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Gilbert Munger: On the Trail
Hildegard Cummings

Notes on Two Seventeenth-Century Drawings
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Cover illustration: François Verdier (1651-1730), *Angel.* Red chalk on beige paper, 29.7 x 18.9 cm. (11 11/16 x 7 7/16 in.). Alumni Annual Giving Program.

GILBERT MUNGER: ON THE TRAIL

Carnival at Nice, a painting of 1890 by Gilbert Munger, is different from any other this American expatriate artist is known to have done.[1] It depicts (see fig. 1) what is presumably a Shrove Tuesday festival in a public square in the French Riviera resort city of Nice and is noteworthy for its rendering, in strong sunlight, of a row of golden-colored Neo-Renaissance buildings and of a crowd scene that looks like Frith's *Derby Day* seen through the wrong end of binoculars.[2] The viewer is too far away from the scene to be able to count heads, spot incidents in the crowd, or get more than a glimpse of a horse-drawn float and the parade behind. But the floats, canopies, and banners, the way groups of people are arranged in relation to open space, and the very fenestration of the buildings all work together to create lively rhythms and a joyful spirit. The work has qualities of Impressionism without its techniques. Though there is some looseness of brush stroke, paint is fairly evenly and thinly laid on, glazing is rich, and contiguous color patches really represent such forms as hooded robes. The painting is mostly of warm golds, browns, whites, and blues, with tiny accents of red or orange, but whether of buildings or banners (French tricolor flags with the red subdued), or of people, horses, trees, or mountains, colors are as carefully orchestrated as is the composition. The scene seems at once realistic and from a Cecil B. de Mille spectacle.

Today Gilbert Munger is virtually unknown and infrequently listed in art reference sources, but when he painted *Carnival at Nice* he was at the height of his career, was regularly winning praise from art critics, and was being showered with titles and other honors — nine medals from six foreign countries, among them three from Venezuela, another that might be a Cross of the French Legion of Honor, and the Saxon Grand Cross for Art and Science.[3] Gilbert Munger apparently got off to a late but excellent start as a painter in the United States, prospered during the seventeen years he lived in Europe, but was disregarded when he returned to this country ten years before his death. A writer for the New York *Commercial Advertiser,* who seems the sole reviewer of a small posthumous retrospective in early 1904 that must have been arranged to coincide with publication of the artist's memoir, considered paintings that had been lauded abroad to be so imitative of early Barbizon works "as to force comparison not to the advantage of Mr. Munger."[4] The reviewer managed scarcely a kind word and

could not fathom why the artist had been bestowed with foreign honors. While in the next several years supporters such as artist Dwight Williams and Lyman Mills, one-time owner of *Carnival at Nice* and of a notable American painting collection that included some twenty Mungers, tried to interest such influential gallery directors as William Macbeth in promoting Gilbert Munger, they were unsuccessful and the artist's reputation fell into oblivion.[5]

Assessing Gilbert Munger today is difficult because his paintings are hard to find and because virtually everything we have known of him is from the *Memoir* published anonymously by De Vinne Press of New York City in early 1904, a year after his death.[6] This small volume of twenty-one pages, with six black and white plates of Munger's art (four from the same late period), has all the attributes of a puff piece financed by the artist's family. Nevertheless, research which has uncovered new information has also revealed, surprisingly, that the *Memoir* is generally trustworthy. Munger's place in American art can now be a little better understood. *Carnival at Nice* was a blaze near the end of its maker's trail, which itself probably represented a truly American nineteenth-century phenomenon.

Gilbert Davis Munger was born April 14, 1837, in North Madison, Connecticut, in the homestead of his seventeenth-century English forebear Nicholas Munger.[7] His family moved to nearby New Haven when Gilbert, the youngest child, was still small. His artistic talents became apparent early, but the parents discouraged their son when he announced his intention of becoming an artist and gave permission only upon the intervention of his English tutor, a Professor Lovell, said to be certain, when the boy was just eleven years old, that he would succeed as an artist. The *Memoir* says that "at that time the prosaic and practical inhabitants of New England did not consider the profession 'quite respectable'," but it does not say that other Mungers in the Madison area had become artists nonetheless.[8] George Munger, who had died in New Haven only a dozen years before Gilbert Munger was born, had a fine reputation as a miniaturist — better, most said, than his relative Anson Dickinson upstate in Litchfield. His career was considered especially remarkable because after an illness had stopped him from painting for eleven years, he had managed, when he began again in 1815, to renew and even increase his fame in the few years before his death. Moreover, two of George Munger's daughters were artists of note, one a miniaturist like her father, the other a celebrated flower painter. Gilbert Munger's parents could not have

