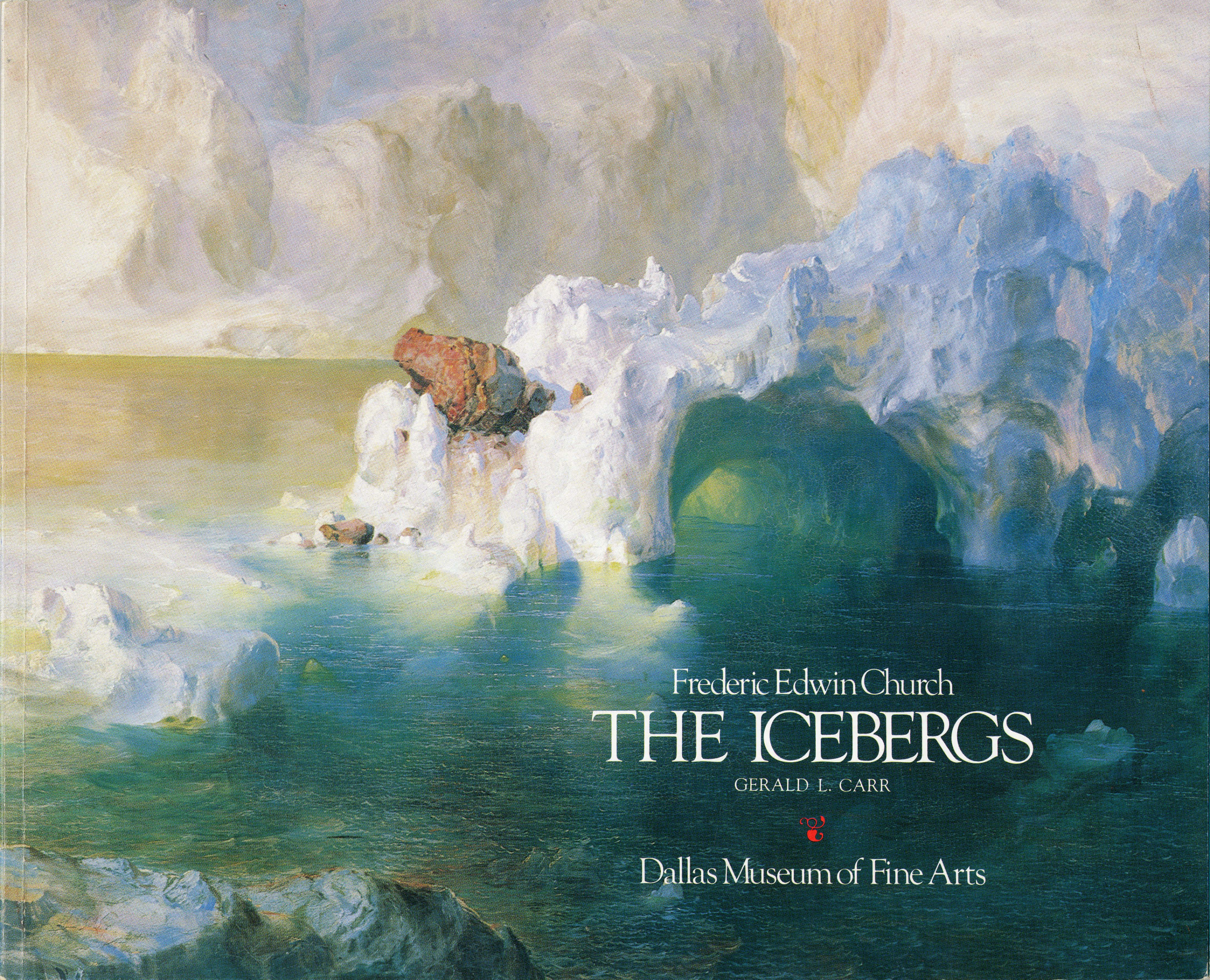

Frederic Edwin Church

THE ICEBERGS

GERALD L. CARR

Dallas Museum of Fine Arts

Frederic Edwin Church

THE ICEBERGS

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THE ICEBERGS

by Gerald L. Carr

with an introduction by David C. Huntington

Dallas Museum of Fine Arts

1
FREDERIC EDWIN CHURCH
Photograph by George G. Rockwood, c. 1866-1867.
(photo: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution)

Dedicated
to the generous donors of
THE ICEBERGS
to the
Dallas Museum of Fine Arts

Frontispiece
FREDERIC E. CHURCH
THE ICEBERGS, 1861
American, 1826-1900
Oil on canvas
h: 64½ in., w: 112⅜ in.
Dallas Museum of Fine Arts
Anonymous gift
1979.28

DESIGN AND PRODUCTION BY JAMES A. LEDBETTER
LITHOGRAPHY BY BRODNAX PRINTING COMPANY

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	
2	LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS	
7	FOREWORD	By Harry S. Parker III
9	INTRODUCTION	By David C. Huntington
21	CHAPTER I	Church in Public, 1859-1863
34	CHAPTER II	Church as Explorer
59	CHAPTER III	Church as Image-Maker
80	CHAPTER IV	*The Icebergs* Completed
101	CHAPTER V	Legacy
108	BIBLIOGRAPHY	

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many individuals have helped make this publication possible. I particularly would like to thank David Huntington, whose knowledge of Church and whose enthusiasm for American 19th-century art first impressed me as a graduate student. It has been a pleasure to work once more with my former teacher. To Mair Baulch of Rose Hill Remand Home for Boys, who first brought *The Icebergs* to the world's attention, and to her husband Glen Baulch, I owe a special debt both for information and for hospitality during a visit to Rose Hill. Linda McLean and James Ryan have been especially cordial and have provided much additional information at Olana, Church's home near Hudson, New York. Elaine Dee of the Cooper-Hewitt Museum was similarly willing to help with matters pertaining to *The Icebergs*. And to Harry S. Parker III, Director of the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, who suggested this publication and who has maintained an energetic interest in its progress, I would like to express a special thanks.

Others who have given freely of their time and/or knowledge of Church and related areas of 19th-century American and British art include Jeremy Adamson of the National Collection of Fine Arts; Warren Adelson of Coe Kerr Galleries; B. Standard Aldridge, owner of an early version of *The Icebergs*; Jean A. Ayton of the City of Manchester Central Library; Frank Boos of Stalker and Boos; Stuart Feld of Hirschl and Adler Galleries; Lawrence Fleischman of Kennedy Galleries; William J. Gavin III and Robert Perkins, Jr., of the Boston Athenaeum; Bernard Heinz; Margaret Hamzy of Southern Methodist University; Clive A. Holland of the Scott Polar Research Institute; Perry Houston of the Kimbell Art Museum; Thomas Leavitt of Cornell University; David Lewall of the University of Virginia; Nancy Little of Knoedler's; Chauncey Loomis of Dartmouth University; Jeremy Maas of Maas's Gallery; I. M. McCabe of the Royal Institute; Grete Meilman and Megan Moynahan of Sotheby Parke Bernet; Theodore E. Stebbins, Jr., of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; J. Gray Sweeney of Grand Valley State College; David Walden of the Archives du Canada; John Wilmerding of the National Gallery of Art; Alison Wilson of the National Archives; and Richard Wunder of Christies.

I must also convey my thanks to Jane Albritton, whose editorial expertise helped unravel a number of knotty passages in my typescript; to John Wilson, who willingly checked several references for me; and especially to my wife Annemarie, whose advice and patience were essential during the writing and refining process.

G.L.C.
December 1980

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Frontispiece:
Frederic Edwin Church, *The Icebergs*, 1861. Oil on canvas. Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, anonymous gift, 1979.

1 Frederic Edwin Church. Photograph by George G. Rockwood, c. 1866-1867. (photo: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution)

2 John L. Marion, Chairman of Sotheby Parke Bernet, New York, auctioning Frederic E. Church's *The Icebergs* on 25 October 1979. (photo: Ted Thai; Time, Inc.)

3 Frederic Edwin Church, *Niagara Falls*, 1857. Oil on canvas. Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. (photo: Gallery)

4 Frederic Edwin Church, *The Heart of the Andes*, 1859. Oil on canvas. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Bequest of Mrs. David Dows, 1909. (photo: Museum)

5 Rosa Bonheur, *The Horse Fair*, 1853. Oil on canvas. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of Cornelius Vanderbilt, 1887. (photo: Museum)

6 William Powell Frith, *Derby Day*, 1858. Oil on canvas. Tate Gallery, London. (photo: Gallery)

7 William Powell Frith, *The Railway Station*, 1862. Oil on canvas. Royal Holloway College, Egham, Surrey, England. (photo: College)

8 John Martin, *The Plains of Heaven*, 1853. Oil on canvas. Tate Gallery, London. (photo: Gallery)

9 John Martin, *The Great Day of His Wrath*, 1852. Oil on canvas. Tate Gallery, London. (photo: Gallery)

10 After Frederic Edwin Church, *Under Niagara*. Chromolithograph retouched with oil. Olana State Historic Site, Hudson, New York. (photo: author)

11 Frederic Edwin Church, *Chimborazo Seen Through Rising Mists and Clouds*, 1857. Oil on paperboard. Cooper-Hewitt Museum, the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Design, New York. (photo: Museum)

12 Frederic Edwin Church, *An Iceberg*, July 1859. Oil on paperboard. Cooper-Hewitt Museum, the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Design, New York. (photo: Museum)

13 After William Hodges, *The Ice Islands, Seen on the 9:th Jan:ry 1773*, 1776. Engraving. British Museum, London. (photo: author)

14 After George Back, *Boats in a Swell Amongst Ice*. Engraving. From John Franklin, *Narrative of a Second Expedition to the Shores of the Polar Sea in the Years 1825, 1826, and 1827*, London, 1828. (photo: author)

15 James Hamilton after Elisha Kent Kane, *Fastened to an Iceberg*. Engraving. From Elisha Kent Kane, *Arctic Explorations in the Years 1853, '54, '55*, Philadelphia, 1856. (photo: author)

16 Frederic Edwin Church, *The Aurora Borealis*, 1865. Oil on canvas. National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., Gift of Eleanor Blodgett. (photo: Collection)

17 Isaac Hayes, *Two Icebergs*, 1860. Watercolor. Olana State Historic Site, Hudson, New York. (photo: author)

18 Frederic Edwin Church, *Oosisoak*, n.d. Oil on canvas. Private collection. (photo: David C. Huntington)

19 Frontispiece of Louis Legrand Noble, *After Icebergs with a Painter*, New York, 1861. Tinted Lithograph. (photo: author)

20 Frederic Edwin Church, *Iceberg Near Cape Race, Newfoundland*, 21 June 1859. Pencil on tinted paper heightened with white. Cooper-Hewitt Museum, the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Design, New York. (photo: Museum)

21 Frederic Edwin Church, *Icebergs Sighted 1 July 1859*. Pencil on tinted paper heightened with white. Cooper-Hewitt Museum, the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Design, New York. (photo: Museum)

22 Frederic Edwin Church, *An Iceberg*, 1 July 1859. Oil on paperboard. Cooper-Hewitt Museum, the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Design, New York. (photo: Museum)

23 Frederic Edwin Church, *Iceberg near Twillingate, Newfoundland*, 4 July 1859. Oil on paperboard. Cooper-Hewitt Museum, the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Design, New York. (photo: Museum)

24 Frederic Edwin Church, *Icebergs Sighted 5 July 1859*. Pencil on tinted paper heightened with white. Cooper-Hewitt Museum, the Smithsonian Institute's National Museum of Design, New York. (photo: Museum)

25 Frederic Edwin Church, *Four Icebergs Sighted 5 July 1859*. Pencil on tinted paper heightened with white. Cooper-Hewitt Museum, the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Design, New York. (photo: Museum)

26 Frederic Edwin Church, *Icebergs, 7-9 July 1859*. Pencil on tinted paper heightened with white. Cooper-Hewitt Museum, the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Design, New York. (photo: Museum)

27 Frederic Edwin Church, *Iceberg*, July 1859. Oil on paperboard. Cooper-Hewitt Museum, the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Design, New York. (photo: Museum)

28 Frederic Edwin Church, *"The Alpine Berg,"* dated 9 over 8 July 1859. Pencil on tinted paper heightened with white. Cooper-Hewitt Museum, the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Design, New York. (photo: Museum)

29 Frederic Edwin Church, *"The Alpine Berg" at Midnight*, 8-9 July 1859. Oil on paperboard. Cooper-Hewitt Museum, the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Design, New York. (photo: Museum)

30 After Frederic Edwin Church, *Ice Falling from a Lofty Berg*. Tinted lithograph. From Noble, *After Icebergs with a Painter*, New York, 1861. (photo: Author)

31 Frederic Edwin Church, *Sketches of Icebergs*, June-July 1859. Pencil. Cooper-Hewitt Museum, the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Design, New York. (photo: Museum)

32 Frederic Edwin Church, *Twilight in the Wilderness*, 1860. Cleveland Museum of Art, Purchase, Mr. and Mrs. William H. Marlatt Fund. (photo: Museum)

33 Frederic Edwin Church, *Study for "The Icebergs,"* c. 1859. Oil on canvas. Cooper-Hewitt Museum, the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Design, New York. (photo: Museum)

34 Frederic Edwin Church, *Study for "The Icebergs,"* c. 1859. Oil on canvas. Destroyed. Formerly Olana State Historic Site, Hudson, New York. (photo: David C. Huntington)

35 Frederic Edwin Church, *The Star in the East*, 1861. Oil on canvas. Olana State Historic Site, Hudson, New York. (photo: author)

36 Frederic Edwin Church, *Study for an Homage to Thomas Cole*, c. 1860-1865. Pencil heightened with white. Cooper-Hewitt Museum, the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Design, New York. (photo: Museum)

37 Frederic Edwin Church, *The Meteor of 1860*, 1862. Oil on canvas. Private collection. (photo: Alexander Galleries)

38 Frederic Edwin Church, *Cotopaxi*, 1862. Oil on canvas. Detroit Institute of Arts, Purchase: Robert H. Tannahill Foundation, Gibbs-Williams, Dexter M. Ferry, Jr., Merrill, Beatrice W. Rogers, Richard A. Manoogian Funds. (photo: Institute)

39 Frederic Edwin Church, *Sunrise off the Maine Coast*, 1863. Oil on canvas. Wadsworth Athenaeum, Hartford. (photo: Athenaeum)

40 Frederic Edwin Church, *Study for "The Icebergs,"* c. 1860. Oil on paperboard. Cooper-Hewitt Museum, the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Design, New York. (photo: Museum)

41 Frederic Edwin Church, *Study for "The Icebergs,"* c. 1860. Oil on paperboard mounted on canvas. Kennedy Galleries, New York. (photo: Galleries)

42 Frederic Edwin Church, *Study for "The Icebergs,"* 1860. Pencil on tinted paper heightened with white. Olana State Historic Site, Hudson, New York. (photo: author)

43 Frederic Edwin Church, *Study for "The Icebergs"*, 1860. Oil on canvas. Mr. and Mrs. B. Standard Aldridge, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan. (photo: author)

44 Advertisement for the New York showings of *The Icebergs* and *The Heart of the Andes*. From *Morning Express*, New York, 29 April 1861. (photo: author)

45 Frederic Edwin Church, *Our Banner in the Sky*, 1861. Oil on paper mounted on paper. Private Collection. (photo: Sotheby Parke Bernet)

46 Advertisement for the Boston Athenaeum Showing of *The Icebergs*. From *Daily Courier*, Boston, 24 March 1862. (photo: author)

47 Frederic Edwin Church, *To Illumine the Iceberg*, 1863. Oil on canvas. Mattatuck Museum, Waterbury, Connecticut. (photo: Museum)

48 Frederic Edwin Church, *Steamer in Northern Waters*, n.d. Oil on canvas. Olana State Historic Site, Hudson, New York. (photo: author)

49 Advertisement for the London showing of *The Icebergs*. From *Court Journal*, London, 4 July 1863, p. 665. (photo: author)

50 Richard Westmacott, Jr., *Monument to the Memory of Sir John Franklin*, 1859. Marble. Royal Naval College Chapel, Greenwich, England. (photo: Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art)

51 *Icebergs, Aurora Borealis, & c*. Engraving. From *The Illustrated London News*, 13 October 1849. (photo: author)

52 Elijah Walton, *The Ailefroide from the Glacier Chardon Dauphise*, 1865. Watercolor. Private collection. (photo: Spink and Son, London)

53 After Clarkson Stanfield, *Rocks of Etretat*. Engraving. From *Heath's Picturesque Annual for 1834*, London, 1834. (photo: author)

54 Rose Hill, Northenden near Manchester, exterior from the south-west. (photo: author)

55 Rose Hill, Northenden near Manchester, main staircase showing the wall (left) upon which *The Icebergs* hung. (photo: author)

56 Edwin Landseer, *Man Proposes, God Disposes*, 1864. Oil on canvas. Royal Holloway College, Egham, Surrey, England. (photo: College)

57 William Bradford, *In Polar Seas*, c. 1882. Oil on canvas. Private collection. (photo: Joseph Szaszfai)

58 Albert Bierstadt, *Iceberg Seen from Steamer*, 1883. Oil on canvas. Private Collection. (photo: Kennedy Galleries)

59 Thomas Moran, *Spectres of the North*, 1891. Oil on canvas. Gilcrease Institute of American History and Art, Tulsa, Oklahoma. (photo: Institute)

60 Frederic Edwin Church, *The Iceberg*, 1891. Oil on canvas. Museum of Art, Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, Howard N. Eavenson Americana Collection. (photo: Museum)

61 After Frederic Edwin Church, *A Large Iceberg in the Forenoon Light Near the Integrity*. Tinted lithograph. From Noble, *After Icebergs with a Painter*, New York, 1861. (photo: author)

FOREWORD

Almost as extraordinary as the inherent art historical and esthetic importance of Frederic Church's *The Icebergs* has been the romantic tale of its initial popular success and later disappearance in the back hall of a school for boys in Manchester, England. Its subsequent reappearance and gift to the citizens of Dallas is at least as dramatic and surprising an event as the earlier chapters of the story.

When first exhibited in 1861, the painting was hailed by the New York *Tribune* as "the most splendid work of art that has yet been produced in this country . . . thoroughly original in conception and execution . . . it is an absolutely wonderful picture, a work of genius that illustrates the time and the country producing it." Indeed, much of the appeal of this extraordinary work is the degree to which it exudes that American spirit of confidence which we so admire in our forefathers.

I would like to think that some of that same spirit characterizes our Museum today as we embark upon the project of building a new Dallas Museum of Fine Arts. In a few short years Church's work will be a highlight of the permanent collection housed in a new facility. Made possible by the positive votes of tens of thousands of Dallas citizens in the 1979 bond issue, the new museum is dedicated to the premise that art is important to the total community and, therefore, justifies popular support. Announced within days of that civic referendum, the donation of *The Icebergs* signaled confidence in the cultural future of Dallas and the future of the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts as an increasingly major institution.

Professor Gerald Carr ably describes in these essays the chain of events which led to the painting's final settlement in Dallas stretching back to Church's travels in Newfoundland and Labrador on a chartered schooner in the summer of 1859. He brings to his task the enthusiasm of a Church scholar who, after years of teaching art history at Southern Methodist University, was suddenly presented in 1979 with the actuality of a Church masterpiece in his own community where not even a sketch had previously existed. Professor David C. Huntington, who over the past decade has been the leader of the rediscovery of Frederic Church's importance, has contributed an excellent introduction on the significance of *The Icebergs*.

The Dallas Museum of Fine Arts has high ambitions for an American collection of importance. Now this collection has a centerpiece, and the people of Dallas have access on a continuing basis to a great work of art. We appreciate the generosity of the donors who chose anonymously to present the work to Dallas.

Harry S. Parker III
Director
Dallas Museum of Fine Arts

2
John L. Marion, Chairman of Sotheby Parke Bernet,
New York, auctioning Frederic E. Church's
THE ICEBERGS on 25 October 1979.

John L. Marion, chairman and chief auctioneer at Sotheby's, gaveled the historic dispersal in 3 minutes and 45 seconds while a standing-room-only audience of 800 people listened in silence. The bidding opened at $500,000 and advanced at $50,000 increments. When the hammer fell on Lot 34 at $2.5 million, the audience cheered at what is the highest figure ever registered at an art auction in the United States.

(New York Times, *26 October 1979*)

INTRODUCTION

David C. Huntington

For those who were already enthusiastic about the painter of *The Icebergs*, witnessing the sale of 25 October 1979 at Sotheby Parke Bernet (fig. 2) was almost to live again in the aura that surrounded the public unveiling of a "new" Church in the days of the painter's fame. A readied few who had been observing the revival of regard for our landscape painters of the 1850s and 1860s paused to savor the moment that signalled a great artist's recovery of glory. The startled many who had never heard of Frederic Edwin Church, let alone the long lost *Icebergs*, could do little more than wonder at the mysteries of the art market. How could a seemingly unknown painting by an artist hardly familiar to the twentieth-century public command such a price? Who was Frederic Edwin Church, and why did he venture into dangerous waters in order to capture arctic shapes and colors on sixty square feet of canvas? Modern critics, obliged by the sheer newsworthiness of the sale to say at least something, were wary. Knowing little about the ethos of the painter's hour, and suspecting a Barnum of the easel, they billed Church as a sensation-monger. His art was popular in his time. Therefore, it must have been good showmanship. Admittedly Church was a technical genius, a virtuoso of the brush, but as for the artistic value of his six by ten foot "lummocking spread of icebergs," it was "not worth one square foot of a good Turner."[1]

Such facile pronouncements betray the twentieth century critic's embarrassing ignorance of the painter and his time. *The Icebergs* cannot be summarily dismissed as mind-boggling but vacuous pictorial sleight-of-hand. No feat of Barnum's ever inspired the public as did this picture by Church. In a scrapbook compiled by the painter are over thirty reviews of *The Icebergs*, some of them more than a thousand words in length. Had it not been for the Civil War and his death at the Battle of Great Bethel, the gifted Theodore Winthrop might well have made *The Icebergs* the subject of an entire essay. He had already in 1859 written a forty-three page pamphlet to accompany the display of *The Heart of the Andes* (fig. 4), Church's great picture of that year. Thoughts inspired by these pictures portray a very different world-view from ours. The images that Church presented to his contemporaries resonated with their beliefs, answered to their "fondest imaginings." Church's genius was to make the myths of his day both visible and believable to his fellow-men. His great landscapes became the very icons of Manifest Destiny. *The Heart of the Andes* depicted a fairer creation than we know. *Niagara* (1857; fig. 3) decreed a New World Genesis, a sight for Yankee would-be Noahs. *Twilight in the Wilderness* (1860; fig. 32) celebrated the mystic birth of the virgin continent. *Cotopaxi* (1862; fig. 38) was a painted parable of the Civil War, addressed to Union eyes. Any major "Church" can be interpreted accordingly, even one of an Old World subject. So, for example, *Jerusalem* (1870) pictures the holiest of cities refreshed by a spring shower and bathed in radiant sunlight: the real thus idealized becomes the metaphor of an ancient dream, the New Jerusalem.[2]

Display of the latest painting from Church's studio was a public event. There is something eminently American and democratic about his art for it could appeal simultaneously to different levels of understanding and appreciation. To the ordinary viewer, the sheer magic of illusion was itself wonder enough. For the more self-conscious, that same illusion was the challenge of a higher vision, one which might elevate the mind and quicken the spirit. Church's visual art is in its way as suggestive as the verbal art of a poem, or a novel or an epic. His spirit is as expansive as Whitman's; his soul is as Puritan as Hawthorne's; his symbolism is as charged as Melville's.

Noble daring has made Arctic ice and waters classic ground. It is no feverish excitement nor vain ambition that leads men there. It is a higher feeling, a holier motive — a desire to look into the works of creation, to comprehend the economy of our planet, and to grow wiser and better by the knowledge.

(*Matthew Fontaine Maury,* The Physical Geography of the Sea, *1860*)

The Icebergs portrays a scene fraught with meaning for its public. Interest in the polar regions was in the air — prompted by motives all mutually reinforcing and all seemingly converging on the moment. The 1860 edition of Lieutenant Matthew Maury's *Physical Geography of the Sea,* the period's standard work on oceanography, declares them concisely: "To enlarge the fields of commerce, to carry the Bible, to spread civilization, to push conquests, . . . to bring back contributions of science" and, "whatever may have been (their) immediate object," arctic explorers have "never lost sight of the promise made by Columbus of a western route to India."

The Physical Geography of the Sea had by the time Church painted *The Icebergs* already gone through eight editions. The painter owned copies of those of 1855 (the first) and 1859. It is significant to note that within a period of five years the account of the Polar Regions was expanded from four to thirty-one pages. The indicated surge of interest in the Arctic Seas that preceded Church's own pursuit of icebergs along the Labrador Coast in 1859 is considered in detail in Gerald Carr's accompanying essay. In the sources which he quotes, there are countless reflections of a set of mind distinctive to intellectual life in the English-speaking world of the early 1860s. In New York, in Boston, in London there is a mental family resemblance which marks commentary on the picture. *After Icebergs with a Painter,* the Reverend Louis Noble's spirited account of his

joint venture in the North Atlantic with Frederic Church, fits well into the mold, as does *The Open Polar Sea,* whose text by the painter's explorer-friend Dr. Isaac Hayes chronicles an arctic voyage of 1860-1861.

A skeptical, more secular late twentieth century may be forgiven for looking nostalgically at the euphoria which hovered around the first public showings of *The Icebergs.* Anglo-American culture at the time seems to have been breathing deeply of a rare and intoxicating amalgam of science, religion, and nationalism. A phenomenon of that extraordinary amalgam, Church's painting constitutes a succinct statement of the relationship between the actual and the ideal, in an age of visionary hopes on both sides of the Atlantic. Indeed, of all the works by Church which were exhibited in England, none so effectively bonded the ties between two great kindred peoples. The painting was animated by the same spirit that Church's compatriot Hayes exhibited as a scientist. As the American explorer planted the Stars and Stripes on what he believed to be the northern-most point of land ever touched by human feet, his thoughts crossed the Arctic Circle to the northern-most point of the globe yet reached by man, that ice-drift where the Englishman Sir William Edward Parry had planted the Union Jack thirty-four years before. Ironically this was in May of 1861, at a moment when, unbeknownst to Hayes, his own nation was riven in a civil war, and Parry's compatriots were sympathizing with the Stars and Bars.

That the cause of the Union would seem nothing less than sacred to an Isaac Hayes or a Frederic Church while England visibly wished for the Confederacy's success is symptomatic of differences between the Old World mother country and its New World offspring. While there was cooperation in the scientific study of the Polar Regions, there was also competition. The faith in Manifest Destiny was the peculiar possession of a continental people. If Britain's navy had secured empire for Englishmen, Nature itself had ordained empire for Americans. A providential geography dictated the annexation of Texas in 1845, the same providential geography that made manifest America's destiny as global mediator between Europe and Asia. It had been the vision of a westward route to India that had led to Columbus's discovery of the New World. Deflected by a double continent, his successors had sought a Northwest Passage to the Orient. Their quest had inaugurated centuries of arctic probing. But by the winter that Isaac Hayes was searching for the Open Polar Sea, and Frederic Church was painting *The Icebergs,* the United States had become — thanks to the mythmaking genius of Walt Whitman — the self-proclaimed "Passage to India."

By 1860, pursuit of the centuries-old dream of a Northwest Passage was almost incidental to the search for the Open Polar Sea. Death was to spare Matthew Maury the discovery that the hypothetical reality was but a mirage of his and his age's ignorance. Our concern, however, is with the excitement of the illusion. It was the fascination of that tantalizing, fugitive polar sea that occasioned the dramatic revisions of the oceanographer's chapter on the northern-most latitudes. In 1860, as Church sat down at his easel and Hayes set out from Boston, few, if any, scientific topics would have been more moot — at least for Americans.

While the implications of Darwin's *Origin of Species,* published the previous year, would in due time radically affect thought on both sides of the Atlantic, the Englishman's theory of evolution had not influenced the studies of natural history with which Church and his public would have been acquainted on the eve of the Civil War. *The Icebergs* reflects a world-view that Darwinism was destined to undermine. References to God, to the Almighty, to the Creator sprinkle the reviews of Church's painting. We can be sure that thoughts of the divine manifestation were ever-present in the artist's mind. Gerald Carr's essay illustrates how the painter was determined to introduce the cross in one guise or another into the arctic epic. To perceive the holy in the natural was conventional with Church's generation.

Scientific thinking in America was shaped by a deep religious faith. The nation's most revered naturalist, Louis Agassiz, was himself an eloquent proponent of the Science of Design, that science which revealed the workings of a Supreme Intelligence in the operations of nature. The Swiss-born scientist who had taken a post at Harvard barely a dozen years before was already renowned when Noble and Church met him on shipboard in the summer of 1859 on the first part of their northward journey.

Church was notably averse to philosophizing in words. Yet, if there was anyone at that date who might speak the artist's thoughts with the authority of the scientist, it would surely have been the great Agassiz. I say at that date, for it might be argued that the venerable Alexander von Humboldt who had died only months before would have been the painter's most rightful spokesman. Barbara Novak has called attention to the many correspondences between Church's panoramic landscape and Humboldt's world-view[3]. In his numerous texts, *Aspects of Nature, Views of Nature, Personal Narrative,* and *Cosmos,* all represented in the painter's library, the German scholar had outlined under the rubric of "geognosy" a comprehensive synthesis of the natural sciences. In doing so he had gone to considerable length to specify how through the integration of fact and idea in a composition a landscape painter might portray nature's grand and beautiful harmony. *The Heart of the Andes*, a summa of the actual portion of the globe which had served as Humboldt's laboratory, is a truly "geognosic" vision.

However, to the staunchly Calvinist Frederic Church, Humboldt, to say the least, must have seemed elusive in matters of faith. The trinity of God, Nature and Man is as conspicuously absent from the pages of Humboldt as it is present in the pages of Agassiz. Consider, for example, a work published by the latter in the same year that Church painted *The Icebergs,* the 1861 edition of *Comparative Physiology.* Punctuated with apostrophes of wonder at the harmony of Creation, this, the era's most esteemed textbook, is informed throughout by the premise that man, "made in the spiritual image of God" and unique among the creatures, is endowed with intelligence which enables him to perceive the ways of the "Supreme Intelligence." The forms of life on the earth, Agassiz declares, are subject to influences which transcend the purely physical agency of climate. As influences "of a higher order," they involve "a general plan," a plan "fully matured in the beginning, . . . the work of a God infinitely wise, regulating Nature according to immutable laws which He has Himself imposed on her." As all has been made "with a view to him," the order and equilibrium of man's domain are providential.

A contagion of confidence and hope holds sway throughout Agassiz's text. The scientist rejoices in the use of his reason as he bows in awe before the Bestower of that reason. Mysteries unfold as man, the ever-inquisitive cosmopolite, reverently explores the planet which is his home. And as old mysteries yield their secrets, new mysteries emerge to challenge the mind and spirit to probe still further. Always immanent is the possibility of fresh revelation. Yet it is God alone, the Architect of the Universe, who is given to know and understand all. So it is that in the final lines of his text, Agassiz speaks of man the naturalist:

> He beholds, indeed, the works of a being *thinking* like himself, but he feels at the same time that he stands as much below the Supreme Intelligence in wisdom, power and goodness, as the works of art are inferior to the wonders of nature. . . .

Church once said at his home, Olana, "I am appalled when I look at the magnificent scenery which encircles my clumsy studio, and then glance at the painted oil-cloth on my easel." We can be sure that the painter who was keenly conscious of the limitations of art in the presence of nature would have agreed with Agassiz's sentiment.

Henry Theodore Tuckerman, to whom the painter addressed those words, noted that Church's "taste in reading suggests a scientific bias."[4] On the bookshelves at Olana there is ample testimony to Tuckerman's observation. It would probably be safe to assert that no previous landscape painter had studied natural history more ambitiously. The effort to keep abreast of developments in science would eventually in 1883 drive an exasperated Frederic Church to exclaim: "I wish science would take a holiday for ten years so I could catch up." Only a bare two decades before that moment of desperation, however, he was mastering the cosmic perspective of a Humboldt, sharing the global vision of an Agassiz, riding the tides and currents of Maury's would-be eight seas.

Church searched the sphere for the genesis or, better, regenesis of its life. For him, Nature's first causes were like the tablets of the law received by Moses on Mount Sinai. The Science of Design was as rife with prophecy as was the sacred word of the Israelites recorded in the books of the Old Testament. Indeed, for Church, living in the New Israel of the nineteenth century, Nature was "for those with eyes to see and ears to hear:" the Word revealed in substance. Americans in the era of Manifest Destiny perceived the arrangement of the earth's oceans and continents, mountains and plains, lakes and rivers, as heaven's preparations for her favored people. Nature's message was unmistakable: the United States would reign from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from the Gulf of Mexico to the Great Lakes. The harmony and order and design of this living planet all prophesied the culmination of civilization within these very longitudes and latitudes. In the New Jerusalem that was America, spirit and matter would no longer be twain, for in the New Dispensation of the Bible of Nature, spirit and matter were perceived as one.

The Icebergs "illustrates the time and place producing it." So declared an admirer in 1861.[5] It was a time and place when Nature was holy and science was sanctified. The quest for knowledge of the workings of the Supreme Intelligence had been a quest marked by tragedy as well as triumph. The shipwreck which Church added to *The Icebergs* in time for its London showing in 1863 may well have been intended as homage to the memory of England's explorer-martyr, Sir John Franklin who, not many years before, had with his party of one hundred and twenty-eight perished in the Arctic. The cross effected by the derelict mast and crow's nest certainly hints at a memorial.

That the shipwreck was not added until after Hayes returned from his 1860-1861 expedition may be of some significance here, as Church would by then have had the opportunity to hear about his friend's adventure. In *The Open Polar Sea,* there is one particularly poignant passage whose sentiment the painter doubtless would have shared. It is the triumphant moment when Hayes, standing on the rim of what he believed to be that previously unseen body of water, paused reverently to remember those who had prepared his way: "As I recalled the struggles which had been made to reach this sea, — through the ice and across the ice, — by generations of brave men, it seemed as if the spirits of these Old Worthies came to encourage me, as their experience had already guided me." The shipwreck in *The Icebergs* may well be a tribute, not only to the ill-fated Franklin Party but to all the "old Worthies" sacred to the memory of Polar exploration. It would have been in keeping for Church thus to christen the cause of science.[6]

Hayes was truly the beneficiary of his many predecessors in the remote North, including the lamented Elisha Kent Kane whom Hayes himself had accompanied to the same vicinity some six years before. The scientific discussions in *The Open Polar Sea* clearly reflect the most up-to-date knowledge of Arctic life and glacial action. Agassiz, Forbes, and Rendu are cited periodically. So, too, is Sir John Tyndall, whose publication on glaciation came out in time for Hayes' writing of *The Open Polar Sea.* It was Agassiz who had formulated the theory of an Ice Age, a theory based on his studies of Alpine glaciers, and on the Mer de Glace of Greenland Hayes repeated the great scientist's procedure as he measured the flow of ice in a six month period. He calculated that it would be at least five hundred years before the ice reached deep water. There, "freed from the shackles of centuries," as a "new-born" "child of the ocean," the long frozen water would rush "into the arms of its parent" to be "nursed into life again."

The phenomenon dramatized the "Law of *Circulation,*" that law decreed by the "will of the Creator" to assure "the permanence of His work," a law "found to reproduce itself in all parts of Nature." While he cites Rendu in his definition of the principle, Hayes' discussion might just as well have been prompted by Matthew Maury's chapter on the role of circulation in the "terrestrial economy." I refer to the sixth edition (1860) of *The Physical Geography of the Sea* in which the existence of an Open Polar Sea is posited largely on the study of ocean and air currents.

The scent of Maury's quarry, proof of the existence of that hypothetical eighth sea of the world, is to be breathed in every paragraph of the chapter. As it is so suggestive of the spirit in which Church must have painted *The Icebergs,* I will take the liberty of distilling the substance of that chapter, using the present tense. According to Maury, evidence of the existence of an ice-free ocean covering the North Pole has been steadily accumulating. The same right whales, identified by the markings of broken harpoon shafts, have been spotted both in Baffin Bay and in the Bering Straits. The species cannot survive the passage through tropical waters that swimming around Cape Horn would necessitate. And, as a right whale cannot go far without coming up for air, it could not swim any great distance under ice. Hence, Maury reasons, there must be an open way across the Pole. Other evidence is adduced as well: the migration patterns of birds points to a warmer clime to the north of the continental ice-ledge. And huge "tongues" of ice, one some 300,000 square miles in extent, have drifted south into the north Pacific. Maury is especially taken with the speculation that the breeding grounds of the right whale, which whalers have never discovered, must be secreted in that elusive Open Polar Sea. This he perceives as further evidence of the great Plan of Nature: the Almighty has taken care to protect the young of one of His creatures.

Even more to be marveled at is the wisdom manifest by the Creator in protecting the cap of the planet with an open ocean whose waters maintain a higher temperature than those of the subarctic circle. All the data that Maury can muster tells of a global pattern of strong currents of warm water that flow northward from tropical zones as they remain beneath counter-currents of cooler water pushing towards the south. Varying salt densities and the physics of water temperature conspire to make this seeming miracle possible.

One moment the discussion may consider the Gulf Stream at a distinctive point in its long steady journey to the Pole. At another, it may focus on the baffling course of an iceberg in the North Atlantic. Indeed the latter provides Maury with one of his most graphic illustrations, for an iceberg will sometimes be observed drifting to the north while the surface current drifts to the south. As seven-eighths of the berg is below the surface it is obvious that the deeper waters have more purchase on the great mass. This observation corroborates the arguments in favor of the existence of an Open Polar Sea. That hypothetical never-freezing ocean, a body of water estimated to extend over an area of three million square miles, is fed by the emergence of tropically originated waters whose currents constantly force the Arctic water southward. In Maury's reasoning, the perpetually replenished warm water mantle atop the globe is a requirement of nature, insuring her equilibrium. Meteorologist as well as oceanographer, he coordinates his knowledge of global hydraulics and global atmosphere. Air currents, dry at their point of origin over the Antarctic continent, but rendered humid by their long voyage over the vast, dense waters of the tropics, sweep northward to their destination over the Open Polar Sea where they deposit their burden of moisture. In the "economy of nature" which he envisages, the South Pole is conceived as an atmospheric "furnace," the North Pole as an atmospheric "condenser." The Open Polar Sea is thus to be viewed as a "grand atmospherical engine," the mechanism necessary to maintain the life system of the earth. The wonder of the law of circulation compels Maury to reflect:

The climates of our planet are as obedient to law as the hosts of heaven. They are as they were designed to be; and all those agents which are concerned in regulating, controlling, and sustaining them are "ministers" of His.

"A band of purest azure will next arrest the eye, and this, we are told, must have been a great fissure or crevasse, in which the thawed water has again frozen, the purest blue being the well-known result of light passing into, as well as through, a limpid medium of great depth. Next, another crevasse will be noticed, not filled up, however, but emitting the loveliest emerald light. This our Arctic friends will know, arises from the light being transmitted partly through and again reflected from the sea beneath, or the semi-transparent compacted snows and ice of the berg."

(Illustrated London News, *4 July 1863*)

Matthew Maury wrote that his hypothesis about the open sea to the North was based on a hundred thousand readings of the hydrometer and a million measurements of wind. In his own way Church was just as scientific and just as exhaustively thorough in studying the operations of "Intelligence." The pigment on his great canvas of 1861 was itself the medium through which he recorded his own countless observations of northern waters, observations which were informed by an understanding of arctic phenomena that had been gained from reading and from conversation. No other subject that he had painted would have been so abstract and elemental. To paint a summa of the North, required an eye readied to perceive the principle of "circulation" manifest in both the humblest and the grandest visible fact. Church looked at nature with a knowing sight. He had internalized the discipline of science.

In a way, Church was not only the student but also the teacher. The observations of the behavior of arctic light and color which he presented in the broadside for *The Icebergs* may well have been unique in 1861, for Church saw better than others had seen. To the scientifically inclined, his art exercised a double appeal. It pictured what had formerly been known only through verbal description; and to that it added the artist's own visual discoveries, such as the optical causes of the seeming darkness and somberness of hue of sky and water in the presence of icebergs. Church's "absolute experiences," so one critic put it, insured the "truth" to be discerned on the canvas. Examining *The Icebergs* the spectator could perceive in the detail and in the whole the workings of the "law of circulation." And, if he or she shared the painter's reverence for the ways of the Creator, that spectator could become "wiser, better, happier."

