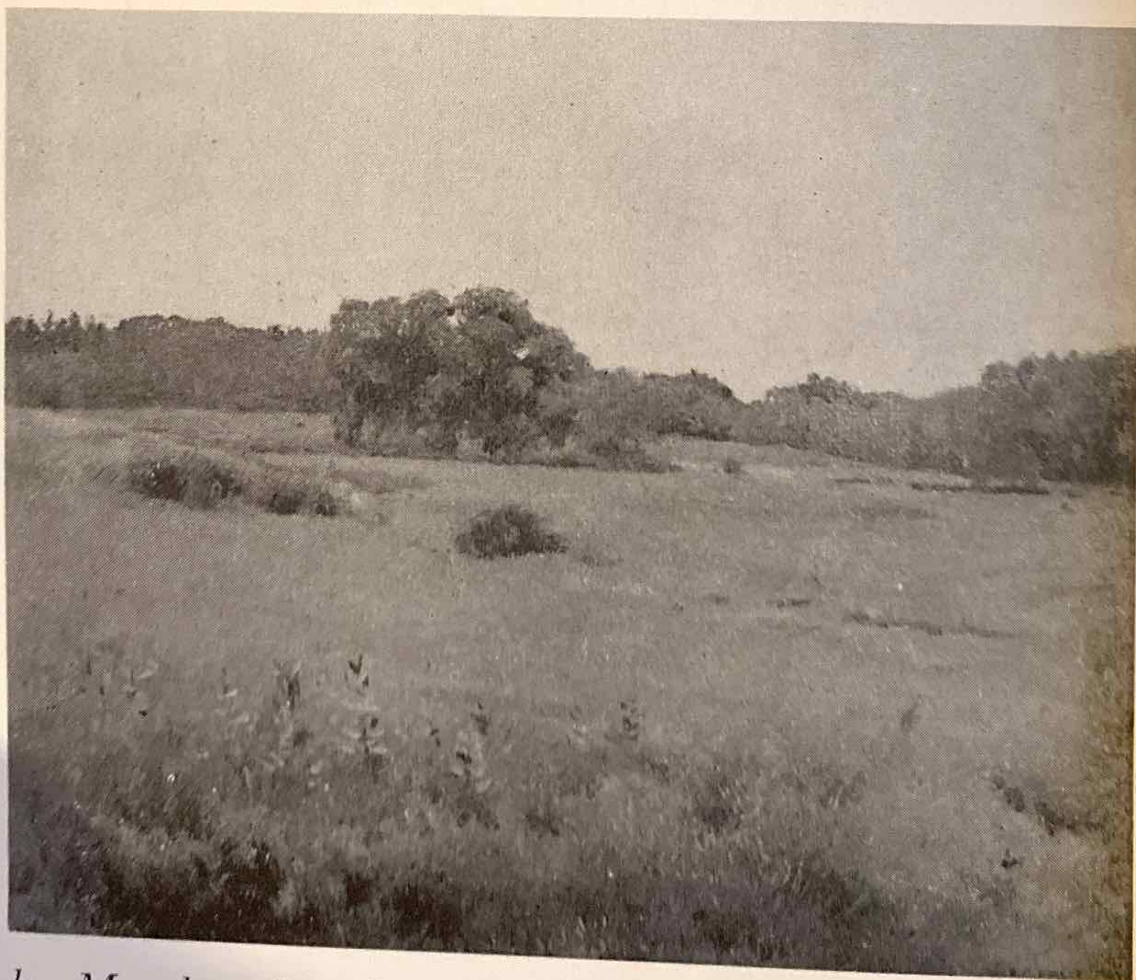


b. Marsh Land, Medfield



a. Meadow Lands, Late Afternoon

COURTESY OF THE TAVERN CLUB, BOSTON, MASS.

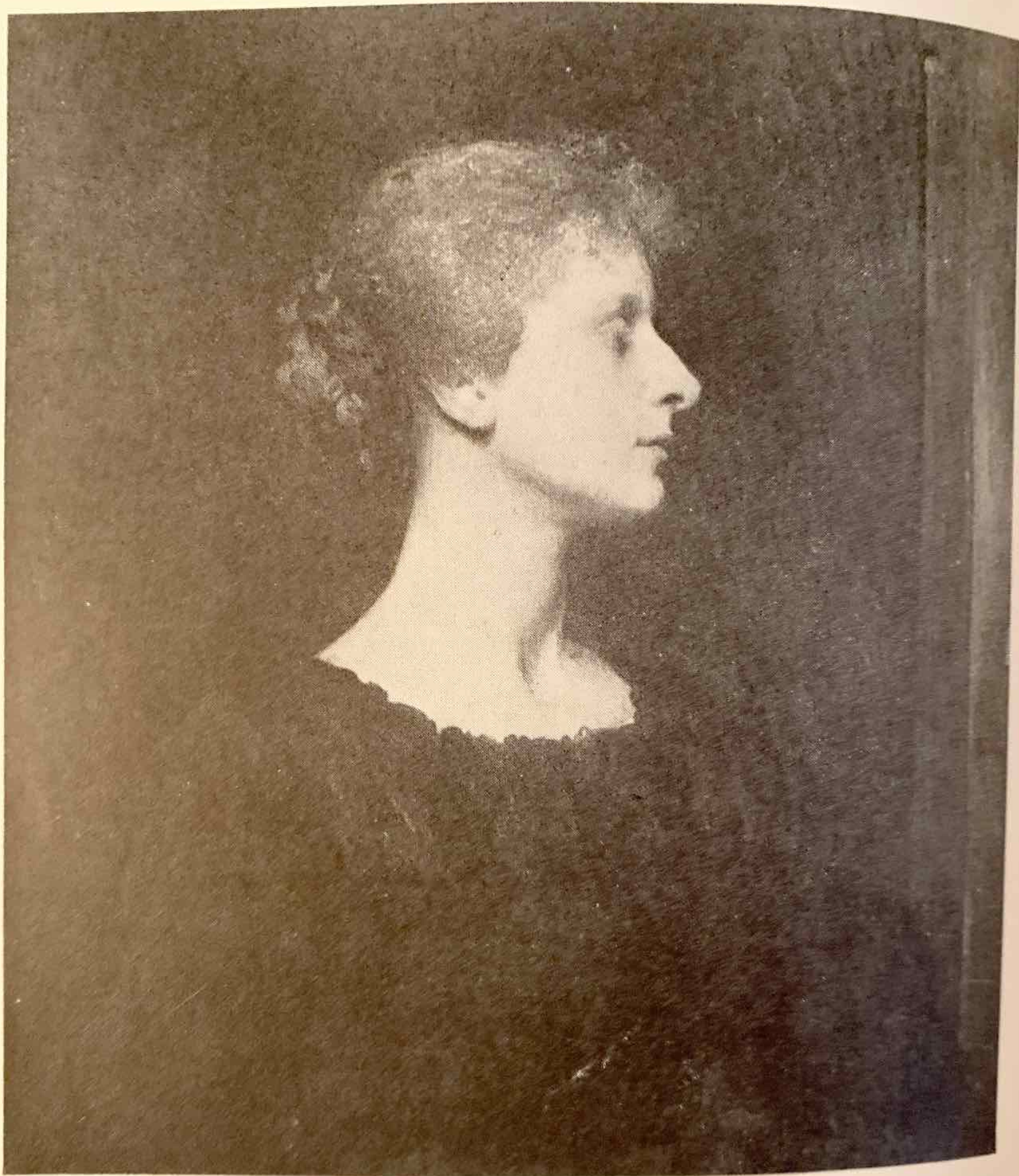


b. Meadow Lands



The Mirror, 1890

COURTESY OF WILLIAM D. MASON, ESQ.