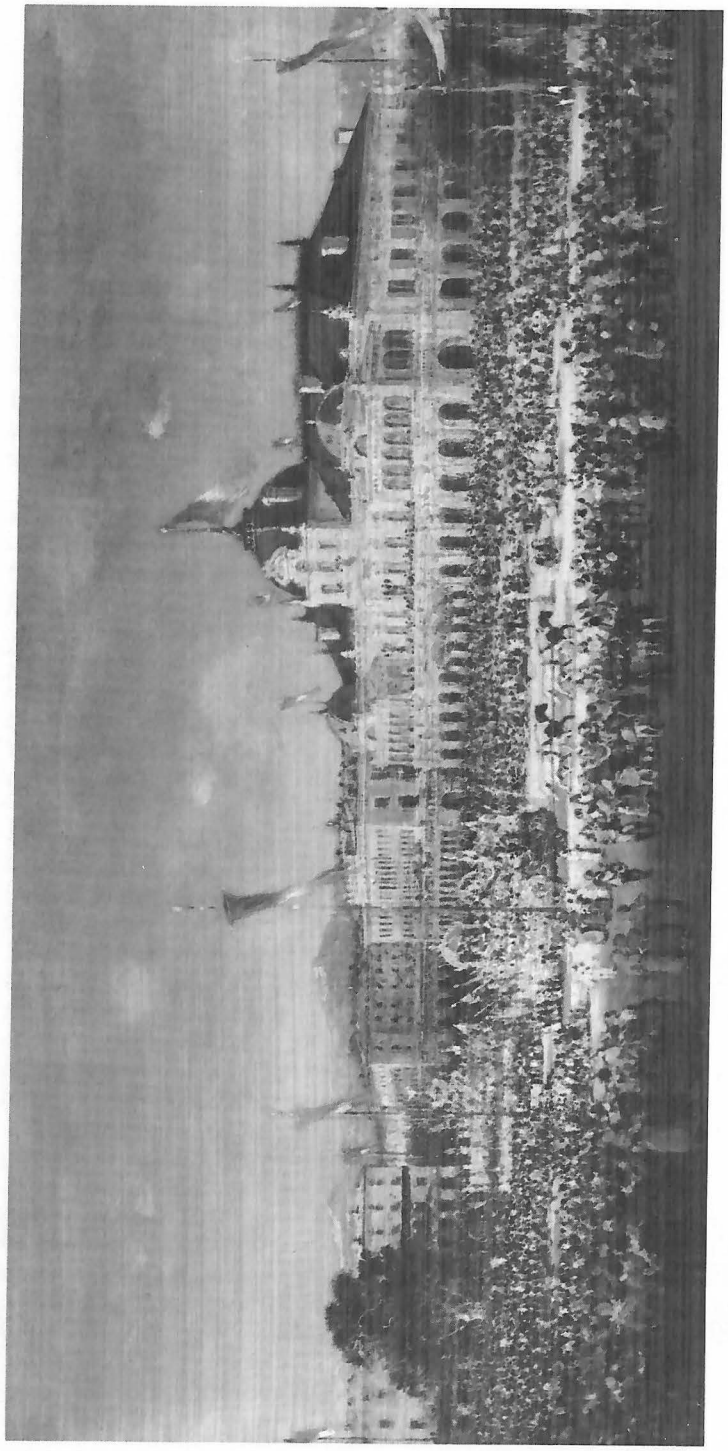

Fig. 1. Gilbert Munger, *Carnival at Nice*, 1890. Oil on cradled panel, 29.8 x 61.2 cm. (11-3/4 x 24-1/8 in.). The William Benton Museum of Art, Louise Crombie Beach Memorial Collection.

been unfamiliar with nor utterly repelled by the art vocation, although they may well have worried, as the *Memoir* says, that their son was acting "on a childish freak."[9]

He would soon demonstrate his dedication to art. At thirteen, when boys in that period commonly began to work as men, Munger went to Washington to study with a natural history and landscape engraver. The next year he began government service, engraving plates for Smithsonian Institution publications and for reports of the famous naturalists Charles Wilkes and Louis Agassiz.[10] Although he worked as an engraver until the Civil War, he longed to be a landscape painter, and to that end read Ruskin, bought a drawing book by Ruskin's teacher J.D. Harding, and spent every free daylight hour in the woods with his sketchbook or paints.

The Civil War abruptly ended Munger's employment as a government engraver. He was able, surprisingly, to become a construction engineer in the Union army, assigned to work on the field fortifications around Washington. Long afterward, his artist friend Dwight Williams recalled Munger saying that he "was called Major in those days and had men under him both as construction chief and in the department of lithography, which department he fathered and saved the Government much money."[11] Williams said Munger simplified the army's department of map-making and that the government offered him a high-paying job in that field when the war ended.

Munger moved, instead, to New York City to try a career in painting, undoubtedly with the attitude that he could wait no longer. He was twenty-eight years old, untried, and without formal training. He must have been jubilant when two of his pictures were accepted for the National Academy of Design exhibition of 1866. Munger's first New York period lasted until 1869, and while little is known of his activities, he did have triumphs there with work that he did away from the city. A large 1868 painting of *Minnehaha Falls,* done at the site of the landmark waterfall in Minneapolis that figures in Longfellow's *Hiawatha,* attracted favorable attention in a widely-circulating ticket exhibition. Two years later, in California, it would be bought by the financier William Chapman Ralston for his lavish Neo-Renaissance palace at Belmont (where it is still), but upon its completion in 1868 it not only evoked press notices lauding its truth to nature and attention to detail but prompted an important commission for a Niagara Falls painting.[12] This was a *coup* for a new painter, and the *Niagara* painting (present location unknown) won Munger praise not only from the *New York Herald*

writer but from that man's idea of "an honest art critic" — a Mr. Perry of the *Home Journal,* a New York weekly with an "Art and Artists" column about established artists like Church, Bierstadt, and Eastman Johnson.[13] The piece for May 12, 1869, however, after decrying the poor quality of the current National Academy exhibition and declaring it no wonder that good artists seldom bothered to exhibit there, said this:

> Gilbert Munger, of 82 Fifth Avenue, has painted a large view of Niagara Falls as seen from the Canada side. The work is one of real promise, showing a good deal of skill and graphic power. It bespeaks for the artist an honorable position among American landscapists, and at once advances him a long stride in his career. The work has been exhibited a few days at Schaus' Gallery.[14]

While established in New York from 1866 to 1869, Munger had to be away from the city for weeks at a time working on paintings like *Minnehaha* and *Niagara.* In late 1865 or in 1866 he did *Evening on Cheat River,* one of his 1866 National Academy pictures, probably in western Maryland in company with artist John Ross Key (grandson of national anthem author Francis Scott Key), who, like Munger, was in New York City in 1866 after service as a government artist and had a Cheat River painting in that year's Academy exhibition. Munger also had a studio in St. Paul, Minnesota, in the Munger Building, where one of his brothers had a music business. While a contemporary *St. Paul Press* notice of *Minnehaha* refers to Munger as "an artist from New York City," obituary notices in 1903 in the *Minneapolis Journal* and elsewhere recall that he was periodically in St. Paul and Duluth. He had brothers in both cities.[15]

In May, 1869, Gilbert Munger left New York for the West, where his art and reputation made great strides.[16] His plans had been announced in the May 12 *Home Journal:* "The artist will make a tour to the Rocky Mountains this summer, and among the grandeurs of that region will doubtless find subjects for still more admirable successes in his art."[17] Key, who went along on this trip, may have encouraged Munger to go, for he once told a Boston writer that he had been to the Pacific Coast as early as 1858 with the Landers railroad survey (which included Albert Bierstadt, on his first trip West).[18]

While Key explored Tahoe and Big Trees country, Munger, in 1869, joined geologist Clarence King's 40th Parallel Survey as guest artist, leaving Salt Lake City around June 1 with a field party

bound for Cottonwood Canyon. On June 22, King met the group at the main camp at Parley's Park, twenty-five miles east of Salt Lake City: "Bills large, Cottonwood lake a 'bilk,'...Gilbert Munger enchanted in a cool and gentlemanly way *sketching* on four foot canvas, the mules thin having been grassless."[19] A week later everyone was on the trail again until work for the season closed at the end of September. Munger saw the Wasatch Mountains, the Green River Divide, the glacier-sculpted Uinta Mountains, and more.