A major painting by Frederic Church will not submit to simple explanation. A masterpiece like *The Icebergs* yields its multiple potential according to the genius of its viewer as much as to the genius of its creator. The workings of the romantic imagination were creatively eclectic, synthesizing the forms and symbols to which the age had fallen heir. Yankees, in particular, were ready to appropriate all history to their purposes. *The Icebergs* deserved "the admiration and applause of the Modern Athens:" the accolade of Boston. How fitting that the painting was on exhibition in the city's Athenaeum! The catholicity of styles in building current in his day made its impress on the mind of Louis Noble. In the protean form of a single iceberg, a lexicon of styles might coalesce: "Greek, Roman, Gothic, Saracenic, Pagan, Savage." Literature as well as architecture primed eyes for arctic sights. As occasion suited, Isaac Hayes invoked Dante, Milton, Coleridge, or Byron. In venturing into a new artistic realm, Church was thought to have hit upon an especially "suggestive" subject in *The Icebergs*. "Hoar" and "hard," the "great central mountain mass" was the Cathedral of Milan, the Rock of Gibraltar, metamorphosed in crystal. The "grotto" became the fancied "haunt" of mermaids, nereids, sirens, fairies, and also, for one viewer, "the daughters of Boreas." For many, too, it was first and foremost the "domain of Neptune." Dreaming before *The Icebergs*, one Englishman pronounced the boulder "an altar of a Druid temple."

The reveries of Americans, whether in the out-of-doors or in the exhibition gallery, displayed a decidedly religious turn of mind. So at arctic nature's suggestion, Hayes could be relied upon for a verse from Genesis, Ecclesiastes, of Revelation. Even readier for such was Church's pastor-companion off the coast of Labrador, the Reverend Louis Noble. In the infinitely varied forms of their arctic prey, the author of *After Icebergs with a Painter* discovered a realm of spiritual fancy made actual to the eye. "Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like the flowers" born of sunset hues and tints on a field of frost. Into an ice-rimmed bay water steals in silent swells "full of majesty, dignity and grace." "They are the swells of olden time, . . . legitimately descended from those that bore the ark upon their bosom and used to bear the unbroken orb of heaven." In awe at the splendor of icebergs towering in the polar night, Noble murmured: "I think of the apostle's vision of permanent and shining walls, 'the heavenly Jerusalem,' the city which hath foundations, whose builder and Maker is God."

Before the arctic voyager's eyes Nature became Scripture. So, too, might Nature become Scripture for viewers of the painting. To make a biblical comparison in the presence of the painting was almost a convention with Church's public. One such comparison is of particular interest for its aptness both as a response to the scene portrayed and as a reflection of Protestant sensibility:

> The scene is as if from that day of creation when the earth was without form and void, and only the firmament divided the waters under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament, and God hung a light in the heaven to divide the day from the night. (*Tribune*, New York, 24 April 1861)

The patterns of romantic imagination are foreign to us and to our way of looking at a work of art. But those patterns are integral to the thought both of artist and public in the nineteenth century. A reader conversant with the legacy of the Puritan conscience is prepared to sense the moral depths which Hawthorne sounded in *The Scarlet Letter.* The plots, characters and discourse of Shakespeare and the Old Testament echo through whole chapters of Melville's epic *Moby Dick.* And resonating with the language and cadence of the Bible is one of the greatest works of art of Church's day, the Gettysburg Address.[7]

The Icebergs is patterned after the American mind of 1861. Living in the aura of Manifest Destiny, Church's contemporaries were alerted to perceive the spiritual revealed in the material. A new people without a fabled past, Americans faced the unprecedented imperative of having to invent their own mythology. Sanctify their New World home, they must. In an age of historical self-consciousness and scientific reasoning, this was no easy task. Still, as emigrants from an Old World, they were the heirs to western civilization, free to appropriate and adapt the tried forms of each and every culture. And, out of their own past, came the deep-seated faith that God and Nature had favored America above all other continents. The Puritan fathers had conceived their mission as the regeneration of the world. Church was keenly conscious of this spiritual heritage. And, happily for him, science itself was the new revelation of that historic mission.

I have told you nothing of the opaline lustres, the chase of rainbows over the surfaces 'white as no fuller on earth can white' them — the mystery of faint, changeful shadows; nor have I mentioned the accumulations of graceful and suggestive form, arch, spire, column, statue, vase, shell. Look for yourself, and you will henceforth gaze at the North Star with more respect, since it points to a continent of waters filled with these icy cathedrals, where ocean is choir, and solitude priest, and beauty the moving presence of the Lord. Truly "there is an evangel in art as well as books," and Church is among the prophets.

(*Boston* Christian Register, *15 March 1862, clipping in Olana Scrapbook*)

In going to the Arctic, Church had penetrated "the arcana of Nature" that he might "reveal" the "secrets" of unknown seas. Returning to his studio, he synthesized in paint the "external" fact and the "presiding spirit" of the mysterious North. Even the composition of the picture was said to harmonize with the "poetry" and "sentiment" of the "unearthly" "ice-scape," a sight at once "desolate" and "beautiful." Grateful, the public thanked Church for opening the eyes of his fellow-men "to finer visions."

Drawing extensively on the actual words prompted by the sight of the painting, let me suggest in paraphrase what a viewer, part New Yorker, part Bostonian, part Londoner, might have noted, might have thought, in the presence of the painting. The initial effect of the whole is that curtains of ice and mist have just now been drawn aside as though to open to view for the first time a new wonder of nature. Here and there

"threatening" grotesquely human faces may emerge in crystal. Off to the right lurks "an awful gorge of death and shadowy splendor." Asylum from this inhospitable void is afforded by the inviting grotto of beautiful "living emerald." Its arch doubles as a gateway to a majestic vista which leads the eye "away, away" towards the distant horizon. Like the eyes in a portrait which follow and command, that distant horizon follows and commands as it draws the spectator's thoughts still further to the North.

But there is enough to enchant within the limits of the picture frame. Beneath one's very feet is an almost supernaturally quiet inlet of the sea. Here in an arctic cradle, July waters gently nurse the great iceberg, lapping its cold shores in steady, graceful, ever-widening circles. As the wreck forlornly reminds us, this sight has perhaps once before been looked upon by men. Yet we, the heirs of our less fortunate predecessors, are privileged to behold what others before us did not live to tell. Is this beautiful, diminutive summer sea the type in microcosm of the scientist's dream: the hallowed Open Polar Sea?

Under the genial influences of late afternoon light and summer winds and currents, a marvel of nature's poetry unfolds before our eyes. All is flux, process, change. The congelations of centuries melt into liquid sapphire, dissolve into pearly vapor. What had in "dull atmosphere" been "dead white, — ghastly and spiritless" (Church's own words) the sun kindles with evanescent hues and tints, the most limpid, tender and pure. Angles of crag and scarp flash and sparkle. Surfaces of satin and velvet "flicker and fade." Transfigured, the elements "glow and quiver." Born of the realm of eternal winter, "a miracle of beauty" proclaims "the moving presence of the Lord." In this moment of transcendence spirit and matter are regenerated as one. For the spectator of 1861, *The Icebergs* was the promise of Nature's and Man's immortality.

Like Church's other epics on canvas, *The Icebergs* challenges the mind, indeed, almost judges the soul. That the painting will yield its full meaning to the modern scholar is unlikely. Whether Church himself could have explained all is a matter of conjecture. Certainly it would have been foreign to his nature to spell out his every intention. "The North," the title of the broadside published for *The Icebergs*, may, in 1861, have reflected the patriotic fervor of the moment, but at that date the mystique of science actually would have had more to do with the conception of the painting. Apart from a few lines, the text of the broadside is restricted to facts which are pertinent to an objective appreciation of the phenomena portrayed. Church's symbolism is determinedly implicit. In the final analysis, his art seems to presuppose an audience of like-minded souls, a company of the Elect, graced with "eyes to see and ears to hear" the divine immanent in the natural. Among that favored number would surely have been the person with whom Church must have shared his more personal and profound reflections on the North, his friend Isaac Hayes. In *The Open Polar Sea* is a passage of notably sublime measure which captures in words the spirit of Church's great *Icebergs:*

> And this *iceberg* has more significance than the great flood which the glacier's southern sister, the broad Amazon, pours into the ocean from the slopes of the Andes and the mountains of Brazil. Solemn, stately, and erect, in tempest and in calm, it rides the deep. The restless waves resound through its broken archways and thunder against its adamantean walls. Clouds, impenetrable as those which shielded the graceful form of Arethusa, clothe it in the morning; under the bright blaze of the noonday sun it is armored in glittering silver; it robes itself in the gorgeous colors of evening; and in the silent night the heavenly orbs are mirrored in its glassy surface. Drifting snows whirl over it in the winter, and the sea-gulls swarm around it in the summer. The last rays of departing day linger upon its lofty spires; and when the long darkness is past it catches the first gleam of the returning light, and its gilded dome heralds the coming morn. The Elements combine to render tribute to its matchless beauty. Its loud voice is wafted to the shore, and the earth rolls it from crag to crag among the echoing hills. The sun steals through the veil of radiant fountains which flutter over it in the summer winds, and the rainbow on its pallid cheek betrays the warm kiss. The air crowns it with wreaths of soft vapor, and the waters around it take the hues of the

> emerald and the sapphire. In fulfillment of its destiny it moves steadily onward in its blue pathway, through the varying seasons and under the changeful skies. Slowly, as in ages long gone by it arose from the broad waters, so does it sink back into them. It is indeed a noble symbol of the Law — a monument of Time's slow changes, more ancient than the Egyptian Pyramids or the obelisk of Heliopolis. Its crystals were dewdrops and snowflakes long before the human race was born in Eden.

The Arctic was a proving ground or, rather, proving sea of the American soul. Bound to mirror the world's type on canvas, Church sailed into waters made sacred by history, by science, and by faith that he might know Nature and its Grand Design. *The Icebergs* pictured the Alpha and Omega of time and tide.

NOTES

1 Robert Hughes, "Confusing Art with Bullion," *Time*, 31 December 1979, p. 56.

2 For detailed discussions of these and others of Church's paintings, see my *The Landscapes of Frederic Edwin Church: Vision of an American Era* (New York, 1966), *passim*, and "Church and Luminism: Light for America's Elect," in John Wilmerding *et al.*, *American Light: the Luminist Movement, 1850-1875* (National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1980), pp. 153-190.

3 Her latest and most comprehensive consideration of the subject is to be found in *Nature and Culture: American Landscape and Painting, 1825-1875* (New York, 1980).

4 Henry Theodore Tuckerman, *Book of the Artists: American Artist Life* (New York, 1867), pp. 375, 380.

5 When not specified in the text or cited by footnote, the sources of quotations may be found in the photocopy of Church's scrapbook at Olana. The original copy has disappeared.

6 For further light on the subject of the relationship between Hayes and Church see William H. Truettner, "The Genesis of Frederic Edwin Church's *Aurora Borealis*," *Art Quarterly* 31 (Autumn, 1968), pp. 267-283. Church, William Bradford and other painters of icebergs are considered in Lewis A. Shepard, *American Painters of the Arctic* (Amherst, Mass., Mead Art Gallery; New York, Coe Kerr Gallery, 1975).

7 See Gary Wills, "Prologue" to *Inventing America: Jefferson's Declaration of Independence* (New York, 1978).

. . . the "Icebergs" lead us at once to the inner arcana of that mysterious temple which sits forever upon the forehead of the world. We can but stand at the base of that towering cliff of ice, broken into huge crystallizations of form, streaked with mingled tints of azure, emerald and gray, kindling here and there into cold, intense gleams of dazzling luster, and look out along the lazy folds of water towards the white pinnacles, uplifted against the horizon, and confess the picture is above and beyond criticism.

(*New York* World, *29 April 1861*)

I

CHURCH IN PUBLIC, 1859-1863

The radiant words quoted on the opposite page were written in 1861 in response to the initial public showing of the subject of this book, Frederic Edwin Church's painting of *The Icebergs*. The reviewer's assessment was, so to speak, only the tip of the iceberg. Many other observers of the day were similarly smitten by the picture, and one writer called it "the most splendid work of art that has yet been produced in this country."

Today *The Icebergs* is again the most famous American landscape painting ever created, and one of the most famous American paintings of any kind. To see it now in its restored condition is to understand immediately an important component of its 19th-century magnetism. Visually it is extraordinary. It is not, and was not intended to be, topographically exact; none of Church's large pictures are. But both its apparent reality and its imaginative "magic"[1] are captivating, just as they were to Church's contemporaries. Across the decades, Church once more casts his spell with a colorful, vibrant, haunting "close encounter" with nature in an unusual guise. The scene fills the eye, yet obligates the spectator to observe every detail closely. It dazzles with the multiple hues of the spectrum; it plays tricks with glistening ice formations that metamorphose into clouds, mountains, human and animal faces and skulls, and even whole, sensuous human figures; it conjures speculation on natural history and on natural forces which render mankind helpless; it may, indeed, in this secular age provoke a spiritual response or two.

In many other respects, too, the late-20th-century viewer has little trouble approaching the original context of the painting. For most viewers in 1861, the subject matter itself was well beyond the range of personal experience; in 1980 it still is. Yet the depiction beckons precisely because of its romantic unfamiliarity. Geological, meteorological and optical behavior at the top of the world is so distinct from that of the environment in which we live that the location might almost be another planet. We, as were Church's contemporaries, are compelled to attentiveness simply because of our human thirst for knowledge and innate desire for new vistas.

The very size of *The Icebergs* was and remains another of its primary attractions. The scene is virtually large enough to walk into. This, too, was part of Church's purpose: the immensity of the canvas, coupled with the incredible variety of minute details, put the spectator among the icebergs. Art and reality merge. The plain, dark frame surrounding the picture was deliberately contrived to enhance the effect of a window onto another world.

The artist's originality in depicting icebergs was the subject of constant comment in 1861. We can now agree with his contemporaries on this point. Occasional portrayals of man and the Arctic, and — more rarely — man and icebergs, do exist from earlier eras of art history; Caspar David Friedrich's *Arctic Shipwreck* (ca. 1824) in Hamburg is a predecessor

which readily comes to mind. But any large-scale painting of icebergs alone that one has ever seen is ultimately dependent upon Church's; his was the first.

Perhaps most interesting of all, as David Huntington points out in the introduction to this publication, the record-shattering sale of *The Icebergs* at Sotheby Parke Bernet in October 1979 resuscitated a repeated, important 19th-century alliance between Church, a major painting, large sums of money and headline news. The fact that the art world has not been the same since the sale, and that the event was the catalyst for further auction price records in European painting, mean that in the minds of scholars, collectors and the general public alike, American art is now to be taken as seriously as the productions of hallowed European masters. This was exactly how Church's countrymen felt in his own day. They paid him the highest prices ever obtained by an American painter to that time; they showered him with volumes of press reviews and published biographies, and by tens of thousands they visited exhibitions of his works; they avidly purchased printed reproductions of those same works; and they exulted in the national and international success of a New World painter who had not — or, at least, had not yet — visited the Old World. As one critic wrote when *The Icebergs*' first showing was about to close, "it is a thought of which an American can be proud, that a native artist, without even the sight of a 'great master,' has proved to all the world that genius dwells in our young country as well as in old, crowded, effete Europe."[2] Indeed, the dramatic rediscovery of the picture in a former stately home on the outskirts of Manchester alone is an indication of the once-considerable dimensions of Church's reputation in Britain.

As Huntington also indicates, however, many aspects of Church's art, and of the artist himself and the ambience in which he lived and worked, have subsided into less easily retrievable American memories. Who, we may reasonably ask, was Frederic Church, and why were he and *The Icebergs* so famous in their day? Why and how did he create the painting? Under what circumstances was it unveiled? And what became of it for the past century and a quarter?

Between 1859 and 1863, exactly the years in which *The Icebergs* was conceived, created and exhibited, Church (1826-1900; fig. 1) was at the summit of his powers as a painter, and of his career as a whole. "America's greatest artist"[3] was the acclaimed creator of monumental images which were poetically resonant with the convictions of his homeland. In the mid-19th century many Americans believed that their land was singularly favored in the perspective of history. Philosophers, poets, politicians, theologians, artists and art critics all drew affirmative associations between the virginity and boundlessness of American nature and their nation's presumed "Manifest Destiny." The United States, they contended, was an Eden, an oasis of promise and unsullied intrinsic goodness, the very fortunes of which were guided by the Creator.

Church and many other mid-19th century American landscape painters eagerly embraced this point of view. Through the formative efforts of the early artists of the Hudson River School, in particular Church's teacher Thomas Cole (1801-1848), landscape painting had become the representative national art form. At mid-century the works of many American landscapists, notably the painters now called "Luminists," were pervaded by a distinctive quality — a meticulously observed and deeply felt attachment to natural reality which, they were persuaded, was reverential acknowledgement of Divine handiwork. Through Nature the artists became witnesses to manifestations of God; and contemporary viewers of their paintings often experienced the same response.[4]

Church, as we know from various contemporary commentaries, from evidence preserved at Olana, and from hundreds of his sketches (the majority of which are now owned by the Cooper-Hewitt Museum), had prepared himself well for the role of painter-minister. He was a tireless student of nature, and an indefatigable seeker of her most astounding vistas and most affecting effects. Indeed, one observer wrote in 1863 that "if visits to the constituent members of the solar system were practicable . . . Mr. Church would undertake to delineate Mars and Jupiter, with their attendent satellites."[5] His library contained numerous Bibles, theological treatises, and several volumes in which important authors amalgamated nature, science, and spirituality. Clergymen were numbered among his close friends, and he was a religious man himself.

Hence, Church's art "spoke" authoritatively to a public that welcomed visual sermons on Nature. To some of its onlookers, as we shall see, *The Icebergs* and Church's other major works functioned precisely in this way. In their limitless horizons, rich detail, and compelling pan-American subject matter, his *Niagara Falls* (1857; fig. 3), *The Heart of the Andes* (1859; fig. 4), *Twilight in the Wilderness* (1860; fig. 32), *Cotopaxi* (1862; fig. 38), and of course *The Icebergs*, were icons of an expanding, self-confident nation which believed itself sanctified by Deity.

3
FREDERIC EDWIN CHURCH
NIAGARA FALLS 1857
Oil on canvas.
Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Small wonder, then, that to many of his contemporaries Church appeared to stand apart from and above most mortals as "one among millions."[6] Obviously he possessed abundant talents, keen poetic sensibilities, and a uniquely favored artistic training as Thomas Cole's sole pupil. The word "fortunate" was frequently invoked by friends and press reviewers in response to the beneficence with which he seemed blessed and to the resplendent rewards which appeared to await his every endeavor.[7] Personally, as well as artistically, Church was an appropriate representative of the vitality and buoyant optimism of his homeland.

Mid-19th-century America was not only, however, an exultant New Paradise, a grand utopia destined for greatness. It was, in addition, a country coming of age within the international community, as its inhabitants and many Europeans knew. Americans were regarded by Europeans as energetic, barrier-breaking, ingenious, competitive in the extreme, and commercially ravenous. The "almighty dollar" was an internationally understood phrase and a global influence. Many United States citizens were as proud of their economic achievements as they were of any others.[8]

We have already noted that Church's paintings attracted — for a few years — the largest quantity of those American art dollars. We can be certain that Church noted the fact as well. In 1857 he decided to exhibit the just-completed *Niagara* (fig. 3) as a one-person, one-work, pay-as-

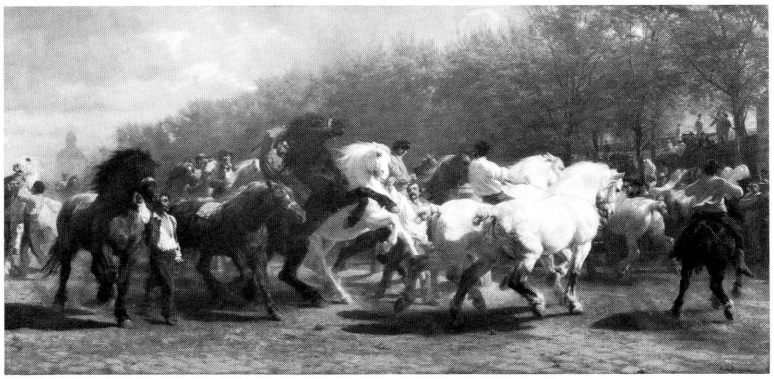
4
FREDERIC EDWIN CHURCH
THE HEART OF THE ANDES 1859
Oil on canvas.
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Bequest of
Mrs. David Dows, 1909.

you-enter attraction in the gallery of a prominent New York dealer and publisher, Williams, Stevens and Williams, instead of at the National Academy of Design's annual group show. In so doing, he entered the international art-market arena of the "Great Picture," to use a phrase widely current at the time. For the next several years, all of his major works, including *The Icebergs,* were offered to the public in this way. Usually the displays were accompanied by proposals for publishing the compositions in color by chromolithography or in high-quality black-and-white engravings. Most of the paintings also were taken on money-making, reputation-building, multi-city tours. The conclusion is obvious: financially as well as philosophically and personally, Church was an exemplary mid-19th-century American success story. Furthermore, his contemporaries were well aware of this commercial facet of his accomplishments and how it related as a two-edged sword to the national character. As the *New York Times* jauntily put it in November 1859 after *The Heart of the Andes* (fig. 4), Church's second Great Picture, had reopened in New York after a triumphant six-week run in London, Americans were a "cotton-raising, shipbuilding, trading, dollar-worshipping people, as all the world knows," who could both produce and appreciate art as capably as any country.[9] That is, as Americans accumulated world-class wealth, they also acquired culture of a similar standard.

With the Great Picture, we arrive at another crucial component of "Church in public" at the time *The Icebergs* was painted. By definition, every Great Picture was, to a greater or lesser extent, surrounded by orchestrated publicity and newspaper and periodical coverage. A few Great Pictures were not only exhibited but also conceived in the spotlight of media and public expectation. *The Icebergs* fell within the latter category. For nearly two years between the summer of 1859 and the spring of 1861, the American public knew a major Arctic painting was forthcoming from Church's easel and awaited its completion with eager anticipation. In every essential sense except one — the canvas was painted behind the closed doors of Church's New York studio — *The Icebergs* was a public work of art.

And that public, as we have indicated, was not confined to New York, nor to America. From *Niagara* onwards, European connections were essential to Church's success in America, for two reasons. First of all, despite the desire of some Americans to establish cultural independence from Europe, an Old World esteem worked wonders on this side of the Atlantic, for writers in particular as well as for artists.[10] Secondly, in this period, British commercial print-makers were the self-proclaimed best in the world. The latter connection is of special significance here: between 1863 and 1979, *The Icebergs*' general appearance was known to the art-interested public only through a chromolithograph published in London in 1864-1865 by Charles Day and Son, "Lithographers to the Queen."

So Church's agents, with the artist's blessing, took his pictures to Britain, and especially to London, the home of the British landscape painting of J. M. W. Turner, John Martin, and a host of other masters. Between 1857 and 1869, seven British Great Picture showings of eight of Church's major works — including *The Icebergs* in 1863 — generated a formidable British following not only for Church but also for American painting in general, and greatly enhanced his reputation at home. In effect, Church's British showings returned a favor: his landscapes, and for that matter most contemporary American landscape paintings, were fundamentally indebted to the works of British masters, and premised upon British art theory and criticism ranging from Edmund Burke in the 18th century to John Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelites in the 19th century. Moreover, the Great Picture itself had been pioneered in Britain in the late 18th century by two transplanted Americans, Benjamin West and John Singleton Copley.



5
ROSA BONHEUR
THE HORSE FAIR 1853
Oil on canvas.
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of Cornelius Vanderbilt, 1887.

For Church, however, these important Anglo-American artistic linkages were augmented by the mid-19th-century commitment to international entrepreneurial enterprise. In addition to their roles in the dynamic theatres of American poetic nationalism and American commercial prowess, Church's paintings were addressed to the age of the transatlantic telegraph, transatlantic steamship, transcontinental railroad (many American railways were financed by British money), and the World's Fair. The first of the Fairs was held at London's Crystal Palace in 1851; many others, including New York's in 1853, soon followed. In short, the dynamic mood of mid-19th-century America, and of Church's paintings, was interwoven with concurrent European and especially British dynamics. At this period Western civilization as a whole was marked by earth-encompassing vitality which emphasized newness and competitive nationalism on a global stage. Church's epical creativity exemplified the epoch, and his success was scaled to its grandeur. His works take their place not only alongside other Great Pictures of the day — such as Rosa Bonheur's *The Horse Fair* (1853; fig. 5), William Powell Frith's *Derby Day* (1858; fig. 6) and *The Railway Station* (1862; fig. 7), William Holman Hunt's *The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple* (1860), and Albert Bierstadt's *The Rocky Mountains* (1863) — but also beside the novels of Melville, the serialized novels of Dickens, and the operas of Verdi and Wagner.

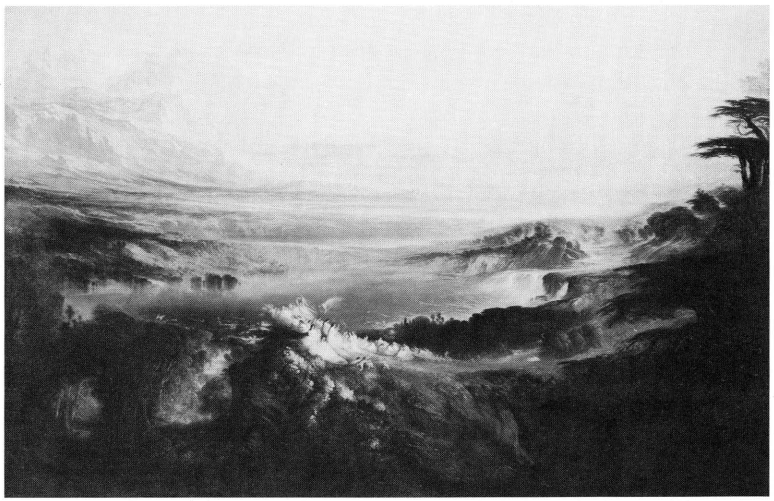
6
WILLIAM POWELL FRITH
DERBY DAY 1858
Oil on canvas.
Tate Gallery, London.

7
WILLIAM POWELL FRITH
THE RAILWAY STATION 1862
Oil on canvas.
Royal Holloway College, Egham,
Surrey, England.

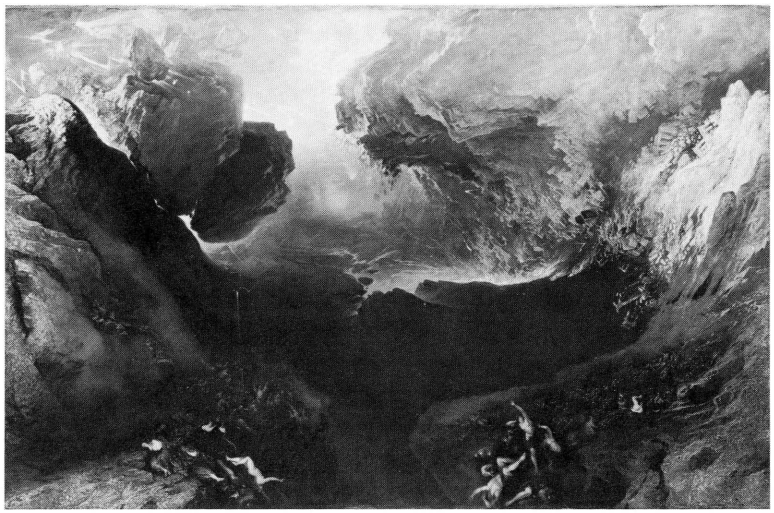
Church's attachments to the globe-girdling business side of the mid-19th-century art world detracted neither from the magnificence nor the profundity of his works. Instead, these attachments allowed him to assume a key position within the Anglo-American cultural community. His works became not only banners of American poetic nationalism, but also cross-cultural ambassadors of goodwill for the most energetic country on earth. *The Icebergs* was a special case in point: it responded as much to British as to American achievements in art, art-dealing and arctic exploration, it was conceived with both audiences in mind, and it was both reproduced and purchased in Britain.

What prompted Church to leave the relative safety of the National Academy of Design's group showings in favor of the more visible but riskier arena of the Great Picture? The answer lies joined within the complex phenomenon of the Great Picture and within his own ambitions. By displaying his works as independent attractions, Church was following in the footsteps of his master Thomas Cole, some of whose most famous compositions had been similarly exhibited a generation earlier. Doubtless Church also was motivated by a recent "panorama" of *Niagara Falls* by Godfrey N. Frankenstein[11] and by the success of his own *The Andes of Ecuador* (1855), his first major South America scene, which was shown at the Boston Athenaeum in 1855 and at the National Academy of Design in 1857. But a specific stimulus in the person of John Martin (1789-1854), the epic landscapist whose work decades before had fundamentally influenced Cole, probably was the most significant factor of all. In October 1856, Martin's final artistic imagining, the huge *Last Judgment* triptych (1851-1853; see figs. 8, 9), landed in New York at Williams, Stevens and Williams' premises on Broadway, after showings in London and several other British cities. Fine-quality engravings of Martin's images further insured a wide knowledge of the series[12].

Church was in town at the time, and one may assume that he saw and was profoundly affected by Martin's works. *The Plains of Heaven* (fig. 8) bears a strong resemblance to *The Heart of the Andes* (fig. 4), while Church's *Cotopaxi* (1862; fig. 38) and *Chimborazo* (1864), which completed his own monumental trilogy of South America, can be likened to Martin's *The Great Day of His Wrath* (fig. 9) and *The Last Judgment*, respectively, in composition and, to an extent, in iconography. Everything considered, Martin's art was the nearest forerunner to Church's in landscape subject matter, religious content, transatlantic touring audience impact, and chronology. Six months later *Niagara* opened at Williams, Stevens and Williams, and another Great Picture career had been launched. But



8
JOHN MARTIN
THE PLAINS OF HEAVEN 1853
Oil on canvas.
Tate Gallery, London.



9
JOHN MARTIN
THE GREAT DAY OF HIS WRATH 1852
Oil on canvas.
Tate Gallery, London.

in the spirit of an astute American Adam, Church "corrected" and brought up-to-date Martin's imagery, just as he did Cole's.[13] In contrast to the two earlier masters' works, Church's epical compositions are New World, not Old World, pure landscape invested with spiritual meaning rather than overt Scripture or figural allegory, and replete with youthful American scientific optimism instead of old-age European dioramic fatalism.

The Great Picture elevated Church to national prominence. From the mid-1840s his work had been taken seriously by American press writers, but with *Niagara* and then *The Heart of the Andes* that seriousness assumed a totally new character. Critics spoke of a new era in American art and of the greatest American paintings ever created. The Old Masters, it seemed to many observers, had been equalled, perhaps surpassed, by a modern New World young man who had never visited Europe. The metaphorical Christian content of his paintings was emphasized by reviewers, and *The Heart of the Andes* was mentioned in church sermons. Poems and at least one musical composition were inspired by the later work. The glittering legacy of these evaluations was passed on directly to *The Icebergs*.

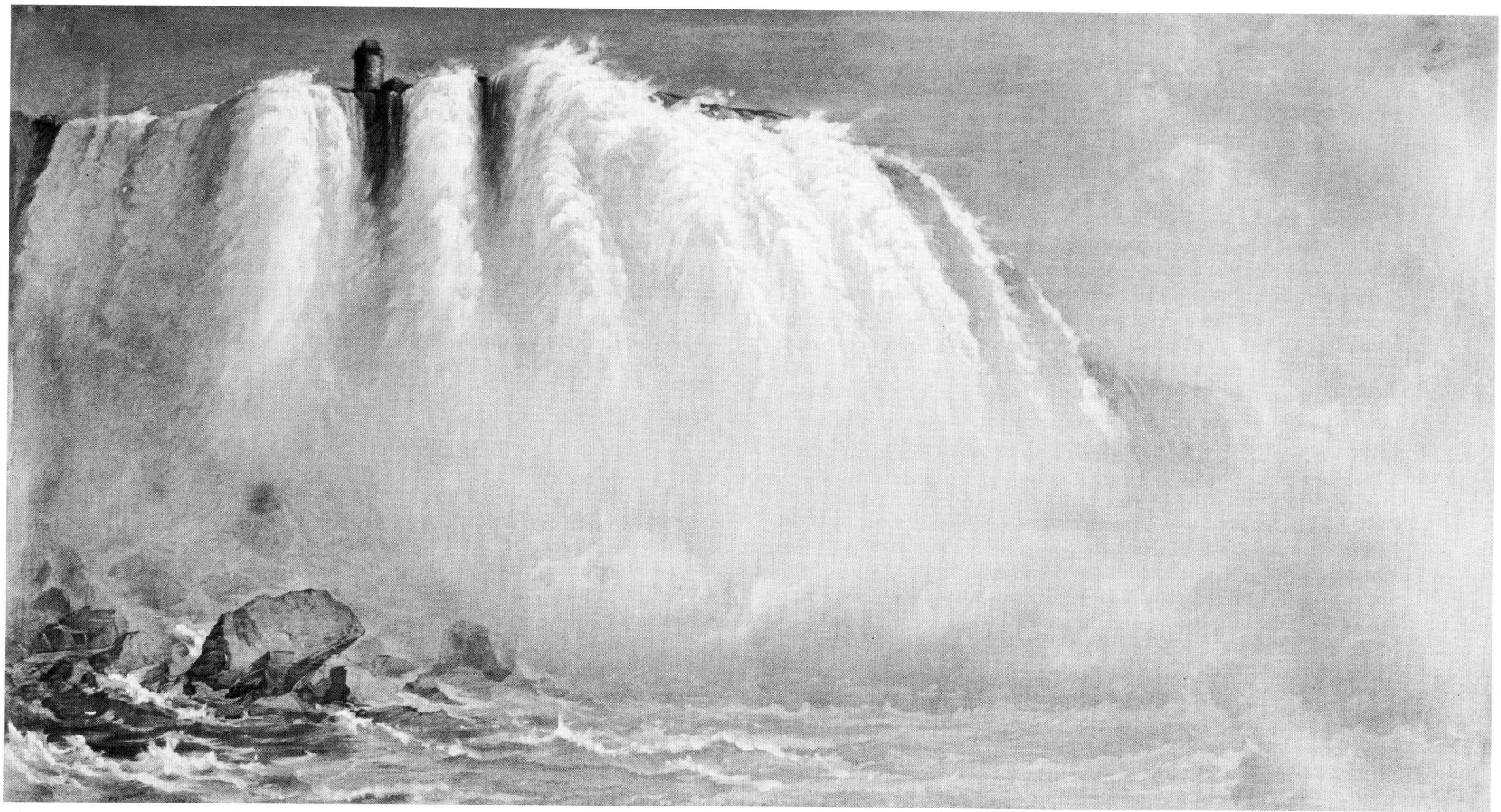
As for Church himself, he became a celebrity, a virtual matinee idol of art. Of course he had toiled for years to attain that eminence, but he was still young. Hence, he also became a symbol for the youthful vitality of his homeland. This status could not last forever, but Church relished it while it persisted, especially between 1857 and 1860. Worthington Whittredge recalled that his fellow painter often had stood out of sight behind the curtain adjoining *The Heart of the Andes* to watch the visitors — especially the young ladies — marvel at his work. Whittredge added that Church had met his future wife on one of these occasions.[14] Whether or not the story is true, many young women were certainly among the attendees in 1859 and 1860. Some of them wanted the artist's autograph.[15] As one newspaper reviewer put it in 1859, Church was "the lion of the day."[16]

He was also a virtuoso. Although the seven and one-half foot-long *Niagara* was the product of months of study and two separate sketching trips to the Falls, one journal reported that the minutely detailed finished canvas had been executed "in less than two months."[17] The following year (1858) an eight-by-fourteen inch "gem of a picture" well-known in its day, *Morning in the Tropics*, was painted, to the amazement of a journalist, "in *seven hours*!"[18] *The Icebergs*, as we shall note, required no more than four months' work, and in 1862 Church dashed off a four-by-six *foot* view of *Under Niagara* (now lost; see fig. 10) in a single day.[19]

The monetary rewards of Church's new fame were stunning. For *Niagara*, Williams, Stevens and Williams paid the artist $2500, plus another $2000 for the copyright. Two years later *The Heart of the Andes* brought $10,000 from William Blodgett of New York, although the contract between painter and purchaser stipulated that Church could sell the work elsewhere if he were offered $20,000 or more for it. Evidently he did obtain a $15,000 offer.[20] In addition, Church stood to make hundreds, perhaps thousands of dollars more from exhibition entrance fees and print reproductions. Probably he felt that he fully deserved such remunerations. Record art prices were all around him on both sides of the Atlantic.[21] *The Icebergs* was slated for similar prosperity.

The pattern of Church's international success was likewise established by *Niagara*, which in mid-1857 after its initial New York run was sent almost with telegraphic speed to London for display and chromolithographic reproduction by Charles Day and Son. London viewers, including John Ruskin, were very favorably impressed, and so were many more Britons when the painting returned in 1858 for a four-city British tour, with stops in London, Glasgow, Manchester and Liverpool. Once more the work was a "sensation," especially in Glasgow, where it was shown at the premises of James McClure and Son, "Printsellers, Carvers & Gilders to the Queen."[22]

The Heart of the Andes was an even greater London attraction in mid-1859 when it, too, arrived with near-electric suddenness after its New York unveiling. A special showing to Queen Victoria and Prince Albert on June 28[23] was followed by exceedingly complimentary reviews of the public display at the German Gallery in New Bond Street, the same facility which had housed *Niagara* in 1858. One writer interpreted the picture as a demonstration of American ingenuity and perseverance.[24] The *Art-Journal's* W. P. Bayley was the most complimentary of all: Church, he wrote, was the successor to Turner, Britain's greatest landscape painter. Many British praises were proudly reprinted in American journals. Church, his countrymen knew, had taken the British capital — and the *Manchester Guardian* — by storm.[25] Although the London showing was handled by Charles Day and Son, reproduction of the painting was entrusted to William Forrest (1803-1889), a famed engraver from Edinburgh.



10
After Frederic Edwin Church, **UNDER NIAGARA**.
Chromolithograph retouched with oil.
Olana State Historic Site, Hudson, New York.

Niagara and *The Heart of the Andes* demonstrated Church's artistic abilities to enchanted audiences on both sides of the Atlantic and provided the foundations upon which the fame of *The Icebergs* was intended to rest. His competition was the very best. In London and New York in 1857 *Niagara* was up against *The Horse Fair*. At London's German Gallery in 1859, Frith's *Derby Day* was the attraction immediately ahead of *The Heart of the Andes*; in fact the two works were displayed simultaneously for one week.[26] These two Great Pictures summarize the differing national outlooks perhaps better than any pair of images of the day. On the one hand, the sizes, formats, compositional arrangements and encyclopedic details are comparable, as are the long labors of production. On the other, Frith's canvas encompasses, in Dickensian unfoldings, the social forces and mechanical improvements of an Old World power sustained by Empire, whereas Church's embraces the horizons of a New World in which the presumed "Manifest Destiny" of its most vigorous nation was regarded as prophecy. When *The Icebergs* arrived in London in 1863, one metropolitan writer aptly observed that "Mr. Church is as esteemed by his countrymen, the Americans, as Mr. Frith is by the English."[27]

There were, however, some negative results of Church's rise to Great Picture fame. By placing himself on a pedestal, he invited a certain amount of rivalry from fellow artists and inevitable fault-finding from the press. Indeed, he received increasing quantities of both, particularly after the newness of his presence and his artistic message began to fade. At first, the strongest criticisms focussed on his go-it-alone exhibitions, which contended with the established displays of the National Academy of Design. Soon other commentators began to doubt that his detailed painting technique was truly "artistic," and to question the basis of his "popularity."[28] A lively controversy concerning the appropriateness of the dark frame in which *The Heart of the Andes* was shown in New York hurt more than it helped Church's cause.[29] Church himself also began to be bothered personally by public attention. While it is clear that he enjoyed his pictures' renown, he was not at ease as a celebrity, preferring to stand, metaphorically as well as physically, behind the scenes. In Britain, where he was not regarded as a national treasure, his precise pictorialism was received with some disapproval even earlier than in America.