Jessica, 1890

COURTESY OF THE BOSTON MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS



The Artist's Wife, 1890

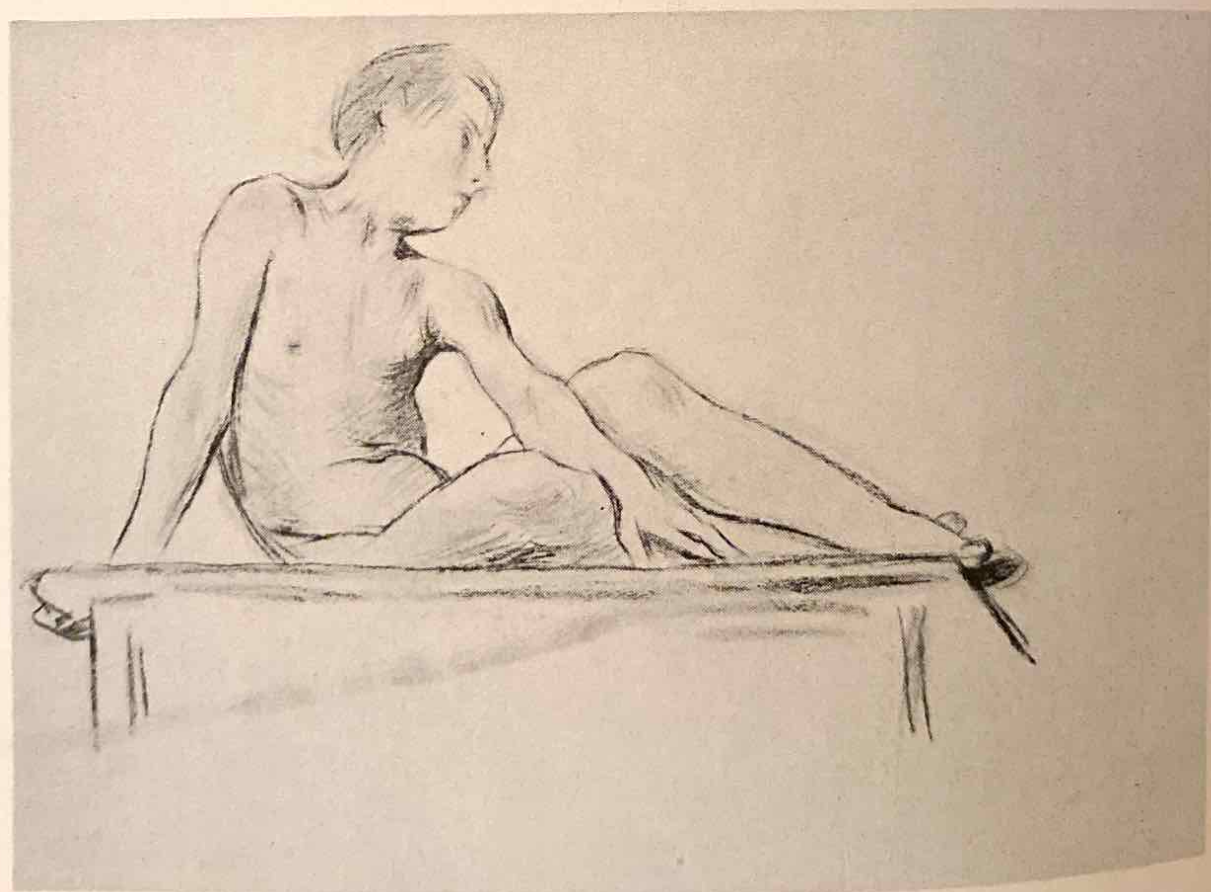
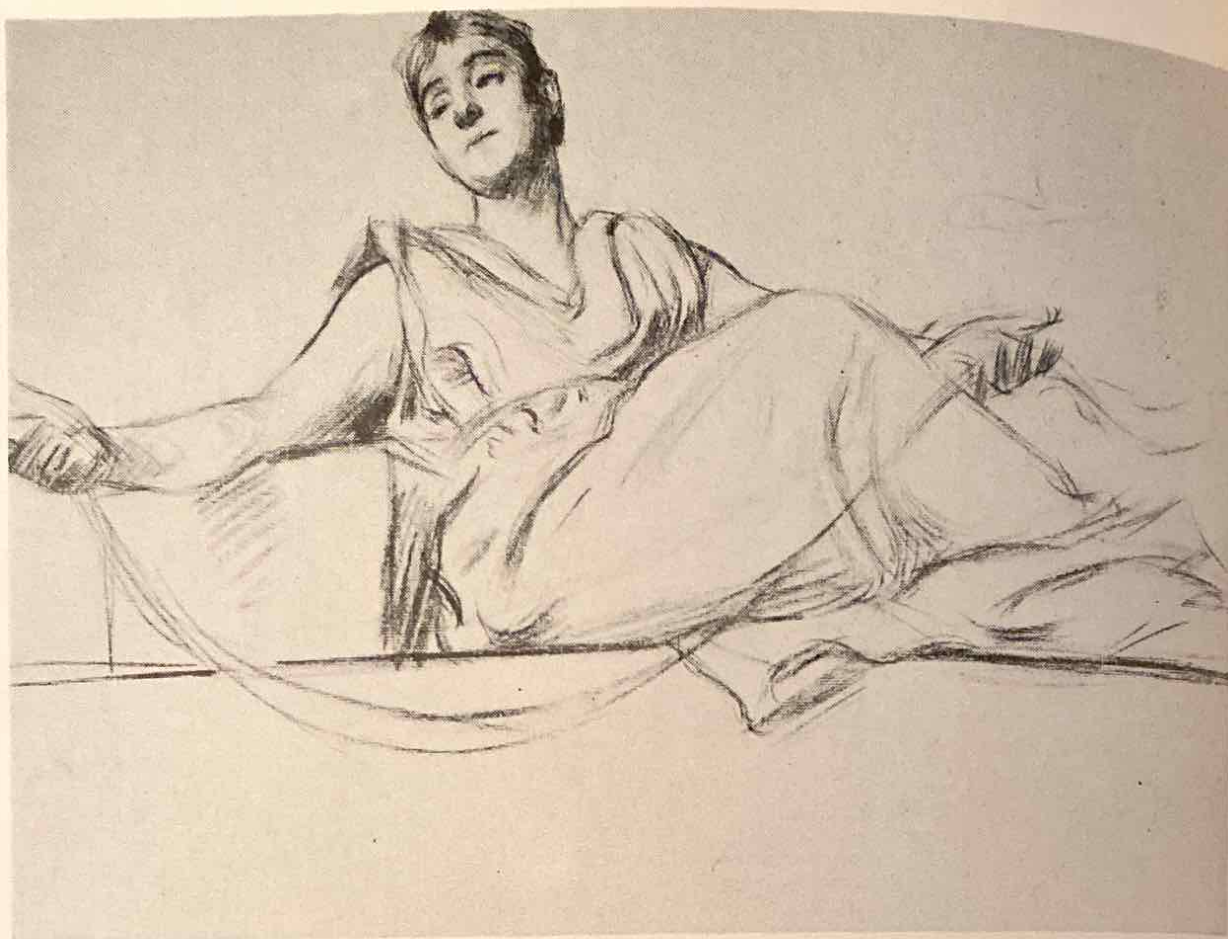
COURTESY OF THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART



Portrait of Eleanor Hardy Bunker (UNFINISHED), 1890



Pencil Study for a Portrait



*Charcoal Studies for a Projected Decoration in the
House of Whitelaw Reid, Esq.*

1887 but Bunker repainted the hands in 1888. The parts done in 1887 are built up in a carefully worked impasto which may have been suggested by the methods of Frederick Porter Vinton, with whom Bunker was associated at that time. We have seen that he collaborated with Vinton on a large copy of Flandrin's "Adam and Eve," now hanging at Bowdoin College, in which the figure of Adam is entirely by Bunker. At any rate, the Morse head is very capably made in a technique deriving from the Bonnat tradition. Vinton had studied in Munich but subsequently worked under Bonnat in Paris. Vinton himself considered Bonnat's teaching the more important influence in his artistic development. Mr. Morse's hands, repainted a year later, are indicated in the swift and rather thin manner of John Sargent with whom Bunker had by then become intimate.

The chief influences traceable in Bunker's later figure pieces are those of John Sargent and of Abbott Thayer. Considering the circumstances, it is remarkable that the influence of Sargent on the art of the impressionable young man, five years his junior, was no greater. At the time of their association Sargent was already in full possession of his astonishing *métier* and enjoyed an international reputation. The dazzling character of his virtuoso talent was even then attracting the vanguard of that host of imitators which was to gather recruits from three successive generations of painters. One might suppose that Dennis Bunker would be submerged by the extraordinary magnetism of a talent which he certainly greatly admired. In fact, this would seem to have been almost inevitable as Bunker was preoccupied with the problems of portrait painting during the period when he and Sargent were most closely associated. In this branch of painting Sargent's pre-eminence was already very generally recognized.

His influence is most noticeable in the technical methods, already referred to, which Bunker adopted about the time of Sargent's visit to Boston. John Sargent was, before all things, a sketch artist, a painter of rapid notations, able to depict passing effects with incomparable skill. His special greatness lay in his

gift for seizing the characteristic gesture, the fleeting facial expression or the momentary effect of light, which revealed a dramatic aspect of his subject. His usual method of work consisted of repainting his canvas or a substantial area of it each day until he was satisfied with the result. A picture painted in this way is, so to speak, a series of superimposed sketches, of which only the last is visible. This method of work, in the hands of a master, frequently gives a suggestion of brilliant improvisation and vitality which is profoundly exhilarating. John Sargent painted many canvases which rank as masterpieces in this form of art.

Unfortunately he was notoriously slovenly in his technical methods and indifferent to the subtler elements of workmanship. A similar carelessness appears in Bunker's pictures about the year 1888. He adopts the deplorable practice of painting on canvases already used. The frequent changes detectable in his compositions betoken insufficient preliminary studies. Reminiscent of Sargent, too, are the alterations made without having adequately removed all traces of previous statements, the latter being disagreeably evident under the repaintings. And it is distressing to find Bunker abandoning the beautiful workmanship of his early years, brushing his paint along the edges of the forms and allowing importunate ridges to pile up. On the other hand, the greater breadth of style noticeable in Bunker's work at this period is also attributable to Sargent's influence, and from him Bunker probably learned the value of gesture as an element of portraiture. The excellent portrait of George Augustus Gardner (Plate 11) shows the degree to which Bunker benefited from association with his older colleague, while in the lovely picture of Miss Olga Gardner (Plate 12) he achieved something very much his own in which the newly acquired qualities are quite thoroughly assimilated. But, on the whole, Bunker must have felt that the brilliant and dramatic art of John Sargent was alien to his own. "I feel frozen somehow," he writes at one point, "in the presence of such a tremendous talent as his."

His attitude towards Abbott Thayer seems to have been quite different. In this painter, some ten years his senior, Bunker appears to have found qualities corresponding very closely to those towards which he himself was striving. On no other basis can Thayer's ascendancy over Bunker be adequately explained. It is true that this ascendancy was first established in Bunker's adolescent years, and the early influences affecting a painter's growth usually leave very permanent marks. And it is also true that Thayer's personality had an almost hypnotic effect on many of the younger painters who associated with him throughout his career. In retrospect, especially for those of us who did not know Thayer, it is difficult to understand the tremendous admiration which they felt for the charming but limited art of their idol. While it is impossible to deny the personal and highly poetic quality of Thayer's best work, the weaknesses of even his most successful canvases are so evident and his scope was so narrow that one wonders why the technically far more accomplished Bunker should have imitated him so slavishly, to the point of following him in his subject matter, in his gamut of color, and in some of his mannerisms.

Borrowings from Thayer are used to good advantage in the portrait of Miss Anne Page (Plate 8). Although the placing of the figure on the canvas is rather reminiscent of Whistler, the tonality and the quality of the grays suggest Thayer, as does the rose on the table near the sitter. But the beautiful handling and execution, as well as the fine draughtsmanship, make the picture a thing apart that is also Bunker's own. Even more reminiscent of Thayer is "The Mirror" (Plate 19), dated four years later. The treatment of the white dress, especially in the sleeves, the quality of the flesh painting, notably in certain passages about the chest, and the general color scheme make the picture seem like a deliberate and rather too successful attempt to paint after the manner of Abbot Thayer. For all that, it is a beautiful thing which a number of painters considered Bunker's finest canvas. It is interesting to note that Thayer himself and Dewing, of whose work "The Mirror" is also reminiscent and

who painted the same model (Doodie Baird, her name was), were both of this opinion. The overstatement of greenish half tones which we find in the heads of Mrs. Bunker, painted by her husband shortly before his death, are only explicable as an ill-advised imitation of one of Thayer's least pleasant mannerisms. These artificial greenish tones are especially surprising in the work of a man who, a few months earlier, had painted the exquisitely colored "Jessica" (Plate 20), owned by the Boston Museum of Fine Arts.

Tracing such various influences in the work of this gifted and passionately sincere young painter, we cannot fail to realize the intensity of the struggle he was making to find himself. There is nothing suggestive of the easy yielding to a current fashion or of the facile adoption of another man's technique which makes the work of the plagiarist so offensive. As we look at these pictures, painted in such different ways, we feel that each one is the effort of a still undeveloped artist trying to find the language best suited to express his own personality. And we also feel that through these various forms a clear-cut personality begins to emerge.

For almost every one of these pictures has a distinction, a personal sense of style, which is the mark of its author. Its outstanding characteristics are delicacy of feeling, a rare sense of harmony, and a constant striving after truthful rendering. The intensity of his effort to make a complete statement of his intention, backed by his great abilities as a draughtsman, gives his work a virility often lacking in the pictures of men similarly preoccupied with the subtler aspects of color, form, and personality. His qualities made him exceptionally fitted to depict the charm of young womanhood. The "Jessica," the portraits of Olga Gardner and Anne Page, as well as "The Mirror," can hold their own with anything of the kind in American painting.