In the fall he rejoined Key and settled in San Francisco. By February, San Francisco newspaper writers were admiring his painting, *Wasatch Mountains, Utah Valley,* and after that Munger was mentioned in virtually every art column of the San Francisco *Daily Alta California* and the *Daily Evening Bulletin* until he moved back East at the end of 1870.[20] By March, he and Key, who sometimes exhibited together, were called "well-known artists."[21] The *Alta* critic, "Caliban," writing about some miniature landscapes Munger was doing, informed his readers that Munger's "skill as a landscape painter has won him a brilliant reputation in the Atlantic States," but this somewhat exaggerated notion of Munger's eastern fame was soon replaced by praise for his work in California.[22] In April a *Wasatch Mountain View* was pronounced "almost a perfect creation" by Caliban and by the *Bulletin* man as "one of the best landscapes by any artist ever exhibited in this city."[23] The *Bulletin* writer was pleased to make an announcement:

> Mr. Key and Mr. Munger, who came here only for a brief visit, have prolonged their stay because the climate and the richness of the material for landscape studies enchant them....Mr. Munger's Mission scenes, studies of California palms, San Francisco Bay scenes, etc., are valuable additions to our local school.[24]

By June, the *Alta* writer believed that Munger was one of the best landscape painters around and, when a new Munger painting, *A Glimpse of the Pacific,* sold for a thousand dollars, he called that "a high figure, but not above its value."[25] A few weeks later he wrote that "Gilbert Munger is doing more to bring to public notice the artistic resources in California scenery than any landscape painter whose pictures have been shown here....Some few have imbibed the subtle spirit of the atmosphere, and have caught the real feeling of nature's handiwork. But Munger has come nearer into these mysteries than any other."[26] Other San Francisco critics generally agreed. Every new Munger picture got close attention and

kudos from the local press, and the comings and goings of the artist were carefully noted.

Munger joined the King Geological Survey again the summer of 1870, this time bound for Mount Shasta. He and King, who was a member of the Ruskin Society, always got on well, and the geologist introduced the artist to the writer Bret Harte and other San Francisco luminaries. Though King always included a photographer on his expeditions, he was so pleased with the color and poetry in Munger's art that he used chromolithographs based on Munger's paintings to illustrate his masterwork, *Systematic Geology* (1878). Munger's work as an engraver, together with his devotion to the teachings of Ruskin, and probable anticipation that some of his western scenes would become chromolithographs, help account for his crisp painting style at this period. Though King and Bret Harte once teased him for "putting snow into Lake Marian, and desecrating Starr King's knob,"[27] generally Munger strove for accuracy and was delighted when geology professors at Yale's Sheffield Scientific School borrowed some of his work to illustrate their lectures: "I made and finished studies of what I saw, painting the geological formation with careful detail so that a geologist could tell the species of rock from looking at the picture."[28] Yet Munger, who had grown up in the Hudson River tradition and had had opportunity to see the Barbizon paintings that were becoming popular in this country, was equally intent on expressing mood and poetic feeling, especially that which involved tender glowing light. Critics such as the San Francisco *Bulletin* writer who commended him for "getting the topography" of a mountain like Shasta always added a comment like this: "The ruddy glow that illumes the peak at morning or evening he has caught with effecting truth."[29]

The Shasta expedition began August 27, 1870, with a steamer trip to Sacramento, then a train to Chico, and a final transfer to mules. On October 10, with the rainy season at hand and most artists already back in San Francisco after summer trips, Munger was still at Shasta. He had climbed the mountain at least once but spent six weeks at the base, making daily studies in oil "on unusually large canvasses for field sketches, some being as large as 22 x 44 inches, and they are as elaborate as to the mountain alone as finished pictures."[30] After Shasta, he went on to Mount Hood, where, "when clouds and mists did not obscure or hide the mountain, strong winds shook his canvass, or carried it bodily off."[31]

Munger's return to the East on November 21 was noted in the San Francisco press with regret and pride. He had come to be

regarded as a local artist and one who had developed in California. His 1868 painting *Minnehaha* had been on exhibit at Snow & Roos Gallery in San Francisco while he was at Shasta and judged less good than his recent work: "The general effect is not satisfactory, being entirely destitute of that freshness and tender firmness which the same artist has shown in pictures executed during his sojourn on this coast."[32] The Shasta and Hood studies were a different matter: "No other artist has so thoroughly and faithfully sketched these noble peaks, and we anticipate that he will delight New York with the large pictures he intends to paint there from his numerous sketches, including many details of scenery, of trees, plants, rocks and living figures."[33]

In New York in 1871 Munger exhibited in the National Academy of Design exhibition for the second and last time: *Lake-La, Unintah Mountains* and *Lake Marion, Humboldt Mountains* (both owned by Clarence King) and what must have been a new *A Glimpse of the Pacific.* The California painting of that title had won acclaim and a wealthy buyer. This one was for sale and dismissed by the *New York Times* reviewer as a work that "seems only a little less hard than some of the artist's previous works," but it may have been the same painting that a Boston critic called "very fine" and "full of poetic feeling and sentiment."[34] Munger is listed at a Broadway address in New York from 1871 through 1874, but, apart from the 1871 Academy exhibition, nothing is heard of him in the city. He spent time in Duluth in 1871, for there are two versions that year of a panoramic view of the harbor and new ship canal. And he worked in his New York studio afterward, because San Francisco's *Daily Evening Bulletin* began its "Art Items" for June 22, 1872, this way:

> Paris has about 2,000 artists.
> Meissonier late received $40,000 for a single painting.
> Gilbert Munger, of New York, has closed his studio for the season, and will spend the summer in California and in the region bordering Puget Sound.[35]

Munger's 1872 visit to the West once again stretched to a year and a half, and again the San Francisco press followed his moves and lauded his paintings as they did few others. Notable changes had occurred in the San Francisco art world since Munger was previously there. There was now an Art Association which held exhibitions four times a year. Artists no longer had to display their work in shop windows or at industrial fairs. Snow & Roos Gallery had been refurbished and others were opening or expanding. Most

exciting to local arts writers, however, was that two artists who had been away from California during Munger's first stay were back in town: William Keith and Albert Bierstadt.