For two other reasons, too, the pinnacle of Great Picture prestige was precarious. First of all, neither *Niagara, The Heart of the Andes* nor *The Icebergs* was ordered or paid for in advance by any patron. Three out of Church's first four Great Pictures — *Twilight in the Wilderness* was the exception — were, therefore, speculative ventures that the artist hoped would be sold upon completion. Both the first two paintings were snapped up immediately, but *The Icebergs*, as we shall notice, remained unpurchased for two difficult years. Secondly, Church's success was premised upon his agents' competence as well as upon the intrinsic drawing-power of his compositions. Williams, Stevens and Williams must have seemed very presentable businessmen in 1856-1857, but by 1858 their operations were financially unsteady, and *Niagara* almost was seized by their creditors in England![30] For *The Heart of the Andes* Church secured the partnership managerial and publishing services of John McClure, a former Williams, Stevens and Williams employee and one of the sons of James McClure (c. 1798-1868), the Glasgow publisher-dealer at whose gallery *Niagara* had been displayed in 1858.[31] The sale of the later work to William Blodgett was separately contracted.

With *The Heart of the Andes*, Church retained much closer personal involvement in presentation matters. The picture was shown in his New York Studio Building quarters rather than at a dealer's, and was accompanied by long explanatory pamphlets authored by his friends the Rev. Louis Legrand Noble (1813-1882), Cole's pastor and biographer, and by Theodore Winthrop (1828-1861), the writer. The talents of both of these men were enlisted for *The Icebergs* two years later.

We have previously noted that *Niagara* secured for Church a pivotal position within the Anglo-American cultural community, a position enhanced by the close ties which then existed on many levels between the two countries. His association with the McClures materially augmented that already formidable standing: the new agents were men whose base of operations, connections and outlook were British. No wonder Church and Great Britain maintained very cordial artistic relations through 1865, the year of the final McClure-sponsored Church exhibition in London. *The Icebergs*' London showing of 1863 was one of the McClure's greatest triumphs.

Thus, when *The Heart of the Andes* was completed in the spring of 1859, the stage was set in many respects for *The Icebergs*. A detailed consideration of that stage will concern us in the following chapters.

NOTES TO CHAPTER I

1 The word "magic" was used by Church's contemporaries to describe the effect of the painting. See *Christian Examiner* (Boston), July 1861, 79, in which a writer on art matters referred to "weird, forbidding magic-shows of icebergs in the North" among recent works.

2 Unidentified newspaper review (probably from New York, June 1861) in Church's scrapbook of clippings, formerly at Olana, of which photocopies have been preserved.

3 The phrase comes from the *Tribune* (Chicago), 4 May 1861, in reference to *The Icebergs*. Similar estimates appeared in other journals of the day. For the interpretation of Church's art which follows in the next few paragraphs, I am indebted, as is every student of 19th-century American art, to David Huntington's exemplary studies. See especially his "Frederic Edwin Church, 1826-1900: Painter of the Adamic New World Myth" (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1960; Ann Arbor, London, University Microfilms, 1969); *The Landscapes of Frederic Edwin Church* (New York, 1966); *Frederic Edwin Church* (Washington, D.C., National Collection of Fine Arts, 1966); *Art and the Excited Spirit* (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Museum of Art, 1972); "Church and Luminism: Light for America's Elect," in John Wilmerding *et al.*, *American Light: The Luminist Movement, 1850-1875* (Washington, D.C., National Gallery of Art, 1980), pp. 155-190.

4 The bibliography of "Luminism" is now extensive. In addition to the fundamental *American Light* cited above, note 3, see particularly John I. H. Baur, "American Luminism, a Neglected Aspect of the Realist Movement in Nineteenth-Century American Painting," *Perspectives USA* 9 (Autumn, 1954), 90-98; Barbara Novak, *American Painting of the Nineteenth Century* (New York, 1969), pp. 92-109; John Wilmerding, *American Art* (Baltimore, 1966), pp. 93-99; William T. Gerdts, *American Luminism* (New York, Coe Kerr Gallery, 1978); Novak, *Nature and Culture: American Landscape and Painting, 1825-1875* (New York, 1980), *passim*.

5 *Leader* (New York), 21 March 1863.

6 "Frederic E. Church," *American Phrenological Journal* (New York), October 1863, 90.

7 Perhaps the most notable instance of the use of the word occurred in a letter from the Rev. Louis Legrand Noble to Church, dated Hudson City, N.Y., 29 August 1862; the letter is preserved in the Olana archives. Noble, who had accompanied Church to Newfoundland in search of icebergs in 1859, wrote to his friend: "You are fortunate. I have never known a much more fortunate man. All things considered, you are the most prosperous person I know. May God's grace fall upon your life & heart and make your virtues as remarkable as your prosperity. Heaven succeeds to earth. What a glorious prospect for us all . . . ."

8 See especially the article on the Haughwout Department Store in the *Cosmopolitan Art Journal* (New York), June 1859, 141-147.

9 *New York Times*, 24 November 1859. For an excellent overview of the mid-19th-century Victorian art-market climate, see Jeremy Maas, *Gambart: Prince of the Victorian Art World* (London, 1975).

10 A number of mid-19th-century American authors were virtually as well known in Britain as in America in their day; Longfellow was welcomed to Britain as a man whose "lines are household words among us, and phrases from his pen have taken their place in our household speech . . ." by the *Daily News* (London), 17 June 1868. For Henry Adams's assessment of the importance of British exposure, see Elizabeth Stevenson, *Henry Adams, a Biography* (New York, 1955), p. 80.

11 The Frankenstein brothers, John and Godfrey N., were among Church's painter-competitors through the 1860s. For the "panorama" of Niagara, see "Niagara," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* (New York), August 1853, 288-304; Joseph Arrington, "Godfrey N. Frankenstein's Moving Panorama of Niagara Falls," *New York History* 49 (April 1968), 169-199. I would like to thank Jeremy Adamson for the latter reference.

12 For Martin's series, see Christopher Johnstone, *John Martin* (London, 1974), pp. 26-27; William Feaver, *The Art of John Martin* (Oxford, 1975), pp. 188-204; Rosemary Treble, *Great Victorian Pictures: Their Paths to Fame* (London, Arts Council of Great Britain, 1978), p. 57. Martin's paintings opened in New York on 20 October 1856, and were reviewed in several New York journals. *The Horse Fair* also was shown at Williams, Stevens and Williams' in late 1857.

13 Church must have been aware that some New York as well as London critics had faulted the "bad drawing" of the figures and the supposed overall excessive artifice of Martin's paintings. In addition, the titles alone of several of Church's most ambitious pictures from the late 1840s and early 1850s suggest an early acquaintance with Martin through prints, as well as underlining Church's early debt to Cole. Church's *The Plague of Darkness* (1849; now lost) reminded a writer for the *Bulletin of the American Art Union* (New York), May 1849, 14 (as quoted in Huntington, "Frederic Edwin Church, 1826-1900," p. 30), of "much of the grandeur which characterized Martin's celebrated pictures." In London in 1865, Church put on his own three-painting show of *Cotopaxi, Chimborazo,* and *The Aurora Borealis.* This exhibition suggests that Church and his agents continued to seek the British audiences that, even at that date — *The Last Judgment* trilogy's last recorded showing was in 1872 — still flocked to Martin's works.

14 *The Autobiography of Worthington Whittredge,* ed. John I. H. Baur (New York, 1969), p. 29.

15 *Tribune* (New York), 24 May 1859; Olana Archives, letter from John McClure to Church, dated Philadelphia, 27 March 1860.

16 *Albion* (New York), 14 May 1859, 237.

17 *Home Journal* (New York), 9 May 1857; as quoted by Huntington, "Frederic Edwin Church, 1826-1900," pp. 86-87.

18 "Art Matters in Baltimore," *Daily Evening Transcript* (Boston), 4 March 1861. The picture is in the Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore.

19 *Evening Post* (New York), 11 December 1862; *World* (New York), 12 December 1862. A "sketch" for the picture is at Olana.

20 Contracts for both pictures are at Olana; they are summarized by Huntington, *Landscapes*, pp. 2, 8. The $15,000 offer was reported by the *Evening Post* (New York), 27 May 1859.

21 For example, Rembrandt Peale's *The Court of Death*, shown in New York in early 1860, and Rosa Bonheur's *The Horse Fair*, which had been purchased by William Wright of Weehauken, N. J., were both valued at $25,000. Erastus Dow Palmer's *The White Captive*, shown publicly in late 1859, was purchased by Hamilton Fish for a reported $6,000. See *Leader* (New York), 7, 14 January 1860; *Evening Post* (New York), 14 December 1863. For examples of concurrent high British art prices, see below, chapter III.

22 The two British exhibitions of *Niagara* will be summarized in my "American Art in Great Britain: The National Gallery Watercolor of *The Heart of the Andes*," *Studies in the History of Art* 10 (forthcoming). I would like again to thank Jeremy Adamson for his help with the picture's 1858 British tour.

23 An unidentified clipping (New York?) from July 1859 in Church's scrapbook specifies 28 June 1859 as the date of the Royal showing. The *Illustrated London News*, 2 July 1859, 7; *Manchester Guardian*, 4 July 1859; and H. B. H., "A Visit to the Studios of Some American Artists," *Art-Journal* (London), December 1865, 362, note, also referred to the special Royal viewing.

24 *Illustrated News of the World* (London), 30 July 1859, 51; as quoted by Albert Ten Eyck Gardner, "Scientific Sources of the Full-Length Landscape: 1850," *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 4 (October 1945), 59.

25 American journals also had republished extracts of *Niagara's* 1857 London reviews, but the reprintings were much more widespread and extensive in 1859. The *Manchester Guardian's* London correspondent included a long and very complimentary review of *The Heart of the Andes* on 8 July 1859; this notice was among those reprinted in America. Presumably the same writer was the first British reviewer of *The Icebergs* four years later; see below, chapter IV.

26 See especially the advertisements for the two paintings in the *Athenaeum* (London), 9 July 1859, 21.

27 *Court Circular* (London), 4 July 1863, 523.

28 See especially the *Daily News* (New York), 10 May 1859; *Herald* (New York), 2 July 1859; "Our Artists. 1. F. E. Church," *Commercial Advertiser* (New York), 19 March 1861.

29 *Evening Post* (New York), 27 April 1859; *Albion* (New York), 30 April 1861, 213; *New York Times*, 4 May 1861. The dark frame which surrounded the painting in London, and which now apparently borders *The Icebergs*, evidently prompted no critical comment in 1859.

30 Olana Archives, letter from John H. Warsund to Church, dated 353 Broadway, New York, 22 November 1861.

31 The relationship of the McClures and Church will be discussed in my forthcoming article on "American Art in Great Britain;" see above, note 22.

II

CHURCH AS EXPLORER

In mid-June 1859, armed with letters of introduction which must have been gathered during previous weeks, Church and the Rev. Louis Legrand Noble sailed from Boston to Halifax, Nova Scotia, on the first leg of a natural history pilgrimage. Their destination was the Newfoundland coast, and their objective was icebergs.

The journey was the third in seven years Church had undertaken almost to the ends of the Western Hemisphere in pursuit of some of nature's grandest scenery. This expedition, like the other two, was stimulated by science.

Church was fascinated by science and scientific discovery, as were many persons at the time. Everywhere one looked, from the tropics to the Arctic, from the Far East to the far west, to the heavens overhead, the perspective of the earth and the Universe was widening. The names and adventures of some participants — Livingstone, Stanley, and the source of the Nile; Charles Darwin and the *Beagle* — are still with us. In the plethora of names from many countries, one heroic leftover from the age of the Enlightenment loomed largest: Baron Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859), the German naturalist, explorer, encyclopedist, thinker, and beatific presence in the mind of Western man. By the mid-19th century Humboldt was regarded in Britain as a statesman and exemplar of character; in the United States as a staunch friend of American democracy, an opponent of slavery, and no less than "the greatest man in the world;"[1] and as a favorite son by every civilized country.

Much like Denis Diderot's before him, Humboldt's expertise comprised the visual arts, and his artistic vision was as sweeping as his learning. In his *Kosmos,* a lifetime's work embracing (as the title suggests) the entire natural world first published in 1845 (in English in 1848), Humboldt specifically called for a landscape painting which would "flourish with a new and hitherto unknown brilliancy" in response to the magnificent scenery of the Himalayas and especially the Andes and Amazon basin.[2]

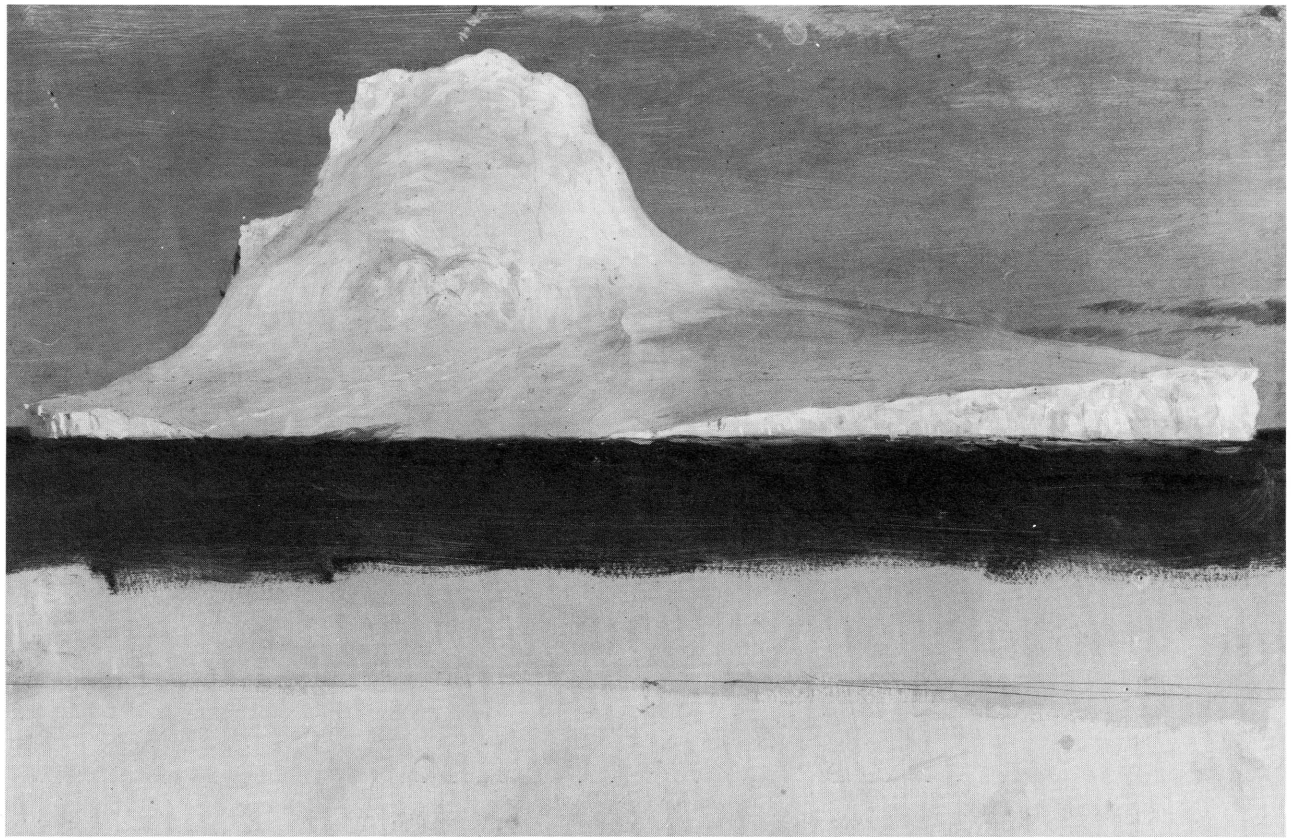
Church could hardly have chosen a better scientist-philosopher-hero for the era than Humboldt. Whenever the artist's interests in science originated, there can be little doubt that they matured in the spring of 1853 when he and Cyrus Field (1819-1892), the Atlantic telegraph entrepreneur who later was closely associated with American Arctic explorations, journeyed to South America with Humboldt's writings as inspiration. For the next two years Church labored to come to artistic grips with the vastness and exotic, colorful natural variety he had witnessed. His first paintings of South American subjects seen in public were displayed at the National Academy of Design in 1855.

In 1857 Church again travelled to the Southern Hemisphere. This time his self-confidence was at its height: his *Niagara* had just been completed and was received with overwhelming favor, and *The Andes of Ecuador*

11
FREDERIC EDWIN CHURCH
CHIMBORAZO SEEN THROUGH RISING MISTS AND CLOUDS 1857
Oil on paperboard.
Cooper-Hewitt Museum, the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Design, New York.

(1855), his most ambitious South American scene to date, had garnered excellent notices that year at the National Academy of Design. His veneration for Humboldt also had intensified and become more personalized. Near Quito, Church stayed in a hacienda room which the naturalist had occupied fifty-five years earlier. On the wall hung a portrait of Humboldt painted by a local artist, whereupon Church, in an incident well-known to his contemporaries, had the portrait copied by a pupil of the original painter.[3] Church's sketches of the great mountains, particularly those of Chimborazo and Cotopaxi, are more assured than before. In several views of the former (e.g. fig. 11), the snow-crested peak rides above obscuring clouds like a magisterial ship on a stormy sea — or like an iceberg (cf. fig. 12). Once again, two more years elapsed before his next major South American composition, *The Heart of the Andes,* was ready.

Church's equatorial trips had been undertaken to slake the thirst of an "inquiring" artist who avidly sought confrontations with the natural sublime, and (undoubtedly) to establish the foundations for an expanded career. But the scientific motivation ran deepest. Before we move to Church's arctic investigations, mention should be made of two aspects of mid-19th-century science that affected both his research and his results. The first is that science, history and art were much more allied than we might now suspect. The search for the order of natural things was, since the later 18th century, a parallel pursuit to the determination of the history of mankind, and to "historical" art. And, given the continuing legacy of the Enlightenment, the first two endeavors predictably produced splendidly creative results: Darwin's *Origin of Species* and Macaulay's *History of England* take their rightful places as great literature as well as exacting descriptions of knowledge. Church's paintings should



12
FREDERIC EDWIN CHURCH
AN ICEBERG 1859
Oil on paperboard.
Cooper-Hewitt Museum, the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Design, New York.

be understood in a similar vein: the science and history summae of a historicizing era were artistic, while Church's artistic summae were informed by science, and created their own history.[4]

The second is that in Britain and America especially, science was still an inquiry intimately connected to — or at least answerable to — theology. Of course, tenets of the two fields often appeared to conflict, but many attempts were made to resolve the difficulties. Church's art, as we have seen, offered a synthesis particularly accessible to Anglo-American audiences. That synthesis was verified by the contemporary science of Humboldt, Agassiz, Maury, Hayes, and others.

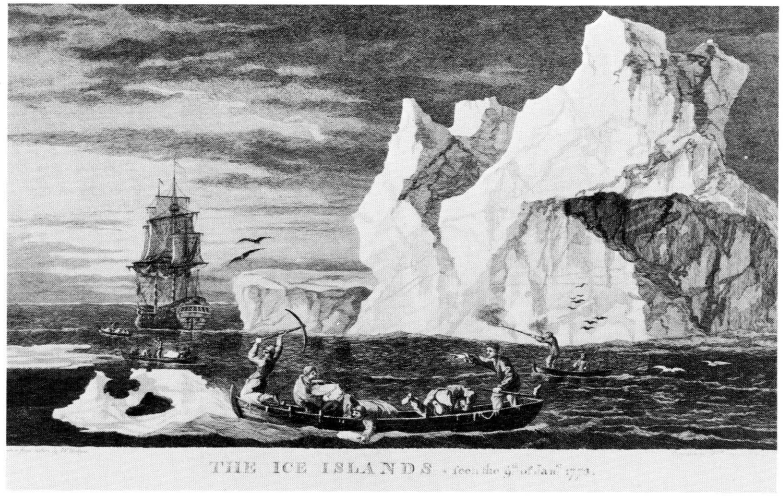
Church's debt to Humboldt was woven into the projected exhibition schedule as well as into the intricate visual fabric of *The Heart of the Andes*. Confident of the importance of the painting, John McClure, Church's agent and publisher, suggested that it be taken to Berlin for Humboldt's benefit, and obviously Church agreed. Some press reports also referred to plans for a transatlantic crossing by the artist in mid-1859, presumably arranged so that he could meet his British public and his venerable German mentor. Humboldt's death on 6 May 1859 was, we know, a source of much regret to Church, and apparently that event cancelled the picture's Berlin stopover.[5] But already by that date Church was preparing to go to the North Atlantic. He departed from Boston three weeks after *The Heart of the Andes* had left New York for London.

What prompted him to change his plans? Why did he decide to venture northward at that moment? The answers to these questions do not come from Church himself; he has left us no diaries of the journey, and no known surviving letters refer to the trip or add much data concerning *The Icebergs* itself. But there is much evidence available from other sources.

Arctic adventure was a topic of the times.[6] During the first half of the 19th century, the frozen environments had captured Western imagination as explorers sought the fabled Northwest Passage. The pioneers were predominantly English, and some of them, notably Sir John Ross (1777-1856), James Clark Ross (1800-1862), Sir William Edward Parry (1790-1855), and Sir John Franklin (1786-1847), became household names. Publications describing their voyages, illustrated either by expedition leaders or by art-talented crew members, recreated the trackless world. Strange animals on land and sea, and the supposed half-savage native human denizens, the Eskimos, added exotic overtones to the setting, as did extraordinary optical effects, the pulsating colorful brilliance of the Aurora Borealis, and the fearful sounds of cracking ice. For the most part, however, the Arctic was understood as a desolate, inhospitable wasteland where transportation was laborious, human accomplishment attended with great physical effort and discomfort, and the very existence of man and his machines constantly imperiled. The explorers who succeeded in charting new regions, unlocking geological secrets, and imposing occasional domesticity in wintered ships amidst nature's coldest seasons were therefore lionized as super-heroes and, to some extent, as martyrs; often they had had to pay for their achievements with the lives of some of their human companions.

Altogether, the Far North was a beckoning frontier, a challenge to man's mastery of the globe, filled with expectations of national economic good and international prestige for the country that secured the Passage. It was not an Eden. But the forbidding treachery of its setting proved more compelling to explorers, armchair adventurers and poets than the tropics. Coleridge's *Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner,* one of the century's most potent landscape evocations, swayed Church, his friends, and *The Icebergs*' viewers, as we shall note below.

Many explorers recorded some of the icebergs they saw. In so doing, they followed a tradition dating at least to the South Sea voyages of Captain James Cook in the 1770s: at one point Cook noted his flotilla was surrounded by more than 200 "ice-islands." Of course, icebergs were a dreaded hazard to shipping well into the 20th century, but Cook found

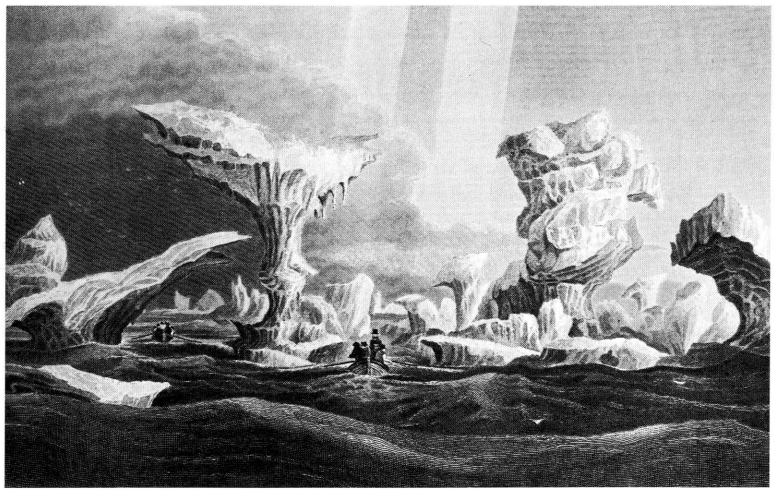


13
After William Hodges, **THE ICE ISLANDS, SEEN ON THE 9TH JANUARY 1773**, 1776.
Engraving.
British Museum, London.

them most useful for supplies of fresh water. His artist, William Hodges (1744-1797), depicted them in this benign yet imposing context in engravings Church may have known (e.g. fig. 13).[7] In northern seas, icebergs stimulated imaginations. The multiform shapes were easily perceived as animal, human and architectural analogies, and the "tints" often were spell-binding. As John Ross wrote in 1819:

> It is hardly possible to imagine any thing more exquisite than the variety of tints which these icebergs display; by night as well as by day they glitter with a vividness of colour beyond the power of art to represent. While the white portions have the brilliancy of silver, their colours are as various and splendid as those of the rainbow; their ever-changing disposition producing effects as singular as they were to us new and interesting.[8]

Some observers spoke of fantastical shapes among smaller icefloes; Franklin's *Narrative of a Second Expedition* (1828) included an illustration of a small boat among phallic pinnacles of threatening yet wondrous



14
After George Back, **BOATS IN A SWELL AMONGST ICE.**
Engraving.
From John Franklin, **Narrative of a Second Expedition to the Shores of the Polar Sea in the Years 1825, 1826, and 1827,** London, 1828.

proportions (fig. 14). Others recounted the continuing changes in the bergs' character as they broke apart, rolled over, or even arose from the waters without warning, encircling surprised captains with an amphitheatre of ice. Often enough a ship would enter a fogbank with no icebergs in sight, only to have the fog lift later to reveal icebergs on all sides.

In 1845 the fifty-nine year-old Franklin convinced the Admiralty to allow him a third attempt to find the Northwest Passage. He enlisted two refitted ships, the *Erebus* and the *Terror,* and stowed supplies to last three years. He felt confident, and physically more vigorous than he had in years. But Franklin died on 11 June 1847, and all remaining 128 men of his party perished by the spring of 1848, most of them during a futile escape effort from ice-locked Victoria Strait in the Canadian Archipelago.

Nothing was known of the disaster for years, but many attempts to unravel the mystery of Franklin's disappearance were made beginning in 1848. For the next two decades arctic activity was at fever pitch. Largely through the entreaties of Franklin's widow, Lady Jane Franklin (1792-1875), the United States added its exertions to the search.

Not until 1854 were the first relics of Franklin's command discovered by Dr. John Rae (1813-1893). But Rae's conclusion that the last of Franklin's men had resorted to cannibalism triggered a storm of indignant British counter-reaction, and as a result Rae's findings were clouded by disbelief. Finally in 1859 an expedition led by Captain Leopold McClintock (1819-1907) encountered additional evidence which seemed to disprove Rae's hypothesis. Even then, however, elements of the mystery lingered, and the Passage was yet to be certainly found. Arctic investigations continued from America, and then from northern Europe. Lady Franklin, in the meantime, had championed efforts to find her husband and then to recover all available remnants of his last struggle; she personally had funded McClintock's expedition of 1859. In the United States, she was admired as a crusading heroine, and as the best-known "private woman of our day."[9]

American involvement in the Franklin search was led by Henry Grinnell (1799-1874) and immortalized by Elisha Kent Kane (1820-1857), who accompanied two Grinnell-sponsored expeditions. Kane died in 1857 at age thirty-seven, worn out by a frantically active life, but not before he had written two lengthy books about his explorations. The second, a 931-page, two-volume tome published in 1856, and augmented by numerous woodcuts and engravings by James Hamilton (1819-1878) after Kane's drawings, injected a lively combination of drama and fantasy into arctic visualizations, a combination which proved immediately popular in the United States. Romanticized descriptions of "Arctic Scenery," as well as love-story poetry involving iceberg adversity, quickly appeared in periodicals.[10] Kane himself was poet-adventurer. He wrote of climbing icebergs for better vantage-points and of "fastening" his ship to bergs in order to have the floating ice escort the vessel out of danger. The first iceberg so harnessed, however, disintegrated with a roar just as the ship pulled free (fig. 15). His description of an iceberg in the midnight sun is stirring:

> The midnight sun came out over the northern crest of the great berg, our late "fast friend," kindling variously-colored fires on every part of its surface, and making the ice around us one great resplendency of gemwork, blazing carbuncles, and rubies and molten gold.[11]

15
James Hamilton after Elisha Kent Kane, **FASTENED TO AN ICEBERG.**
Engraving.
From Elisha Kent Kane, **Arctic Explorations in the Years 1853, '54, '55**, Philadelphia, 1856.

His reaction to the Far North as a whole was tinged with spirituality:

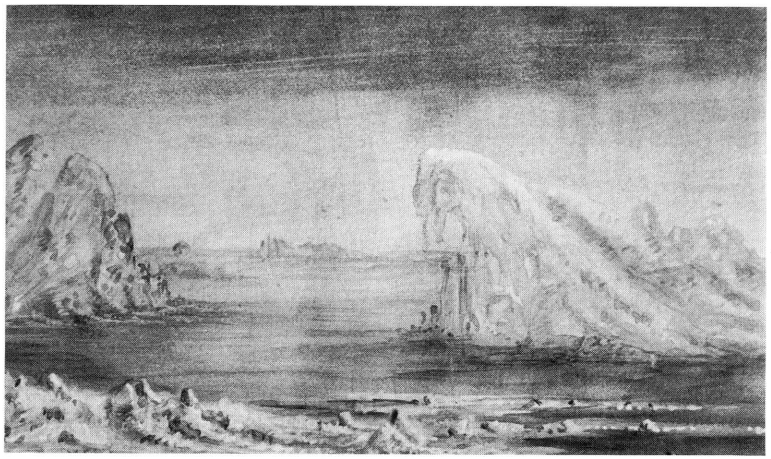
> . . . Rising above all this, and shading down into it in strange combination, is the intense moonlight, glittering on every crag and spire, tracing the outline of the background with contrasted brightness, and printing its fantastic profiles on the snow-field. It is a landscape such as Milton or Dante might imagine — inorganic, desolate, mysterious. I have come down from deck with the feelings of a man who has looked upon a world unfinished by the hand of its Creator.[12]

After his untimely demise, Kane became America's arctic martyr, and his words near-scriptural reading for multitudes of his countrymen. Church owned a copy of Kane's two-volume work.

It is here that the surgeon on Kane's second voyage, Dr. Isaac Hayes (1832-1881) enters our story. In the late 20th century Hayes has been overshadowed by Charles Francis Hall (1822-1871), a rival — and, in the end, a more tragic — American polar explorer, but in his day the former was a superior oratorical and literary talent who galvanized American opinion in favor of his own proposed extensions of Kane's discoveries. Hayes was also a close friend of Church.

The relationship between artist and explorer is only tantalizingly documented, but there can be little doubt of its significance. It seems to have begun when Church — at an unspecified date — taught drawing techniques to Hayes for the explorer's scientific uses. In turn, a Hayes tempera eventually furnished the basis for Church's second major arctic composition, *The Aurora Borealis* (1865; fig. 16). In the foreground of the scene stands Hayes's steamship *United States* supposedly wintering at the point "farthest north" reached by his expedition of 1860-1861, while in the background the highest promontory is "Church's Peak," named by Hayes for his painter-friend.[13] Church owned at least two autographed copies of Hayes's books, the aforementioned Hayes drawing and two others — one of which depicts beast-like icebergs (fig. 17) — and a set of stereopticon photographs of Hayes's 1860-1861 voyage. Church also painted an engaging portrait of Hayes's lead sled dog *Oosisoak* (fig. 18). Hayes's own fertile arctic descriptions, and his invocations of both *The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner* and *The Icebergs*, suggest that he was verbally as well as visually influenced by Church.[14] In addition, both men were members of the American Geographical and Statistical Society in New York.

16
FREDERIC EDWIN CHURCH
THE AURORA BOREALIS 1865
Oil on canvas.
National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian
Institution, Washington, D.C., Gift of Eleanor Blodgett.



17
ISAAC HAYES
TWO ICEBERGS 1860
Watercolor.
Olana State Historic Site, Hudson, New York.

The Geographical Society's doings at the end of 1858 are of special interest here. On November 25, under Society auspices, Dr. John Rae lectured to an "overflowing" crowd at Niblo's Saloon.[15] Focusing his attention on his own search for Franklin, Rae enlivened his presentation with maps, a painting of a snow-hut, skins and skulls of polar animals, and several objects retrieved from Franklin's expedition. But Rae also included references to icebergs and the boulders which often remained imbedded in them from their glacial origins — features which Church would later see and paint.

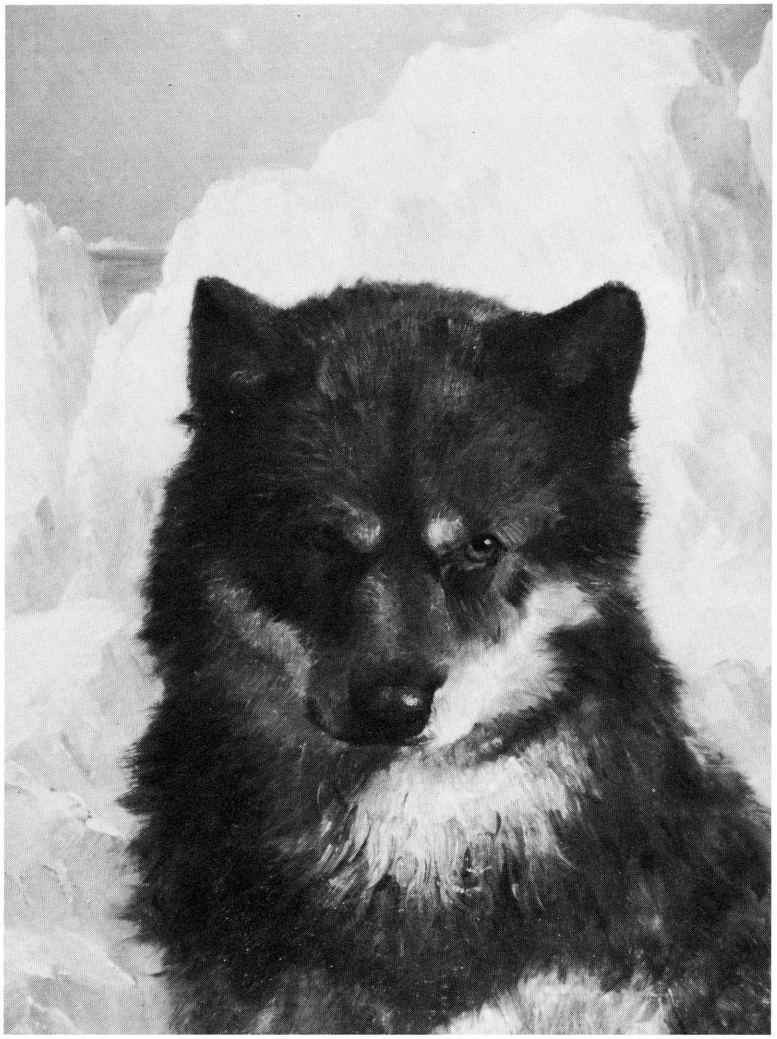
Less than a month later, Hayes himself assumed the podium back at Society headquarters.[16] His purpose, as it had been in previous discourses in other cities, was to solicit support for his proposed arctic voyage of 1860. The concept of the "Open Polar Sea" was the crux of his argument and, as it turned out, the title of his book on the venture published in 1867. Some earlier explorers believed they had seen or were near open water stretching across the North Pole in summertime. Because they paralleled Matthew Maury's thinking as already analyzed by Huntington, Hayes's reasons for trusting in the existence of this unobstructed ocean at the top of the world need not concern us here. What remains relevant is the fact that the theory retained currency and was accepted as fact rather than hypothesis for years afterwards. Hence, for Hayes the primary task of arctic travellers was to overcome the many lower-latitude obstacles, including icebergs, which blocked the route north.

Towards the close of the talk he delivered a stirring appeal to American pride and patriotism. Sweeping pronouncements were nothing new to Hayes. In a March 1857 lecture at the Brooklyn Athenaeum he had said that "since the chivalric attempts to recover the Holy Sepulchre, there had been nothing in the world's history to equal the attempts made to recover the body of Sir JOHN FRANKLIN, dead or alive."[17] Twenty-one months later the reference to Franklin had been deleted, but the crusading tone was even more fervent:

> He would earnestly appeal to every good man, lover of science and patriotic citizen, for money if he has it, if not for interest and influence. The cause is one in which we have invested a good degree of national honor. Our flag has been planted on the most northern lands of our planet; it guards at this day the highway opened to the Pole by our gallant countryman, Dr. KANE; and he could not see but that it had the right, and he did not know why it had not the power to maintain the right, to be carried to the extreme north . . .
>
> Through Kennedy Channel the gateway had been opened to us by Dr. KANE. Shall we go in and gather the fruit, or shall we leave it to others? The object for which men have been striving through centuries is within our grasp. Shall we reach out our hands and take it, or leave it for another nation's benefit? I have too much confidence in the pride and patriotism of my countrymen to believe this can be. That the next Polar enterprise, by whomsoever conducted, would be successful, if the experience of the past be properly used, he fully believed, and in this belief, and with the full conviction that the object is worthy the [sic] highest human devotion, he offered it his time, his labor and his life.

The lecture, it was reported, "was heartily applauded throughout," and the proposal received the Society's unqualified endorsement.

When *The Icebergs* opened in 1861, the biographer Henry Tuckerman listed the general "curiosity and wonder which Arctic discovery had excited in the public mind," "Dr. Kane's narrative," and "Dr. Hayes's



18
FREDERIC EDWIN CHURCH
OOSISOAK n.d.
Oil on canvas.
Private collection.

talk" among Church's stimulants, adding that the painter had "conversed with scores of Arctic voyagers; he read the adventurous story of their explorations."[18] The impact of the two Geographical Society lectures may readily be imagined: Rae had brought crypto-Holy Relics of Franklin to America and had spoken of icebergs; Hayes had issued a clarion call to his compatriots to support him *now* in a quest for a vision of benefit in the name of national honor and that of a national hero. Indeed, through Hayes's oratory the Arctic had become an objective of Holy Grail-like pilgrimage, and a warm-water Eden. Moreover, Hayes's reference to the Humboldt Glacier in Greenland, which reputedly gave birth to multitudes of icebergs in the North Atlantic, even commingled Church's German mentor with the Frozen North.

The Icebergs therefore represented a very special phase of Church's career. The voyage to Newfoundland was more topical in its goals than any he had undertaken previously, while the final painting was at once original, artistic, scientific, spiritual, poetic, exotic, nationalistic, and commemorative of modern Anglo-American heroics. The conception was in addition more closely allied to Britain and British tastes than any of his earlier works. Thus, the Great Picture had been brought full circle: *The Icebergs,* a landscape composition, was a "contemporary history" painting as newsworthy in America — and almost as much so in Britain — as Copley's *Death of Major Pierson* and *Death of the Earl of Chatham* had been in Britain eighty years earlier.[19]

The subject matter was not entirely new in American art. In March 1839 Titian Ramsay Peale had been struck by the sight of icebergs in the South Pacific and had produced a fanciful painting of them. Two years later, Asher B. Durand sketched some icebergs "for himself and his fellow passengers" on his return trip to New York from Europe; the studies, in fact, were published in a Dutch journal at the end of 1841. And James Hamilton had painted iceberg subjects on his own after converting Kane's sketches into publishable form.[20] But none of these antecedents, nor Church's own winter sketchings at Niagara, nor his occasional experiences of near-arctic effects in the tropics, account for his interest in icebergs in 1859, or for his determination to make them, for the first time, a theme fit for grand art. It was an original idea, born from then-widespread enthusiasm for things Arctic.

