

NOTES AND REVIEWS

TWO WILLIAM HOLMAN HUNT LETTERS TO JOHN CLIFFORD,
CHIEFLY CONCERNING HENRY WENTWORTH MONK

It was because of a chance visit to a London bookshop on St. Martin's Lane that this writer discovered two unpublished letters of William Holman Hunt (1827-1910) addressed to John Clifford (1836-1923), the English Baptist preacher and divine.¹ Research carried on since then seems to indicate that there are no other surviving documents of their relationship. Furthermore, the longer of the two letters reproduced here is an important comment on Hunt's friend, Henry Wentworth Monk (1827-96), as well as a statement of Hunt's artistic point of view.

The English Pre-Raphaelite painter first met the Canadian-born prophet, Monk, in 1854 at Ourtass, a village between Jerusalem and Hebron. Hunt was traveling in Palestine, zealously observing, drawing, and painting there, hoping thus to escape the stereotyped triviality of the religious pictures of his time. Through conscientious study of the inhabitants, the landscape, the flora and fauna of the scene of Christ's ministry, he sought to reform religious painting and contribute to God's plan as he perceived it. Monk, who two years earlier had taken a vow of poverty and devotion to world peace and Zionism, had only recently settled in the Holy Land.²

Both Hunt and Monk were to see their meeting as providential. Each was to learn that the other anxiously anticipated the approach of the millennium. Neither had much patience with orthodox religion. Steeped in Malthusian pessimism, both men hated war and dreaded the seemingly inevitable devastation of the earth by prolific and wasteful man. Both agreed that the foundation of a homeland for the Jews was central to the inauguration of the Kingdom of God as envisioned in the Book of the Revelation. Throughout their lives the two men were to remain in touch -- meeting and corresponding from time to time -- while each carried on his very different sort of evangelistic work.

On at least three occasions Monk served Hunt as a model.³ The signed and dated (1858) portrait of the young prophet at the age of thirty-one is the most interesting result of their collaboration. Now in the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, the portrait shows Monk's head turned right in three-quarters view, shoulders outlined against a window, or possibly a door sash of antique green bottle glass. The circular "eyes" stare out at us, while the seer gazes toward the source of