With Thomas Hill, they were, of course, California's stars, especially Bierstadt, who was hailed as "the genius of the wilderness." Yet, for a time, Gilbert Munger was in their constellation, regularly mentioned with all three or with Bierstadt alone. The anonymous poem in a San Francisco newspaper of the early 1870s that called Bierstadt the wilderness genius also appreciated Munger's more realistic work: "In landscape Munger claims a worthy place./Neutral in tone his pictures never glare...They spread their beauties in a quiet way/And to be felt requires a long survey."[36] The *Bulletin* critic, reporting on the May, 1873, San Francisco Art Association exhibition, said that "In the list of those we like to claim as California artists, because they have resided here more or less, and have attained on this coast their most famous subjects, are the well-known names of Albert Bierstadt, Thomas Hill, William Keith, Gilbert Munger...."[37] A year later, when both Bierstadt and Munger had left California for good, another writer chauvinistically declared that "California has helped to make Bierstadt, Munger and others who have sought their inspiration in our State."[38]

The main business of Munger's 1872 trip seems to have been to paint the Shoshone Falls on the Snake River in Idaho. Higher by a hundred feet than Niagara and in perilous terrain, these falls had not yet been done from original studies by any painter. After a trip to Puget Sound, Munger went to the falls alone for two weeks and subsequently spent months back in San Francisco finishing a five-by-eight-foot painting of the scene, which he exhibited briefly in the Art Association gallery in February or March and again in the regular May exhibition.[39] Critics began commending the work (a sunset scene) while it was still on the easel, even noting that in April the artist reworked it "with a careful hand, materially improving this excellent painting."[40] Since *Shoshone Falls* and a *Green River* painting that Munger exhibited at Snow & Roos in August, 1872, are among the illustrations in King's *Systematic Geology,* Munger might have been fulfilling a commission connected with King.[41] Before returning East at the end of 1873, he sketched in the Bay Area, Monterey, and the Sierra Lakes, and he visited Yosemite, where at some point he met Lord Skelmersdale and other English noblemen, who, according to the *Memoir,* commissioned $10,000 worth of Yosemite paintings and advised him to go to England.[42]

For some reason, he was persuaded, and his days of buckskin, mules, and wilderness trails were at an end. Had he stayed in California, his career and reputation might have continued to rival that of Hill and Keith. Curiously, when Keith's Barbizon-inspired work of later years was exhibited at Macbeth Gallery in New York City in the early years of this century, it did not meet with the harsh criticism accorded Munger's Barbizon "imitations" but was spoken of as interesting because of its integration of the "old-fashioned" Barbizon look with California's scenery and light.

When Munger went abroad in 1877 or so, he did not simply tour art centers, as his friend John Ross Key had done a couple of years before, but was caught up in the expatriate movement of American artists in the late 1870s and 1880s. He never came home until 1893.[43] Until 1885 he was in England, where he became enough a part of the art world to be listed sometimes as a British artist, and afterward he lived in France, in Paris and at Barbizon. What Munger was doing between the time he left California at Christmastime, 1873, and his arrival in England some four years later is not clear, although some western scenes were finished in that period.[44] One wonders why his work was not in the 1876 exhibition at Philadelphia. His decision to leave the United States just when he was beginning to get a good reputation here is also puzzling until one remembers that numbers of other American artists were also feeling an urgency to go abroad. In California especially, artists were anxious about their remoteness from cultural mainstreams.[45] They venerated European training and were receptive to foreign influences. Munger may have shared such feelings. Had he thought of staying in California, where his reputation was stronger than anywhere else, he should have been concerned that, despite four-figure prices for a handful of pictures, most of his paintings — and those of his peers — were fetching less, sometimes much less, than a hundred dollars. The English aristocrats probably assured him he could do better in England.

Years later, in 1892, Munger would say that he had developed his style in Europe:

> Perhaps the ample survey of the whole field of art offered in Europe better enables a man to 'strike his personal note,' as the French say — to find out his failings and avoid them, I should say. The gratifying measure of success which has greeted my humble efforts in these latter years is due, I am sure, to having found a way to my own style through a number of experiments and a series of careful observations which I should not have been able to make if settled at home.[46]

Virtually none of the work Munger did in England has surfaced, so one can only guess at stylistic developments in his art there. An artist friend, Walter Paris, recalled that "his work was somewhat changed at this period as he had been studying the great galleries of Europe and England,' but was no more specific than that.[47] Published comments about Munger's art at this time are rare, partly because he usually dealt directly with collectors. He exhibited four times at the Royal Academy (1879, 1880, 1882, and 1885), but no references to his work have been discovered in reviews of those exhibitions.[48] *A Great Salt Lake, Mormon City, and Wahsatch Mountains* painting that was one of his three entries in the 1879 exhibition (now at the Utah Museum of Fine Arts?; see fig. 2), was not only ignored by the press but hung in an Academy gallery that had a reputation for having inferior work, but his *King Arthur's Castle, Cornwall* was "well placed" and "on the line" in the 1880 exhibition.[49] Titles of his other Academy works indicate that he visited Scotland as well as Cornwall and that he painted English park and river scenes. According to *The Dictionary of British Artists, 1880-1940,* between 1880 and 1885 Munger's work was also shown once at the Royal Society of British Artists, once at the Royal Society of Painters, Etchers, and Engravers, three times at the Royal Hibernian Academy, and a dozen times at the Fine Art Society on New Bond Street.[50] A contemporary source says that the Fine Art Society published etchings by Munger.[51]

Munger apparently flourished in London. Clarence King, who looked him up in 1882, was dazzled by his old friend's success. Walter Paris, who saw a good deal of Munger about the same time, described him as elegantly dressed, with a fine studio near New Bond Street. Paris wrote: "He had a great display of pictures on the spacious walls and on easels and he appeared to be full of work and in a most prosperous condition of life."[52] A cousin of Munger's once said that his picture sales in England were "always phenomenal, bringing flattering sums, a few as high as $5,000."[53]

When he had been about three years in England, two London serials published pieces on Munger. The *Whitehall Review* described his houseboat on the Thames as "a sort of rough Noah's Ark on a raft," where he worked on *Autumn on the Thames,* a pastoral sunset scene "with a poetic realization of the richness and depth of color and beauty of forest outline and sky forms which are to be seen in October and November on our picturesque English river."[54] A profile in *The New Monthly Magazine* for June, 1880, recounted Munger's career and told of a stay at Dunkeld, Scotland,

the first autumn after his arrival in England, with Sir John Everett Millais.[55] Millais often worked late into the fall and sometimes complained of the cold and snow.[56] Munger probably told the famous Pre-Raphaelite about doing the Shoshone Falls in sub-zero temperatures, with inadequate blankets, nothing but bread and dried beef to eat, and fingers so benumbed some days that he had to run around every five minutes and beat warmth into them.[57]