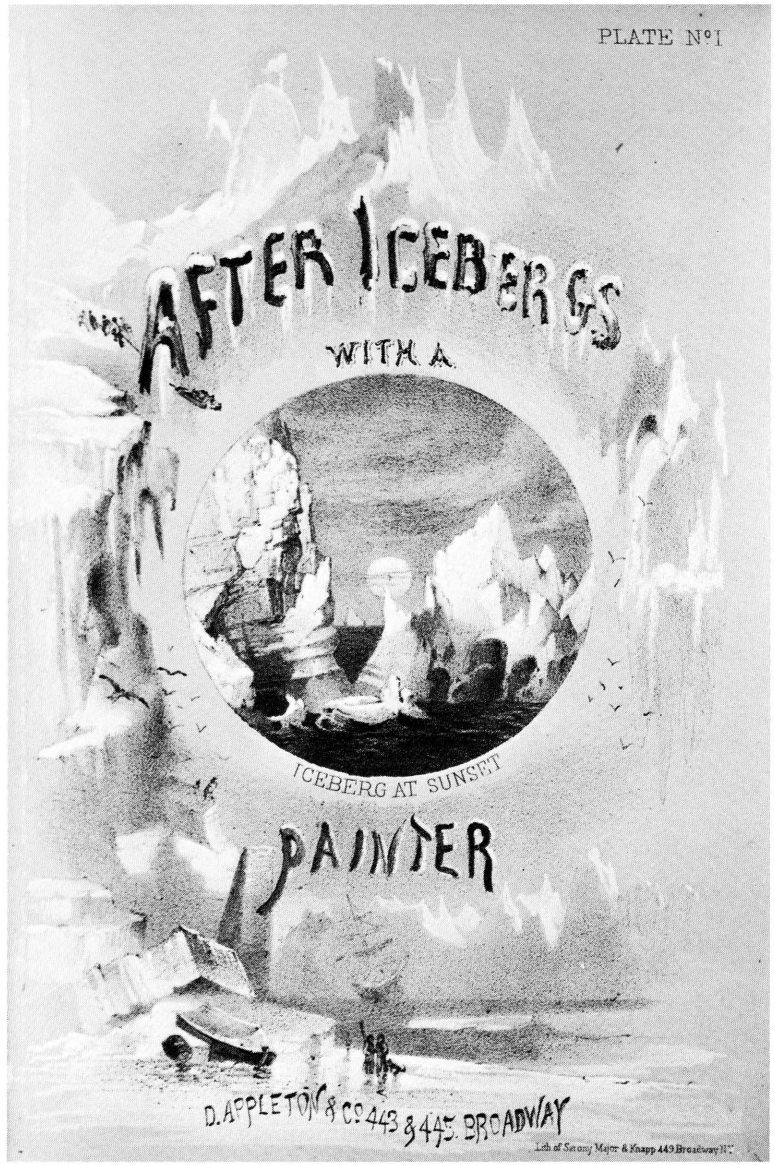
Church made certain all of these uniquenesses would not be overlooked either by his contemporaries or by posterity. As noted before, the Rev. L. L. Noble accompanied the artist to the North Atlantic. The latter's

function in the journey was basically two-fold: to add companionship of a "kindred spirit" nature-lover (Noble went along with Church to Mount Desert, Maine, in 1862), and to record the events for book publication. *After Icebergs with a Painter,* a 336-page volume with six tinted illustrations adapted from Church's sketches, was the charming result. Announced in late 1860, the volume was printed in New York in early 1861, in London later that year, and reissued in New York in 1863. Noble's text provides a full account of the trip and is especially useful for pinpointing particular iceberg sightings, a number of which can be coordinated with extant sketches by Church now in the Cooper-Hewitt Museum. The fact that an entire book was devoted to a Church excursion should be carefully noted: the volume was a contribution, albeit a modest one, to polar literature, publicity for the painting-to-come, and a valuable memoir of an undoubted art masterpiece. The book's appearance in 1861, just as the picture was nearing completion, was more than a coincidence.

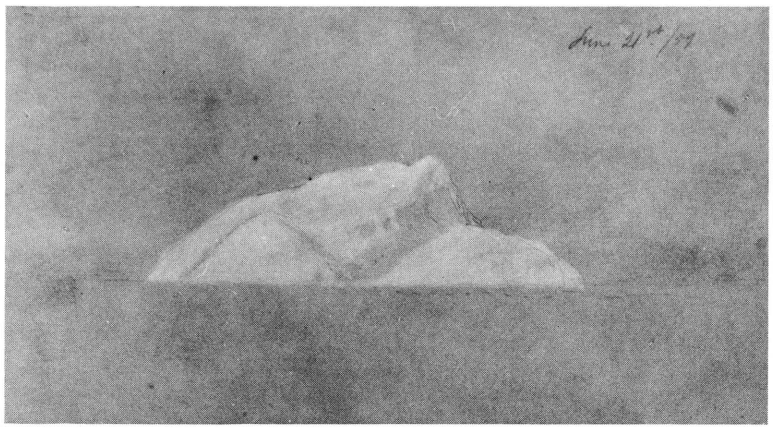
Noble is an attractive writer. He calls attention with easy grace to details of geography, human physiognomy, and human behavior; he sings to himself, quotes poetry and the Bible, converses amiably with the predominantly British local inhabitants, preaches sermons in village churches; and he is convinced that Church, to whom he refers with literary modesty only as "C——," is "one of the immortals." He is happy to serve as historian for the voyage. He describes the main segment of the iceberg-hunt as "perilous," but at the outset he likens the sojourn to a big-game safari. The colorful frontispiece of the book (fig. 19) confirms our suspicions: its fantastical composition is derived from popular press illustrations of *Harper's Monthly* and other magazines, not from serious science or arctic tragedy. Conditions were picturesque rather than truly dangerous. Noble is also, fortunately, a good friend with a strong sense of documentary duty and a sympathetic response to nature. He is not Church, but his prose may be read as a close approximation of the mood and reactions of the artist.

Throughout every stage on the journey there was one recurrent difficulty: even on board the *Great Republic* from Boston — which was bound for Europe, and which carried the naturalist Jean Louis Agassiz (1807-1873) among its passengers — both writer and painter were beset by seasickness. The infirmity at times hampered Church's ability to sketch and Noble's disposition to take notes.

At Halifax, the two men climbed aboard the *Merlin,* a smaller steamship



19
Frontispiece of Louis Legrand Noble, **After Icebergs with a Painter**, New York, 1861.
Tinted Lithograph.



20
FREDERIC EDWIN CHURCH
ICEBERG NEAR CAPE RACE, NEWFOUNDLAND 1859
Pencil on tinted paper heightened with white.
Cooper-Hewitt Museum, the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Design, New York.

which took them to St. John's, Newfoundland, which they had hoped to use as a base for individual iceberg sorties. Near Cape Race on June 21 at dawn, a crewmember's cry of "Icebergs! Icebergs!" signaled the first sighting of their quarry. Church and Noble were on deck in a flash. Before them at a distance were two specimens:

> a large one [iceberg] and a smaller: the latter pitched upon the dark and misty desert of the sea like an Arab's tent; and the larger like a domed mosque in marble of a greenish white. The vaporous atmosphere veiled its sharp outlines, and gave it a softened, dreamy and mysterious character. Distant and dim, it was yet very grand and impressive. Enthroned on the deep in lonely majesty, the dread of mariners, and the wonder of the traveller, it was one of those imperial creations of nature that awaken powerful emotions, and illumine the imagination. Wonderful structure! Fashioned by those fingers that wrought the glittering fabrics of the upper deep, and launched upon those adamantine ways into Arctic seas, how beautiful, how strong and terrible! A glacier slipped into the ocean, and henceforth a wandering cape, a restless headland, a revolving island, to compromise the security of the world's broad highway . . . (*After Icebergs*, p. 28).

Actually the sighting was only a faint prelude to later encounters, but Noble's rapturous words set the tone. Church managed at least one quick sketch before fog suddenly closed the view (fig. 20). The *Merlin* continued to St. John's.

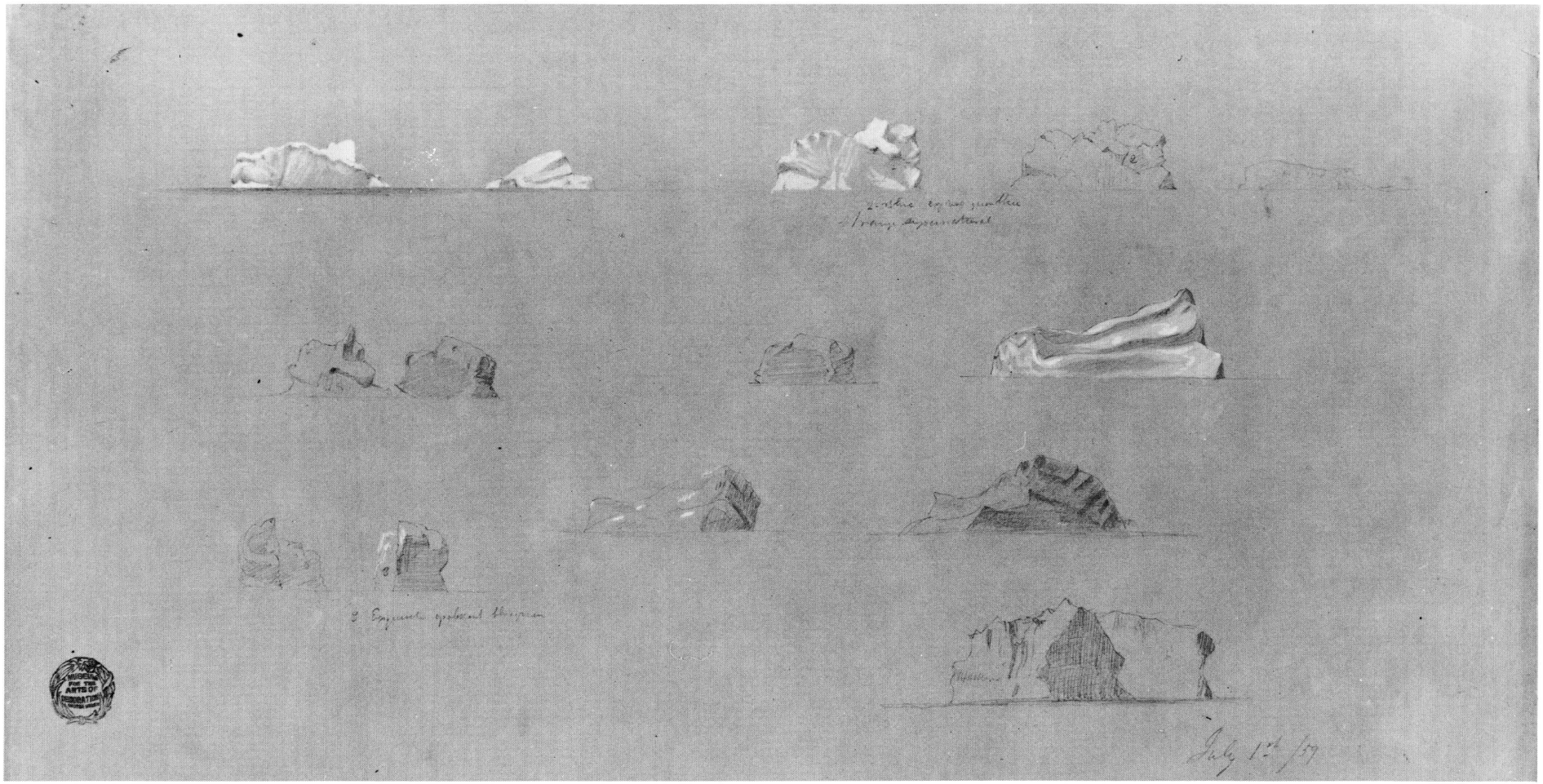
Once they arrived, however, the iceberg sightings were less numerous than anticipated, so Church hired at his own expense the *Integrity*, "a pink-sterned schooner of only sixty-five tons" (in Noble's words). The *Integrity's* mission was to cruise farther into northern waters to the strait of Belle Isle and to Battle Harbor.

The plan worked. Clearing weather at mid-day on July 1 found the ship encircled by thirteen icebergs. Noble and Church were giddy with excitement: "I could bound like a deer, and shout like the wild Indian, for very joy," Noble wrote (p. 83). He was also overcome with reverence:

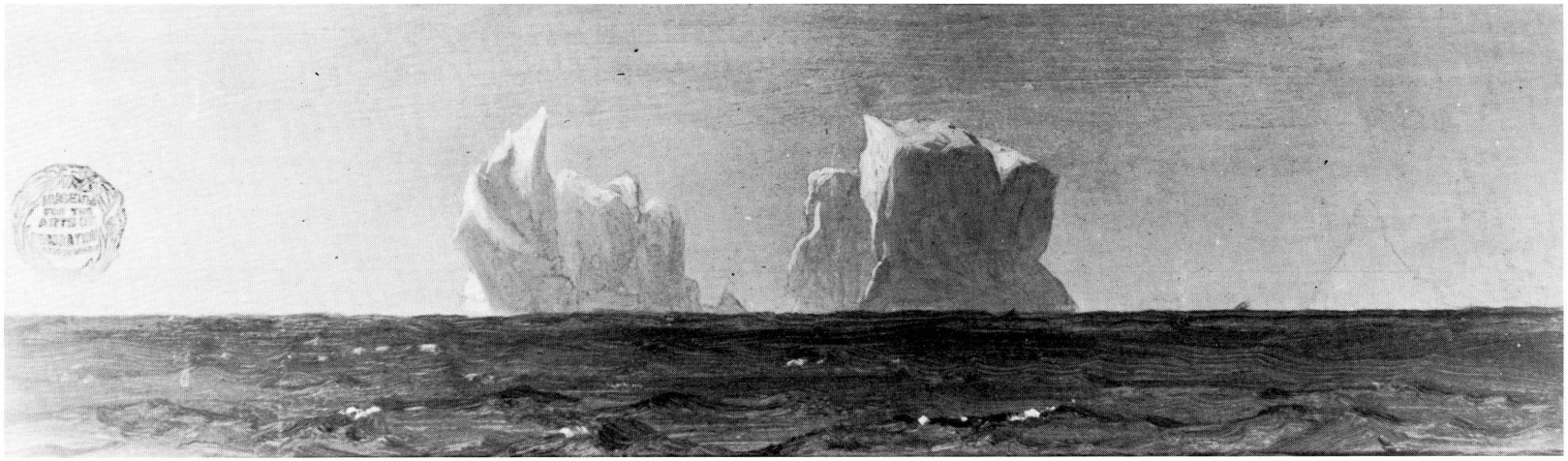
> And how lovely the prospect as we go! That this is all God's own world, which he holdeth in the hollow of his hand, is manifest from the impartial bestowal of beauty. No apple, peach or rose is more within one network of sweet, living grace, than the round world. How wonderful and precious a thing must this beauty be, that it is thus all-pervading, and universal! Here on these bleak and barren shores, so rocky, rough and savage, is a rich and delicate splendor that amazes.

The largest berg absorbed the most attention, but all of them were arresting in their multi-aspects: "in passing around a single one, we see as good as ten, so protean is its character." (p. 84). The largest, which "resembled, at one moment, a cluster of Chinese buildings, then a Gothic cathedral, early style," and then the Coliseum, appeared to split in two as the ship moved farther around. Noble's fancy also was caught by the "numbers of block-like bergs, which, when thrown together by our perpetual change of position, resembled the ruins of a marble city." (p. 85).

Church, meantime, was busy with pencils and brushes. One of his most stunning drawings surveys the prospect on July 1 (fig. 21). It comprises a cluster of smooth and roughened shapes in pencil and pencil heightened with white, including two views of the large iceberg at left, and a remarkable color notation for the blue-green vein of the berg at upper right: "strange, supernatural." The two halves of the largest berg prompted one of the artist's most effective oil studies (fig. 22). Though



21
FREDERIC EDWIN CHURCH
ICEBERGS 1859
Pencil on tinted paper heightened with white.
Cooper-Hewitt Museum, the Smithsonian
Institution's National Museum of Design, New York.



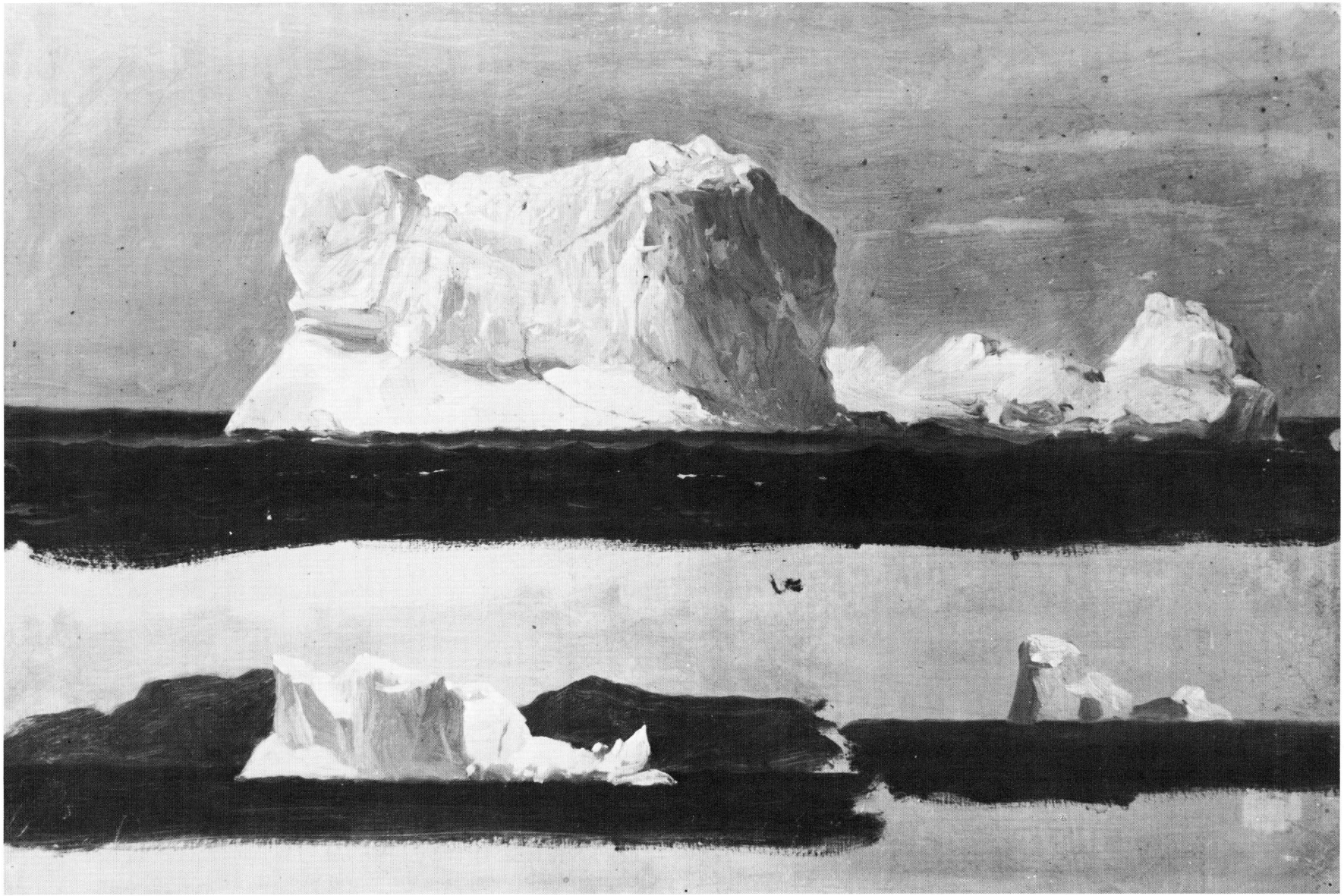
22
FREDERIC EDWIN CHURCH
AN ICEBERG 1859
Oil on paperboard.
Cooper-Hewitt Museum, the Smithsonian
Institution's National Museum of Design, New York.

only some 3¾″ x 11″ in size, the slender oblong format, rapid paint handling, assured lighting, and intense simplicity of craggy amphitheatre shapes lying just over the horizon, combine in an image of supreme wonder.

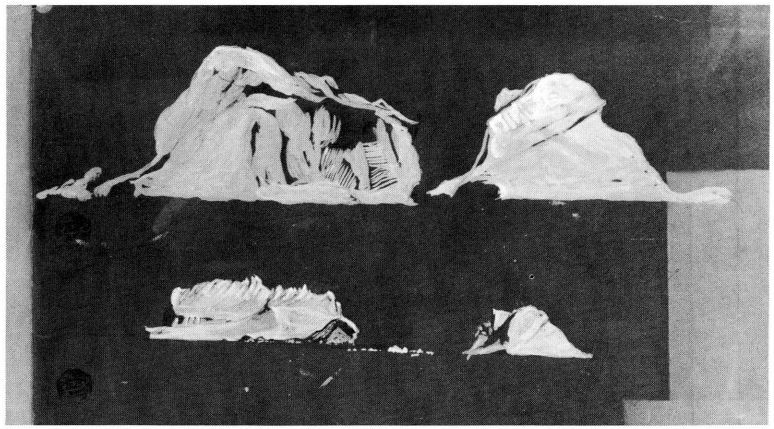
The following days were filled with innumerable sightings. Sometimes Church managed to retain only a few "golden straws" in the face of cold weather, high winds, and strong currents. On other occasions, the relative calm of the moment or protection of an inlet allowed more prolonged contemplation. On July 2 they confronted an iceberg which, even at three and one-half miles' distance, seemed of "enormous size;" on a pencil sketch Church noted its "strange resemblance to a house." Two days later at Twillingate, they stalked a berg stranded in "fifteen fathoms of water," while the sea above and the rocks below beat upon it relentlessly (fig. 23).[21] As the *Integrity* approached cautiously nearer, Noble was entranced by the variety of sounds made by waves breaking against the ice and ice cracking from within, and by the colors:

> In the seams and fissures the shadows are the softest blue of the skies, and as plain and palpable as smoke. It melts at every pore, and streams as if a perpetually overflowing fountain were upon the summit, and flashes and scintillates like one vast brilliant. Prongs and reefs of ice jutting from the body of the berg below, and over which we pass, give the water that emerald clearness so lovely to the eye, and open to view something like the fanciful sea-green caves . . . Its water-line, under which the waves disappear in a lengthy, piazza-like cavern, with explosive sounds, is certainly a remarkable feature. (p. 108).

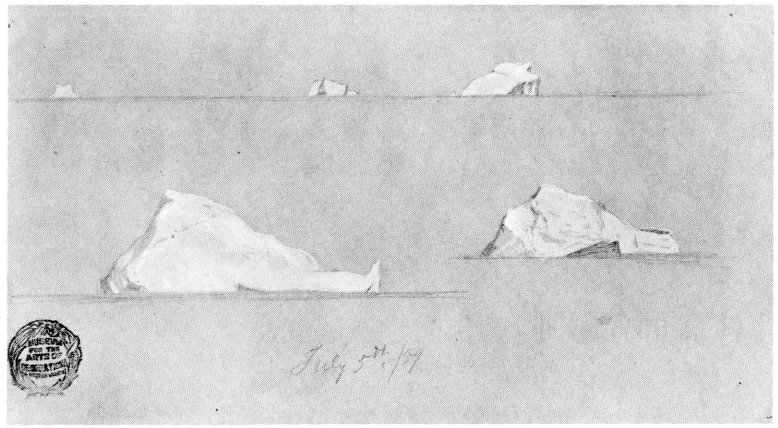
Likewise July 5 was a fruitful day. A panorama of ice-islands dotted the horizon, while closer at hand, an iceberg resembling "a balloon lying on its side in a collapsed condition" caught the two men's attention (fig. 24). That day also produced one of Church's most extraordinary drawings, a mirage of four fanciful white shell-like formations of dashing vivacity set against a dark and now partly discolored background (fig. 25). Noble also referred to a shell-like berg on July 7 (p. 150), and Church included two views of it in a large drawing (fig. 26) and made it the central theme of an oil study (fig. 27). On July 8 they counted "more than forty" icebergs from Battle Island, the most intriguing of which Noble christened "the Alpine Berg" because of its mountain-like peak on one end. To this specimen Church and Noble decided to venture as close



23
FREDERIC EDWIN CHURCH
ICEBERG NEAR TWILLINGATE, NEWFOUNDLAND 1859
Oil on paperboard.
Cooper-Hewitt Museum, the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Design, New York.



24
FREDERIC EDWIN CHURCH
ICEBERGS 1859
Pencil on tinted paper heightened with white.
Cooper-Hewitt Museum, the Smithsonian
Institution's National Museum of Design, New York.



25
FREDERIC EDWIN CHURCH
FOUR ICEBERGS 1859
Pencil on tinted paper heightened with white.
Cooper-Hewitt Museum, the Smithsonian
Institution's National Museum of Design, New York.

as possible in a small sailing skiff which could be converted to a rowboat. At the berg's edge they reached down, "catching a panfull of water, fresh from the great Humboldt glacier, quite likely, and cold and pure it is." (p. 166). Artistically the results were striking: two views in the large drawing just mentioned (fig. 26), a fine large tinted drawing (fig. 28), and arguably Church's most romantic iceberg oil study (fig. 29), inscribed "Midnight — Labrador."

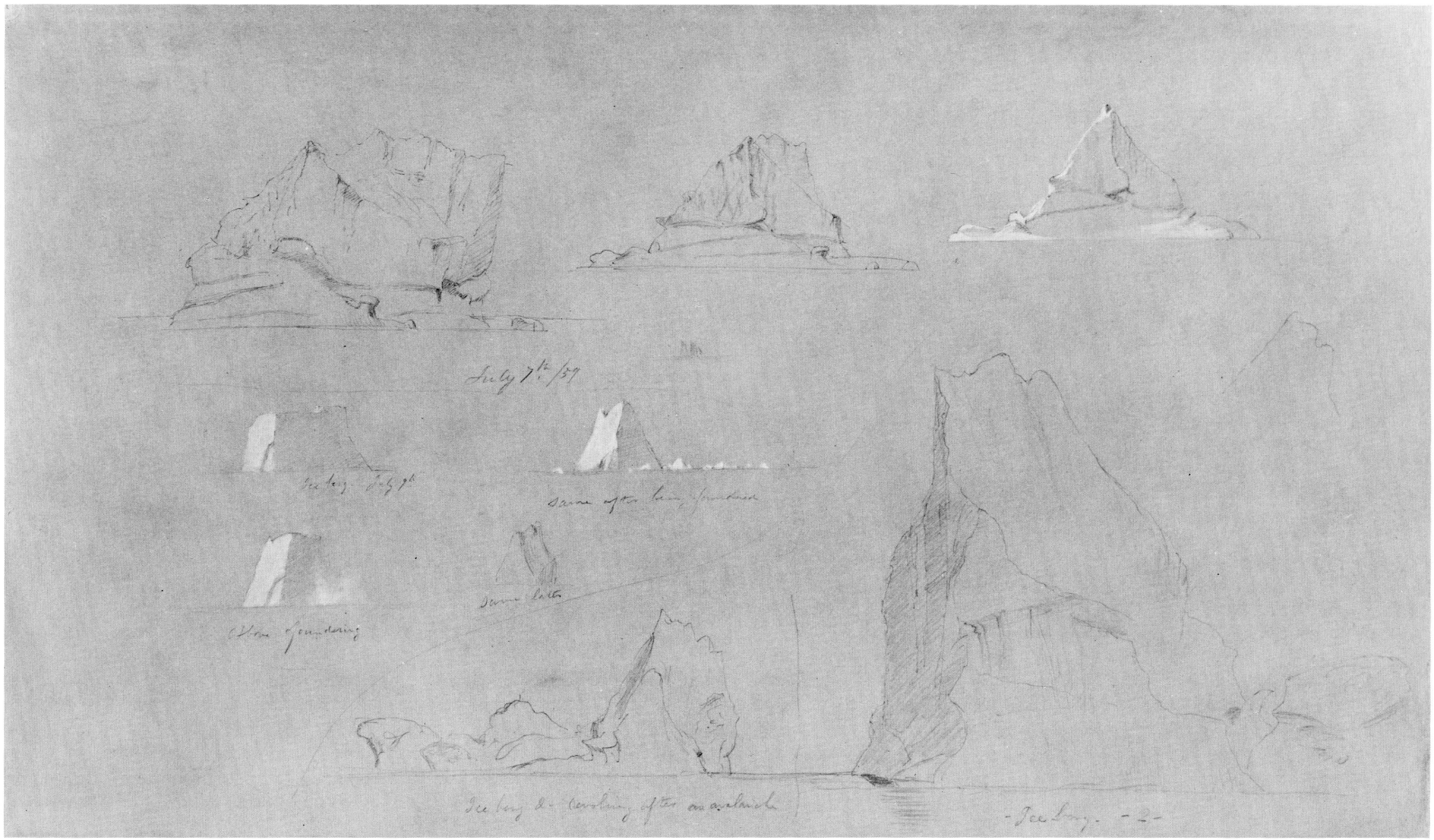
"The Alpine Berg" also proved a memorable object when it suddenly suffered a partial collapse "that shook me through, and struck the very heart" of everyone in the vulnerable party (pp. 173-174). An illustration in the book of "Ice Falling from a Lofty Berg" graphically — and probably with some exaggeration — conveys the drama of the incident (fig. 30). The instability of icebergs was more emphatically demonstrated the next day when the largest example they had seen, a veritable mountain which Noble dubbed "Windsor Castle," abruptly fell into ruins:

> While in the act of sketching, C—— suddenly exclaimed: when, lo! walls and towers were falling asunder, and tumbling at various angles with apparent silence into the ocean, attended with the most prodigious dashing and commotion of water. Enormous sheaves of foam sprung aloft and burst in air; high, green waves, crested with white-caps, rolled away in circles, mingling with leaping shafts and fragments of ice reappearing from the deep in all directions. (p. 186).

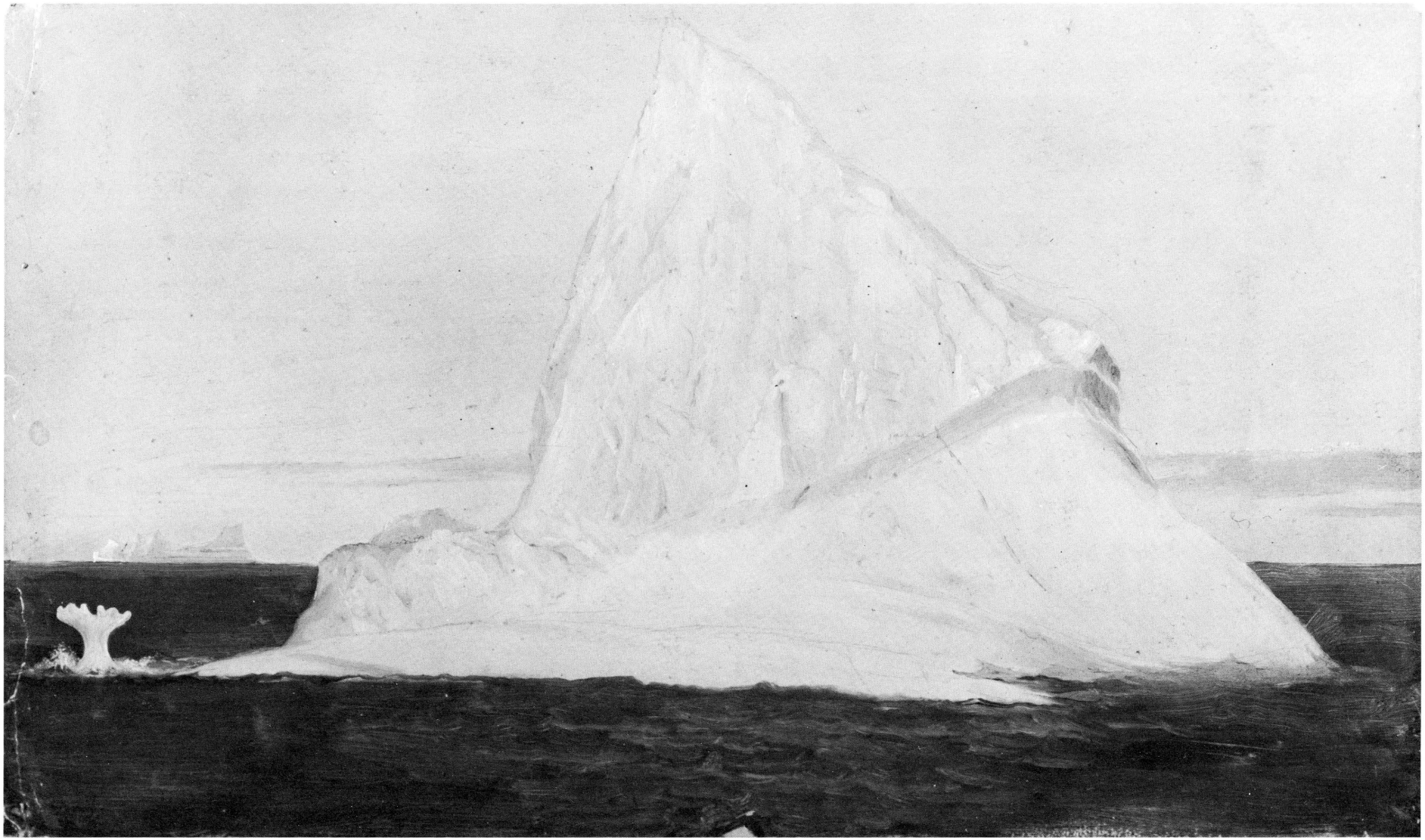
The thunderous sound of the dissolution took nearly a minute to reach them across the five-mile distance. Church portrayed the collapse in a series of images on the aforementioned large drawing (fig. 26).

Noble and Church also noticed other arresting phenomena, such as sapphire "seams" in the ice which, they concluded, were "cracks filled with water, and frozen when the berg was a glacier" (p. 174); pieces of broken ice that "assume many curious shapes, huge antlers of the moose and elk, and sea-fowl, geese and ducks, of gigantic figure" (p. 175); "earth and stones" covering the bergs, which are "an indication of their recent lapse from the land" (p. 269); the deep purple coloring of the sea near a berg (p. 251); and the fact that, "like cumulous clouds, icebergs are perpetually mimicking the human face." (p. 118).

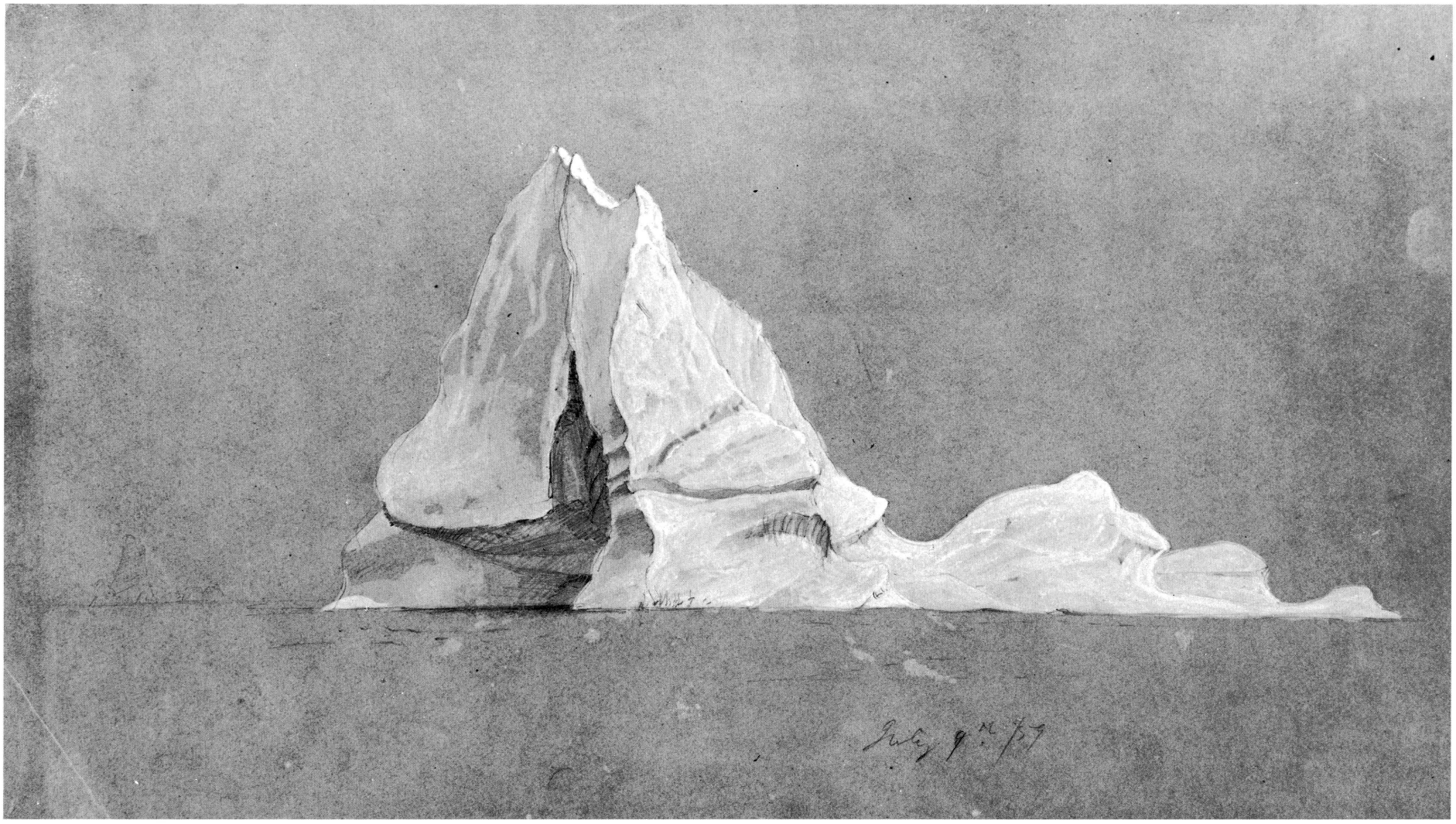
Frequently working with his paintbox on his lap in rolling seas, Church recorded all of this through varied means. At the most informal end of the scale are pocket-size pencil studies on a paper folded in four, so that each surface is hardly larger than a matchbox (fig. 31). Next in ambi-



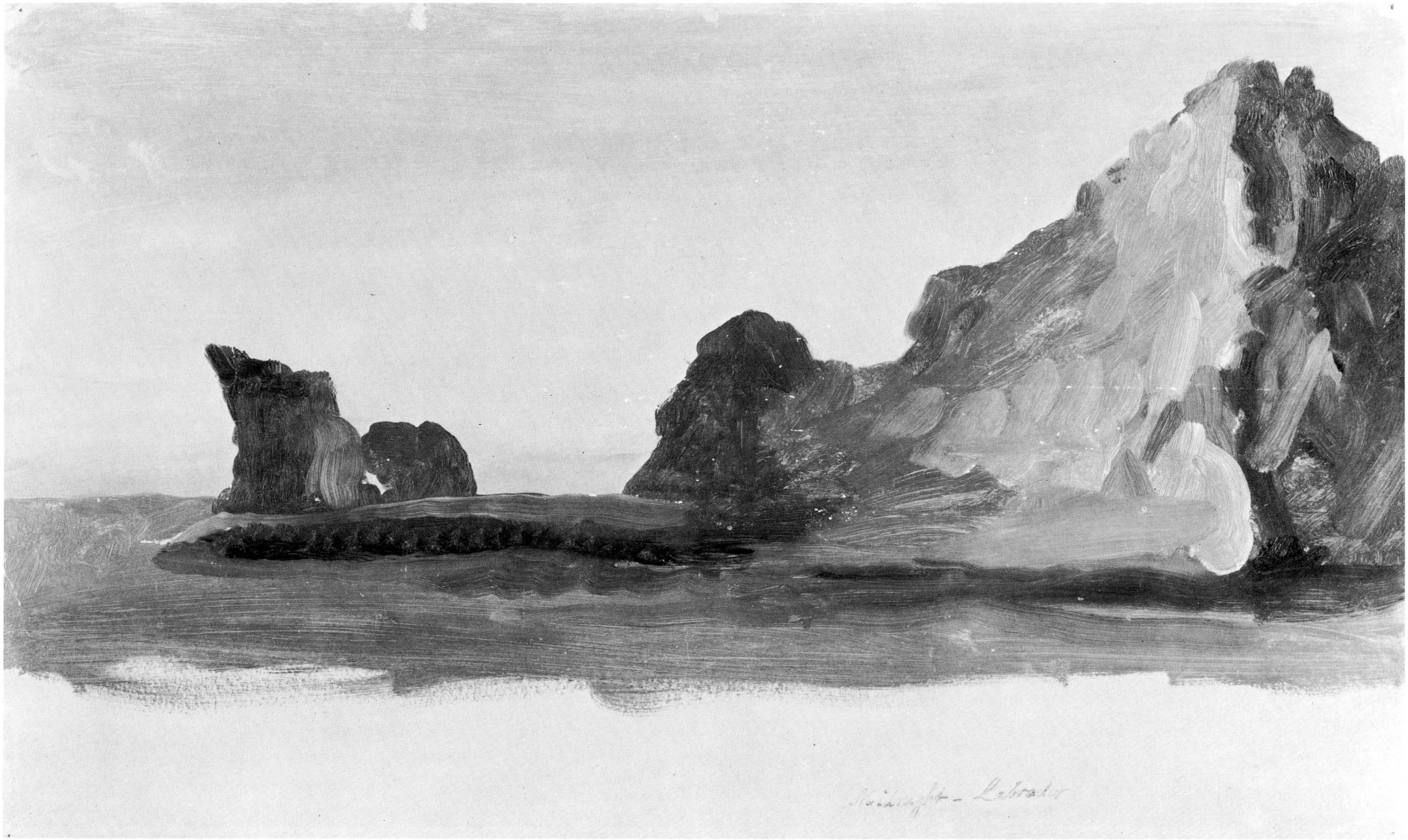
26
FREDERIC EDWIN CHURCH
ICEBERGS 1859
Pencil on tinted paper heightened with white.
Cooper-Hewitt Museum, the Smithsonian
Institution's National Museum of Design, New York.