Bunker's ability as a draughtsman continued to develop up to the time of his death. To the correctness which he acquired so early in life he added a feeling for stylized form which grew more pronounced and sure with each successive year. His draw-

ing reached its fullest development in the beautiful head of his wife (Plate 22) which he left unfinished at the time of his death. The canvas is a fragment of a larger picture originally sketched in as a three-quarter length of Mrs. Bunker, seated, and holding in her hands a Tanagra figurine. Although even the head is uncompleted, the drawing of it has been brought to a high degree of finish. Its precision, style, and interpretation of form make it perhaps the most beautifully drawn head in the whole range of American art. To find like qualities carried to greater perfection one must turn to the work of the great Florentines or that of the very best French draughtsmen.

This gifted man's perception of color was very nearly equal to his grasp of form, but it developed very much later. It appears to have been given a great impetus by his study of landscape painting and by the Impressionist discoveries. We find its complete expression in the landscapes which Bunker painted in the summer of 1889. The "Jessica," painted the following winter, is the only figure piece in which he utilized to the full his newly acquired understanding of color. Because it is the one in which all his qualities are found together, "Jessica" is probably the best and most personal of all Bunker's portraits. It is the one in which we find the rendering of form by means of color notation which makes the special distinction of his later landscapes. In those landscapes Dennis Bunker produced something very perfect and entirely his own.

The Landscapes

DENNIS BUNKER painted his finest landscapes at Medfield during the summers of 1889 and 1890, summers which were to be his last.

At Medfield he found material peculiarly congenial to his talent in the brook-crossed meadow, a stone's throw from his boarding house. He describes it affectionately as "a funny charming little place, about as big as a pocket-handkerchief with a tiny river, tiny willows and a tiny brook." This meadow, typical of so much of the countryside near Boston, Bunker painted a number of times in slightly varying lights. The limited character of this subject matter is emphasized by a similar lack of variety in the artist's choice of weather conditions. Bunker, at this period, elected to paint those more static effects of light whose comparatively unchanging aspects enabled him to carry his renderings to a high degree of finish. Two types of weather lend themselves most readily to portrayals of this sort. When the sun is veiled, but the atmosphere is clear, the color of landscape alters little from hour to hour, or even from day to day. Painters bent on registering accurately the apparent color of the outdoor world have always liked to work in this kind of weather. So it is not surprising to find in Bunker's letters from Medfield such impatient phrases as: "I don't think we've had two grey days since I came here. It's disgusting," or "I despair of ever getting a grey day!" But, when the sun is high in an unclouded sky, colors and shapes likewise remain relatively unchanged for several hours at a time. Dennis Bunker's preference was for

gray days at that time, but he painted some sunlit pictures as well.

Looking at these Medfield landscapes, few people can fail to be struck by their remarkable quality. Painters who have struggled with the formidable technical difficulties to be surmounted in successfully rendering the rich greens which deck the New England woods and fields throughout the summer months will recognize that no artist has painted them with a like mastery. The rather monotonous greenness of our countryside, intensified by an atmosphere lacking the hazy veil which both softens the tones and defines the planes of verdure in Europe, has always proved a stumbling block to painters. To render these greens convincingly and also convey their beauty requires an extraordinarily delicate perception of the subtlest variations of color, as well as great technical skill. At one time it was a tradition of the studios that the American landscape was unpaintable in summer, and it is certainly true that our most successful landscape painters have concentrated their efforts on depicting the other seasons, especially winter. But this uniform greenness, which others have found impossible to use as material for art, apparently had a special appeal for Dennis Bunker. He even seems to have delighted in selecting the very aspects which presented the most formidable technical problems. We do not know how many failures he made and destroyed. But again and again he emerged triumphantly from a struggle in which the odds were heavily against success. More than one of his landscapes is a sheer tour de force, although the difficulties overcome are concealed by the perfection of the workmanship and the seeming simplicity of the art by which the thing is accomplished. The compelling beauty of these pictures transcends both technique and subject matter, so that they seem to convey the very essence of midsummer New England, fragrant with clover and pine. In these landscapes a type of painting has been carried to its ultimate limits and it is difficult to conceive how, in their own particular kind, they can ever be surpassed. The studies

which Bunker made of his beloved meadow at Medfield rank among the finest landscapes that have been painted.

A superlative of this sort invites challenge, especially when it is applied to the work of a comparatively little-known artist. But it is certainly arguable that Dennis Bunker carried a certain type of landscape painting to a somewhat greater degree of perfection than has been attained by any other artist working in the same form. To justify this estimate it will be necessary to examine the nature and the various objectives of landscape painting, as that art has been practiced by painters of the European tradition throughout the centuries.

The elements of landscape introduced into paintings and illuminated manuscripts during the Middle Ages and in the early years of the Renaissance serve merely as backgrounds for figures. Their pictorial function is largely confined to situating the episode depicted. An indication of a tree or a rock is usually little more than a symbol denoting that the action is taking place in the country. As a rule the rendering of such objects shows very little perception of their actual appearance, or even of their decorative possibilities. But, as the art of painting progressed, painters grew aware of the esthetic possibilities of the landscape background and realized what a vast storehouse of decorative material lay outside their doors. To this storehouse they turned with increasing interest, utilizing the forms they discovered in nature to enhance the effectiveness of their figure compositions. The art of combining figures with poetically conceived landscapes was perhaps brought to its greatest perfection by the Venetian painters of the sixteenth century.

That the chief function of their landscapes was effectively to set off human figures which were the essential part of the picture partly accounts for the low key adopted by the older painters in their representation of outdoor effects. This key is admirably calculated to give full value to the flesh tones of the figures. It is notable, for instance, that the sky was regularly painted in a value darker than the one adopted for flesh in light, an effect which only occurs in nature under very exceptional

conditions. This convention gives a remarkable unity to compositions in which the human figures are intended to hold the spectator's interest. Furthermore, until the nineteenth century, landscapes were painted indoors, from drawings which the artist had previously sketched from nature. This method of work tended to make the painter more observant of form than of color. And there is very little development in the perception of open-air color effects between Giorgione and the painters of the Barbizon school.

The practice of working on a canvas out of doors came into general use about the middle of the nineteenth century. But before that time the thing had been tried by a few individual painters. Constable may have been the first to have set up his easel in the open air. Turner, too, is said to have painted landscapes on the spot. And by 1850 the English Pre-Raphaelites were already making it a part of their creed that every detail of their pictures of outdoor subjects should be rendered with scrupulous accuracy under the atmospheric conditions represented. But it was in France that the serious study of landscape as a record of appearance was undertaken by artists working directly from nature. The effect on their pictures was immediate and startling. These men very soon observed that the dark browns and greens used by their predecessors bore little resemblance to the colors perceptible under the open sky. They found that the brilliant coloration of the outdoor world could not be matched in paint, many of the tones being both higher in value and brighter in hue than any pigment on their palettes. And, as they made these discoveries, they became intoxicated with the beauty of nature as they now saw it. This new perception of outdoor light and color was the great innovation of nineteenth century art and constituted the most spectacular addition to the technique of painting since the discovery of chiaroscuro in the fifteenth century.

The painting which developed from this new observation of nature is now so familiar that people have already largely forgotten how completely it reoriented the art of a still recent past.