While little is known about Munger's English period, even less has been learned about his time in France, which began in late 1885 or early 1886 and lasted until 1893. Why Munger moved to France and where he exhibited there have yet to be discovered. His work was never at the Salon or in other major French exhibitions of the period. It is not clear how much time he spent in Paris, in Barbizon, or on a houseboat he is said to have had on the Seine and Oise Rivers. It is not known whether he was friends with other American artists in France, with French artists, or with anyone at all. But some paintings that he did in France are known and there are contemporary accounts or photographs of others. They are all, except the *Carnival at Nice,* in the Barbizon mood — quiet, domestic landscapes that are glowing and mysterious. While some of Munger's earlier work had Barbizon characteristics (increasingly so while he was in England, one suspects), now he wholeheartedly absorbed the spirit and ideas of "the men of thirty" who had made the village of Barbizon famous years before. "Rub out the signature of Gilbert Munger, an American painter, still young, we believe [he was actually forty-nine], and it would pass for a work of that same school which glorifies the forest scenery of Fontainebleau," said the *London Daily Telegraph* in 1886.[58] Munger became so closely associated with the Barbizon masters that some critics assumed he knew or studied with them, but by the time he got to Barbizon they were, of course, dead or gone.[59] Munger was compared with Corot, Diaz, and Théodore Rousseau, and Daubigny, Dupré, and Troyon might sometimes have been named just as well, but his individuality was stressed nonetheless. It must have been the gentle, green and gold pastoral scenes of this period (see fig. 3) that Munger thought were the achievement of his personal style and which won for him critical praise and foreign decorations. The *Memoir* quotes laudatory comments about Munger's French landscapes from more than a dozen newspapers of 1886 to 1890, nearly all of them British. Beginning in 1886 he showed regularly at the Hanover Gallery in London, which for some years had favored Barbizon painting. (One wonders whether Munger exhibited much

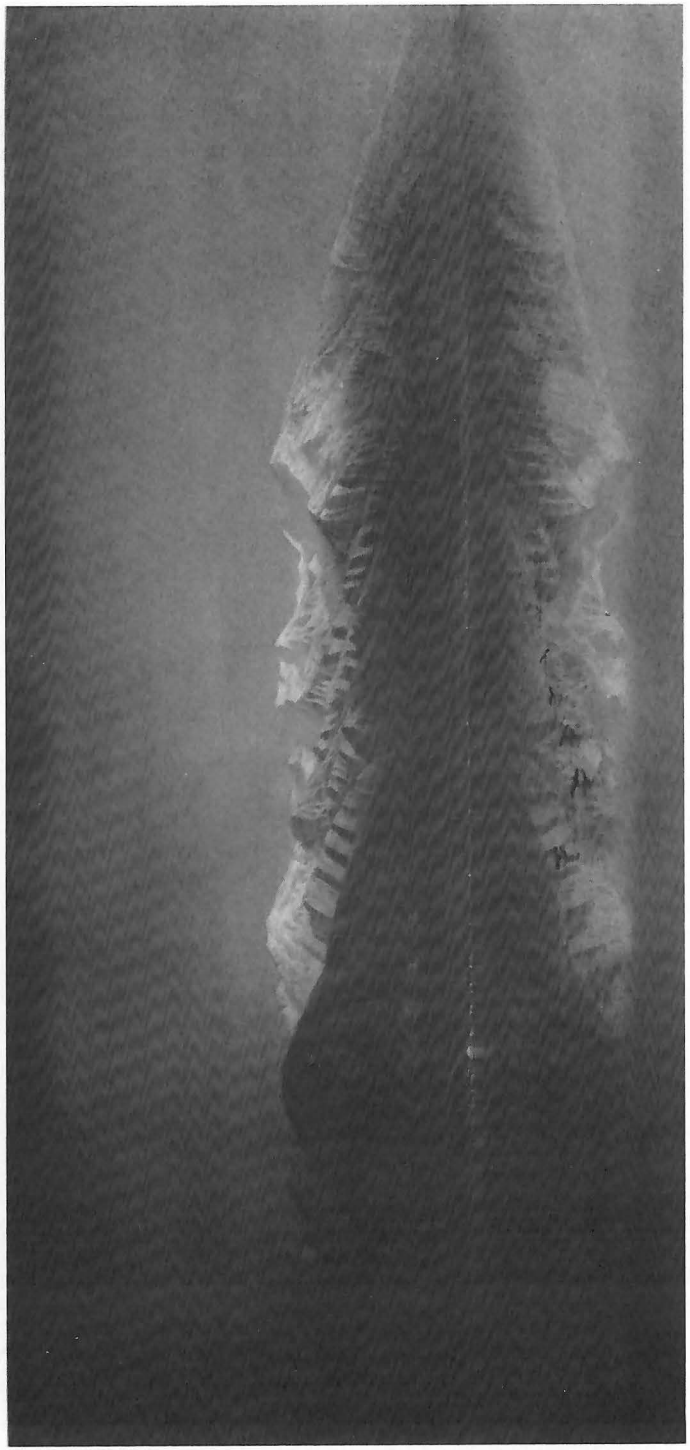

Fig. 2. Gilbert Munger, *The Wasatch Mountains with Salt Lake City and the Great Salt Lake in the Foreground,* 1877. Oil on canvas, 53.3 x 111.8 cm. (21 x 44 in.). Utah Museum of Fine Arts, University of Utah.

Fig. 3. Gilbert Munger, *On the Seine,* 1880s. Oil on wood panel, 29.8 x 46.0 cm. (11-3/4 x 18-1/8 in.). The Heckscher Museum, August Heckscher Collection.

Fig. 4. Gilbert Munger, *Mission San Carlos Borromeo de Carmelo,* c. 1869. Oil on paper mounted on canvas, 35.2 x 50.2 cm. (13-7/8 x 19-3/4 in.). Phelan Collection.

in France while he was there.) What the English reviewers liked in Munger's French scenes were "quiet, harmonious tones" and "wonderful atmosphere and breadth of treatment."[60] Curiously, they seemed not to know Munger had ever been among them but often assumed he had lived in France for years, was still young, and new to English viewers: "...Gilbert Munger, the French-American, whom Hollander and Cremetti introduced to England last year, and whose fame will yet be great" (*Land and Water,* October 28, 1887).[61]

Carnival at Nice, more Impressionist than Barbizon in effect though not in style, suggests that Munger by 1890 had become aware of and receptive to French Impressionism, as other American artists in France, like Robert Vonnoh, were beginning to be. Yet *Carnival at Nice,* while an apparent anomaly for Munger, has its roots in his earlier work, the "Barbizon trees" done in a way Dupré and Rousseau would have liked and the topography of the Maritime Alps in the distance "gotten" as the American Rockies had been years before. Munger had previously portrayed "golden" architecture — from California missions (see fig. 4) to King Arthur's Castle to buildings in Venice, when he had at some point been inspired by Ruskin to do an extensive series there — getting *their* topography and setting them into the middle ground of his composition, as in *Carnival at Nice.* And while he had almost never before been moved to do more than tuck one small human figure or two into a landscape, in *Carnival at Nice* he grouped masses of figures in a manner reminiscent of bushes or weeds growing at the edges of water, as in scenes he had done many times before.