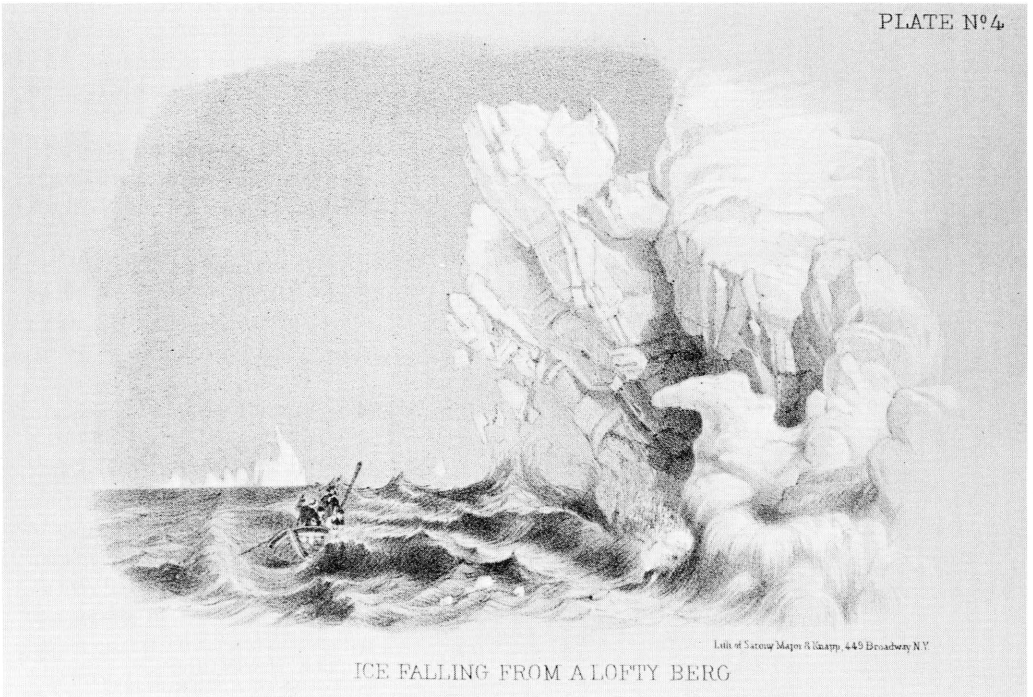
27
FREDERIC EDWIN CHURCH
ICEBERG 1859
Oil on paperboard.
Cooper-Hewitt Museum, the Smithsonian
Institution's National Museum of Design, New York.



28
FREDERIC EDWIN CHURCH
THE ALPINE BERG 1859
Pencil on tinted paper heightened with white.
Cooper-Hewitt Museum, the Smithsonian
Institution's National Museum of Design, New York.



29
FREDERIC EDWIN CHURCH
THE ALPINE BERG 1859
Oil on paperboard.
Cooper-Hewitt Museum, the Smithsonian
Institution's National Museum of Design, New York.

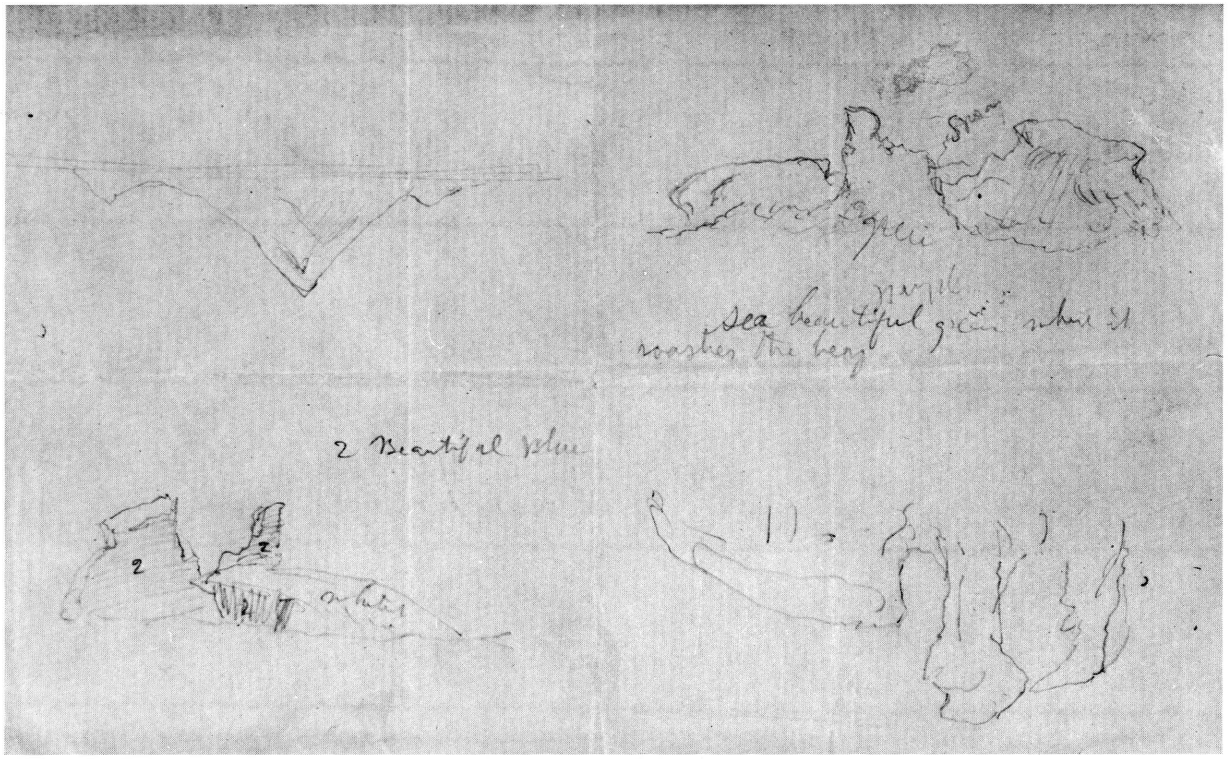


30
After Frederic Edwin Church
ICE FALLING FROM A LOFTY BERG
Tinted lithograph.
From Noble, **After Icebergs with a Painter,**
New York, 1861.

tiousness is a sketchbook of thirty-two leaves (now unbound), each sheet of which measures about 4½″ x 8″ (e.g. figs. 20, 24). Then come larger pencil drawings often, but not always, heightened with white, several of which are filled with renderings of single icebergs (e.g. figs. 21, 26, 28). Finally, Church worked in full colors with oil-on-paper in many sizes and formats (e.g. figs. 22, 23, 27, 29). Frequently he used drawing sheets over a period of days, and some of the oils likewise combine several sightings both as clearly separated studies and as unified presentations. The shell-like iceberg shown in Fig. 27, which originally was seen on July 7, trails an ice "antler" of the kind Noble mentioned on July 8, while the huge background "Great Castle Berg" was witnessed on July 13 and July 14.[22] Thus, some of the oils are studio compositions rather than plein-air products. The eighty-nine sketches of icebergs and Newfoundland scenes now preserved in the Cooper-Hewitt Museum probably represent the majority originally produced by the artist in June-July 1859.

Painter and writer were attentive to everything they saw. The rocky coastline and nearby hills, which reminded Church of barren portions of the Andes, nonetheless bore myriads of small brightly-hued flowers, colored mosses, miniature willows and evergreens, and innumerable tiny sparkling streams of the purest water. Noble more than once was transported to Eden. As for Church, the coastal scenery, sunlit waters, a panoply of boats and boating hardware, picturesque local architecture, birds, one dog and one Eskimo face diverted his pencils and brushes.

But the icebergs held center stage. Nearby or at a distance, washed in cloudy light, brightened by noontime sun or vivified by reddened skies, they understandably became vehicles for imaginative associations of form, natural history and mythology, and for meditations on mortal and spiritual existence. "It is so new and fresh to me, that I feel as if none had ever seen this prospect before," Noble mused; "I am thrilled with emotions, kindred to those of a discoverer, and remember and repeat the rhyme of the Ancient Mariner: 'We were the first that ever burst / Into that silent sea.' " (pp. 94-95). Throughout the book, Noble expressed both reverential awe and uneasy, sometimes tragic sentiments in response to the giant glacial fragments. Once, when reflecting upon the



31
FREDERIC EDWIN CHURCH
SKETCHES OF ICEBERGS 1859
Pencil.
Cooper-Hewitt Museum, the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Design.

enchanting visual effects of icebergs and late evening light, he wrote: "Possessed with the mournful and nearly supernatural beauty, we forget the dangers of this intimacy. There is a strange fascination, and particularly at this hour, that draws like the fabulous music of the Sirens." (p. 213). He exclaimed on another occasion: "After all, how feeble is man in the presence of these arctic wonders!" (p. 113). And he often returned to contemplations of glacial origins in Divine destinies:

> It is wonderful! I never dreamed of it, even while I have been reading of icebergs well described. As I sit and look at this broken work of the Divine fingers, — only a shred broken from the edge of a glacier, vast as it is — I whisper these words of Revelation: "and hath washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." It hangs before us, with the sea and the sky behind it, like some great robe made in heaven. (p. 177).

Throughout the trip the two men's enthusiasm hardly flagged, although it did develop occasional playful overtones. Their two most fanciful outings took place near the end. The first involved an "ugly berg" which Church's drawings show as a weathered fortress encrusted with random pinnacles and towerlets. After moving alongside the berg in a rowboat, they tossed blue flares and rolled a flaming tar-barrel at it, and thoroughly enjoyed the weird illumination effects (pp. 232-235). The second was the result of an invitation: the captain of the *Integrity* asked Church and Noble to help gather ice cakes from a "little mouse of a berg." In an intrepid moment the painter clambered aboard the mini-berg, only to slip and nearly tumble into the chilled surrounding waters. Moments later the rolling ice almost capsized their rowboat (pp. 274-276). Both episodes were spirited salutes to an eventful adventure.

By the time the last icebergs slipped below the horizon on July 20, the travellers' sights were set for home.

NOTES TO CHAPTER II

1 The quotation is from *Harper's Weekly,* 3 April 1858, 211. For a British opinion of Humboldt, see *Morning Post* (London), 5 July 1866.

2 The pioneering article on this subject is Albert Ten Eyck Gardner, "Scientific Sources of the Full-Length Landscape: 1850," *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 4 (October 1945), 59-65.

3 See *The Life Travels and Books of Alexander von Humboldt, with an Introduction by Bayard Taylor* (New York, 1859), p. 228; Henry Tuckerman, "Frederic Edwin Church," *Galaxy* (New York), July 1866, 422; Tuckerman, *Book of the Artists: American Artist Life* (New York, 1867), p. 370.

4 The parallel between Church and Macaulay was made by the artist's contemporaries. See "Our Artists. 1. F. E. Church," *Commercial Advertiser* (New York), 19 March 1861, in which the anonymous author, who signs himself "Proteus," says: "But let us remember that as we have had a writer like Macauley [sic] who can treat history and invest it with all the charms of romance, and yet preserve the truth of more severe and simple statements, so we may have an artist whose paintings have those lesser but 'taking,' qualities appreciable by the most uncultivated, and yet, in addition possess those higher qualities essential to great art, and only to be recognized by an eye well educated to perceive the most subtle excellences of artistic representation." This is, I believe, a succinct and astute analysis of Church at the height of his powers: his art appealed to a broad perspective of Americans, from the general public to the intellectual connoisseur.

5 Cornell Regional Archives, Bayard Taylor Correspondence, Box A-Cr, nos. 1, 2 (copies at Olana), letters from Church to Taylor dated New York, 9 May 1859, and Hartford, 13 June 1859; Olana Archives, letter from Bayard Taylor to Humboldt (in German), dated Rockford, Ill., 16 Mai 1859; letter from Taylor to Church, dated Rockford, Ill., 16 May 1859.

6 Literature on polar exploration is vast. See especially Chauncey C. Loomis, "The Arctic Sublime," in *Nature and the Victorian Imagination*, ed. U. C. Knoepflmacher and G. B. Tennyson (Los Angeles, 1977), pp. 95-112. A good general introduction to the subject also may be found in the same author's *Weird and Tragic Shores: The Story of Charles Francis Hall, Explorer* (New York, 1971).

7 James Cook, *The Explorations of Captain James Cook in the Pacific: As Told by Selections of his own Journals 1768-1779*, ed. A. Grenfell Price (New York, n.d.), pp. 148-149; Bernard Smith, *European Vision and the South Pacific* 1768-1850 (Oxford, 1960), pp. 36-58. On 20 January 1774, Cook observed "two ice islands one of which was very high terminating in a peak or like the Cupala [sic] of S^{t} Pauls Church we judged it to be 200 feet high."

8 John Ross, *A Voyage of Discovery*, 2 vols. (London, 1819), I, p. 23.

9 *Tribune* (New York), 13 August 1860.

10 *Cosmopolitan Art Journal*, September 1857, 147, 151-154. The poem, "The Lover at Sea" (p. 147), was reprinted from the *United States Magazine* (New York), July 1857.

11 Elisha Kent Kane, *Arctic Explorations in the Years 1853, '54, '55*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, 1856), I, p. 37.

12 Ibid., II, pp. 56-57.

13 The artistic relationship between the two men is described at greatest length in the *Times* (London), 28 June 1865; evidently the reviewer's information was derived from a broadside available at the exhibition of Church's *Aurora Borealis, Chimborazo* and *Cotopaxi* at McLean's Gallery, London, June-August 1865. See also William H. Truettner, "The Genesis of Frederic Edwin Church's *Aurora Borealis*," *Art Quarterly* 31 (Autumn, 1968), 267-283.

14 Isaac Hayes, *The Open Polar Sea* (New York, 1867), pp. 21, 25-26, 44-45, 50-51. After describing an iceberg, Hayes wrote (p. 25) that "nothing indeed but the pencil of the artist could depict the wonderful richness of this sparkling fragment of Nature. Church, in his great picture of 'The Icebergs,' has grandly exhibited a scene not unlike that which I would in vain describe." Hayes's earlier book, *An Arctic Boat Journey* (New York, 1860), does not include the evocative topographical descriptions found in the later volume.

15 *New York Times,* 26 November 1858. Other New York journals carried less detailed reports of Rae's lecture.

16 *New York Times,* 18 December 1858. Once again, other New York journals carried less elaborate reports of Hayes's lecture.

17 *New York Times,* 27 March 1857.

18 (Henry Tuckerman), "Fine Arts. A Trio of Pictures. Church's Icebergs," *Evening Post* (New York), 25 April 1861; Tuckerman, *Book of the Artists* (New York, 1867), p. 381. The *Post's* article is unsigned, but its contents and wording are identical to the coverage of the painting in Tuckerman's *Book.* In a signed article, "Frederic Edwin Church," *Galaxy* (New York), July 1866, 428, Tuckerman wrote that "the vivid descriptions of Arctic voyagers, the admirably illustrated journal of Dr. Kane, and the conversation of some of his intelligent companions, enlarged and defined the project [of pursuing icebergs] in the artist's mind."

19 Copley's *Pierson* enjoyed a resurgence of interest at the London World's Fair of 1862. See *Daily News* (London), 22 May 1862; *Parthenon* (London), 7 June 1862, 184.

20 Jesse Poesch, *Titian Ramsay Peale, 1799-1885, and his Journals of the Wilkes Expedition* (Philadelphia, 1961), pp. 140-142; John Durand, *The Life and Times of A. B. Durand* (New York, 1894; reprint ed., Da Capo Press, 1970), p. 165 and illus. opposite p. 164; David Lewall, "Asher Brown Durand: His Art and Art Theory in Relation to his Times," 3 vols. (Ph.D. Dissertation, Princeton, 1966; Ann Arbor, London, University Microfilms, 1972), III, pp. 308-309; Arlene Jacobowitz, *James Hamilton 1819-1878: American Marine Painter* (Brooklyn Museum, 1978), pp. 14-16, 39-41. American arctic painting in general is ably surveyed in Lewis A. Shepard, *American Painters of the Arctic* (Amherst, Mass., Mead Art Gallery; New York, Coe Kerr Gallery, 1975).

21 Another Church study showing the Twillingate iceberg has been reproduced several times. See e.g. Huntington, *Landscapes,* fig. 68.

22 Noble, *After Icebergs,* pp. 204-218, describes this iceberg at length. Several of Church's dated sketches confirm that the background berg in Fig. 27 is "the Great Castle Berg."

32
FREDERIC EDWIN CHURCH
TWILIGHT IN THE WILDERNESS 1860
Cleveland Museum of Art, Purchase, Mr. and Mrs.
William H. Marlatt Fund.

III

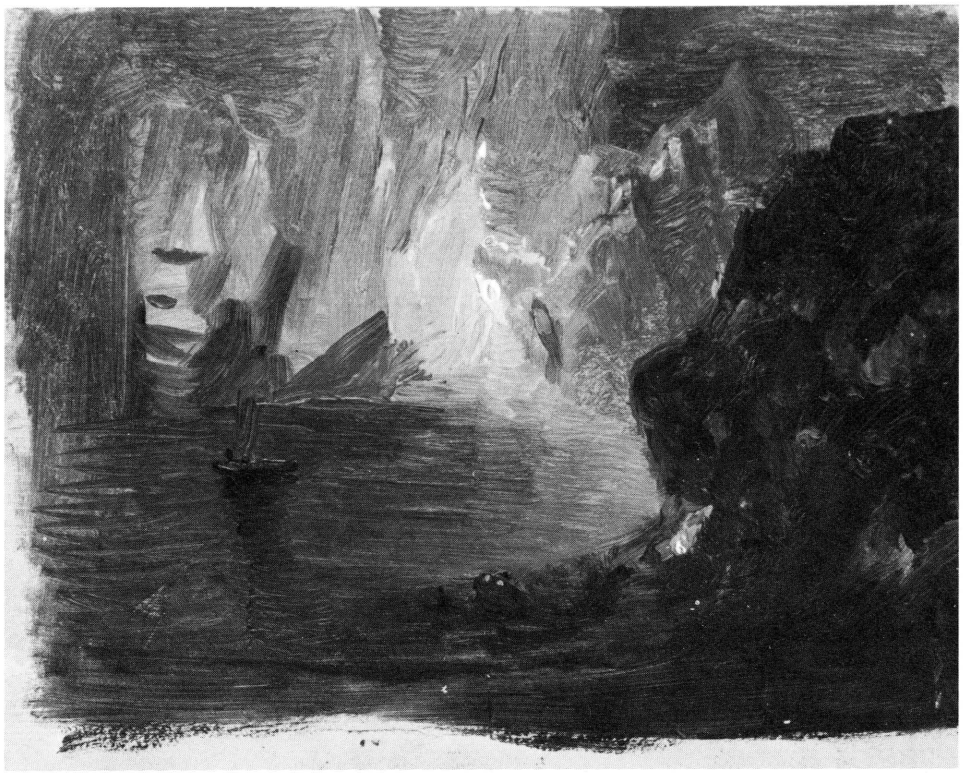
CHURCH AS IMAGE-MAKER

In late 1859 Church stood at the peak of his career. His national reputation never had been higher. His international standing was considerable. His most recent paintings continued to draw crowds, comment, and praise. The two-year-old *Niagara* was attracting visitors for the third year running in New York at Williams, Stevens and Williams, and afterwards in Boston. The newer *Heart of the Andes* was the talk of London for six weeks, and the talk of London in turn became the talk of New York. When it returned from its British triumph, the later work again generated long lines of fashionable carriages outside the Studio Building and large audiences within. The subscription list for the engraving became a who's-who of city society. When *The Heart of the Andes* moved on to Boston in December, Church himself supervised its installation at the Boston Athenaeum. There the picture created, in the words of one newspaper notice, "a perfect furore."[1]

New Yorkers also were well aware of the artist's sojourn to Newfoundland. Several city journals had recorded his departure with "Cole's biographer," the Rev. Noble.[2] Several more published a résumé of his return from the finest and largest iceberg "supply" in years with "over a hundred sketches in color of these Arctic monsters. So," this version of the story went on, "we may in time expect the Heart of the Icebergs, if these cold and glittering piles can be said to have a heart." Another paper predicted that a new picture would be ready "next spring."[3] In December two journals reported that in Newfoundland Church had purchased a German clock of ca. 1640 with an exposed mechanism and proudly had had the device restored to perfect working order.[4] A short time later another noted that Church had not yet unpacked his North Atlantic studies, "and before he attacks his polar subjects, he is gradually loosening his hold upon the tropics by painting a small picture of a South American volcano."[5]

Church's doings, therefore, were a consistent topic of press and public interest at this time. Some of the stories, especially the last-quoted one, hint at his creative methods as well as providing skeletal descriptions of his activities for us and social gossip for his contemporaries. He did not, obviously, take up his icebergs studies right away. He chose instead to let the images simmer, to fall back on more familiar creative territory, and to occupy himself with the more pressing matters of *The Heart of the Andes*.

But he could not wait for long. At that moment the Arctic was a topical, history-in-the-making subject particularly because of the imminent departure of Hayes's expedition. And never before had Church himself been the object of such intense public scrutiny and expectation. One writer who received a "frigid" reception at his studio door in December 1859 assumed that "icebergs" must be within;[6] probably she was unaware that Church had gone to Boston. A month later, the season's first Studio Building Reception prompted another disgruntled writer to remark that Church's quarters were accessible only to the artist's "special friends."[7]



33
FREDERIC EDWIN CHURCH
Study for THE ICEBERGS 1859
Oil on canvas.
Cooper-Hewitt Museum, the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Design, New York.

The criticism was sharpened in March 1860 when Church, alone among Studio Building artists, closed his studio during a Reception and contributed nothing to the general exhibition;[8] but this time, unbeknownst to the critic, the painter may have been saddled with jury duties (see below).

Thus, Church found himself pulled in one direction by public anticipation at the same moment his private interests were diversifying in others. By early 1860 he had purchased a "farm" — the future Olana — near Hudson, N.Y. Surviving letters and bills from this period reveal that he soon was lavishing much effort and large expenditures on the property. He had good reason to do so: in June 1860, he married Isabel Carnes (1836-1899), the young woman whom, it seems, he had met at *The Heart of the Andes*' first New York showing. Domesticity certainly settled Church down.

As for his painting, Church also was moving in several directions at once. The small "volcano" depiction upon which he was working at the end of 1859 may have been an initial trial for *Cotopaxi* (fig. 38), his most dramatic painted essay on geological upheaval, and one of his most Turner-like conceptions. In addition, he took time out from iceberg ruminations to create one of his most famous works, *Twilight in the Wilderness* (fig. 32), which was ready by early June 1860.[9] This painting, though it is smaller than *Niagara, The Heart of the Andes* and *The Icebergs*, was also a Great Picture shown at Goupil's gallery on Broadway. Because it culminated a series of sunrise/sunset compositions which had occupied Church for over a decade, its very subject suggests that he was preparing himself for the arctic depiction by returning to the scene of earlier triumphs. *Twilight in the Wilderness* is also a very Turnerian conception. The painting was partly intended as a pendant to the English master's *The Fighting Temeraire* (1839),[10] and although the exhibition did not take

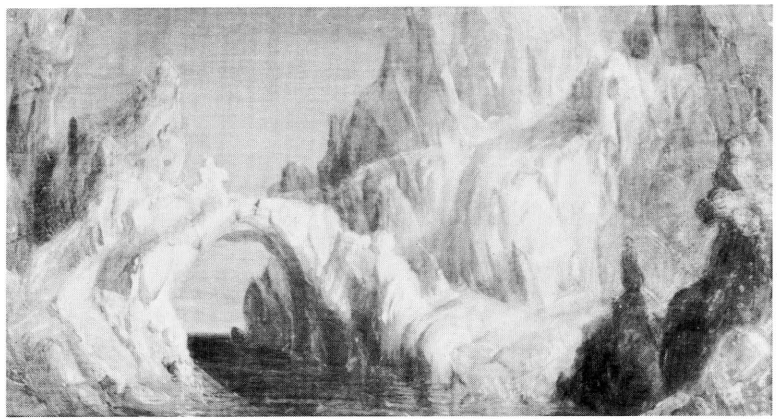
place, it was considered for a London showing.

Throughout these months, icebergs were never artistically far from Church's mind. How did he go about producing the final composition? Several considerations, including references to *Twilight in the Wilderness, Cotopaxi*, and other of Church's near-contemporary creations, will prove useful in sorting out his creative processes.

The first is Tuckerman's tantalizing statement that before the Newfoundland sojourn, the painter "drew, from oral description, the most characteristic forms, and acquired a definite notion of the tints which belong to icebergs, when massed, isolated or in a transitional state."[12] No other written evidence survives for this earliest phase of Church's interest in icebergs, but one tiny extant sketch (fig. 33) and perhaps another, somewhat larger study (fig. 34), may be products of these formative imaginings, as Stebbins has suggested.[13] The imagery of a small boat among spiky multi-colored shoals — another vessel has capsized in the foreground — recalls arctic book illustrations (fig. 14), and also is related to compositions by Martin and Cole, notably the latter's *Manhood* from *The Voyage of Life*. The larger study, which unfortunately was ruined by a restorer in 1965, and now may be studied only in photographs, shows a craggy ice-canyon opening into distance at left through an ice-bridge surmounted by an unmistakable ice-cross. Again, Cole's compositions come to mind, as does the first painting Church sent to Britain, *The Natural Bridge, Virginia*, shown at the Royal Academy in 1852.

The link to Cole makes eminent sense, and provides an important clue to the iconography of *The Icebergs*. It is fair to say that Cole's late imagery permeated the bulk of his pupil's pictorial output and doubtless was fundamental to the younger painter's lifelong attachment to light metaphysics. *The Heart of the Andes*, and before it *The Andes of Ecuador*, are, in effect, Cole-like visions of Eden translated into pure "scientific" landscape. The pilgrim's Cross, an essential symbolic component in both pictures, is an element inherited from the older artist's late work, with which the student Church would have been very familiar, and which he had emulated as a youth. One of *The Heart of the Andes*' reviewers commented on the Crucifix as follows:

> The happy introduction of the Holy Cross, the symbol of our faith, and the figures kneeling, as the vesper chimes float faintly from younder hamlet, are highly suggestive in the blending of the spiritual and material, and by one subtle *coup de grace* place the picture in the highest range of art.[14]

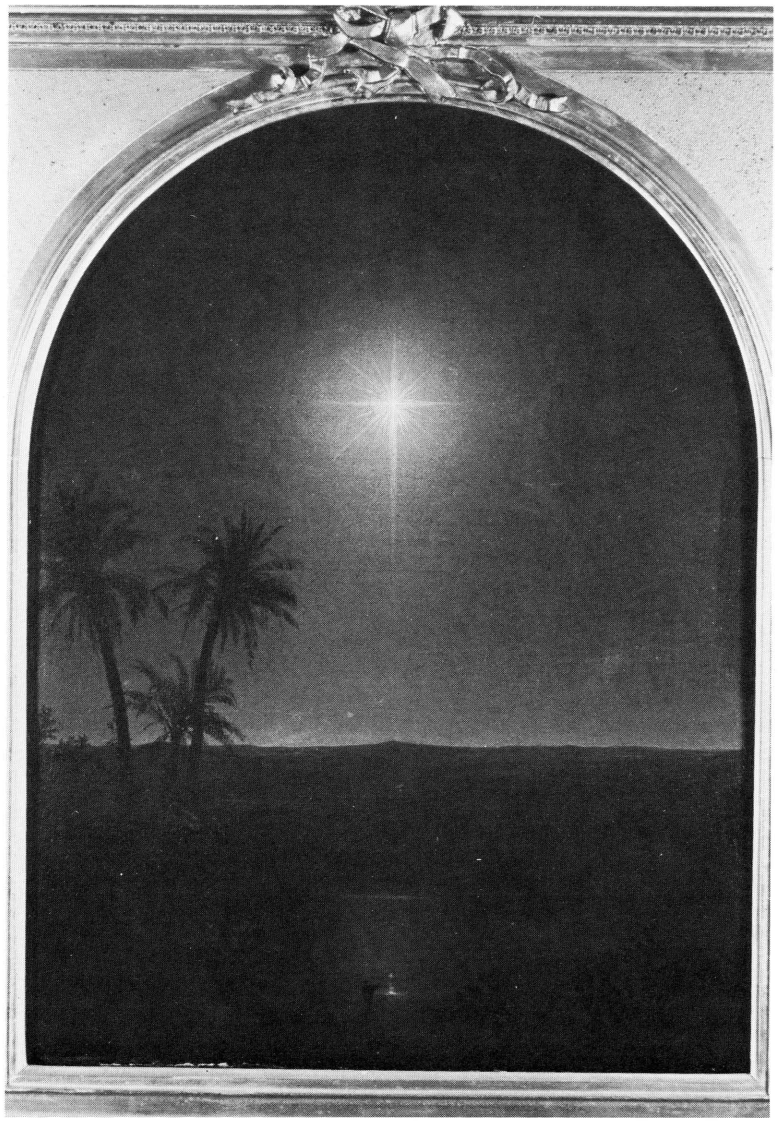


34
FREDERIC EDWIN CHURCH
Study for THE ICEBERGS 1859
Oil on canvas.
Destroyed. Formerly Olana State Historic Site, Hudson, New York.

The Cross is the key to the underlying meaning of the picture, just as is the tiny Crucifix in Hiram Powers' *The Greek Slave*, still a popular work in the 1850s. Unlike in most of Cole's late paintings, in Church's it is accessibly positioned on the earth as a reminder of mortality, faith, and Divine bounty, rather than being placed in the sky as a distant supernatural emblem of salvation. As the reviewer said, in Church's works Nature and spiritual symbolism are united.

The Heart of the Andes and *The Icebergs* share a special conceptual relationship. The two canvases, Church's largest to that date, are nearly the same size. Both are composed in a roughly similar manner, and both are dominated by a cathedral-like natural dome of ice. Through the sharpest possible contrast between lush tropical greenery and bleak uninhabited masses of refractive ice, the two complementary works embrace the ends of the Western Hemisphere.

Twilight in the Wilderness (fig. 32) can be interpreted as a naturalized



35
FREDERIC EDWIN CHURCH
THE STAR IN THE EAST 1861
Oil on canvas.
Olana State Historic Site, Hudson, New York.

Colean vision of Heaven heralded by an angelic chorus of crimson clouds. In the left foreground a small detail underscores this interpretation: the crown of a treestump assumes the shape of a kneeling angel holding a Cross and facing towards the golden light on the horizon. One cannot help but be reminded of *Old Age* from *The Voyage of Life*, and *The Vision of the Cross* from *The Cross and the World*; it is worth noting that both of Cole's series remained popular in the 1850s and 1860s.[15] The spiritual message of *Twilight in the Wilderness* was understood by at least some of Church's contemporaries. As one of them wrote:

> Solitude reigns over the scene, and as the eye ever turns away from the wilderness below to gaze upon the brilliant canopy of the sky, the imagination whispers that he who was once "led up of the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted," must often at the twilight hour have turned his gaze from the gloom and loneliness of the forest to the brightness and beauty of those heavens which to his vision of faith were ever opened, revealing the "Father of Lights."[16]

Another painting completed in time for the National Academy of Design exhibition of 1861, and which was on view concurrently with *The Icebergs*, is closest to Cole of all. *The Star in the East* (fig. 35), a small canvas now at Olana — a fact that suggests Church painted it for himself — focuses upon a bright star of obvious cruciform radiance within a Biblical context of Salvation rather than Sin. The Cross of Light is reflected in still water below. The symbolism was intelligible to Church's audiences.[17]

Cotopaxi (fig. 38), a work completed in 1862 although not exhibited until the following year, has been astutely analyzed by Huntington as a Christian struggle of good and evil between primeval forces of astronomy (the reddened sun) and geology (the volcano). At the right, the sun burns a reflection of the Cross upon the lake.[18] Again, the metaphor would have been comprehended by Cole, and Church's public also alluded to it in passing.[19]

The ties between Church and his late teacher were especially strong in 1859-1860. The Rev. Noble, of course, was an indispensable intermediary between master and pupil; Cole's name is mentioned both in Noble's pamphlet of *The Heart of the Andes* and in *After Icebergs with a Painter.* In January 1860 Church exhibited *The Castle at Chilon*, a canvas begun by Cole and finished by Church, at a New York Studio Building

36
FREDERIC EDWIN CHURCH
Study for AN HOMAGE TO THOMAS COLE
c. 1860-1865
Pencil heightened with white.
Cooper-Hewitt Museum, the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Design, New York.

Reception.[20] By early 1860 Church also had bought property within sight of Cole's home. Then in May, Church was asked to contribute to an "artists'" memorial window (or two windows) in Cole's honor; the windows probably were intended for the parish church at Catskill, N.Y.[21] The wording of the request makes it clear that the idea was not a new one, but it suggests that some of Church's extant trial compositions for a *Memorial to Cole* showing a radiant Cross hovering in the sky are connected with this proposal. Church constructed one version of the vision in a forbidding wintertime — or Arctic — environment (fig. 36). Finally, according to press reports, in early August 1860 Church was preparing to go to Mount Desert, Maine, a favorite former haunt of both Cole and himself, to make "rough water" studies for *The Icebergs*, when he was injured in a fall from a wagon near his farm.[22] Although the accident did not prove as serious as at first had been feared, it was severe enough to confine him to bed for a couple of weeks, and to postpone the Mount Desert trip into September. Church impatiently recovered at Cole's house, under the care of Cole's widow. By that date he was anxious to get underway with *The Icebergs*.

Another source of Church's inspiration was the portentous condition of the skies of North America in 1859-1860. Several major astronomical events attracted much attention at the time. On the night of 27-28

37
FREDERIC EDWIN CHURCH
THE METEOR OF 1860 1862
Oil on canvas.
Private collection.

August 1859, observers as far south as Savannah, Mobile, St. Louis, and Havana, Cuba, were startled by night-long Aurora Borealis so brilliant that they could read outdoors by it at 1 A.M., and fire brigades were misled into false alerts. One New York spectator equated the occurrence with a Bibilical reference from the Book of Job.[23] Three days later another "magnificent" Aurora display took place.[24] Less than three weeks before a very bright meteor accompanied, it was said, by explosion noises and pyrotechnical light scatterings was visible in New York State and Connecticut.[25] More large meteors fell along the east coast in November.[26] Then, on the evening of 20 July 1860, a huge double meteor trailing a sparkling comet-like tail arced west to east above the northern horizon across midwestern and northeastern states in a spectacle reportedly lasting, in some places, as long as two minutes. The illumination was strong enough to cast shadows. A writer for a New York religious journal responded by referring to:

> the most brilliant meteor which men now living remember ever to have seen; whose bursting upon the world just at this time seems to have been designed to teach men, in the moment of their boast of knowledge, how little they know, after all, of God's wide universe, and the "many wonderful works of his hand."[27]

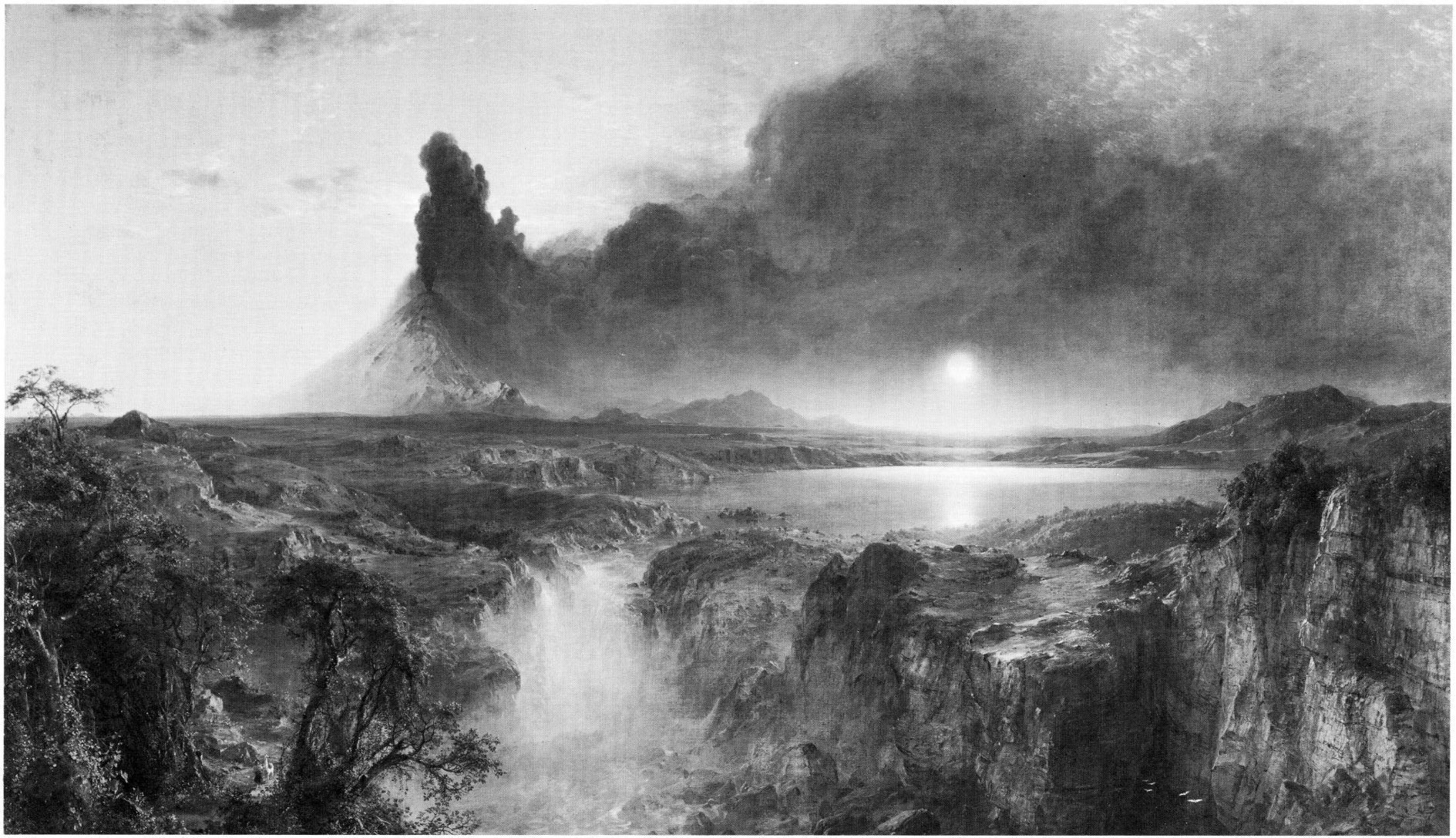
Additional meteors, another Aurora, and the visibility of the planet Venus at mid-day from Chicago to Newburyport, Mass., also caused much public comment in August 1860.[28]

Church instinctively was drawn to such phenomena. Especially in a period of increasing predictions of Civil War, they would have been perceived by his associative mind as amalgams of science and prophecy. They were also ready artistic subjects. Noble mentioned Aurora in Newfoundland, and Church's surviving sketches include views of Aurora at Mount Desert and at or near Olana. In 1865 the Aurora became the theme of the artist's second important arctic painting (fig. 16). Meantime, *The Meteor of 1860*, a small canvas of a double-headed fireball with a tail, was unveiled at a New York Studio Building Reception on 30 January 1862 (fig. 37).[29] In the pond below is a double crucifix reflection. The painting was first shown one and one-half years after the event, an elapsed time similar to that between Church's Newfoundland voyage and the completion of *The Icebergs*.

Judging only by these chronologically surrounding works, *The Icebergs* logically should have combined extraordinary visual effects with distinct overtones of Cole's Christian imagery. This was indeed the case.