The pioneers of the movement, the so-called Impressionists, first treated as eccentric mountebanks, then revered as classic masters, are gradually being relegated to the position of minor nineteenth century painters. The very real import of their innovations, the fetish of three successive generations of painters, is largely forgotten. Their aims, insofar as these are considered at all, are disparaged today and are considered irrelevant by art critics as well as by many persons who devote their time to painting. The Impressionist approach to landscape is nevertheless a logical development of the central tradition of European painting, which has always held that the painter found his chief source of inspiration through his perception of the phenomena of the visible world and that his chief means of self-expression lay in the representation of those phenomena. Without some awareness of the changes which the discoveries of the Impressionists brought to our perception of nature, it is impossible to understand the development of painting at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries.

As a result of their experiments, certain principles of landscape painting have been accepted as axiomatic by all professionally trained painters seriously concerned with rendering the appearance of nature. The most important of these principles could be summarized as follows: Since the range of color and of light and shade out of doors far exceeds the limits of the painter's palette, it is recognized that outdoor effects can be adequately suggested only by painting the tones in their proper relationship to one another within a limited color scale. By painting their darkest tones very nearly black, the older masters were able to obtain very powerful contrasts of light and dark and still keep their lightest tones, such as the blue of the sky, intensely colored. But the *plein air* painters observed that, out of doors, even the darkest tones were luminous and saturated with color. They also observed that the actual value of these dark tones was very much lighter than it had been the convention to paint them. They therefore proceeded to key their pictures by painting their darkest tones in their actual

values, as closely as they could be matched on the palette, taking great care to give them the full degree of coloration which they carried in nature. But, while this procedure raised the general key of their pictures considerably, it also shortened the range within which they could obtain their contrasts. For the brighter colors observable out of doors, especially in sunlight, far exceed in brilliancy any pigment seen under indoor lighting conditions. They perceived nevertheless that by giving to the sky the maximum lightness compatible with suggesting its color and then keeping all the intermediate tones in their proper relation between this sky tone and the pre-established darkest values, they did succeed in suggesting much of the quality of outdoor light and atmosphere. However one may feel about Impressionist landscapes and the landscapes painted since their day, few will deny that they have made us realize how very little like nature the landscapes of their predecessors were in color, and how lacking the earlier landscapes were in atmosphere or sunlight. On the other hand, the tendency of atmosphere and sunlight being to obliterate form, the older painters often successfully suggested the structure of rock and tree and leaf, something we sense as we stand in the country, but which is too frequently absent from Impressionist pictures. A graver defect of these latter from an esthetic standpoint is their weakness in composition and design, the natural consequence of painting always in the open air, under more or less trying conditions which preclude reflection and careful planning.

When Dennis Bunker was a student in Paris the storm centering about the Impressionist group was at its height. He must have seen the work of these innovators and have joined in heated discussions of their merit, or lack of merit. But there is no evidence that the pictures or the ideas of these painters interested him at the time. The landscapes which he painted during these years, if we may judge by the examples still to be seen, show no trace of the Impressionist vision or technique. These landscapes are painted very much after the manner of the Barbizon painters in conventional dark greens and browns and

betray little perception of the cooler tones, the lavenders, the silvery grays, or the bluish greens, which a few years later he was to set down so sensitively. Nor is there any mention of these sensational Frenchmen in the letters which have come down to us from this period.

It is notable that a student so mentally alert as Bunker should have worked in Paris in the early eighties and remained untouched by the most spectacular artistic movement of the day. It shows how little the ideas of the Impressionists had as yet taken hold. To be sure, Bunker was studying under Gérôme, whose dislike of the Impressionists has become notorious and has served to give this prodigiously skillful painter a reputation for artistic narrowness which is belied by his own very learned art, as well as by the reports of his own students. But ten years later the more open-minded of the young men in that very atelier were intensely aware of the vistas opened up by the *plein air* painters and were more attracted to ideas emanating from them than to the esthetic tenets of their own master. The change apparently took place in the late eighties.

When and through whom did Bunker acquire his perception of outdoor color as the Impressionists taught the world to see it? The answer to this question would be of exceptional interest, for once his eyes had become adjusted to the new vision, the young American developed a mastery of the Impressionist idiom which enabled him to equal, and in some respects to surpass, all other painters who have worked in it. Unfortunately no evidence has come to light from which we can deduce a final answer. The letters to Joe Evans, in which Bunker reveals so many of his professional preoccupations, are silent on this matter. And scarcely any landscapes remain from the many he painted in the summers of 1886 or 1887. With one exception these are all of gray days. They certainly show a sensitivity to the cooler tones not noticeable in Bunker's French landscapes. But this is still a far cry from the color notation of the Medfield pictures of 1889. The exception mentioned above is a landscape painted at South Woodstock (Plate 6) when he was living near

Abbott Thayer. This landscape, which has many fine qualities, is notable for its complete failure to give the sense of sunlight which it purports to represent. From the summer of 1888, which he passed in England working very industriously, as he wrote Mrs. Gardner, no landscapes remain. It is permissible to suppose that Bunker was dissatisfied with everything that he did and ruthlessly destroyed the results of his labor. He was striving for something which he could not then attain but which he was to achieve triumphantly in Medfield the following summer. What influence brought about the change?

A clue to the riddle is suggested by a passage in Hamlin Garland's book *Roadside Meetings* * (Macmillan, 1930). The author, describing the atmosphere of Boston studios in the eighties, speaks of the heated discussions engendered there by the new ideas on landscape painting recently imported from Paris. "All the younger men fresh from Paris were open-air painters at war with 'the bitumen school' who had studied in Germany and Holland," Garland writes, calling it, "a war which I enjoyed without fully understanding its significance." The passage which follows is of considerable interest. "In calling on Dennis Bunker," he goes on to say, "a powerful young artist of a type not unlike Collins, [Alfred Q. Collins] I heard him say to Enneking, 'I'm in a hole. I don't know how I shall come out but I show no more canvases till I have solved my problem!' His seriousness convinced me that his struggle was as real as mine, although I could not understand it. A little later Lilla Cabot Perry, one of Bunker's friends, brought back from Paris a group of vivid canvases by a man named Breck and so widened the influence of the new school."

Unfortunately these happenings cannot be accurately dated. The sequence of Garland's reminiscences suggests that the meeting with Bunker occurred during the winter of 1885-1886. If this was the case and if Garland correctly interpreted the purport of Bunker's remark to Enneking, the young painter was

* From *Roadside Meetings* by Hamlin Garland. Copyright, 1930, by The Macmillan Company. Reprinted by permission of The Macmillan Company.

already grappling with the new approach to landscape during his first season in Boston. More significant is the explanation, provided by the passage, of the dearth of landscapes by Bunker dating from this period. Bunker was endeavoring to work out the new principles of landscape painting and, dissatisfied with his results, destroyed his work.