The foreground of this cityscape must have been a new challenge for Munger, however, because it had to have been invented or "staged" to an extent, unlike the elements in his landscapes, where he had always worked, as Ruskin had urged, for literal truth. Furthermore, Munger was an outdoor painter — one who elaborated his oil sketches in the studio but who, according to the *Memoir,* "invariably finished his pictures at the point of observation," even if he had to wait weeks, "until the weather would unfold to view a landscape in perfect accord with his own peaceful sentiments."[62] At any carnival at Nice, where the crowd and the parade were constantly moving and changing (and were soon altogether gone), Munger could only have managed some quick sketching.[63] Except for banners and clouds, the upper half of his picture could represent "literal truth" and be finished at the site, but the foreground composition, based on sketches, memory, and

invention, may as well have been finished in the studio as anywhere else and may have involved preliminary drawings. In any case, the artist succeeded in integrating the various picture parts. *Carnival at Nice* may be Munger's *tour de force.* It is also a painting which, together with, at the very least, some fine scenes of the American West and certain Barbizon works this writer has seen, demonstrates that Gilbert Munger does not deserve the obscurity that has been his lot in our time.

HILDEGARD CUMMINGS

NOTES

1 Acc. no. 33.41. Gift of Lyman A. Mills, Middlefield, Connecticut, to The Louise Crombie Beach Memorial Collection. 29.8 x 61.2 cm. (11 3/4 x 24 1/8 in.) Oil on cradled panel. Signed and dated in brown at lower right: "Gilbert Munger 1890." The painting is in good condition. Some vertical crazing overall, minor paint loss at left edge, and minor surface abrasion at left and right edges. At some point before Munger painted on it, the panel was extended at the right by about an inch. The surface of the painting indicates that it was once in a smaller frame and that sometime in the past minor restoration was undertaken, principally in the margins. *Carnival at Nice* was exhibited at the Wadsworth Atheneum in 1923 in an "Exhibition of Paintings from the Collection of the Hon. Lyman A. Mills of Middlefield, Conn. in the Morgan Memorial, Hartford, Connecticut, Beginning November 12th, 1923" as No. 36. Mills, the Lieutenant-Governor of Connecticut at the turn of the century, owned some twenty Mungers, as well as works by Inness, Moran, Kensett, and even the English artists Richard Wilson and John Constable. Mills gave *Carnival at Nice* to the Beach Collection in July, 1927, and a label on the back of the frame reading "Carnival At Nice, by Gilbert Munger, No. 26" indicates its place in that collection.

2 The site is probably the Place Masséna, but the largest building, which may, of course, have since been demolished, has not been satisfactorily identified. The *Derby Day,* 1856-58 (Tate Gallery, London) of English artist William Powell Frith (1819-1909) is a complex Victorian crowd scene on a double canvas, 40 x 88 in., that is as panoramic as our Munger painting but places the viewer close to the scene.

3 The decorations are extant, along with a photograph of the artist shown wearing several of them, as he did for an 1891 bronze bust (St. Louis County Historical Society, Duluth, Minnesota) sculpted in Nice by the Italian Massimiliano Contini (born c. 1850). Not all of the medals have been properly identified or dated, such as one which has an overall design like that of published illustrations of the Cross of the French Legion of Honor but differs in some details, including the motto. A *Memoir* of the artist (see n. 6) lists the Cross of the Legion of Honor as among Munger's decorations. Other medals are from Belgium, Russia, and Italy. Munger was also a knight of the Order of Saxe-Ernestine (the *Memoir* erroneously attributes the knighthood to the Duke of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, Prince Albert of England's elder brother), an honorary member of the Italian Academy of Fine Arts, and a member of the Association Littéraire et Artistique Internationale, founded in France by Victor Hugo. Some prominent American artists of the period, such as Albert Bierstadt, had similar collections of foreign awards, but few lesser artists had any.

4 New York *Commercial Advertiser,* January 5, 1904 (Vertical File, Art Room, New York Public Library). The exhibition included eighteen paintings and was at Noé Art Galleries (formerly Avery), 368 Fifth Avenue, beginning date unknown but ending before January 16, when another exhibition opened.

5 Dwight Williams (1856-1932), a New York State watercolor artist who seems to have met Munger after his return to the United States in 1893, was one of his most ardent admirers, once declaring that the only landscapes he had seen on an 1896 European trip that compared with Munger's were in the Uffizi Gallery. That same year he wrote William Macbeth more than once about Munger and wanted Munger to meet Arthur B. Davies, whom Macbeth was sponsoring and whom Williams had once had as a drawing student (letter, October 3, 1896, Macbeth Papers, Archives of American Art, roll NMc 12, frame 339). Years later, Lyman Mills, who bought art from Macbeth, sent the dealer photographs of Munger work that he owned and loved but, while Macbeth put Mills in touch with another dealer who had Mungers to sell, he seems never to have handled Munger's work himself (letters from late 1908 and 1909, Macbeth Papers, AAA, roll NMc19).

6 *Memoir: Gilbert Munger, Landscape Artist, 1836-1903* (New York: De Vinne Press, [1904]). An end note says "compiled by a friend of Gilbert Munger, assisted by his relatives, and from reliable art critics both in America and Europe...." Authorship remains a question. Professor J. Gray Sweeney, in the new collection catalogue of the Tweed Museum of Art of The University of Minnesota at Duluth, proposes as author the artist's brother Roger Sherman Munger, a philanthropic entrepreneur known as the "Father of Duluth." Since, disturbingly, nothing in the *Memoir* conveys intimacy with the artist or his art, one might as well suggest Myra Dowd Monroe, a second cousin of the artist (*not* his niece, as in previously published statements) and an artist herself, who published an essay about Munger in *Connecticut Magazine* in 1904 (Vol. 8, 775-84) and a 1948 paper for the Madison [Ct.] Historical Society (Madison Historical Society: *Madison's Heritage,* 1964). The Frick Art Reference Library has catalogued the *Memoir* under the authorship of James Cresap, on the strength of an identification made in 1945 by a "G.H. Hamilton" (art historian George Heard Hamilton?). James Cresap, whoever he was, apparently published nothing else, so perhaps it makes just as much sense to suggest James Cresap Sprigg, who at least is known to have written a book (albeit one about Smithfield hams, which he autographed "Cresap Sprigg") and who may be the "J.C. Sprigg" who inscribed a presentation copy of the *Memoir* to the art collector and dealer Samuel P. Avery as early as January 15, 1904. The wild conjecturing one is tempted into in this instance is finally of little importance, for the *Memoir* mostly appropriates entire paragraphs from a biographical sketch published in London's *New Monthly Magazine,* June, 1880, and interlaces these with quotations from newspaper clippings, probably all from a once-existing scrapbook.