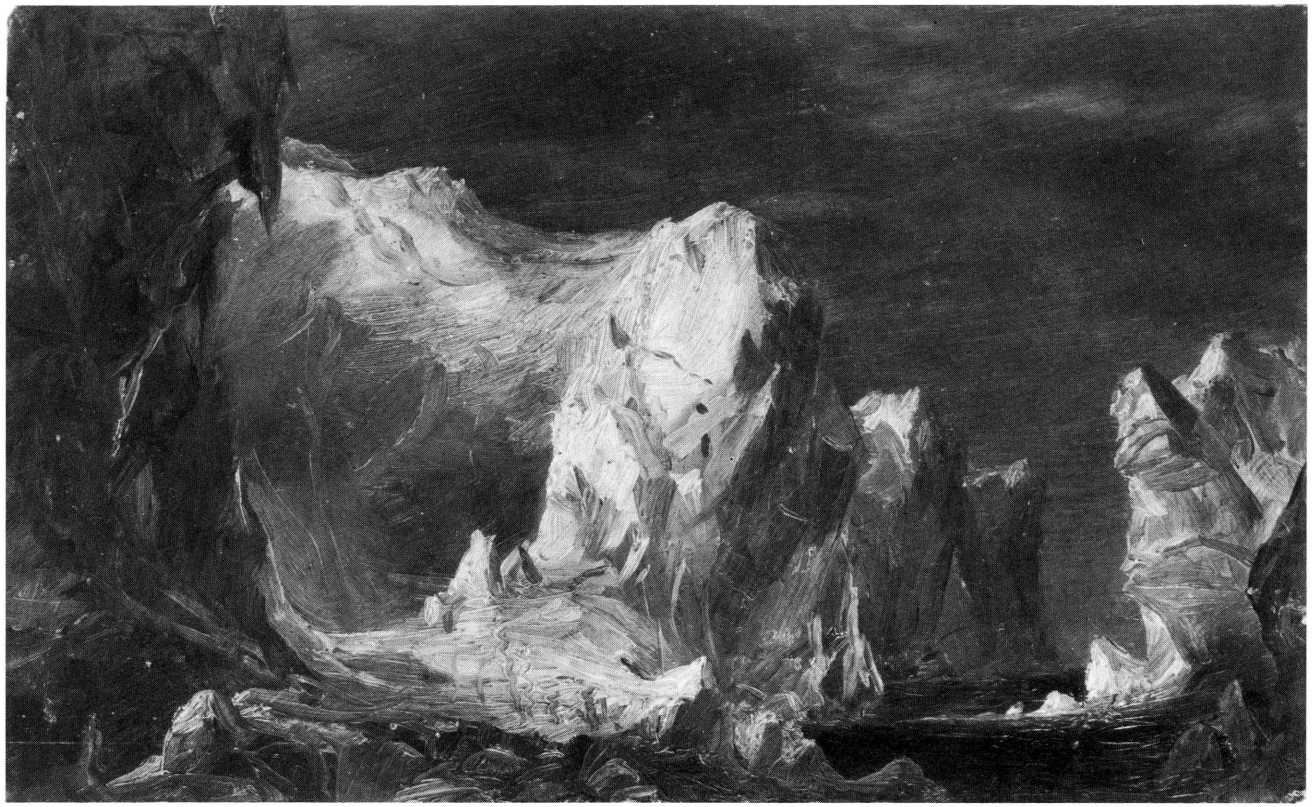
The example of Turner's art was also of primary importance. As noted earlier, the London *Art-Journal's* W. P. Bayley contended in 1859 that Church was Turner's successor. Church knew and appreciated Bayley's views — the two men became transatlantic correspondents over the next several years — and for a few of those years Church appears to have taken Bayley's equation to heart. Between 1860 and 1863 several paintings exhibited marked Turnerian tendencies in vivid coloring, rapid brushwork, and abstracted composition. It is, I believe, possible to delineate Church's evident interests in Martin and Turner, the two most epic English landscape artists of the day. Turner was for Church, as for Ruskin and for us, a man of many talents. *Under Niagara* (fig. 10) was a unique large-scale demonstration of Church's paint virtuosity; the precedent must have been Turner. The vibrant *Cotopaxi* (fig. 38) and *Sunrise off the Maine Coast* (original title, *Coast Scene, Mount Desert*; fig. 39), both first shown in 1863, the former as a Great Picture at Goupil's and the latter at the National Academy of Design, represent, along with *Twilight in the Wilderness* and *The Icebergs*, the apices of Church's conscious emulation of Turner. In addition to Martinesque spectacle, *Cotopaxi* embodies Turnerian breadth, drama and heated coloring apposite to a direct view of the sun. Many of Church's contemporaries recognized the connection when they coupled Turner's name with the painting. *Sunrise off the Maine Coast* is energetic but more abstract, dashing, and overpowering in brightness, all of which prompted criticism from some of Church's reviewers, much as from Turner's from the 1830s onwards. *The Icebergs* reverts to Martin's subterranean settings via Cole, but it is also an essay in suggestive, prismatic crystal mythologies constructed with elusive brushwork and predominant light hue variations. Much as had happened with Turner's later works, some of Church's audiences at first reacted with puzzlement instead of comprehension when *The Icebergs* was unveiled.

A less obvious but compelling parallel to Church's preoccupations in 1859-1861 may be found in contemporary grand opera. Richard Wagner's *Tannhäuser* is an especially interesting case in point: Wagner's hero is a pilgrim-shepherd who visits radically contrasting environments, kneels before an outdoor Crucifix, and becomes entangled for long periods with the goddess Venus in her enchanted grotto. Wagner's landscapes are potent, and their scope self-evidently magnificent. And



38
FREDERIC EDWIN CHURCH
COTOPAXI 1862
Oil on canvas.
Detroit Institute of Arts, Purchase: Robert H. Tannahill Foundation, Gibbs-Williams, Dexter M. Ferry Jr., Merrill, Beatrice W. Rogers, Richard A. Manoogian Funds.

39
FREDERIC EDWIN CHURCH
SUNRISE OFF THE MAINE COAST 1863
Oil on canvas.
Wadsworth Athenaeum, Hartford.



40
FREDERIC EDWIN CHURCH
Study for THE ICEBERGS 1860
Oil on paperboard.
Cooper-Hewitt Museum, the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Design, New York.

although the opera dates from 1845, it received its American premier in New York on 4 April 1859, just as Church was completing *The Heart of the Andes* and planning his icebergs sojourn. As an opera-goer, Church must have been aware of the production, even if he himself did not attend a performance. The revised *Tannhäuser* was first performed in Paris in March 1861, when Church was finishing his own enchanted grotto in *The Icebergs*.[30]

Exactly when Church began preparatory work on *The Icebergs* is not clear. His normal procedure in producing a major picture, as Tuckerman observed in 1866, involved long deliberation, intense concentration, rapid execution, and summers set aside for sketching and reflection. A letter dated 16 March 1860 from Church to Theodore Winthrop refers to just such a plan of action for *The Icebergs*. On that day the artist received a summons for jury duty, and, fearing that the distraction would end his hopes of completing the painting by the following fall, asked Winthrop to intercede with the judicial authorities:

> . . . If I am interrupted now — I shall probably be obliged to give up attempting the Icebergs until next winter which will be a serious damage because I wished to commence it this season and after getting fairly started lay it by for the summer months in order that I might see it with refreshed eyes next season . . .[31]

He also spoke of his father's declining health as an added difficulty.

As it happened, the "serious damage" did occur: the large canvas was not begun until December. It is likely, however, that Church started laying

41
FREDERIC EDWIN CHURCH
Study for THE ICEBERGS 1860
Oil on paperboard mounted on canvas.
Kennedy Galleries, New York.

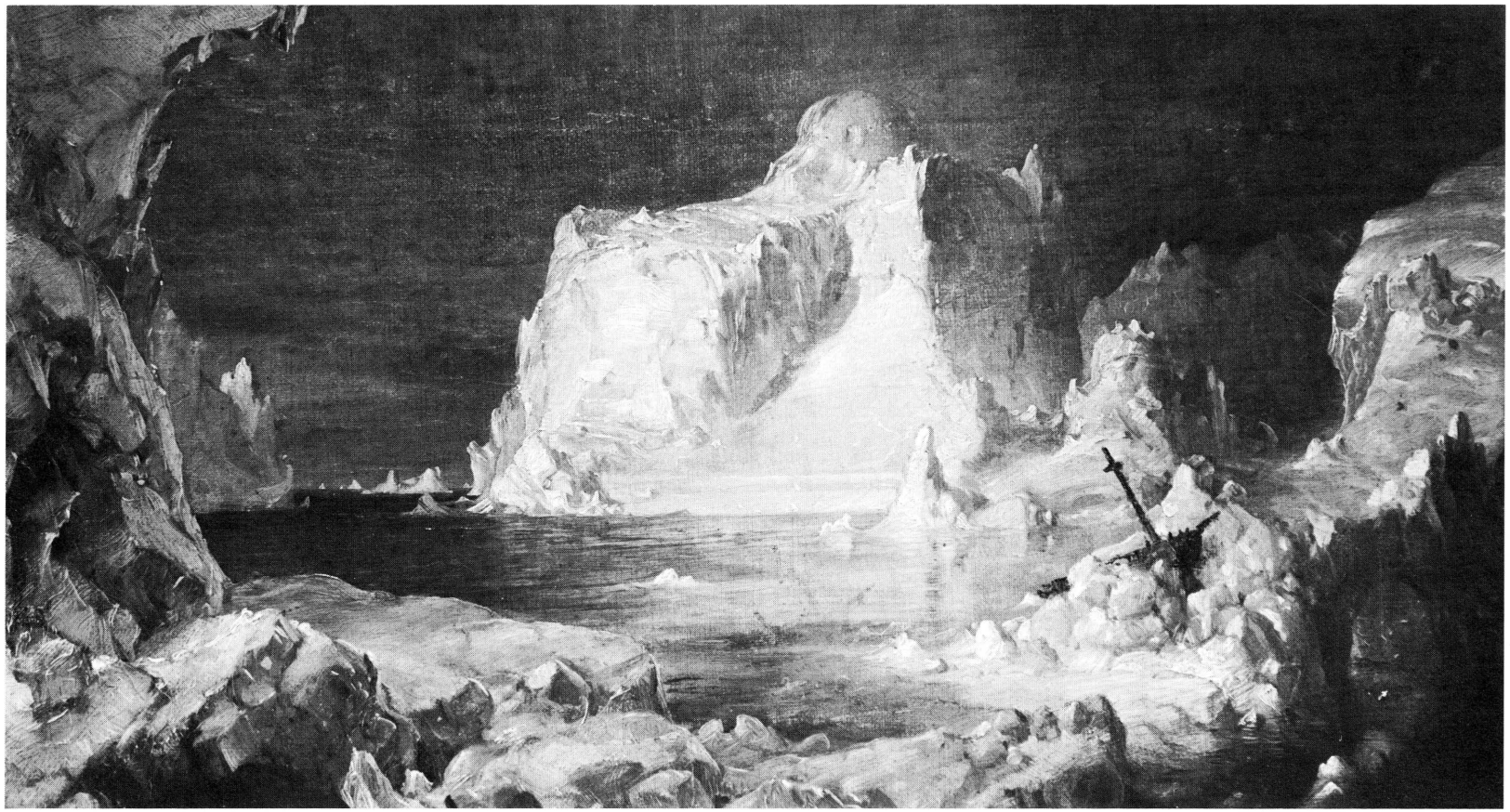
out compositional ideas during the previous spring. Two surviving oil-on-paper studies (figs. 40, 41) probably represent the phase succeeding that of the sketches already mentioned (figs. 33, 34). The smaller, more loosely brushed and fanciful of the two (fig. 40) is again reminiscent of the metamorphosing geology of *Manhood* from *The Voyage of Life*. The other, larger sketch (fig. 41) shows a calmer but still precipitous range of ice escarpments and introduces in the foreground the left-facing wreckage of a small sailing vessel with a cruciform mast. In both scenes, a shadowy, spectral ice cliff occupies the left foreground, while a vista to a roseate horizon extends towards the right. The opening in the larger study is more spacious, and additional orange-hued bergs, which contrast with the prevailing foreground yellows and blue-greens, are visible in the distance.

In all four compositional studies seen thus far, Church relied more on fanciful iceberg depictions by Kane and others and on imagination than upon observed reality. Even the sketch shown in Fig. 41, with its blocky ice-mountains that, by comparison, appear moderately adduced from on-the-spot analysis, is a confection, a hallucinatory ice-scape in which a focus on a single iceberg is lacking.

Church seems to have recognized the inadequacy. The next two studies (figs. 42, 43), which presumably date from weeks later, represent a significant reorganization of the composition. In the pencil and chalk drawing (fig. 42) at Olana, clearly the earlier of the two, the foreground and left side are temporarily omitted while the artist concentrates on a central domed berg seen across a bay of calm water, and flanked at right by an ice-cave or grotto, floating pinnacled flotsam, and piled ice-peaks.

42
FREDERIC EDWIN CHURCH
Study for THE ICEBERGS 1860
Pencil on tinted paper heightened with white.
Olana State Historic Site, Hudson, New York.

Above a serrated flank, the near slope of the main berg drops easily to the water's edge, but not before passing through two strange spiky larger and smaller appendages. Below, a chunk of detached ice and two small stalagmites constitute the berg's prow. In the distance, which now opens to the left instead of the right, loom additional ice-peaks. Two floating ice fragments just left of the grotto mouth distinctly resemble bathing nymphs; perhaps Church remembered Turner's *Ulysses Deriding Polyphemus* (1829), a work which remained famous throughout the Victorian period. Once more, the overall appearance is fantastical rather than realistic, as it is in the similarly constructed central vignette of an "Iceberg at Sunset" on the title-page of *After Icebergs with a Painter* (fig. 19).



43
FREDERIC EDWIN CHURCH
Study for THE ICEBERGS 1860
Oil on canvas.
Mr. and Mrs. B. Standard Aldridge, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan.

With the oil-on-canvas sketch (fig. 43), Church was nearing the final solution. This more finished picture, which until its sale at auction in January 1980 was in the possession of a Church family descendent,[32] is the same size as the major oil study (dated 1858), still at Olana, for *The Heart of the Andes*.

Refinement of all components continues. Church has portrayed a broad cove or harbor of ice in which many formations, effects and associations vie for attention. The reintroduced foreground has been smoothed and extended to provide, as it were, a (slippery) ledge for the spectator to stand and survey the wonders arrayed before him. The emphasis given to water in both studies doubtless reflects Church's trip to Mount Desert in

September 1860.[33] The repoussoir ice-cliff is reinserted at left, but here it is given a curving profile with a flinty overhang and has been extended into space by an ice-hemicycle guarding entry into the bay with a brightly lighted peak. The wreck, which also makes a reappearance, now rests on the edge of a mint-jelly green ice grotto at right, and faces right rather than left. With age and cleaning the canvas now shows an alternative, half-submerged wreckage in the bay which Church had painted out. The central iceberg is further isolated and defined. A larger opening at its right revealing darkened, receding ice-peaks, partly counters the vista to distant orangey bergs at left, and effectively broadens the composition, as do the lower summits and generally more parallel planar positioning of all elements at the right. The ice-mountains to the left of the main berg have been removed. The berg itself is proportionately taller and has acquired a higher dome, a much-improved rounded front, a choppy low prow, and a more vertical spreading smooth central slope to the water suggesting a recent ice-avalanche. The right edge of the slope helps direct the eye towards the entire right side of the composition. The colors, too, are more lavishly orchestrated than in earlier studies, but again the reddish tints of late afternoon predominate. The general effect is still fanciful. One cannot avoid noticing the weird profile face in the cliff at right, the pulsating animal-like aspect of the central dome, the crucifix mast of the wreck, and the combination of enchantment at the mouth of the grotto and tragedy atop it.

Throughout the compositional development, Church was proceeding intuitively, as the reversals of direction, substantive shifts of emphasis and character of the formations, and fading in and out of spiritual-tragic connotations amply attest. Tuckerman, who was very well informed about the picture, referred to this process when he wrote that *The Icebergs* "was a hazardous experiment" bereft of forms, colors, variety, "living beauty" (i.e. plants and animals), and such items as a "picturesque crucifix to make attractive the central space" usually constituent in landscapes. "Ice-water-sky — these elements alone, to most painters, would afford little scope for general effect, however much they may be rendered of special significance," he continued. Other witnesses, including John McClure, also mentioned the artist's "difficulties" with the work.[34] The task was indeed formidable: to create a cosmos of ice. Almost in self-defense, Church clung to mountainous and coastal configurations and heightened the anthropomorphism. Nonetheless, he told John McClure that he was "cheery" about the result as the painting neared completion.[35]

The work's title proved to be a problem as well. Contemporary sources refer (accurately or not) to several alternatives — "The Icebergs at Noon-Day," "The Icebergs," "View in the Arctic Region," and "Crown of the Arctic Regions" — in the six months before the picture's unveiling.[36] At the last minute, the outbreak of Civil War induced a two-part title, "'The North' — Church's Picture of Icebergs," as a patriotic espousal of the Union cause. In London the reference to "The North" was dropped, and the painting was shown simply as "The Icebergs."

Throughout 1860 pressures were building upon Church to begin the "long-expected" work. Early July saw Hayes's embarkation for the presumed Open Polar Sea. A month later Lady Franklin herself arrived in New York as Grinnell's guest on the first stop of an American and Canadian visit lasting several months.[37] Probably Church's indisposition prevented his meeting the valiant heroine, but Tuckerman noted that her presence was one more "inspiration" for *The Icebergs*. Meanwhile, Régis Gignoux (1816-1882), an early competitor of Church's, exhibited a painting of "some huge icebergs on the banks of Newfoundland" at an Artists' Reception held at Dodworth's Academy in Manhattan on 1 March 1860.[38] A short time later Jasper Cropsey's (1823-1900) *Autumn on the Hudson*, a large American scene composed and initially shown at the artist's London studio, was well received in the British capital. Cropsey's success, which imitated Church's British exhibitions of *Niagara* and *The Heart of the Andes*, was accorded extensive coverage by American journals.[39] In late December rumors of the largest payment ever received by a living painter reached America from London. Frith was the fortunate artist, and the picture — which turned out to be *The Railway Station* (fig. 7) — did not yet exist: it had just been commissioned with an organized press ballyhoo by the London dealer Louis Flatow for a reported $50,000.[40] A concurrent New York press story stated that Holman Hunt's *The Finding of Our Saviour in the Temple*, the year's most sensational Great Picture in London, would shortly be sent to the United States. Hunt's painting reportedly had been sold for $26,000, but its exhibition had been so successful that the owner (the dealer Ernest Gambart) already had recouped his investment.[41] Small wonder, then, that John McClure advised Church on 4 February 1861 to "try and hit the London season this time, according to accounts from the other side it will be a stirring one for art."[42] Since McClure was shepherding *The Heart of the Andes* through the concluding stages of a two-year, eight-city tour, Church was left to make exhibition arrangements with Goupil's for *The Icebergs*.

On 22 December 1860, the *New York Times* announced that Church, "having made a name, is crowded with work and annoyed by visitors. . . and is chalking on a large piece, picturing the icebergs, in which he intends spreading both himself and paint to an extent most gratifying to know." On Christmas Day the New York *Tribune* offered more details:

> Mr. Church has at last commenced upon his undertaking of painting an iceberg, studies for which he made two years ago [sic] in Newfoundland. The canvas is the same size as that of the Heart of the Andes. The sole object in the picture will be a vast and solitary iceberg, a mountain of glittering ice, with domes, and fantastical pinacles [sic] rising out of the ocean.

Over the next four months, Church allowed few people to see him at work on the canvas, but sporadic reports of his progress filtered into the press and private conversation.[43] The three longest printed accounts surely were authored by the artist's friends. The New York *Morning Express* of 26 February 1861 twice carefully alluded to Church's "difficulties" and promised a picture in which "many of the ordinary rules of painting are reversed:"

> It is . . . evident even now, that Mr. Church will conquer all technical difficulties; while the magnificence of his imagination has never before been so manifest as in the great masses of ice so strangely grouped, in the wild solitude, the immense distance, and the bleak grandeur, he has already put upon the canvass [sic]. In this work, he rises to the rank of a creator.

The *New York Times's* editorial praise of 29 March 1861 — by which date the canvas essentially must have been complete — was an arranged "scoop" for the paper.[44] The writer remarked on Church's love of extreme climatic contrasts, the poetic attractions of "ice and snow views" (dating verbally from the Book of Job and visually from paintings by Joos de Momper), the allied sentiments of *The Ancient Mariner*, and the "intense solitude in the clear frozen North — nature in her utter loneliness:"

> To the right rise masses of ice — blue islands in a blue sea; amid them a turquoise arch over a sapphire current, — but all is ice and the fearful silence of intensest cold. It is not the burning sulphur blue which the sea wears in the warm Mediterranean, and sends up in mad light like the chemical fires of a theatre into the *Grottona Azzura* of Capri. It is another light and another life here; but always real and always beautiful.

Four days before the exhibition opened at Goupil's newly extended gallery on Broadway on 24 April 1861, *Harper's Weekly* published a richly descriptive preview probably penned by Theodore Winthrop.[45] "There it is, at last," he wrote, palpably breathless with enthusiasm, "the picture we have all known was waiting for us: the new work of the year, which is as surely and sternly required of a famous painter as of a successful novelist . . . It is as bold a picture as ever was painted, for there is nothing before you but air, light, and water."

By that date, however, the bombardment of Fort Sumpter had opened a new chapter in American history. *The Icebergs*, like most everything else, was swept into the maelstrom.

NOTES TO CHAPTER III

1 *Leader* (New York), 22 October, 5 November, 31 December 1859; *Tribune* (New York), 23 December 1859.

2 *Tribune* (New York), 25 June 1859; *Morning Express* (New York), 27 June 1859; *Home Journal* (New York), 2 July 1859.

3 *Evening Post* (New York), 5 August 1859; *Commercial Advertiser* (New York), *Daily Evening Transcript* (Boston), *Daily News* (New York), *Tribune* (New York), all 6 August 1859; *Morning Express* (New York), 8 August 1859; *Cosmopolitan Art Journal*, September 1859, 182. Our two quotations are from, respectively, the *Post* and *Tribune*.

4 *Morning Courier and New York Enquirer*, and *Evening Post* (New York), both 17 December 1859. The clock is not now at Olana.

5 *Tribune* (New York), 23 December 1859. The "Volcano" picture, mentioned without additional description in other journal reports, was shown at the Studio Building Reception of 19 January 1860; see *Crayon*, February 1860, 57.

6 *Leader* (New York), 31 December 1859.

7 *Tribune* (New York), 20 January 1860.

8 Ibid., 27 March 1860. The writer believed that Church kept his studio closed because "a large picture" — presumably *Twilight in the Wilderness* — was incomplete on the artist's easel. A similar criticism was made in the same paper two years later (1 February 1862) in response to another Studio Building Reception.

9 The painting was shown at Goupil's between 8 June and 25 July 1860. It had been already purchased by William T. Walters of Baltimore before the exhibition began.

10 H.B.H., "A Visit to the Studios of Some American Artists," *Art-Journal* (London), 1 December 1865, 362.

11 Olana Archives, letter from John McClure to Church, dated Baltimore, 26 April 1860.

12 See chapter II, note 18.

13 Theodore E. Stebbins, Jr., *Close Observation: Selected Oil Sketches by Frederic E. Church* (Washington, D.C., Smithsonian Institution, 1978), p. 31. For the smaller sketch (fig. 33), a derivation from the playful flare-lit iceberg outing of July 1859 is not impossible.

14 Blanche d'Artois, "World of Art. 'The Heart of the Andes,'" *Leader* (New York), 28 May 1859.

15 Engravings by James Smillie of *The Voyage of Life* prompted favorable reviews in the *Albion* (New York), 26 January 1856, 45, and *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* (New York), December 1856, 130-131; the original paintings were shown at the Derby Gallery on Broadway in March 1863; see *Evening Post* (New York), 14 March 1863. Cole's *Cross and the World* series was included in the National Academy of Design winter exhibition of 1867-1868.

16 "Art Matters in Baltimore," *Daily Evening Transcript* (Boston), 4 March 1861. The writer saw the painting in the Walters' collection.

17 *Commercial Advertiser* (New York), 5 April 1861; *New York Times*, 21 April 1861.

18 Huntington, *Landscapes*, p. 15.

19 I have not seen a review of the painting in which the Cross is specifically mentioned. For allusions to "the Almighty's Sunlight" and "Heaven's fair light" in the picture, see *New York Times*, 17 March 1863; *Albion* (New York), 21 March 1863, 141.

20 *Evening Post* (New York), and *Tribune* (New York), both 20 January 1860.

21 Olana Archives, letter from M. R. Cooke to Church, dated (Catskill) 22 May 1860. Already in 1848 Church had painted *To the Memory of Cole*, a large canvas recently rediscovered, showing a flower-bedecked foreground Cross and a billowy mountain-and-cloud landscape behind. The central white cloud bears a striking resemblance to the major berg of *The Icebergs*. I would like to thank J. Gray Sweeney for bringing the 1848 work to my attention. Presumably the "Visions of the Cross" compositions would be more suitable for translation into a painted-glass medium than the 1848 picture.

22 *World* (New York), 16 July 1860; *Morning Express* (New York) 15 August, 13, 21 September 1860; *Evening Post* (New York), 17 August 1860; *Tribune* (New York), 15 September 1860; *Cosmopolitan Art Journal*, September 1860, 126. In a letter to A. C. Goodman dated Catskill, 20 August (1860?), Church writes that "I am getting well very rapidly can do almost anything now." Another letter from George Bethune to Church, dated 18 August 1860, is addressed to the artist at Cole's house. Both of these documents are in the Olana Archives. The *New York Times* reported as late as 12 October 1860 that Church was being "kept prisoner. . .by a most untoward and untimely accident."

23 The Aurora was widely reported. See especially *Tribune* (New York), 30, 31 August, 3, 14 September 1859; *Leader* (New York), 1 October 1859.

24 *Tribune* (New York), 3 September 1859.

25 Ibid., 16, 22, 30 August 1859.

26 Ibid., 16, 18, 19, 21, 24 November 1859.

27 *Independent* (New York), 26 July 1860. See also *Tribune* (New York), 21, 23, 31 July 1860; *Evening Post* (New York) 27, 31 July 1860; *Morning Express* (New York), 23, 24, 25 July 1860.

28 *Morning Express* (New York), 6, 9, 17, 22, 31 August, 10 September 1860.

29 *Evening Post* (New York), and *Tribune* (New York), both 1 February 1862. The *Post's* writer accurately observed that "it seems to us the meteor is moving in the wrong direction."

30 See especially *Evening Post* (New York), 7 April 1859; *Daily Evening Transcript* (Boston), 10 April 1861.

31 New York Public Library, Ford Collection, letter from Church to Winthrop, dated New York, 16 March 1860; as quoted in Huntington, "Frederic Edwin Church, 1826-1900," pp. 128-129.

32 The painting was sold at Stalker and Boos, Birmingham, Michigan, on 19 January 1980, for $225,000.

33 A few of Church's pencil sketches at the Cooper-Hewitt Museum can be securely dated to this trip. The studies concentrate on rolling water surfaces some distance from shore, rather than on waves breaking along the coast.

34 Olana Archives, letter from John McClure to Church, dated Chicago, 4 February 1861; *Commercial Advertiser* (New York), 21 January 1861; *Morning Express* (New York), 26 February 1861.

35 Olana Archives, letter from John McClure to Church, dated St. Louis, 1 March 1861. The word "cheery" is McClure's.

36 *Morning Express* (New York), 13 September 1860, 26 February 1861; *New York Times*, 29 March 1861; *Home Journal* (New York), 27 April 1861. The title "Crown of the Arctic Regions" would have been a gloss on George Loring Brown's *Crown of New England*, a large painting completed in early 1861. The *Tribune* (New York), 9 June 1860, had complimented Church for his recent poetic titles of "The Heart of the Andes" and "Twilight in the Wilderness."

37 *Evening Post* (New York), 11 August 1860; *Tribune* (New York), 13 August 1860; Francis J. Woodward, *Portrait of Jane, a Life of Lady Franklin* (London, 1951), p. 305f.

38 *Tribune* (New York), 2 March 1860; *Crayon* (New York), April 1860, 115.

39 Peter Bermingham, *Jasper F. Cropsey, 1823-1900: A Retrospective View of America's Painter of Autumn* (College Park, Maryland, University of Maryland, 1968), pp. 26-27; and David S. Talbot, *Jasper Cropsey 1823-1900* (Washington, D.C., National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution, 1970), pp. 33-34, 86-87, discuss the London success of the painting. See also e.g. *Tribune* (New York), 12 May 1860; *Crayon*, May 1860, 142; June 1860, 170; *World* (New York), 26 June 1860; *Littell's Living Age* (Boston), 7 July 1860, 60. The painting is now in the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

40 *Morning Express* (New York), and *Tribune* (New York), both 29 December 1860. See also *Tribune*, 16 February 1861; *Evening Post* (New York), 4 April 1861; *Leader* (New York), 6 April 1861. Compositional studies for the picture already had been completed when Flatow stepped in with his commission. The history of the work is discussed in Frith's *Autobiography and Reminiscences*, seventh ed. (London, 1889), pp. 220-225; Jeremy Maas, *Gambart: Prince of the Victorian Art World* (London, 1975), pp. 135-137; Aubrey Noakes, *William Frith: Extraordinary Victorian Painter* (London, 1978), pp. 71-75.

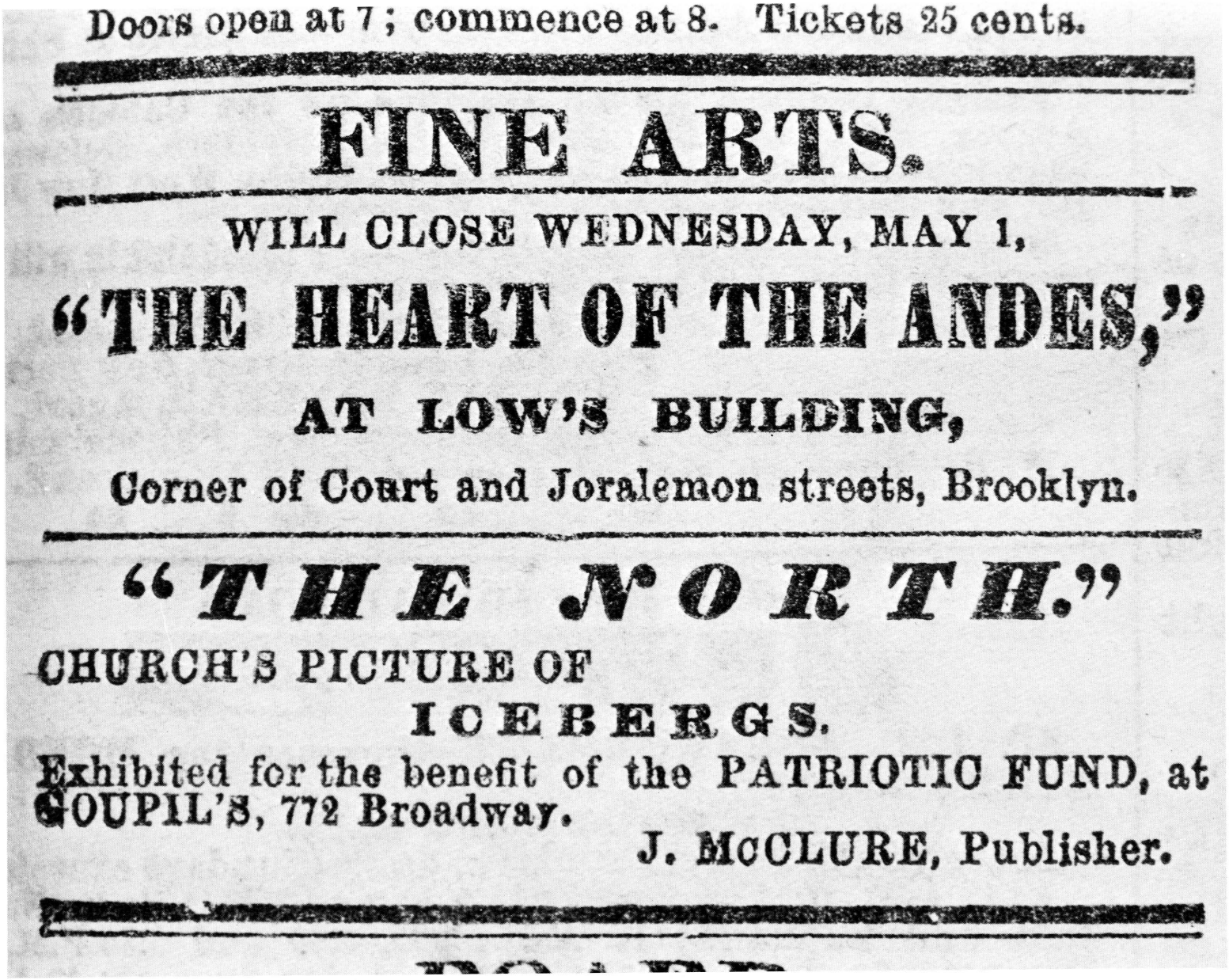
41 *Evening Post* (New York), 29 December 1860. The picture did not come to the United States. Gambart's role in the work's history is discussed by Maas, *Gambart*, pp. 114-122, 126-127. The painting is now in the City Museum and Art Gallery, Birmingham, England.

42 Olana Archives, letter from John McClure to Church, dated Chicago, 4 February 1861. In another letter to Church, dated St. Louis, 1 March 1861, McClure wrote that if Church went ahead with exhibition plans for *The Icebergs* with Knoedler's (i.e. Goupil's), "I trust it will be of such a nature as not to interfere with any arrangement between yourself and me which may be deemed necessary to make."

43 Olana Archives, letter from John McClure to Church, dated Chicago, 19 February 1861, in which McClure wrote that Bayard Taylor's wife spoke enthusiastically about the work; *The Diary of George Templeton Strong*, ed. Alvin Nevins, 4 vols. (New York, 1952), III, p. 110, as quoted in Huntington, "Frederic Edwin Church, 1826-1900," p. 129; and Major H. Byng Hall, "Art in America," *St. James's Magazine* (London), September 1863, 240. Hall wrote that "for hours I watched his pencil working on the canvas, and all who look on this picture must alike admit the interest of the subject and the talent of the artist." In another letter to Church, dated St. Louis, 1 March 1861 (Olana Archives), McClure wrote that "you do well to let as few as possible see it [*The Icebergs*]."

44 The newspaper had been well-disposed towards Church since late 1859, and had printed a glowing editorial on *Twilight in the Wilderness* on 7 June 1860.

45 "The Lounger. Church's New Picture," *Harper's Weekly* (New York), 20 April 1861, 242-243. Winthrop's authorship of the article is suggested by Bernard Heinz, "'Lost Painting' May Bring Record Bids," *New Haven* [Conn.] *Register*, 21 October 1979. I would like to thank Mr. Heinz for calling his attribution to my attention.



44
Advertisement for the New York showings of THE ICEBERGS and THE HEART OF THE ANDES. From **Morning Express**, New York, 29 April 1861. (photo: author)

None need be told that Church is great — that he is national. Has he not given us his "Niagara" and his "Heart of the Andes," and is he not treating us this summer with his refrigerating "Iceberg?" How those dazzling mountains of ice freeze into the very soul, awing us with the mystic revelations of another sphere!

(New York Knickerbocker, *July 1861, p. 50)*

Upon ordinary occasions a new picture by Mr. CHURCH would be for a time an object of central attention to the cultivated community of New York. At present the war excitement absorbs every other, and the picture of the "Icebergs" has been placed on view at GOUPIL'S without attracting special attention. Last year the announcement of such a work would have packed the gallery from morning till night for weeks; now so intense and eager is the interest concentrated upon the capital, the movements of forces, and the pageantry wherein the town has draped itself, that we doubt if any considerable number of our citizens are aware of its exhibition . . .

(New York World, *29 April 1861)*

IV

THE ICEBERGS COMPLETED

During the last ten weeks of spring, 1861, New York was alive with patriotic ardor. Every public building, most private residences, and many church spires and altars were draped with the red, white and blue, while ranks of individuals rich and poor, young and old alike sported the Union cockade. Songs and poems were composed about the flag. Volunteer soldiers, would-be soldiers, and well-wishers filled the streets. Businesses of all kinds subscribed money and efforts to the Northern cause. Religious services and prayers were dedicated to the nation's preservation.

But other patterns of life, especially cultural ones, fell on hard times. Book publishers, newspapers, theatres and the visual arts were hit by material shortages and audience neglect. Writers, performers and artists enlisted in the military. And everyone with an eye for transatlantic affairs wondered "what will England do?" now that America was split in two. Many expected that John Bull's appetite for cotton would compel him to intervene on behalf of the Confederacy. London commentators, especially those in the *Times,* were heavily criticized for their apparently distorted views of the war. As a result of these and other factors, much anti-British feeling arose in the Union.

The very foundations of Church's success had therefore been severely shaken by the time "'The North' — Church's Picture of Icebergs" went on view at Goupil's on 24 April 1861. But at least he was a loyal Unionist. The cumbersome title was one demonstration of his sympathies. In a further gesture, soon followed by fellow artists, he publicly allocated all exhibition fees to the Patriotic Fund, a newly created charity — modeled on a British Crimean War foundation — to support soldiers' dependents. Within three weeks he also had contributed his mite to Northern flag-adulation with a rapidly sketched small sunset composition called *Our Banner in The Sky* (fig. 45). Although at first criticized as an exercise in artistic license, it proved immediately popular as a chromolithograph. Church sold the work for $200, and the copyright to Knoedler/Goupil for another $200. By August 1861 the publisher already had netted $1500 on the venture.[1]

As for *The Icebergs,* it was not so overshadowed by other events as the *World's* writer believed. *The Heart of the Andes* provided friendly rivalry at Low's Building in Brooklyn until May 1, Church's oil study for the "main iceberg" of the large painting could be seen at the New York studio of the sculptor Launt Thompson (1833-1894),[2] and paintings by other artists were showing in Manhattan. The preview notices for *The Icebergs,* favorable reviews of *After Icebergs with a Painter,*[3] and newspaper advertising signed by John McClure (fig. 44), had prepared the way. For 25¢ viewers could confront a 5½′ x 9½′ Arctic scene surrounded by a dark frame.

Probably Church himself (perhaps with Noble's assistance) authored a

45
FREDERIC EDWIN CHURCH
OUR BANNER IN THE SKY 1861
Oil on paper mounted on paper.
Private Collection.

printed explanation of the picture available for gallery attendees.[4] As with *Niagara* and *The Heart of the Andes,* the spectator was encouraged to witness the reality itself. Under headings of "The Form of an Iceberg," "Motion of an Iceberg," "Surface of an Iceberg," Colors of an Iceberg," "The Sea," "The Sky," and "Expression of the Scene," Church outlined the major features of the composition. He began by noting that the "amphitheatre" of ice was a single iceberg discharged from a giant Greenland glacier and subsequently subjected to weathering. The huge berg displayed, he said, the "manifold forms" of these glacial fragments — that is, its features were derived from a variety of specimens.

Much of the description parallels Noble's observations. The foreground, including the "bridge and bowlder" at the right, is wet after having recently risen from the depths; the waterlines on the main berg are additional evidence of these movements. The sea in the center is dark, in contrast to the brightness of the surrounding ice. The escarpment at left is "fresh and sharp" from new fractures, while that at right is worn by prolonged exposure. The blue veining stitched into the ice at left is water frozen in glacial cracks. The emerald greens at right are characteristic "where the sea comes in contact with ice." The "pale-blue water" atop the foreground ice is fresh water produced by melting. The fog at right, "a feature of icebergs, is sweeping the heights in front, and reddening in the late afternoon sun."

There is no mention in the description of arctic exploration, no allusion to Church's own journey, and no reference to religion. But the words are chosen carefully both for their precision and their evocative effect. We are told that because the colors of an iceberg are almost entirely confined to "an opaque, dead white," the "brilliant hour" of late afternoon was selected for the depiction, when "lights and shadows, hues and tints, shower the scene, and are thrown in all ways, and multiplied by reflection." The concluding paragraph on "Expression of the Scene" at once vivifies and calms the viewer's impressions:

> All things favoring, an iceberg, in itself alone, is a miracle of beauty and grandeur. A fine, quiet afternoon at sea affords all the requisites. Hence the picture presents the beholder with ice only, reposing, under the brightness of the declining sun, in the calm, solitary ocean, — grandeur with repose. The flight of the mist is noiseless. The swells come gently rolling in, in glassy circles, breaking with low murmur on the icy foreground.