It is fair to assume that Bunker finally acquired his mastery of the new technique during his summer in England, at Calcot, while working in close proximity to John Sargent. One does not think of Sargent as a master of subtle color relations and his indifference in this respect is one of the juster accusations leveled at him by his detractors. But Sargent had a very keen eye and his alert intelligence was quick to seize upon any element of the art of painting suitable to his purpose. He readily adopted a gamut of color based on the Impressionist observation of nature and he utilized it with tremendous effectiveness in his own brilliant landscape sketches. In these, as in his other work, he habitually sought the dramatic effect, the spectacular moment, and the unusual aspect, with little interests in the more delicate shifts of tone and color. He already knew Monet well and had spent much time in his company and in that of the painters belonging to the Impressionist group during the winter of 1884, which he was spending in Paris. Although he never adopted the *pointilliste* technique, Sargent must have understood it thoroughly. Even if Bunker had already absorbed some of the new ideas before his visit to the Sargents in England, it was probably in the course of that visit that he really assimilated those ideas and made them his own.

He was certainly in full possession of a very sound method of landscape painting when he arrived at Medfield in the early summer of the following year. His way seems to have been to lay in first the larger masses of color on his canvas, a procedure he was able to carry out with great rapidity and accuracy. In so doing he established once and for all the general tonality of his picture, pitching it in a key which allowed for sufficient luminosity while avoiding the chalky and insubstantial look which

so often mars the work of *plein air* painters. Bunker's unerring judgment in this matter of key is one of the main factors in the success of his landscapes. Once the larger masses were properly established and the canvas covered, he would proceed to work into these areas with broad touches of color. As the pictures progressed these touches naturally became smaller until, in the more finished canvases, the workmanship bore some resemblance to the *pointilliste* * technique of the Frenchmen. But Bunker's feeling for paint quality and fine surface of pigment did not desert him. Although he necessarily sacrificed some of this surface quality in his unrelenting pursuit of visual truth, several of his landscapes have a beauty of workmanship very unusual in pictures executed out of doors with a similar pictorial purpose.

People untrained in the art of painting often believe that finish is attained by simply adding detail to detail and consequently they dismiss it as a mere by-product of industry and patience. Unfortunately this view does not correspond with the truth. For an essential characteristic of all fine painting is unity of effect, and this unity is destroyed by any detail stated in a false relation to the other component parts of the picture. This is particularly true of the type of painting we are here discussing, the purpose of which is to recreate on canvas the impression made on the painter's eye by the landscape before him. To achieve this end, each detail must be set down with just the degree of definition and coloration which it holds for the eye when the focus of vision is adjusted so as to include the entire scene depicted. Piecemeal notation of individual detail immediately destroys the requisite unity of impression and turns the canvas into a compilation of separately observed visual facts. This invariably results in a hard, dry look, destroying all breadth of effect and offensive even to those who are quite unaware of its technical cause. It is, in fact, one of the most serious defects which a painting can have and perhaps the most difficult defect

* Many years later Frank Benson recalled how Edmund Tarbell had come to him saying, "Dennis Bunker is making them out of fish-hooks these days," referring to a type of brush-stroke that seemed very novel in Boston at the time.

for an earnest painter to avoid. The ability to carry a picture to a high degree of finish without losing its unity of impression is the mark of a master and requires artistry of the highest order. It is the central problem of the type of painting which takes for its main theme the interpretation of the beauty of the visible world.

His feet firmly planted in the long grass at Medfield, Bunker struggled manfully with the immense difficulties presented by this problem. His gift for suggesting the quality of a landscape by a simple statement of its broader aspects would have enabled him to paint charming sketches. Like every painter cognizant of his art, he knew that each additional detail jeopardized the balance of every previously established tonal relation. But he was deeply convinced that only pictures in which the artist's intention is completely expressed are likely to possess enduring interest. This view was not shared by all his contemporaries. The cult of the brilliant sketch, of the "start" and the deliberately unfinished picture, was coming into fashion and, with it, the corollary view that painters are habitually more interesting in their unfinished studies than in their completed pictures. The debate between proponents of the two views is not settled yet and insufficient time has elapsed for us to know with any certainty which of the pictures painted in the eighties and nineties will eventually hold the admiration of posterity. For the moment we can only record that Bunker was among those who believed in the necessity of completeness.

The dilemma of the artist who, fully aware of the supreme importance of the quality which I have called unity of impression, is unwilling to achieve it by skimping the subordinate elements of his picture is a recurring topic in Bunker's correspondence. He discusses it in a letter to Miss Page, written while he was working at South Woodstock, in the summer of 1886:

I imagine that my tendency to underdo things has led me to develop, and always will lead me to develop, the kind of bulldog tenacity that I am weakest in and I doubtless get carried beyond my point after all. I have grown to see that unless a

thing were thoroughly done, complete, finished and not left *en route* it was worthless. I have grown so to hate the clever appearance of things commenced or suggested, that I'm afraid I don't know sometimes when to stop and often destroy the charm of a thing in trying to take its raw commenced look out of it.

And in the last year of his life we find him still harassed by the same difficulties and writing, this time to Eleanor Hardy:

I get awfully tired of seeing my things always come out with the same labored look, painful and tiresome. I try hard to really *paint* things and have them simple and fluid. But I have to do them over so often that in the end they look always as if they had been written out on the canvas instead of painted.

The truth is that I am so afraid of doing something crude or violent that I mull away until everything is tired out. . . . I rehearse things too much, I eliminate too much and in the end it is poor and thin.

A few days later, in a moment of despair over a canvas which had lost its unity of effect, he is carried away by an opposite mood. "The truth is one should never finish a thing. It ought to be always *en route*, never done. There is something awfully banal and commonplace about a finished work. I fancy it is different in music." But he fully realized that the trouble did not reside in finish, but in piece-meal observation of detail. "I am always losing myself in detail, always forgetting and beginning to paint comfortably. I wish I was made of steel and had a demon with a pitchfork at my back." These excerpts give some idea of the heartbreaking difficulties of this type of painting.

Bunker's sense of form, which is another name for draughtsmanship, gives his landscapes a quality too often lacking in the outdoor pictures of the Impressionists and of the men who followed the trail they had blazed. None of them were draughtsmen. Degas, though connected with the group, was an essentially different type of painter. His landscapes differed from theirs

both in purpose and in method. And no other landscape painter since the eighties has had a grasp of form equal to Dennis Bunker's.

His ability to draw, to perceive and indicate with precision the underlying shapes of things, made it possible for Bunker to transcribe what he saw in terms of color—relations without losing the structure of the landscape. Conversely, he succeeded in suggesting these shapes beautifully and correctly while still conveying a feeling of their existence in light, atmosphere, and space. An equal power to depict the subtle manifestations of both the form and the color of landscape has been in the possession of no other painter since the evolution of the Impressionist concept of outdoor painting. This dual gift gives to Bunker's landscapes their remarkable effect of completeness and perfection.

We can measure the extent of Bunker's achievement in this difficult branch of art by comparing his landscapes with those of the painters who have been universally considered its leading exponents. Placed beside the best Medfield studies, the one in the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, for instance, or the painting entitled "The Brook, Medfield" (Plate 16), Claude Monet's pictures look a little candy-colored and artificial, while even Sisley's seem rather haphazard and incomplete. Standing before the best Renoirs one thinks of fuzziness and a lack of solidity. Dennis Bunker's landscapes simply look right.

Most students of painting, whose analyses of the enduring masterpieces of the past are corroborated by their practical experience in painting pictures, become convinced that lasting recognition is accorded a picture primarily for its pre-eminence in such essentially pictorial qualities as I have been discussing. The full measure of any work of art, however, is established by imponderable elements emanating from the personality of the artist who created it. Had Bunker not developed his rare gifts for rendering form and color, had he not acquired a great technical mastery of the very difficult art of landscape painting, it would matter very little today whether or not he had brought

to his work a highly cultivated mind, sensitive to the poetical implications of the beauty which stirred him so deeply. But these intimate qualities of mind and heart, expressed through his sure pictorial sense and sound craftsmanship, enabled Bunker to paint objectively conceived landscapes which stir us as other pictures, similarly intentioned and almost as well executed, do not.