7 Why the *Memoir* gives Munger's birthdate as 1836 is a mystery, for the town records of Madison, Ct., clearly say 1837. The present town clerk cannot imagine that the date could have been recorded incorrectly. On the other hand, if Munger's family had had anything at all to do with the *Memoir,* one would expect the artist's birthdate to be correct there. But because the *Memoir* and *The Munger Book* (New Haven: 1915; a genealogy whose statistics are drawn from town records) have conflicting dates, one finds confusion about Munger's birthdate to be rampant. One source even lists him as two people.

8 *Memoir,* p. 6.

9 *Memoir,* p. 5.

10 Munger's obituary in the 1903 *American Art Annual* says he "spent two years with Prof. Louis Agassiz on special work in the Indian Ocean" (p. 143), but Agassiz was never on any expedition there. Munger's work for some government publications of this Harvard naturalist and for reports that were being published on Charles Wilkes' expeditions of earlier years was almost certainly done in Washington.

11 Quoted in Myra Dowd Monroe, "Gilbert Munger, Artist — 1836-1903," *Madison's Heritage; Historical Sketches of Madison, Ct.* (Madison Historical Society: 1964), p. 119.

12 The *Memoir,* p. 9, says Ralston paid $5000 for *Minnehaha* but this seems doubtful, since even a price of $1000 was high enough to be reported by the San Francisco press and this work was not well praised when it was shown in California in 1870, when Ralston probably bought it. The Niagara commission, according to the *Memoir,* p. 8, was from the Prussian government for $5000, but the *New Monthly Magazine* for June, 1880 says "a wealthy gentleman from France" paid £1000 for it (p. 660). For some reason, Munger felt moved to paint another

large *Niagara* (now in a private collection) just before he died, which showed both the American and Canadian falls and which was included in the Noé Gallery exhibition, where it was panned by the *Commercial Advertiser* critic as commonplace in color, undistinguished in drawing, and feeble in conception.

13 The *Memoir,* p. 8, quotes the *New York Herald* reference to *Niagara.*

14 *Home Journal* (at times called *Town and Country),* May 12, 1869, p. 2, col. 2. 82 Fifth Avenue was probably a studio building, where Munger might have met San Francisco landscape artist Frederick A. Butman (1820-1871), who was there for a time beginning in 1867. Butman did many western mountain scenes, including a *Mount Shasta* of 1864, which (or studies for which) Munger could have used as the basis for his own *Mount Shasta,* 1867 (Tweed Museum). This date has been disturbing because presumably Munger had not yet been to California then.

15 His immediate family had moved to Iowa in 1856, where his mother died that same year. His father was murdered the next year while on the way to Kansas, and his three brothers then moved to St. Paul, Minnesota, and established a music business. The eldest brother, Roger, moved once again, to Duluth in 1869, and Russell then ran the music business alone in St. Paul, the other brother William having died in 1863.

16 The *Memoir,* p. 9, says only that the artist spent three years in the West and gives surprisingly little indication of his great success there, apart from a mention of some commissions and a favorable criticism from the San Francisco *Daily Evening Bulletin* of "1868," a wrong date which should read August 24, 1870, p. 3, col. 4.

17 *Home Journal,* May 12, 1869, p. 2, col. 2.

18 *Boston Evening Transcript,* March 1, 1918, "Pictures by Mr. Key." For this reference I am indebted to Mr. Alfred C. Harrison, Jr., of Berkeley, California, who is researching John Ross Key.

19 Letter to James Terry Gardiner from Clarence King, June 22, 1869, James Terry Gardiner Collection, New York State Library, Box 12, Folder 21.

20 *Daily Alta California,* February 20, 1870, p. 1, col. 1; and an unidentified clipping of about the same date reporting the same event (in Amelia Neville Scrapbooks, 19:43-44,46, California Historical Society).

21 *Daily Evening Bulletin,* March 16, 1870, p. 3, col. 3.

22 *Alta,* March 27, 1870, p. 2, col. 3: Caliban, "Art in San Francisco."

23 *Alta,* April 3, 1870, p. 2, col. 3; *Bulletin,* April 4, 1870, p. 1, col. 4.

24 *Bulletin,* April 4, 1870, p. 1, col. 4.

25 *Alta,* June 5, 1870, p. 2, col. 2.

26 *Alta,* August 28, 1870, p. 1, col. 1.

27 Diary entry, August 19, 1870, Samuel Franklin Emmons, Emmons Papers, Library of Congress.

28 Unidentified and undated newspaper, c. 1893, Munger File, Tweed Museum of Art. I am indebted to Professor J. Gray Sweeney for this reference. Sweeney's essay on Munger in the collection catalogue of the Tweed Museum of Art (1982), which owns several Munger paintings, is the first on the artist since the *Memoir* and the two pieces by Myra Dowd Monroe.

29 *Bulletin,* November 22, 1870, p. 3, col. 5.

30 *Ibid.*

31 *Ibid.*

32 *Alta,* October 10, 1870, p. 1, col. 3.

33 *Bulletin,* November 22, 1870, p. 3, col. 5.

34 *New York Times,* April 30, 1871, p. 3, col. 7: *Boston Evening Transcript,* May 25, 1872, p. 2, col. 8.

35 *Bulletin,* June 22, 1872, "Art Items."

36 Unidentified San Francisco newspaper of the early 1870s. Quoted in *Kennedy Quarterly,* XV (June, 1977), 190.

37 *Bulletin,* May 6, 1873, p. 3, col. 4. By the early 1870s there was a substantial, lively colony of landscape artists in San Francisco; therefore the listing of Munger as one of the best is noteworthy.

38 *San Francisco Newsletter and California Advocate,* June 27, 1874, p. 5, col. 1.

39 *The California Art Gallery,* I (February, 1873), 19: *Bulletin,* May 6, 1873, p. 3, col. 4 (#25, "Shoshone").

40 *The California Art Gallery,* I (April, 1873), 54.