The broadside does not, however, disclose all of the scene's interesting elements. Additional features noteworthy from the standpoint of geology are the modest ice-fall from the prow of the central berg, and the tiny spray waterfall at upper left which drops into the emerald crevasse below. Icebergs, Church tells us in these undemonstrative events, are inherently unstable, and their primordial depths are green, in complete contrast to the red volcanic core of earth. The description also only hints at the visual subtleties of the ice masses lurking beneath the water surface at right. Furthermore, although Church omits any comment on the associative powers of his imagery, we nonetheless may perceive intentional skull-like features in the foreground ice-blocks nearest the crevasse, distended facial aspects at the upper left, vague humanoid profiles still present at the right, and especially a floating ice-"siren" (to use Noble's word) who has reappeared at the grotto mouth at far right; all of these elements send metaphorical chills up the viewer's spine. The central berg, with its shrouded dome and pinnacles, assumes a cathedral-like majesty. Like many man-made cathedrals, this natural analog, therefore, stands in a cemetery. Icebergs, Church seems to be saying, are at once hellish and heavenly. The constantly flickering colors, and the vigorous handling of paint, impart much vibrancy to the conception. The bergs on the distant horizon, we are encouraged to believe, are as intriguing as the one immediately around us.

We can see, as Church's public generally could not, that the final composition has been both further simplified and elaborated from the preparatory studies. Most of the floating ice has been eliminated, but many details of structure — including the boulder and its remnants — and lighting have been added. Technical examination of the finished painting shows that Church at first included an extension of the cove at left (as in the final compositional sketch, fig. 43), but then replaced it with a wider horizon and three distant icebergs. The grotto has benefitted from increased parallel planarity, although the water level within does not precisely match that outside. Most noteworthily of all, the painting shown in New York and Boston included, in the words of a New York journalist:

> . . . no trace whatever of human association, not a living creature of any description, no ship, no boat, not even the semblance of a wreck, no connecting link of any sort between themselves and the canvas. One brown boulder of rock, lodged on the ice, alone hints that the great floating glacier was once in contact with earth. There is, so to speak, a complete

abnegation of extrinsic interest.[5]

The foreground mast we now see was added between mid-1862 and early 1863, before the work was taken to London. In New York and Boston, Church challenged the spectator to fathom a world entirely outside the familiar. By standards of its day, the composition was virtually abstract. Much was left to the imagination.

Most press critics responded well. Many metropolitan papers quickly ran glowing evaluations, poems were penned in Church's honor, and despite distractions of the War, references to the New York showing were published as far away as Boston, Chicago, San Francisco (via Pony Express), and London.[6] On their own, icebergs became a topic of some journal discussion.[7]

A few reviewers admitted they found the initial encounter with the picture difficult. "One hardly knows what to say about it," the Boston *Transcript's* New York correspondent began. "After a while, however," he continued, "you get into the picture, so to speak; and the panoramic berg begins to tell its story to your curious and admiring gaze." The New York *Express'* critic was similarly impressed. "The scene represented," he wrote, "is one which might well have been taken in Fairy Land. It is difficult to realize that it is a representation of nature." The *World's* writer elaborated on the same theme:

> It leads the mind away from its accustomed habitudes and palsies the analytic faculty, as if the picture radiated upon the spectator its atmosphere of cold. Lord BYRON was wont to say that it took a long time to become acquainted with the Alps. We think it will require some time to get even on speaking terms with the "Icebergs." They are not to be taken into the soul with a glance. We shall be surprised if those of acute sensibilities do not look upon it at first with a positive feeling of pain, akin to that which we sometimes feel in the presence of the terrible visions of sleep.

The *Tribune's* commentator mused farther afield:

> . . . the scene is as if from that day of creation when the earth was without form and void, and only the firmament divided the waters under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament, and God hung a light in the heaven to divide day from night . . .

The *Commercial Advertiser's* "Proteus" said that the picture fulfilled Ruskin's four precepts of artistic "truth" — noble subject, love of beauty, sincerity, and invention.

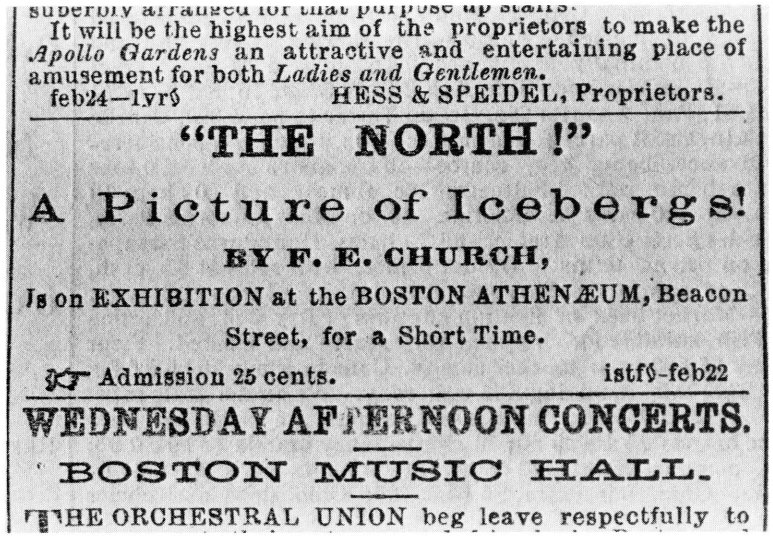
Although the allusion to the Union in the title was unfavorably received by those who bothered to remark on it, and the frame failed to generate any comment, most press assessments were extravagantly positive. The artist's allegiance to the Patriotic Fund was praised. Tributes were paid to his "originality," "lively imagination," "calm self-reliance," and "daring . . . But the man who had been obstructed neither by tropical heats nor by the tumbling masses of Niagara was not to be deterred by frozen or oceanic barriers."[8] Most reviewers agreed that *The Icebergs* was Church's most satisfying creation. The *Tribune's* author called it "the most splendid work of art that has yet been produced in this country . . . an absolutely wonderful picture, a work of genius which illustrates the time and the country producing it." The Rev. Theodore L. Cuyler (1822-1909), who two years earlier had championed *The Heart of the Andes*, opined that "for the benefit of the Patriotic Fund, for the esthetic luxury of the scene, and for the revelation of a new phase of God's creation, at least twenty thousand people should visit at once the exhibition room of Mr. Church's 'Icebergs.'"

Actual attendance probably was well under that figure. The painting's nationalist and commercial schedule was upset by the War. The loss of admission fees was less serious than the change necessitated in the "Proposals for Publication" John McClure advertised on the printed description.[9] McClure in effect promised to follow precedent by taking *The Icebergs* immediately to London to be engraved, at $50 for an artist's proof, $30 for a proof before letters, $20 for a proof, and $10 for a print. But this scheme was abandoned, even though George Loring Brown (1814-1889), a contemporary American landscapist and a friend of Church, managed to send three large landscapes to London shortly afterwards.[10] On 1 August 1861, McClure, who had gone to Britain anyway to attend to *The Heart of the Andes* engraving, reported to Church that the art business was "even more seriously affected here by American troubles than I expected . . . the great publishers are doing nothing. I assure you I feel very thankful that the 'Iceberg' picture was not brought over."[11] Church and McClure were not alone in their Civil War predicament. Publication of the *Cosmopolitan Art Journal* and the *Crayon*, two New York art periodicals founded in the mid-1850s, ceased.

The completion of another major American "national" painting, Daniel Huntington's *Republican Court,* was delayed. In October a New York paper noted that some local artists were at work, but that few had prospects of patronage.[12] *The Icebergs,* meanwhile, closed at Goupil's on 22 June 1861. It should have proceeded directly to London, or at least to Boston or Philadelphia.

In fact it was not seen or heard of until shortly before its arrival at the Boston Athenaeum on 20 February 1862. The intervening eight months constitute the first of several lengthy unaccounted intervals in its history. One may suppose that the picture returned to Church's studio where, perhaps, it was retouched.[13] Doubtless Church and McClure sought further exhibition sites, but some cities visited just weeks earlier by *The Heart of the Andes,* especially Baltimore and St. Louis, were now unacceptable risks. This much is evident: as the months passed and the work remained unsold, unexhibited, and unreproduced, it increasingly burdened both artist and agent. Church's asking price is not certainly known, but presumably it was fixed between $10,500 and $11,000.[14] His patrons or potential patrons were not necessarily impoverished by the War, but other demands, including the Patriotic Fund, diverted their resources for months or years. "Fortune" smiled on Church in later 1861 when James Lenox commissioned *Cotopaxi* for a reported $5,000, and again the following spring when Marshall O. Roberts purchased *Under Niagara* for the same sum,[15] but these important paintings were smaller and less costly than *The Icebergs.* The picture's vaguely disturbing subject matter may also have restricted its appeal to potential buyers. Finally, Theodore Winthrop was killed at the Battle of Great Bethel even as *The Icebergs* was on view in New York. Thus, the canvas had become too ponderous, too expensive, perhaps too rarefied, and tinged with personal tragedy for the artist. Through little fault of its own, the Great Picture that had been so right for the times had gone wrong.

The Athenaeum exhibition was not anti-climactic, however. *The Heart of the Andes* had made many friends in the same rooms two years before. By February 1862 war confusions had abated, and cultural endeavors were rebounding in Boston as well as in other Northern cities. *The Icebergs'* coming was heralded by press advertisements, some of which — with deliberate sensationalism — were punctuated by exclamation points (fig. 46).[16] And "Modern Athens," as Boston often styled itself, conveyed an enthusiastic welcome. "It is useless to compare this with anything the artist has yet done, on account of the unique character of the subject," said the *Evening Transcript* in the first of four notices:



46
Advertisement for the Boston Athenaeum Showing of THE ICEBERGS. From **Daily Courier,** Boston, 24 March 1862.

> Here we have floating islands of ice illuminated by the setting sun, in a purple sea, and with every conceivable fracture, form and color — emerald arches under which the sea flows, lofty forms of pure, glowing white, suggesting the great white throne of the Apocalypse.[17]

Many local journals followed suit with favorable appraisals and at least two poems dedicated to the painting.[18] Reviewers marveled at Church's "daring," "originality," "diligence," "extraordinary skill," and "wonderful memory." Several assessed the picture as Church's best. *The Icebergs,* said the *Transcript's* critic, "belongs with those works, for which we should reserve our best love and praise." Attendance was good. When the showing was extended for two weeks due to deferral of the yearly Athenaeum group exhibition, reduced-price tickets were sold to schoolchildren "[to] enable every scholar [i.e. student] to see what has so often been described and so seldom painted."[19]

Although the amount of critical attention was below that from New York the previous year, Bostonians arguably were more attuned to the painting's spiritual implications. The writer(s) enlisted by the *Christian Regis-*

ter and *Christian Examiner* in particular were, as one might expect, susceptible to theological responses, but they also were among the most articulate commentators ever to confront a Church painting.

The former began inimitably:

> I have heard persons complain that they never dreamed dreams and saw visions: now, then, is their opportunity. They can go to the Athenaeum and look at Church's picture of "The North." It will burst on their sense like a vision, it will follow them home and haunt them for weeks, it may open their eyes to finer visions.

"Why do all Church's pictures produce this supernatural vividness of impression?" he asked. His answer might have been penned by Noble and Ralph Waldo Emerson working together: "It seems to me the secret is in the artist's earnestness and modesty, — in the 'sublime repression of himself.' He aims to display the Lord's beauty, and not his own skill: his flowers bloom, ice shimmers, and waterfalls weave their rainbows, to the praise of nature, the glory of God, — not Church." He detected the same tendency in Cole's works. His descriptions of *The Icebergs* sparkle. The following is a sample:

> Consider what an iceberg is; something between the cumulus clouds of June, and the shifting Aurora of a January night . . . The sides of the berg are like cloven mother-of-pearl; there are crags of sapphire, and cliffs of fretted opal. The tints are mystic and lovely as the tinge inside of a white rose; the shades soft as those between petals of waterlilies.

The large berg he named (following Noble) "a Cathedral of Milan," and he noticed the "high icy crags in fantastic shapes" at left which "mimic human form." His concluding sentences are also worth quotation:

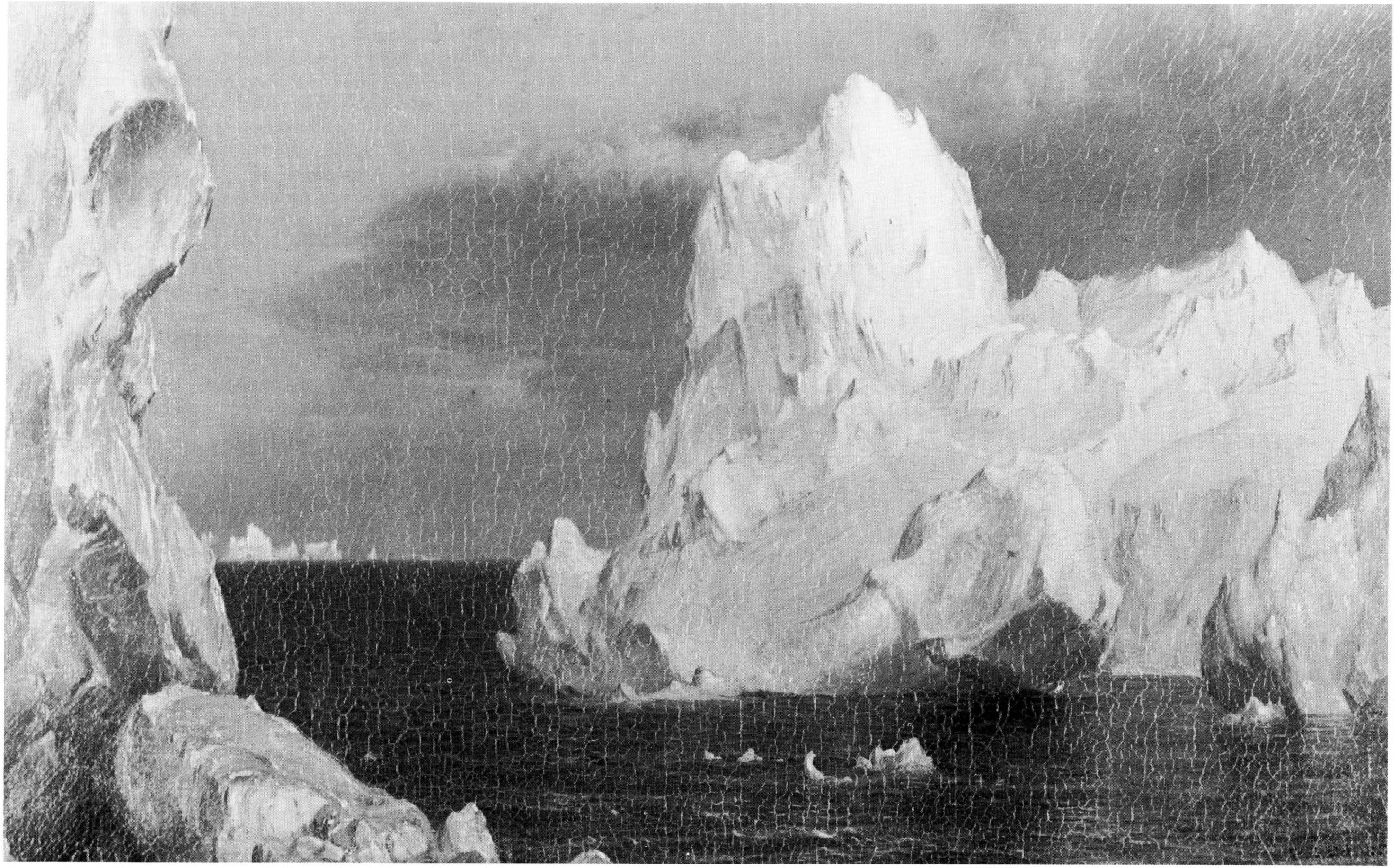
> Look for yourself, and you will henceforth gaze at the North Star with more respect, since it points to a continent of waters filled with these icy cathedrals, where ocean is choir, and solitude priest, and beauty the moving presence of the Lord. Truly "there is an evangel in art as well as books," and Church is among the prophets.

The latter's review of *After Icebergs with a Painter* embraced a discussion of the painting. After complimenting Church's "wild and original attempt, like Dante's when he would make a poem of Hell," the author offered a memorable evocation of the canvas:

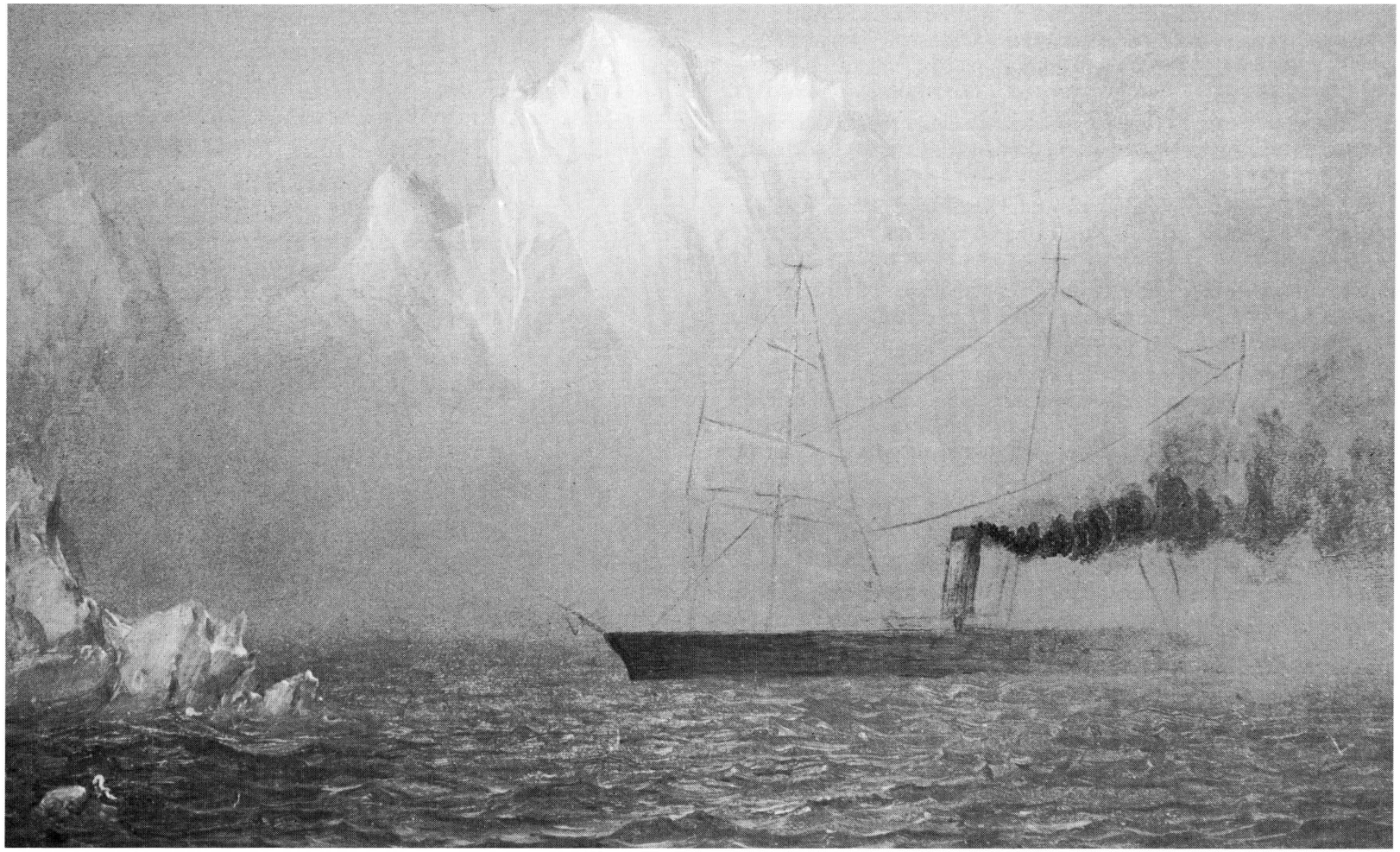
> . . . "The North," that vision of wonder and beauty, that dreamy lotos of Arctic seas, with a loveliness as strange, penetrating and ethereal as the fragrance of Arctic flowers. It is a frozen Aurora Borealis, with temples of white dissolving flame, with pillars of pearl, and vanishing wings of angels at its doors, or glowing in the sunset light above. By mere touches of color and form the picture hints how all the separate, scattered beauty of the world is gathered and heaped confusedly in those lone Northern seas, as if they were Beauty's working-room and studio, where she plans Parthenons and "Peter's domes," and models with sure, quick fingers her oriels and Byzantine columns, her vase-like flowers, and flower-like shells, — yea, stains them with dyes such as they of Tyre knew not. . . And back of book and picture our thoughts are led, to find how like children we are amused and educated in this world. God throws the words down in confusion, and we assort them into epics, and are flattered. We are elated, but the angels smile.

As successful as it was, however, the Boston showing was less splashy than the one in New York. McClure's name was not appended to advertisements, no "Proposals for Publication" were presented, admission fees were not deflected to charity, and "news" items about the painting were not consistently inserted in the *Transcript*, as had been done with *The Heart of the Andes*. A popular preceding landscape Great Picture, Régis Gignoux's *Indian Summer in Virginia*, may have taken the edge off Church's attraction. Even so, comparatively speaking, Church and McClure were biding their time.

Other things were on their minds. *Cotopaxi*, and after it *Chimborazo*, absorbed much of Church's efforts from later 1861. *Under Niagara*, that spectacular day's work of mid-1862, was handled with an unusual marketing twist: McClure sent the picture incognito to London to be chromolithographed by the Days before it was officially opened in New York in December 1862.[20] In August of that year Church also sold a painting for $300 to Samuel Hallett, a New York banker who commissioned *Chimborazo*. The work, which in one of Hallett's letters is entitled "To Illumine the Iceberg,"[23] clearly was an affordable satellite of the large *Icebergs*.



47
FREDERIC EDWIN CHURCH
TO ILLUMINE THE ICEBERG 1863
Oil on canvas.
Mattatuck Museum, Waterbury, Connecticut.



48
FREDERIC EDWIN CHURCH
STEAMER IN NORTHERN WATERS n.d.
Oil on canvas.
Olana State Historic Site, Hudson, New York.

Hallett's picture has disappeared, but an undocumented 10″ x 18″ canvas signed and dated 1863, now in the Mattatuck Museum (fig. 47), fills the same specifications. Compositionally the Mattatuck canvas derives from the large painting, although certain important elements — the foreground, the ice-grotto, and the accessory peaks — are omitted, while color and fantasy are heightened. The blue and red "illumination" (recalling the Newfoundland flare and tar-barrel experiments as much as sunset lighting), the prominent blue veins marking the central masses, and the upswept prickly formations invoke the trial sketches as much as the final picture. There is again no evidence of man. For this modest private format Church distilled and dramatized the most striking effects of the public production.

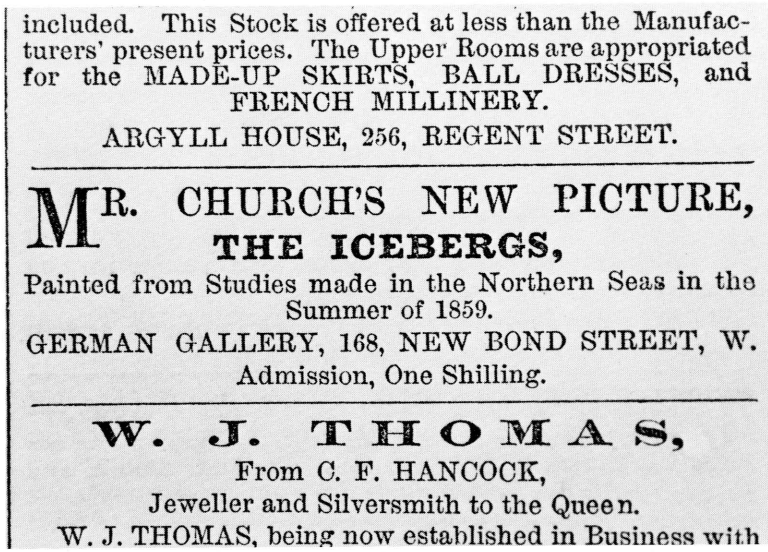
Probably he created other small "icebergs" on commission, as well as one or two for himself. The *Steamer in Northern Waters* (fig. 48) at Olana, unfortunately not dated, is related to his ship-and-ice studies and to the plate entitled "Iceberg in the Morning Mist — Whaleboat" from *After Icebergs with a Painter,* as well as to illustrations from the popular press. The theme also distantly prophesies the *Aurora Borealis* (fig. 16).

The Icebergs itself, meantime, remained on hold. In July 1862, McClure advised Church that a showing in Rochester would be "useless."[22] By September Church offered "the use" of the work to "Mr. [M.O.?] Roberts,"[23] but further particulars of the proposal are not recorded. At year's end a London exhibition finally was in preparation.[24] There was little choice but to await warmer seasons in the British metropolis. In Philadelphia a 40,000-square-foot "world renowned" panorama of Kane's polar exploits would have posed formidable competition had *The Icebergs* visited that city.[25] And in New York, the openings of *Under Niagara* and (in March 1863) of *Cotopaxi* kept Church's name before the public.

London at last provided the crowning success for which Church and McClure had hoped for two years. The press and public outdid themselves with interest and praise; the display at the familiar German Gallery (see fig. 49) ran three months (22 June-19 September 1863), a month longer than any other of Church's British showings; a fine chromolithograph by Charles Risdon, published by the Days — the engraving had been supplanted by the faster and more colorful process — was itself commended by the *Art-Journal;*[26] and a buyer was found in Sir Edward William Watkin (1819-1901), a wealthy railroad magnate with extensive North American business and travel experience. Watkin, to whom we shall return, was the British equivalent to Church's major American patrons.

Several factors contributed to the London triumph. First, Church's earlier British exhibitions had carved out a niche for him. Secondly, interested Britons were aware of his doings and awaited his arctic composition with anticipation.[27] Thirdly, good reviews of *After Icebergs with a Painter* appeared in British journals in late 1861, though none of the critics equated Noble's "C——" with "Church."[28] Fourthly, publication of the handsome *Heart of the Andes* engraving in early 1862 was applauded in both Britain and the United States.[29]

More importantly, *The Icebergs* touched a British nerve sensitized by

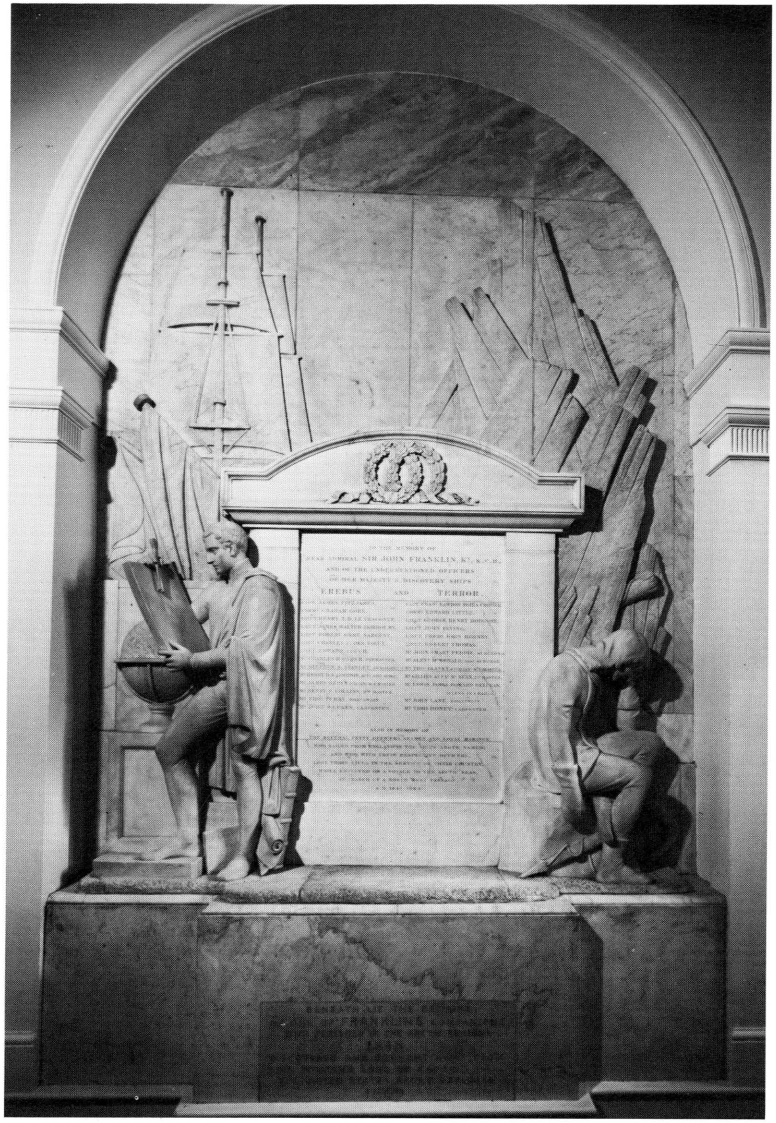

included. This Stock is offered at less than the Manufacturers' present prices. The Upper Rooms are appropriated for the MADE-UP SKIRTS, BALL DRESSES, and FRENCH MILLINERY.
ARGYLL HOUSE, 256, REGENT STREET.

MR. CHURCH'S NEW PICTURE,
THE ICEBERGS,
Painted from Studies made in the Northern Seas in the Summer of 1859.
GERMAN GALLERY, 168, NEW BOND STREET, W.
Admission, One Shilling.

W. J. THOMAS,
From C. F. HANCOCK,
Jeweller and Silversmith to the Queen.
W. J. THOMAS, being now established in Business with

49
Advertisement for the London showing of THE ICEBERGS. From **Court Journal**, London, 4 July 1863.

years of arctic exploration, tragedy, and controversy. The preview opening at the German Gallery on 20 June 1863 was attended by a remarkable group of Franklin saga veterans, including Lady Franklin, McClintock, Rae, Sir George Back (1798-1874), Sir Edward Belcher (1799-1877), and Sir Richard Collinson (1811-1877). Also in attendance were Sir Henry Parkes (1828-1885), diplomat to the Orient, Professor John Tyndall (1820-1885), natural scientist and expert on glaciers, Sir Andrew Waugh (1810-1878), surveyor and engineer in India and the Himalayas, and a host of Dukes, Earls, Bishops and Countesses.[30] The Days, who for years had published chromolithographs of the Arctic, were the perfect sponsors for this stellar gathering of British polar and scientific expertise. Church and McClure must have been highly gratified. Perhaps no other painting of the day premiered to a more appropriate audience. The scientific interest was underscored a few days later when the London *Times* published two letters on "Icebergs and Meteorology" inspired by the picture.[31]



50
RICHARD WESTMACOTT, JR.
MONUMENT TO THE MEMORY OF SIR JOHN FRANKLIN 1859
Marble.
Royal Naval College Chapel, Greenwich, England.

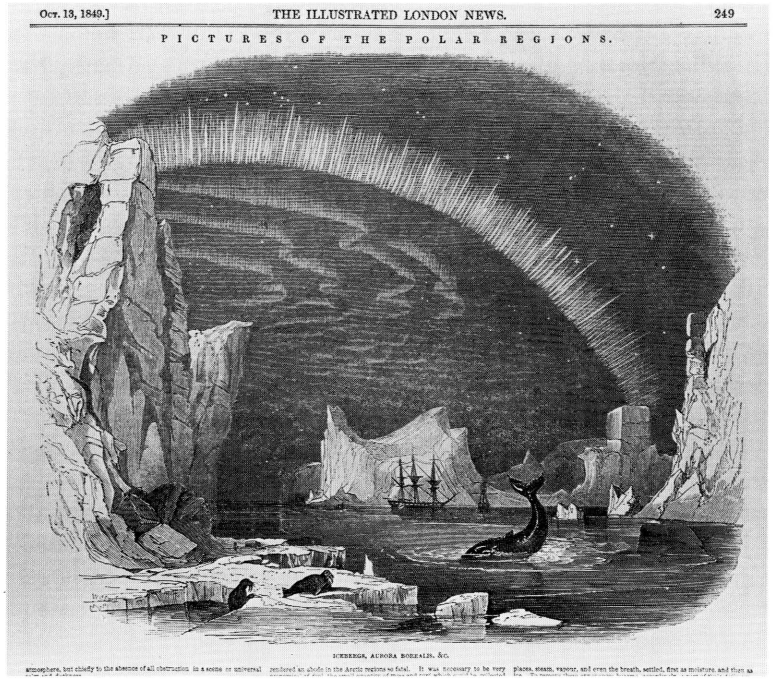
The Icebergs also capitalized on a vast British visual anthology of the Arctic, portions of which had been recently created in homage to Franklin. Notable among these was a sculptured memorial by Richard Westmacott, Jr. (1799-1872), which in 1859 was placed in the Painted Hall of Greenwich Hospital (fig. 50),[32] and canvases shown at the Royal Academy between 1860 and 1863 by Edward Cooke (1811-1880) and the now-obscure J. Hamer. A London critic compared Church's and Hamer's works.[33] Other components of the anthology appealed on a more popular level, including panoramas, illustrations in the weekly press (e.g. fig. 51),[34] and a short-lived but memorable dramatic production — acted by Charles Dickens, with stage-sets by Clarkson Stanfield (1793-1867) — called *The Frozen Deep.* Although *The Frozen Deep* ran for only a few performances in 1857, *The Icebergs* reminded one writer of the play's scenic backdrop.[35]

In addition, a long tradition of British Alpine art and literature was resonant in Church's painting. Nearly contemporary depictions of the Alps exhibited in London in 1865 and 1867 onwards by Elijah Walton (1833-1880), in which snow, glacier and mountain were occasionally transmuted into iceberg-like visions (fig. 52), will serve as an example here.

The Icebergs also plumbed deep-seated British notions of geological history and dim epochs at the dawn of European man. The London *Athenaeum's* writer was fascinated by the "enormous boulder, born away from the rocky arctic home of the berg, and thus floated far to south to find an ocean-bed, when the whole fabric is wracked:"

> Such ice-borne boulders are said to be the originals of our enormous stones that, grouped by some forgotten people to serve priestly rites, are named Druidic temples or tombs. The stone, deeply tinged with iron, has stained with red and russet streaks the pure snow and ice of its bed.[36]

And in general, Church's painting must have reminded British viewers of coasts, coves and shipwrecks by Danby, Martin, Stanfield (fig. 53), Turner, and other marine artists. The derelict mast, besides resurrecting the wreckages Church had essayed in compositional sketches, accorded the repainted picture an increased visual accessibility in Britain. Perhaps, indeed, Church hoped the device would make his work more saleable abroad. Huntington has suggested that the artist added the mast as a tribute to Franklin,[37] and certainly the tragic overtones of the scene


Oct. 13, 1849.] THE ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS. 249

PICTURES OF THE POLAR REGIONS.

ICEBERGS, AURORA BOREALIS, &c.

51
ICEBERGS, AURORA BOREALIS, &C.
Engraving.
From **The Illustrated London News**, 13 October 1849.

are enhanced. An allusion to the Cross is also probable, particularly in light of the earlier studies. No British reviewer, however, went farther than to recognize the remnants of "some gallant ship," or "a fishing boat." One writer perceptively remarked that the wood was being untwisted into splinters by the decaying process.[38]

Two other factors in the London celebrity of *The Icebergs* need attention. The first concerns British artistic discontent of the day. For years critics had uneasily concluded that British landscape painting had fallen on lean times after Turner's death. Moreover, the year of the Paris *Salon des Refusés* also witnessed an exhibition of the "Rejected of the Academy" in London, an event much publicized by an often sympathetic British press. These circumstances clearly influenced the *London Review* author's declaration that Church's picture was a "refreshing" oasis among the "conventionalities and commonplace productions of every kind in art" that the writer believed were standard fare at London art displays.[39] The second factor was the Civil War, which must have accorded *The Icebergs* an accidental increased notoriety. As we have seen, for the London showing Church had de-politicized the work's title, but his countrymen regarded its display abroad as a demonstration of Northern cultural prowess under duress.[40] Much British popular sentiment favored the South. Soon after the picture's London opening, British recognition of the Confederacy was proposed in Parliament, and — until the news of Vicksburg and Gettysburg — Lee's armies seemed about to overrun the North. In neutral London, the South offered its own artistic competition with a display of portraits of eminent Confederate generals "painted from life" by Benjamin Franklin Reinhart (1829-1885),[41] and in a highly touted proposed statue of Stonewall Jackson to be executed by the British sculptor John H. Foley, R.A. (1818-1874), as a donation to the state of Virginia.[42] Two prominent London newspapers with Southern sympathies, the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Morning Post,* did not carry reviews of *The Icebergs.*

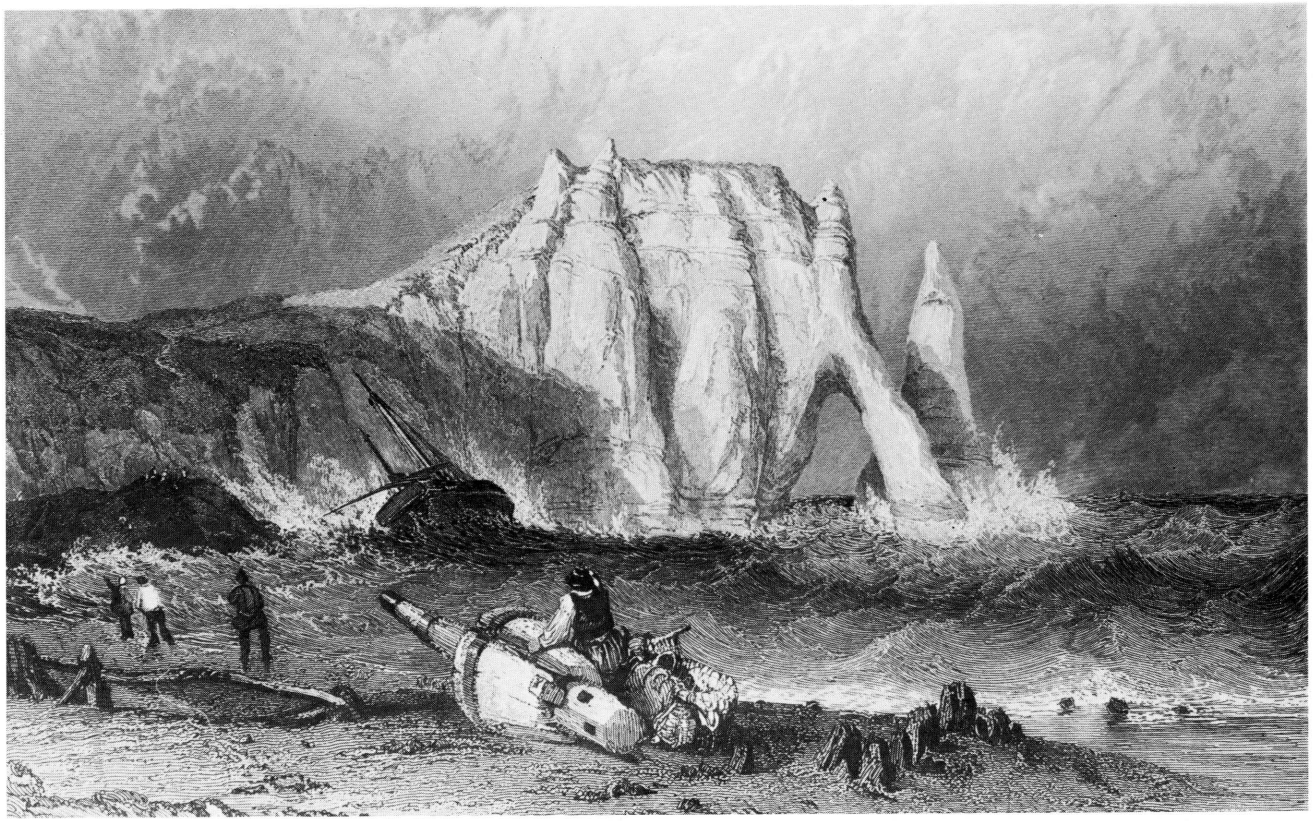
Almost every other metropolitan journal, however, assessed the picture in radiantly positive terms.[43] The *Manchester Guardian's* London correspondent scooped everyone else on June 19 by promising his readers "a very magnificent and strikingly original work of art . . . by Church, the most remarkable living American painter:"

> I have never seen anything like the singularly truthful and delicate painting of the prismatic effects of light on these monstrous masses of opaque ice; indeed, no such painting has been seen. It is altogether a most weird and beautiful picture; one to affect the imagination powerfully by virtue of its grand and simple truth. Let all your readers who love art, and visit London, take care to see this picture. I have no fear of their charging me with exaggeration.