Many people today feel that the failure of the French Impressionists to retain the high place which they were accorded at the beginning of the century is due to an inner lack in the individual artists themselves. They were not men of broad culture or of great emotional depth. Dissatisfied by the absence of poetry in the work of these particular men, some observers have concluded that they and their followers were engaged in a fruitless quest and that so faithful a devotion to the changing appearances of the visible world is without artistic interest. Others feel that the Impressionists opened up a vast new field of painting which as yet has scarcely been exploited. Some of these latter may agree that no pictures hitherto produced approach the realization of the ideal of Impressionism more nearly than the landscapes which Dennis Bunker painted in the fragrant meadows of Medfield, his mind full of the verses of Browning and Keats, with the echoes of Martin Loeffler's violin lingering in his ears.

The Art of Dennis Bunker

DENNIS BUNKER'S resemblance to certain artists of the Renaissance has already been alluded to in these pages. As we study his life and work more closely we are especially reminded of Raphael. It is perhaps dangerous to evoke so great a figure in this connection for, of course, the achievements of the two men are in no way commensurable. Both painters belonged, however, to the same genus, or type, of artist. Dennis Bunker's talents suggest, on a very much smaller scale, some of the characteristics we associate with the genius of Raphael. Bunker may have cared very little for the art of the mighty Urbinate or for the latter's esthetic intentions. The two painters are not on the same level as artists. But they did have certain traits in common: the particular quality of their good looks, their social gifts, the affection they aroused in their friends and acquaintances, and the precocious development of their ability to paint. Both painters were extremely impressionable and sensitive to external influences. Each assimilated the qualities of the artists whom he admired but managed to give a wholly personal character to his own eclectic art. The work of both men reflects the dominant artistic trends of their time. And in the art of each those trends appeared tempered and harmonized by a feeling for the more delicate aspects of beauty.

Dennis Bunker's early training was along academic lines, and in selecting Gérôme as his master in Paris he put himself under the leading academic painter of the day. We have reason to believe that Gérôme thought especially well of his American pupil and Bunker's own letters voice his admiration for his master

and for his master's pictures. But his instinct led him in another direction. A letter written to him by a French fellow pupil from Gérôme's atelier indicates that he at least toyed with the idea of starting a picture along academic lines. The Frenchman, one Castaigne, writing in December, 1885, to Bunker, then settled in Boston, says, "I am, I think, entirely cured of the longing which you express for Italian models and archaeological research." This letter expresses its writer's revulsion from the literary subject matter favored by the academicians of that day and his excitement at discovering the pictorial material furnished by the spectacle of London dock workers. Bunker refers to the letter several times in writing to Joe Evans, translated it into English, and distributed copies among his friends. His own ideas had probably been developing along parallel lines and this letter, from a man whom he considered the strongest pupil in Gérôme's atelier, sufficed to bring about the crystallization of his point of view.

Any longing Dennis Bunker may have had to paint pictures of the academic types seem to have been dispelled by Castaigne's remarks. In devoting his talents to the interpretation of the visual aspects of the world about him he was following the predominant trend of the time. He was probably also being true to his own temperament. Bunker's literary feeling and the fantasy which made his conversation and his letters a delight did not, apparently, affect the character of his talent for painting. The few jottings of imaginary compositions found in his note books show no particular aptitude in that direction. The oil sketches which he must have made for the Whitelaw Reid decoration have not been found, but some figures drawn in charcoal for those compositions (Plate 24) suggest an extremely conventional treatment. Dennis Bunker seems to have belonged by nature to the great family of painters we now call Impressionists, giving a broader meaning to a name first connected with a small group of Frenchmen. He did possess a type of imagination and a culture lacking in most of the painters who, in his time, were working in that tradition. And it is reasonable to suppose

that those very traits contributed to the peculiar quality which sets his pictures apart from the work of many of his similarly intentioned contemporaries.

Zola expressed the esthetic creed of painters of Bunker's type in a famous phrase which defined art as "*un coin de la création vu à travers un tempérament.*" This concept is by no means limited to the nineteenth century. The words are applicable to the art of a Velasquez, of a Vermeer, of a Hals and to a great part of the art of Titian, Veronese, Raphael, or Rembrandt. Perception of the visible world, interpreted with a greater or lesser degree of personal bias, is at the very core of the great western tradition of painting. The degree of objectivity with which it is rendered has varied with individual artists. During the seventies and eighties, in France especially, a number of painters and writers made objectivity a major tenet of their esthetic purpose. That Bunker was attracted to their view is evident in many of the extracts from his letters quoted in the preceding pages, especially the one written to Miss Hardy during the summer before his marriage.

This particular passage, hurriedly written at the end of a hard day's work by a young painter pouring out his heart to the girl he was soon to marry, should perhaps not be taken too literally. But the austere program implicit in it is typical of the great Impressionist tradition; passionate devotion to objective truth tempered by classic discipline. It is as far from the naturalism which underlines the more eccentric manifestations of life as it is from the emotional self-expression which we call romanticism. This is not intended to imply that any one of these attitudes is necessarily less productive of great art than the others. But Bunker's spontaneous confession of faith is peculiarly valuable for the light it throws on a kind of painting very little understood today.

A more personal facet of his approach to painting is expressed in another letter, written four years earlier, this time to Miss Page. "I begin to find that power lies as much in gentleness as anything else, as much in being led, as in leading. Gérôme used

to say that, but I never understood what it meant. He used to say "*Jamais de la violence*" * but it is only when one has learned those things one's self that one remembers that one's master said them years ago." It is also true that the mature painter recalls particularly those sayings of his master which evoked a response in his own nature. The whole art of Dennis Bunker was averse from violence, violent action, violent oppositions of tone or color, excessive characterization or brutal manipulation of pigment. This young man of twenty-five concludes his letter to Miss Page with a sentence which evokes with startling lucidity the elusive quality which runs like a silver thread throughout his work:

Your highest phase of art is to be perfectly lovely, gorgeous or beautiful, beautiful through some quality of light, of life, or solemnity, or richness, or loving elaboration of delicate form, anything so that it be a gracious beautiful canvas to look at—leaves, flowers or faces or limbs or draperies or skies.

To the expression of these things Dennis Bunker brought a very remarkable combination of natural gifts. It was said by several artists who knew him, most of whom outlived him by very many years, that Bunker was the most talented painter America had produced. Taken literally, this statement is hard to refute. Probably no other artist in the annals of American painting has started his career endowed with a similar equipment.† He was fortunate in receiving admirable teaching, but

* This quotation from the precepts of Gérôme is extraordinarily interesting. Gérôme, the painter of violent subjects, obviously was speaking of treatment and had in mind the avoidance of violent contrasts of light and dark or of color, of coarseness of line and crude handling of pigment. It provides one more example of a painter's tendency, in discussing the art he practices, to speak exclusively of the means of expression, of the purely pictorial elements, rather than of the subject matter. Writers and art critics, on the other hand, habitually attach the maximum importance to the subject matter of pictures.