41 *Memoir,* p. 11: "One season was passed amid the extinct volcanoes of Oregon, California, and Washington Territory. He chose them as the subjects for a series of paintings, and he also received a commission from the United States government to paint a series of pictures illustrating scenery of that wild description." While Munger was at Shoshone Falls, Bierstadt was guest artist with King's 1872 Survey at Mount Whitney, and although King was promised Bierstadt's studies for his report, he never did use them.

42 *Memoir,* p. 11, says Munger spent two seasons in Yosemite. He was associated enough with the Valley (and presumably important enough) to be listed in around 1880 as author, along with Carleton E. Watkins (the celebrated photographer who was with him at Shasta), Josiah Whitney, Clarence King, and Bierstadt, of a flyer describing McCauley's Trail: "The undersigned, familiar with the Yosemite Valley...state, for the benefit of travelers...." Lord Skelmersdale (1837-1898) was an important peer, a baron when he met Munger, who had already been a Lord in Waiting, and who, while Munger was in England, would be created Earl of Latham, be Captain of the Yeoman of the Guard, and subsequently Lord Chamberlain of the Household. Whether he and Munger met again while Munger was in England is not known.

43 The date of Munger's arrival in England is published variously as 1873, 1876, and 1877. *The New Monthly Magazine* piece of 1880, written closest to the event, says 1877 and points out that Munger did not exhibit in the May, 1878, Royal Academy Exhibition, as he might have, but waited until 1879, the next opportunity. When the *Memoir* repeated this statement, p. 12, the date in the *New Monthly* phrase "Arriving in London in 1877" became "1876." Then the *Memoir,* p. 18, quoted Munger himself saying in 1892 that his stay abroad had been "since 1873," while Monroe, in her 1904 *Connecticut Magazine* piece, quoted the *same* statement (here attributed to a *New York Journal* piece that Munger had written in answer to the question of why American painters live abroad) as "since 1877" but, when she quoted it again in her Madison Historical Society Paper, 1948, it became "since 1873." Munger's return to this country in late April, 1893, is unquestioned as to date, but the artist's motives for returning are less than clear. He did have a work in the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago: #752 *The Rising Moon.* There are hints that his investments had gone sour. He himself said he was only here for a visit and a rest. But he also told a reporter that he had "learned all that I can learn from the masters" and "would like to earn that recognition in my own country which I have won abroad" (unidentified c. 1893 newspaper clipping in Tweed Museum Munger File, for which I thank J. Gray Sweeney).

44 Lyman Mills owned a *Colorado River* dated 1876, and in May, 1875, Munger sent James Terry Gardiner, the geologist second in command on the King Surveys, a *Mount Ranier* that was presumably a new picture (draft of letter from James Terry Gardiner to_____Munger, May 4, 1875, Gardiner Collection, New York State Library, Box 12, Folder 11). These could, of course, have been painted on a third western trip, and Walter Paris did speak of meeting Munger for the first time in San Francisco in 1875. But Paris was remembering long after the fact (1904), and no San Francisco publications of 1874 or later have been located that report Munger's presence in the city or list him as a local artist. Considering the coverage he had had before, it seems inconceivable that his return in 1874 or later would have been ignored by the press.

45 See, for instance, pp. 12-13 of Dwight Miller's introduction to *California Landscape Painting, 1860-85: Artists Around Keith and Hill* (exh. cat., Stanford [University] Art Gallery,

1976). Miller also discusses the financial difficulties of California landscape artists at this time. Whether the market had been saturated by the generally heavy production of the 1870s or for other reasons, sales were frequently disappointing and by 1880 California landscape artists were in deep trouble. Hill reportedly had not sold a picture in eight months, and he and Keith were among the artists who left California in 1880 for the East and Europe amid fears they would never return. (It should be said that while Munger was not included in the Stanford exhibition, Miller noted that he might well have been had his pictures been readily available in local collections.)

46 *Memoir,* p. 18.

47 Monroe, Madison Historical Society Paper, p. 122.

48 *Catalogues of the Royal Academy,* ed. Algernon Graves, VI, 94-112 (1862-1880); VII, 113-123 (1881-1891).

49 *Magazine of Art,* I (1879), 101, "The Royal Academy, Third Notice" [of the 1878 exhibition]: "Galleries No. 6 and No. 7 are not often very attractive by the importance of their contents." Munger's *Great Salt Lake* was in Gallery 7. "Our Portraits: Gilbert Munger," *The New Monthly Magazine* (at times called *Colburn's*), 117 (June, 1880), 662.

50 *The Dictionary of British Artists, 1880-1940* (London: Antique Collectors Club, 1976).

51 *New Monthly Magazine,* 662.

52 Monroe, Madison Historical Society Paper, p. 122.

53 *Ibid,* p. 21. See also her "Connecticut Artists and Their Work: Gilbert Munger...," *Connecticut Magazine,* 8 (1903-04), 775-84. Here Monroe implies Munger got such prices throughout his career and says: "That he was not more universally known was due to the fact that he did comparatively little exhibiting, his pictures being sold in advance and sent direct to their owners."

54 Monroe, *Connecticut Magazine,* 781.

55 *New Monthly Magazine,* 661.

56 Letter, November 9, 1876, John Everett Millais, in John Guille Millais, *The Life and Letters of Sir John Everett Millais* (London: Methuen & Co., 1899), II, p. 83.

57 *Alta,* June 27, 1873, "Art Items."

58 *Memoir,* p. 15.

59 The New York *Commercial Advertiser* reviewer of the Noé retrospective exhibition (see n. 4) said Munger went to England only after he had first lived in France and been "intimate with many of the 'men of thirty'." An 1894 San Francisco sales catalogue of the Kate Johnson collection (November 15, Easton, Eldridge & Co., Auctioneers) says, p. 26, that Munger was a "pupil of Rousseau, Corot, and D'Aubigny." Rousseau died in 1867, Corot in 1875, and Daubigny in 1878.

60 *Memoir,* p. 14: *The London Telegraph,* October 23, 1890; *Memoir,* p. 16: *Fame and Fortune,* March 3, 1887.

61 *Memoir,* p. 16. Hollander and Cremetti were the proprietors of the Hanover Gallery, where Munger regularly exhibited French scenes beginning with the Winter Exhibition of 1886-87.

62 *Memoir,* p. 17.

63 One wonders whether Munger ever used photography as an aid to picture-making; his attitudes toward nature and his working methods suggest otherwise. In *Carnival at Nice* the arrangement of the crowd seems too perfect in its complex balance ever to have happened naturally, and, in any case, Munger colored the picture to his own taste.