† An exception should probably be made for Gilbert Stuart, a man of very remarkable talent. But the two men were born into conditions too fundamentally different in every way to permit comparison.

the rare quality of his inborn talent is demonstrated by the amazing rapidity with which he progressed. Few painters of any period have had both a sense of form and a sense of color developed to a like degree. To this exceptional combination, which made him both a draughtsman and a colorist, was added an unusual feeling for the material in which he worked and an innate dexterity of handling. He had none of the blind spots or weaknesses which so frequently flaw the work of painters with great gifts. In Bunker's pictures the elements of painting to which he gave comparatively little attention, such as composition and design, are always adequately handled. And his various abilities were co-ordinated by an intelligence of a high order.

The exceptional quality and variety of Bunker's talents does not warrant the assumption that had he lived the full span of his life he would necessarily have become a great artist. Certainly nothing in his brief career rules out that possibility. But the development of genius is unpredictable and great painting is the result of many factors, some of them so imponderable as to defy analysis. It is idle to speculate on what Dennis Bunker might have done. His actual accomplishment was sufficient to put him in the front rank of the American painters of the later nineteenth century. He was one of the very few really fine draughtsmen we have had in this country. He contributed a few portraits of outstanding merit. And he painted a number of landscapes which, in their own kind, have not been surpassed anywhere. This is no small achievement for any man. And, while we cannot but regret that he was not permitted to bring his talents to their full fruition, it would be a serious error to underestimate the significance of his actual contribution to American painting. By virtue of his pictures and of the influence he exerted, Dennis Bunker has a permanent place in the history of his country's art.

Information About Bunker's Pictures

IT WOULD BE impossible to draw up a comprehensive list of the pictures by Dennis Bunker now in existence. A number of landscapes, which may well include examples of his best work, certainly remain untraced, some of them probably owned by persons unaware of the painter's identity or importance. On the other hand it seems unlikely, though not impossible, that important figure pieces or portraits not reproduced in this volume will be discovered. The distinction of Bunker's landscapes being largely dependent on their color, only typical examples have been included in the illustrations. Various sketches and studies have likewise been omitted. Not included is a portrait of Mrs. John L. Gardner at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum which is not on public view. The landscape on permanent exhibition in that museum, perhaps Bunker's finest, is not reproduced because no photograph can do justice to its delicately adjusted color values.

Two exhibitions of pictures by Dennis Bunker were held at the Museum of Fine Arts, one in 1943, the other in 1945. All the works available at that time were collected and the relevant information given in the two catalogues. These catalogues remain permanently on file at the Museum. Filed with them is a catalogue of the memorial exhibit held at the St. Botolph Club, Boston, in 1891. The vagueness of the titles and the changed ownership of pictures listed in this latter catalogue has made identification and tracing impossible but it may help to establish the identity of canvases which turn up in the future.

Appendix

A NOTE ON JOE EVANS BY CHARLES C. BURLINGHAM

Joe Evans, son of Dr. Joseph T. Evans, was born October 27, 1857, in New York City, where he died, April 23, 1898 (Shakespeare's death and birth day).

Too delicate—a humpback—to go to school, he was educated at home and well educated. He early developed a talent for drawing and began to attend the Art School of the National Academy of Design. In 1872 he went with his parents and his sister to Paris, where they lived until 1880. Evans was admitted to the Beaux Arts and the atelier of Gérôme. Abbott H. Thayer was there then and many other American artists were in Paris, among them St. Gaudens, George de Forest Brush, Thomas W. Dewing and Kenyon Cox. Dr. Evans was himself an invalid and had retired from practice. They had an apartment on Place d'Eylau, which became a resort for American art students, many of them glad to get a square meal. Joe had a hard time at first in the Beaux Arts. The French students were none too kind and some of them were so cruel as to make fun of his deformity. But he stood his ground like a man and in the end became very popular. In vacations he went off to the country to sketch and paint. The summer of 1880 he passed in Ober-Ammergau, living in the house of the Pontius Pilate.

On their return to New York the Evanses lived at 36 East 31st Street, and this, too, became a resort for artists. Joe joined the Art Students League and in 1891, 1892 and 1893 was its President. His portrait by Alfred Q. Collins hangs above the staircase in their building on West 57th Street. Joe did little painting while in town, but every summer he painted at least two landscapes, one on clear days and the other on rainy days. He spent one summer at Siasconset on Nantucket near Thayer and his family. Most of his summers he

lived with or near his intimate friends the Burlinghams in Bantam, Connecticut, Cornish, New Hampshire, and Ashfield, Massachusetts. His last summer, 1898, he lived next door to the Burlinghams in Petersham. He went to England often, spending one summer in Broadway and two with his mother and sister in Ellen Terry's cottage in Uxbridge and in Winchelsea.

He loved the theater and was especially interested in Robert Taber, whose brief but brilliant career began through an introduction by the Gilders with a nonspeaking part in Mme. Modjeska's company. Joe was a master as manager and actor in private theatricals, and there were many joyous charade parties at his house and the Burlinghams', where Joe, the Tabers, including Florence (later Mrs. Henry Holt), Bunker, George Brush, St. Gaudens, Charles A. Platt, Mrs. Henry Oliver Walker, Loyall Farragut and others played many parts, ending usually with an Indian war dance by Brush.

When Henry Irving and Ellen Terry made their first visit to America in 1883, Joe, Taber and his brothers, and a half dozen other young friends were enthralled by Miss Terry and Mr. Irving and used to go to the Star Theatre (formerly Wallack's) at 13th Street and Broadway almost every night. Finally they sought an introduction to Miss Terry. She was playing Viola in *Twelfth Night*, and the little crowd of worshipers, who usually got the front seats in the gallery, unreserved in those days, made a huge wreath of chrysanthemums about three feet in diameter with a broad orange satin ribbon on which Joe had printed in beautiful Roman letters "To sweet Ellen Terry whom the Gods adore." When Miss Terry, dressed in a kilt like a boy with a little white cap, came out for one of the calls at the end of a scene, Charles Taber, a man of might, hurled the huge wreath from the gallery onto the stage. The next time the curtain went up Miss Terry had a tiny chrysanthemum stuck in her cap and she cocked her eye to the young gods and goddesses in the gallery.

This episode led to an introduction through Joe Gilder and the presentation to Ellen Terry of a little book bound in parchment with charming drawings and verses by Joe and the Tabers, and this was the beginning of a close friendship between Ellen Terry and Joe that lasted until his death.

Evans was an admirable draughtsman and a good, though not

great, painter. He left a few beautiful landscapes. He was a member of the Society of American Artists and, in 1894, its secretary. He belonged to the Players Club and the Century.

Evans was a rare personality. He was very small and badly deformed, but he was light of foot and flitted about like a bird. He had a beautiful face with luminous brown eyes and a soft brown beard. The Collins portrait is a perfect likeness and so is Abbott Thayer's portrait of him painted in Paris in the late seventies and now owned by Charles C. Burlingham. (Fig. 3.)

Joe loved good company and made it, for he had great charm and his conversation sparkled with humor and wit. His taste was exquisite, his knowledge wide and accurate; he seemed to know everything and he could do and make anything. No one who saw him, even if only once, ever forgot him. He was beloved by all who knew him and was the truest of friends.

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