Other critics rushed in with similar praises. The *Times's* Tom Taylor (1817-1880), playwright, biographer, editor of *Punch* and the "thunderer's" art reviewer in these years, spoke for many:

> The picture altogether is a noble example of that application of the landscape-painter's art to the rendering of grand, beautiful and unfamiliar aspects of nature, only accessible at great cost of fatigue and exposure, and even at the peril of life and limb,

52
ELIJAH WALTON
THE AILEFROIDE FROM THE GLACIER CHARDON DAUPHISE 1865
Watercolor.
Private collection.



53
After Clarkson Stanfield, **ROCKS OF ETRETAT**.
Engraving.
From **Heath's Picturesque Annual for 1834**,
London, 1834.

> which seems to be one of the walks in which this branch of the art is destined to achieve new triumphs in our time. All who can honour and appreciate the art in this new and arduous development of it should see Mr. Church's great picture.

The *Sunday Times* was still more complimentary. "We have no hesitation," their reviewer wrote, "in esteeming the artist a man of profound and exquisite genius." The *Daily News* summed up the picture more pragmatically:

> The painter has produced an impressive work, and he touches us with a fellow-feeling for this grand and beautiful aspect of Nature. At the same time the artist succeeds in giving us with uncommon piquancy what all town birds fly at with such rapacity — a new sensation.

The *Observer* agreed: "It may be pretty safely anticipated that his [Church's] icebergs will become the summer resort of all London."

Exactly that happened. The Rev. Noble's "C——" was now known by name, and copies of the printed description were available at the gallery. For a shilling, viewers were enabled to see the results of Church's originality, ingenuity, and "dangerous" exploits. "Amongst these Livingstones of the Beautiful, Mr. Church certainly towers pre-eminent for extent of range and the magnificent completeness of the acquisitions with which he returns," said the *Art-Journal's* W. P. Bayley. The shapes,

colors and lighting effects were captivating. "Of pure white, of which we should have thought there would be plenty, there is absolutely none," wrote the surprised critic of the London *Guardian*. Instead, the artist had contrived "the haunt of fairies or green-haired nereids or some lovely sirens" (*Daily News*), "fantastic grottoes and hiding places for the mermaids," and "enormous mountains of ice" fabricated from "opal and pearl, with here and there a bright blue vein of lapis lazuli . . . and the snow sparkling in the light of the bright sky like diamond dust" (*London Review*). W. P. Bayley's responses were, as usual, both well-informed and poetic:

> It is the heart of the *Icebergs* you have been brought now. The wondrous, floating, sailing Alps of Ice soar around you everywhere, drearily terrible, no doubt, in their commoner aspect; but the adventurous painter has been permitted to hang over them leisurely, in those moments when the glowing colours of summer evening air soften them, through their intense reflective power, with delicate beauties of even an oriental and fairy-like splendour . . .
>
> The air seems soft; you might really deem it warm. The mariner now will be tempted to forget the terrors and the perils around him, and if he is a cultivated man, he will dream of the Nereids, for these are beauties to make him think that they have been here — Arctic navigators long before Hudson's and Baffin's Bays were known . . .
>
> The Spirit of Beauty, whose minister this painter is, is she not the Enchantress of the Imagination, who inspires us with a longing to people the solitude with lovely ideals, and, with a higher power, gives shape, and body, and new life, to our sweeter and shyer inner feelings?

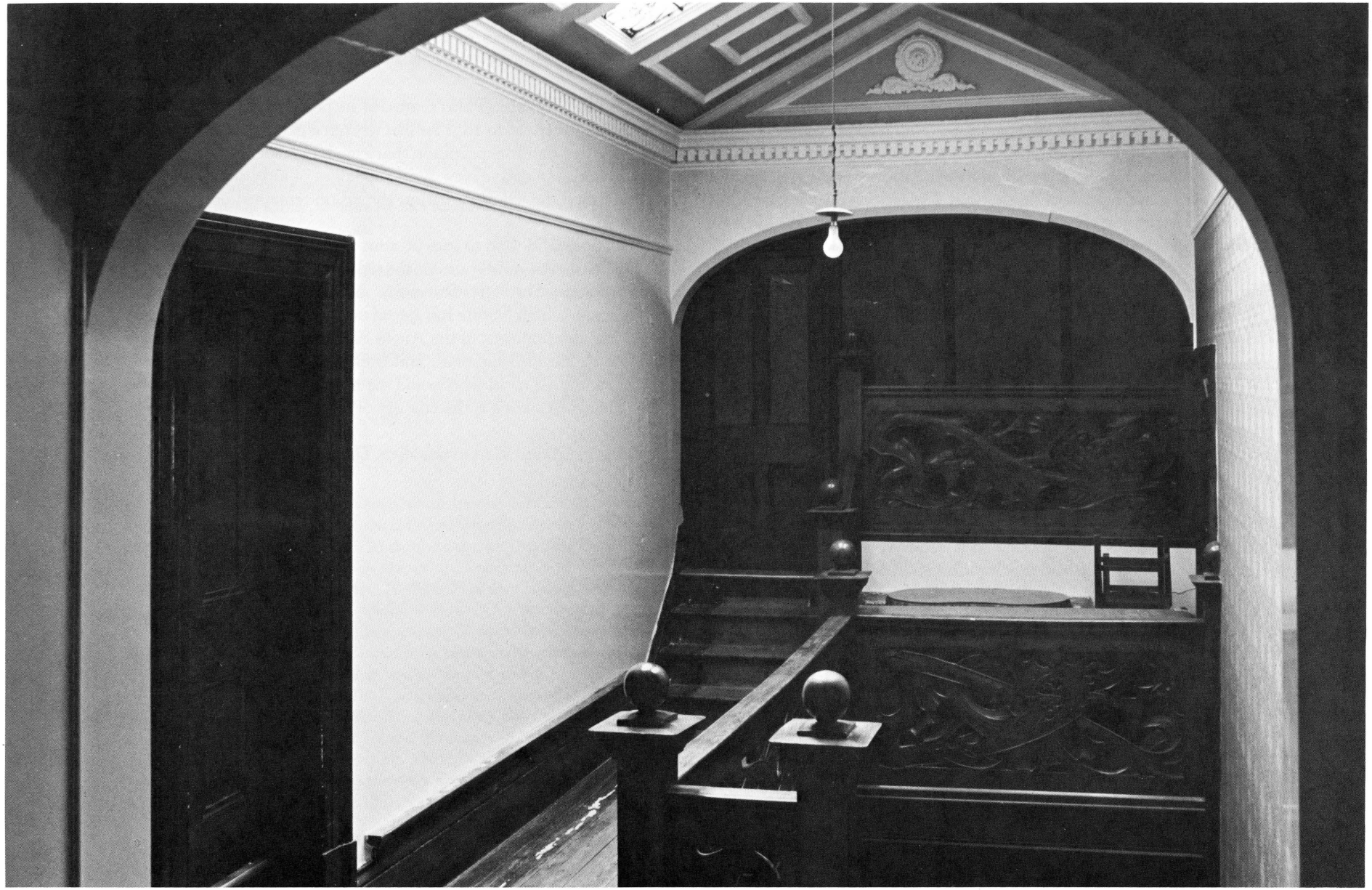
Church, Bayley concluded, "is far more Turneresque in his gifts than any other landscape-painter," and in *The Icebergs* had produced a work from which "our existing painters may derive a well-timed lesson, and generous incentives."

The picture did inspire a few negative comments. In an echo of some observations made in London about *The Heart of the Andes* in 1859, the *Reader's* critic remarked that Church's paint handling was too precise to be compatible with the "wonder, mystery, awe, the sense of God's presence" apposite to the scene. For that writer, the conception lacked the emotion he believed the artist must have experienced "when, for the first time, he stood upon the schooner's deck in the wondrous world of ice." The plain dark frame, presumably the same frame which surrounds the painting today and which also bordered *The Heart of the Andes* at the German Gallery in 1859, was adjudged a failure, especially by the *Spectator*.[44]

But the vast majority of reporters and the public at large were thoroughly entranced. "To Mr. Church has fallen the lot of giving to the world its vast and most resplendent celebration," wrote Major H. Byng Hall in September 1863.[45] In 1864 *The Icebergs* was remembered as "the most remarkable" singly exhibited art object from the previous year, and as late as 1869 a London reviewer recalled "the great 'Iceberg' picture, which, whether for novelty of subject, for strange and subtle beauty of color, or for unparalleled difficulties of every kind gallantly overcome, was perhaps, taken all in all, the most astonishing *tour de force* ever executed on canvas."[46] Church's competition had included Frith's *Railway Station* (fig. 7), then in its second hit year at Flatow's gallery, and the same artist's *Derby Day* (fig. 6), the original version of which could be seen in Bristol, while a replica was showing in New York. Much as in 1859, the concurrent Great Picture showings summarized the similarities and differences in national outlooks. The American press, meanwhile, although distracted by other matters, proudly recorded that *The Icebergs'* exhibition was "crowded with the *elite* of London society." The painting, said the New York *World*, had been received "as a work of a man from whom greatness in art is to be expected."[47]

In view of its enthusiastic British reception, the fact that Church's canvas was purchased by a Briton should not come as a surprise. Indeed, the artist and his agents doubtless had sought a buyer in London if only because British currency was preferable to the besieged greenback. Other American landscapists, notably Bierstadt, Cropsey, and Church's pupil Louis Rémy Mignot (1831-1870), found willing British patrons as well as exhibition audiences about the same time; reports of Bierstadt's sales were widely circulated in America. Yet Church's belated coup does not appear to have been acknowledged on either side of the Atlantic for years. The earliest known reference occurs in Tuckerman's *Book of the Artists* (1867), in which the author states that *The Icebergs* is owned by "Mr. Watson, M. P. of London." Later sources gradually alter (or more likely, correct) the buyer's identity to "Sir Edward Watkins [sic]," also of London.[48]

54
ROSE HILL
Northenden near Manchester, exterior from the southwest.



55
ROSE HILL
Northenden near Manchester, main staircase showing the wall (left) upon which **THE ICEBERGS** hung.

As a Member of Parliament, entrepreneur (his later life dream was a tunnel under the English Channel), well-travelled railroad man, and published author, Watkin was visible enough. But as an art collector he was and still is elusive. No references to the painting occur in any of his published writings or in his will, neither his biographers nor his obituary writers mention it, and no documents pertaining to his acquisition are known from either side of the Atlantic. Those British critics who reviewed Church's subsequent London exhibitions in 1865, 1868 and 1869 seem not to have been aware that *The Icebergs* had remained in Britain. The painting apparently was not shown publicly again — at least to audiences who were aware what it was — until 1979.[49]

The mystery of Watkin's ownership is not totally insoluble, however. In the first place, we do know that Watkin was Manchester born and raised. Rose Hill, the now-converted Watkin mansion (figs. 54, 55) in which *The Icebergs* was rediscovered in 1979, had been constructed in the 1830s by Absalom Watkin (1787-1861), and modified by his son Edward, who made it his own residence until his death in 1901. We may guess that the picture migrated to Rose Hill shortly after the Days published the chromolithograph by early 1865.

In the second place, Watkin does offer some help in a part-autobiography published in 1887 entitled *Canada and the United States: Recollections 1851 to 1886.* Portraying himself as a sensitive, energetic visionary concerning the prospects and accomplishments of the two nations mentioned in the title of his book, he summarizes his involvement with the Canadian Pacific Railroad in the following words:

> The problem of a 'North-west Passage' has been solved in a new and better way. It is no longer a question of threading dark and dismal seas within the limits of Arctic ice and snow, doubtful to find, and impossible, if found, to navigate. (p. vii).

Watkin himself had beheld "Arctic ice." Aboard ship hours east of the Newfoundland coast in 1861 he recorded seeing a large iceberg which, he said, "assumed all sorts of shapes as we caught sight of it" and which glistened with "a fairy-like whiteness — transparent, snowy whiteness — which was very beautiful to see." As he watched in the reddening evening light, "a great mass broke away, toppled over into the sea, sending up an immense snow spray, and disappeared." (pp. 511-512). Church's painting must have crystalized that memorable experience. Because Watkin was in Canada at the time *The Icebergs* was showing in London, he probably heard about its success via press critiques (perhaps including the praises of the *Manchester Guardian)* and purchased it through an agent.

Doubtless *The Icebergs* also reminded its possessor of the "romance" he found in America. In 1851 he had written a paragraph on the subject so filled with Adamic expectation that a modern reader might easily believe it the work of a native New World apologist. Thirty-six years later, as he republished the words verbatim, the vision remained undimmed:

> Those who wish to gaze at ruins need not go to it [America]. Those who only yearn for the sight of crown jewels, or ancient armour, had better stay away. But to all who would see the realm which Nature has spread out, in her largest features, for the development of the Anglo-Saxon race, under institutions once deemed Utopian, and even yet wondered at as experimental — to all who would see how a people can GROW — North America is the country of irresistible attraction.[50]

While Sir Edward Watkin was alive, *The Icebergs* had found a good home.

NOTES TO CHAPTER IV

1 *Tribune* (New York), 18 May, 18 August, 1 September 1861.

2 *Commercial Advertiser* (New York), 18 June 1861. The paper's writer in general preferred the sketch to the large picture: "Much as we admire the larger production we are more pleased or rather impressed with this small study of a solitary and gigantic visitor from the Arctic seas. It is more simple, more grand, and more impressive. How true it is, that the slight sketch or study direct from nature, is more worthy than the elaborated works on the easel."

3 See *World* (New York), 11 April 1861; *Evening Bulletin* (Philadelphia), 23 April 1861; *Albion* (New York), 27 April 1861, 201; *Home Journal* (New York), 27 April 1861.

4 A copy of the version of the broadside published in Boston in 1862 was in Church's scrapbook (see above, chapter I, note 4). Huntington refers to the New York version (no copies of which are now known at Olana) in "Frederic Edwin Church, 1826-1900," pp. 130-131.

5 *Albion* (New York), 4 May 1861, 213.

6 The completed painting was reviewed or mentioned in at least the following New York journals in 1861: *Tribune*, 24 April; *Morning Courier and New York Enquirer*, and *Evening Post*, both 25 April; *Leader*, and *Morning Express*, both 27 April; *Commercial Advertiser*, *Journal of Commerce*, and *World*, all 29 April; also *Commercial Advertiser*, 10 June; Theodore Cuyler, "Among the Icebergs," *Independent*, 2 May; *Albion*, 4 May, 213; *Home Journal*, 11 May; *Crayon*, June, 133; *Herald*, 19 June; *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, July, 266; *Knickerbocker*, July, 50. Some of these items were included in Church's scrapbook. Among the clippings was a "Sonnet to F.E.C." from an unspecified source, dated 8 May 1861, in which the writer called Church "the Michael Angelo of landscape Art." See also *Daily Evening Transcript* (Boston), 10 April, 27 May 1861; *Tribune* (Chicago), 4 May 1861; *Daily Alta California* (San Francisco), 14 June 1861; William Michael Rossetti in *Weldon's Register of Facts and Occurrences Relating to Literature, the Sciences, and the Arts* (London), August 1861, 94.

7 See Charles Hallock, "Three Months in Labrador," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* (New York), April 1861, 577-599, especially 588; "Among the Icebergs," *Observer* (New York), 6 June 1861, 182. Publication of the *Harper's* article, which included an illustration of an iceberg derived from a photograph, was clearly timed to coincide with Church's painting.

8 The last quotation is from the *Morning Courier and New York Enquirer* review.

9 See Huntington, "Frederic Edwin Church, 1826-1900," p. 131.

10 The paintings were: *Niagara by Moonlight*, *The Crown of New England* (alternate title, *The White Mountains*), and *New York City and Bay*; see e.g. *Evening Post* (New York), 19 June 1861; *Art-Journal* (London), 1 June 1861, 191. All three original versions of these compositions are now lost. For Brown in general, see Thomas W. Leavitt, *George Loring Brown: Landscapes of Europe and America 1834-1880* (Burlington, Vt., Robert Hull Fleming Museum, 1973).

11 Olana Archives, letter from John McClure to Church, dated Glasgow, 1 August 1861.

12 *Evening Post* (New York), 5 October 1861.

13 Technical examination has disclosed a number of retouchings in addition to the mast. Some of these changes probably were already made by early 1862. The writer for the *Daily Evening Transcript* (Boston), 11 March 1862, wrote that "we saw this fine picture, last spring, in New York and came away with a dissatisfied feeling and unmoved. But it must have been repainted and a good deal changed, or else our eyes were then greatly at fault, or that gray, stormy day had an ill effect upon it and upon our wits. For now it seems a new thing, and grows more and more attractive . . ."

14 In a letter to Marshall O. Roberts, dated New York, 22 January 1863 (Olana Archives), Church wrote that a five-by-seven foot painting would cost $7500. On that scale, *The Icebergs*, which was still unsold at that date, would have been priced at $10,750.

15 *Evening Post* (New York), 21 September 1861; 30 January, 11 December 1862; *New York Times*, 8 December 1862; *World* (New York), 12 December 1862; *Albion* (New York), 13 December 1862, 597. According to Church's then-current pricing standards (see note 14), *Cotopaxi* should have cost Lenox $6000.

16 Advertisements in the *Boston Post* and *Boston Daily Courier* included exclamation points; those in other journals did not.

17 *Daily Evening Transcript* (Boston), 4 March 1862.

18 The painting was reviewed or mentioned in at least the following Boston journals in 1862: *Daily Advertiser,* 22 February; *Daily Journal,* 22 February, 1 March; *Christian Register,* 22 February, 26; 15 March, 42 (longer notice); *Saturday Evening Gazette,* 1, 22 March; *Daily Evening Transcript,* 4, 11 (longest notice), 28 March, 2 April; *Christian Examiner,* May 1862, 368-383. The *Daily Evening Traveller,* 27 March, printed a poem entitled "The Iceberg" by H. W. Parker, sent by a reader who had seen the painting. Another poem, "The North — A Painting by Church," dated March 1862, from an unspecified (Boston?) paper, was in Church's scrapbook.

19 *Daily Evening Transcript* (Boston), 28 March 1862.

20 Olana Archives, letters from John McClure to Church, dated New York, 3 June 1862; New York, 2 July 1862; New York, 29 July 1862; New York, 11 September 1862; New York, 27 September 1862.

21 Olana Archives, letter from Samuel Hallett to Church, dated New York, 4 August 1862. Hallett also spoke of making an initial payment of $2500 for "the large picture." About this time Hallett became the purchaser in advance of *Chimborazo,* but according to Church's usual practice (see the letter to Marshall Roberts, referred to in note 14), a patron was asked to make a 25% down payment on a commissioned painting. Does this mean that "the large picture" was *The Icebergs?*

22 Olana Archives, letter from John McClure to Church, dated 15 July 1862.

23 Olana Archives, letter from John McClure to Church, dated 29 September 1862.

24 According to the anonymous author of "Pen, Pallet, and Piano," *Continental Monthly* (New York), January 1863, 121, *The Icebergs* was slated for a London showing in the near future. I am indebted to Jeremy Adamson for calling my attention to this article.

25 The panorama, "the largest ever painted," was produced by Dr. E. Beale. Matters pertaining to its multi-month performance were frequently reported in the *Philadelphia Bulletin.*

26 *Art-Journal* (London), March 1865, 96. After praising the painting itself, the reviewer said that "Messrs. Day have issued no production that so conclusively exhibits the power of their Art — none that so effectively shows what can be done by the appliances at their command. We cannot say to how many 'printings' it has been subjected; but they must have been very numerous; for, perhaps, there has never been a chromolithograph containing so many 'tints.'"

27 In a letter to Church, dated London, 2 March 1860 (Olana Archives), W. P. Bayley wrote that "there are many here who look forward with no ordinary interest for the next work which we hope you may feel disposed to send us. It has been said here that you were last summer in the northern seas running tilt with your adventurous pencil against some tremendous iceberg — If so, it is a matter for earnest congratulation to find that you have been safely wintering in New York once more."

28 *Athenaeum* (London), 21 September 1861, 368-370; *Saturday Review* (London), 12 October 1861, 386-387; *Eclectic Review* (London), November 1861, 595-602; *Guardian* (London), 6 November 1861, 1022; *Critic* (London), 9 November 1861, 472-473.

29 See my "American Art in Great Britain: The National Gallery Watercolor of *The Heart of the Andes,*" *Studies in the History of Art* 10 (forthcoming).

30 *Court Journal* (London), 27 June 1863, 633. A clipping of this article was in Church's Olana scrapbook. Unfortunately none of the existing diaries or other papers of any of the Arctic-explorer attendees, or of Professor Tyndall, appear to contain any reference to *The Icebergs'* London showing. Lady Franklin's *Diary,* which survives at the Scott Polar Research Institute, University of Cambridge, contains *no* entry for 20 June 1863. I would like to thank Clive Holland of the Scott Polar Research Institute for his extensive help with my inquiries in these matters.

32 *Illustrated News of the World* (London), 20 August 1859, 100. This monument has not previously been listed among the younger Westmacott's works. It is now located in the stairway behind the altar of the Chapel, not in the Painted Hall.

33 *Daily News* (London), 25 June 1863.

34 The *Illustrated London News* alone carried twelve illustrations of icebergs between 1849 and 1868.

35 *Under the Management of Mr. Charles Dickens: His Production of "The Frozen Deep,"* ed. with an introduction by Robert Louis Brannan (Ithaca, 1966); Pieter van der Merve, *The Spectacular Career of Clarkson Stanfield 1793-1867: Seaman, Scene-Painter, Royal Academician* (Tyne and Wear County Council Museums, 1979), p. 160; *Reader* (London), 18 July 1863, 68.

36 *Athenaeum* (London), 27 June 1863, 847. The *Illustrated London News,* 4 July 1863, 7, also linked the stone with prehistoric cromlechs.

37 Huntington, *Landscapes,* p. 86.

38 *Illustrated London News,* 4 July 1863, 7.

31 *Times* (London), 7, 8 July 1863.

39 *London Review,* 11 July 1863, 49.

40 "Pen, Pallet, and Piano," *Continental Monthly* (New York), January 1863, 121.

41 The portraits, which in London were shown at Revell's Fine Art Gallery, travelled at least to Liverpool, as well.

42 The proposal was promoted by the *Index,* the Confederate newspaper in London. Foley's statue was completed and set up in Richmond, Virginia, but only in 1876.

43 *The Icebergs* prompted nearly thirty notices in London and out-of-town journals in 1863. In addition to those cited in previous notes, the following were important: *Manchester Guardian,* 19 June; *Observer* (London; all the following publications are from London), 21 June; *Morning Advertiser, Morning Herald, Morning Star,* all 22 June; *Times,* 3 July; *Court Journal* and *Court Circular,* both 4 July; *Guardian,* 29 July, 720; *Spectator,* 1 August, 2320; William Michael Rossetti in the *Fine Arts Quarterly Review,* October 1863, 343-344; W. P. Bayley, "Mr. Church's Picture of 'The Icebergs,'" *Art-Journal,* September 1863, 187-188. The *Art-Journal* also printed shorter notices of the painting in May, July and August.

44 An equation of the present frame and the one which surrounded the painting in London in 1863 must remain in some doubt. The *Morning Star* (see note 43) described the 1863 frame as "carved," the same adjective used for the frame of *The Heart of the Andes* in New York in 1859, but the present frame has no carved ornament whatever.

45 Major H. Byng Hall, "Art in America," *St. James's Magazine* (London), September 1863, 240.

46 *Reader* (London), 2 January 1864, 23; "Fine Arts. Mr. Church's Damascus," *Morning Post,* 24 June 1869. The writer of the latter notice clearly had met and talked with Church in London in June 1869.

47 The quotations are from *Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* (New York), 1 August 1863, 295; *World* (New York), 14 July 1863.

48 H. W. French, *Art and Artists in Connecticut* (Boston, 1878, reprint ed., Da Capo Press, 1970), p. 130, almost — but not quite — says that "Watkins" bought the picture during its London showing.

49 See below, chapter V.

50 Watkin, *Canada and the United States,* p. 339. The quotation is extracted from his *A Trip to the United States and Canada* (London, 1852).

56
EDWIN LANDSEER
MAN PROPOSES, GOD DISPOSES 1864
Oil on canvas.
Royal Holloway College, Egham, Surrey, England.

V

LEGACY

The story of *The Icebergs* is a study in contrasts. Despite the difficulties attending its creation, and especially those surrounding its exposition during this country's most wrenching internal upheaval, the picture was one of Church's most important and most successful works. And yet, some aspects of its history and legacy are so filled with irony that the present-day observer cannot avoid wondering if Church was relieved when it all but vanished from sight upon its migration to England.

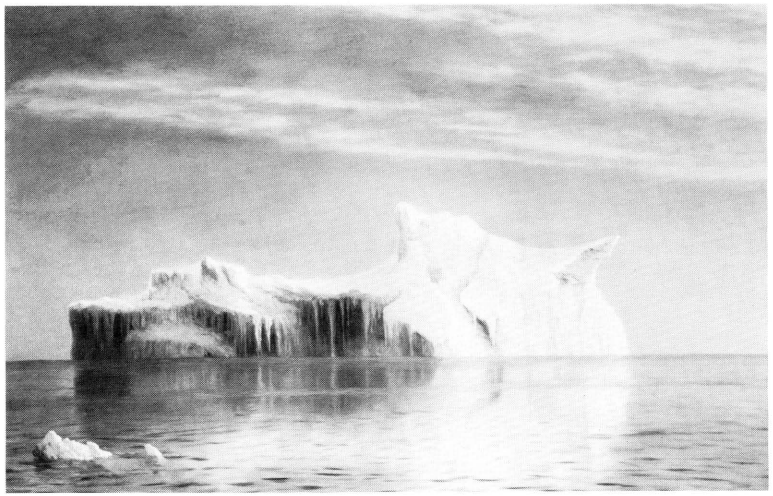
Consider especially the fact that only one major iceberg painting emerged from Church's studio. By contrast, the artist essayed Niagara three times in monumental canvases, South America several times, and eventually the Middle East on a number of occasions. The nearly one hundred on-the-spot studies now preserved at the Cooper-Hewitt Museum offered, one might think, many possibilities for additional paintings, but Church did not take advantage of those opportunities. Perhaps he believed that little more needed saying artistically about the subject; more probably he felt that his most public work of art was plagued by undeserved misfortune and personal tragedy.

Just once more did Church concern himself with the Arctic in an important painting. *The Aurora Borealis* (fig. 16), completed in New York in early 1865 and shipped immediately to London as part of a splendid three-work Church exhibition,[1] commemorated, even as did *The Icebergs*, the strong personal ties between Church and Isaac Hayes. Indeed, the two pictures were intended as companion pieces through the medium of chromolithography.[2] The planned pairing (unfortunately the print of the *Aurora* was not carried out) of these two very different images confirms an oft-repeated observation of many of the painter's contemporaries: he did not repeat himself in his major works. The two depictions are distinct yet related representations of thrilling unearthly radiances. The "frozen Aurora" which some commentators saw in *The Icebergs* had become actual Aurora.

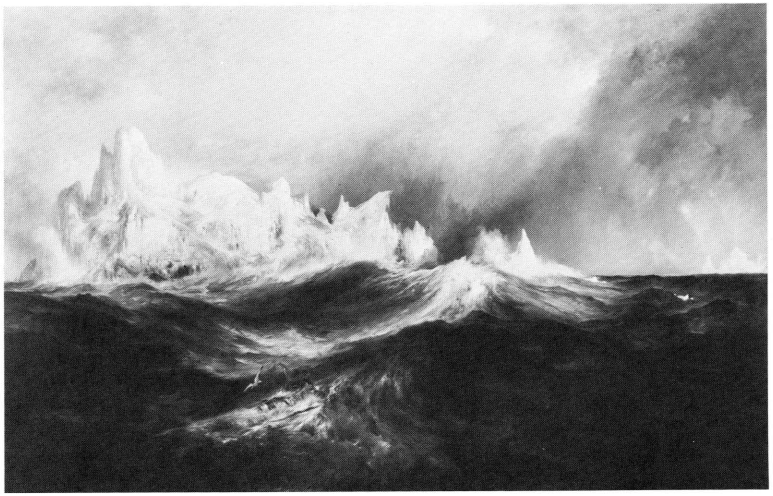
It was in the work of other artists that *The Icebergs* spawned a significant following. At the London Royal Academy exhibition of 1864, Sir Edwin Landseer's (1802-1873) *Man Proposes, God Disposes* (fig. 56), a large canvas showing two polar bears tearing at the remains of the Franklin expedition, was a fine critical success despite the disapproval of Lady Franklin. After some clever maneuvering by the artist, the picture was sold for £3500 — i.e. $17,500.[3] "Who taught" Landseer to portray Arctic desolation with such bone-chilling accuracy, one appreciative reviewer asked.[4] But neither he nor any other writer reached the conclusion that seems so evident to us.

As early as the spring of 1861, William Bradford (1823-1892), a Massachusetts marine painter, made his first of several voyages to the North Atlantic in search of new subject matter. Although Bradford is known to

57
WILLIAM BRADFORD
IN POLAR SEAS 1882
Oil on canvas.
Private collection.



58
ALBERT BIERSTADT
ICEBERG SEEN FROM STEAMER 1883
Oil on canvas.
Private collection.



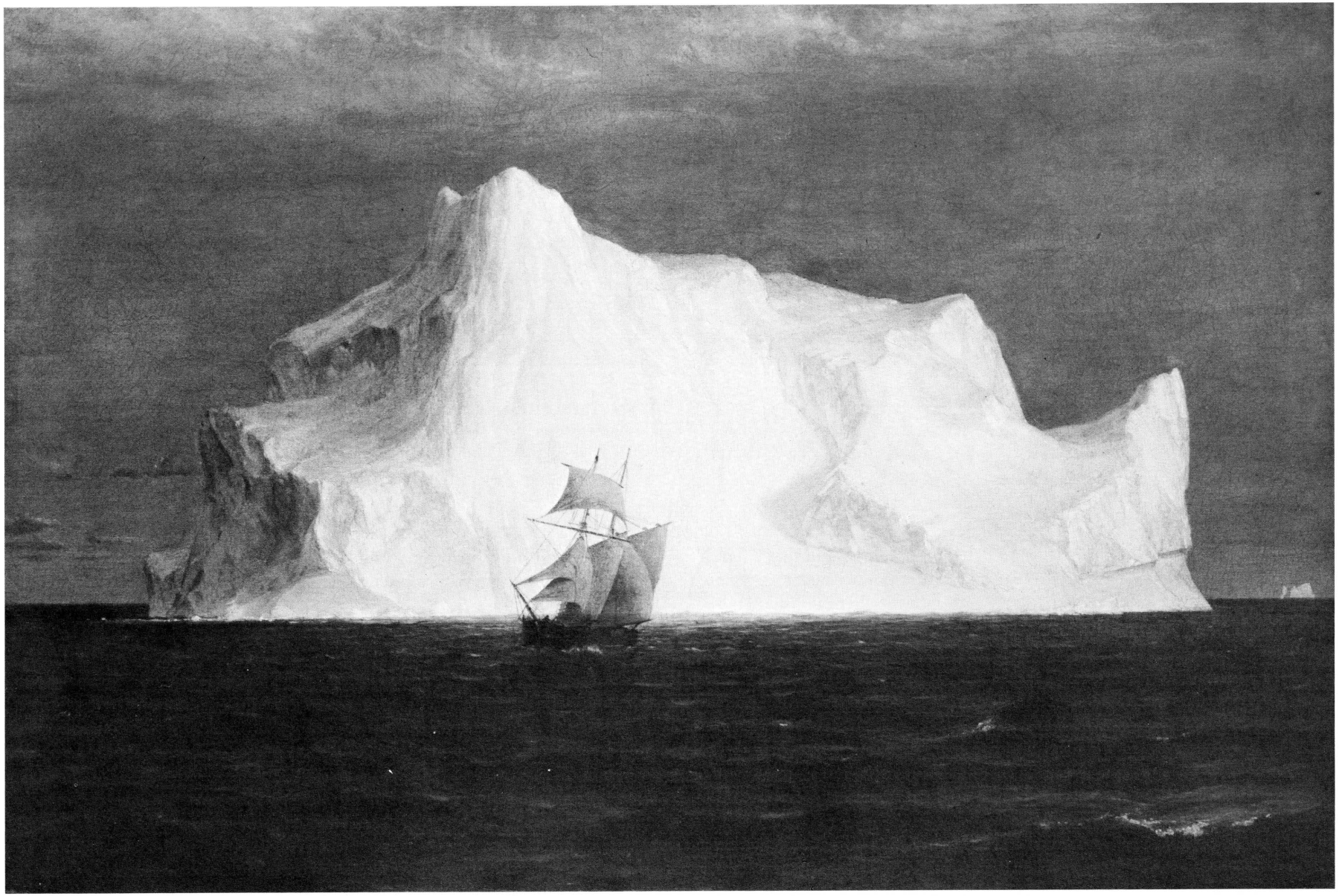
59
THOMAS MORAN
SPECTRES OF THE NORTH 1891
Oil on canvas.
Gilcrease Institute of American History and Art,
Tulsa, Oklahoma.

have had prior interest in the Arctic, it can safely be said that Church's *The Icebergs* opened the door to Bradford's mature career as a noted Arctic explorer, painter, lecturer, and photographer-publisher. In succeeding years Bradford, not Church, accompanied Isaac Hayes on a Polar expedition (in 1869); painted large numbers of Arctic and iceberg scenes, many of which were widely exhibited in America, Great Britain and Germany to lavish critical acclaim; and numbered Lady Franklin, Professor Tyndall and Lord Tennyson among his friends and Queen Victoria among his patrons. Bradford's studio was notably more open to public scrutiny than Church's had been.[5] As late as 1882, Bradford's *In Polar Seas* (fig. 57) demonstrated his continuing debt to *The Icebergs*.

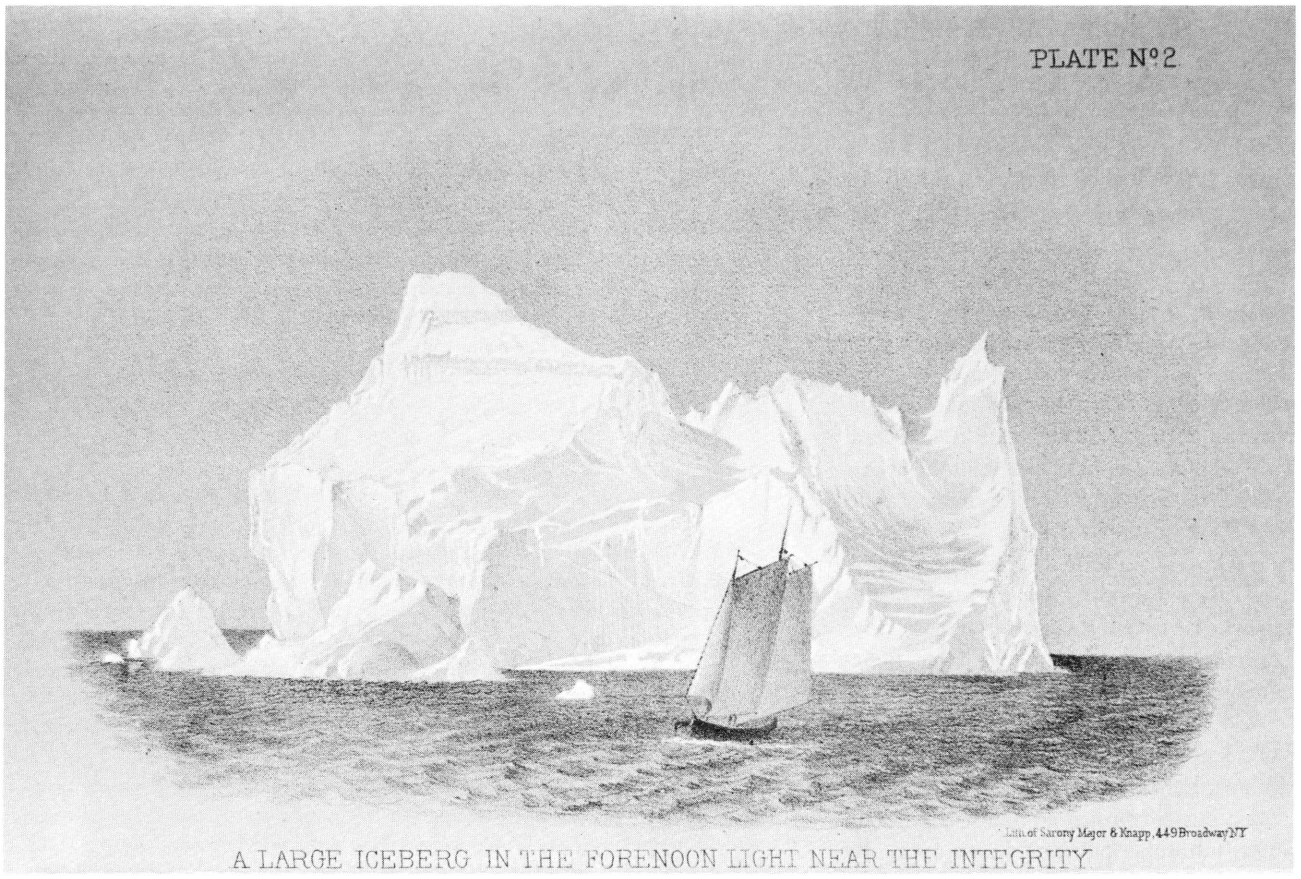
In 1865 George Curtis (1826-1881), a Boston marine artist who also had had prior interest in the Arctic, exhibited *The Iceberg* in New York to complimentary newspaper appraisal.[6] Several times in the 1880s Albert Bierstadt (1830-1902), Church's major American rival heroic landscapist since the early 1860s, was intrigued by ice floes and icebergs sighted both in the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. At least one of Bierstadt's iceberg paintings (fig. 58), which recorded a sighting during a transatlantic crossing in June 1883, distinctly recalled Church's picture of nearly a quarter century earlier.

But the most spectacular descendent of *The Icebergs* has a different relationship with the original, and with Church himself. A full three decades after *The Icebergs* was unveiled to a distracted New York, Thomas Moran's (1837-1926) colossal *Spectres of the North* (1891; fig. 59) was exhibited twice in a much more sedate atmosphere in the same city.[7] Moran's giant canvas, which recollected but also amplified and allegorized icebergs which Moran had recently seen in the North Atlantic, doubtless was in addition — particularly in its title — a belated but deliberate homage to Church's masterpiece.

Church must have been aware of the intent, if only through press reports of Moran's success. By mid-April 1891, according to a letter he wrote to Erastus Dow Palmer (1817-1904), the Albany-based sculptor with whom he had shared many artistic ambitions and personal contacts over the years, Church had just completed a painting of *The Iceberg* (fig. 60).[8] Compared to Church's own earlier work as well as to Moran's, the



60
FREDERIC EDWIN CHURCH
THE ICEBERG 1891
Oil on canvas.
Museum of Art, Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh,
Howard N. Eavenson Americana Collection.



61
After Frederic Edwin Church, **A LARGE ICEBERG IN THE FORENOON LIGHT NEAR THE INTEGRITY.**
Tinted lithograph.
From Noble, **After Icebergs with a Painter**.
New York, 1861.

modest-size canvas is unadventurous. For its composition Church looked no farther than an illustration of "A Large Iceberg in the Forenoon Light Near the Integrity" (fig. 61) from *After Icebergs with a Painter*, and neither the coloring nor the paint handling are distinguished by the artist's earlier standards. Yet, as the aging painter told Palmer, the work — "the best I think I ever painted and the truest" — was produced in a burst of enthusiasm following the completion of a new studio at Olana. New working facilities, perhaps the thirty-year anniversary of the completion of his own *Icebergs*, and Moran's new blockbuster had revived potent memories. In the center of the picture a substantial vessel — which, though larger than *The Integrity*, is clearly based upon it — is set in full sail against an iceberg arrayed "like some great robe made in heaven." The painting undoubtedly symbolizes Church's own forthcoming confrontation with the Almighty.[9]

Well before his death in April 1900 Church had become a prophet without a following in his homeland. Philosophically relegated to obsolescence by new scientific discoveries, fin-de-siècle fatalism, and faded relevancies of "Manifest Destiny;" bypassed by the varied Francophilia of a younger generation of American artists; and partially crippled by arthritis, he consoled himself with work on Olana rather than on major paintings.

And in far-away Manchester, *The Icebergs* sank into even more complete anonymity, a banner of American mid-19th-century buoyancy, and of Anglo-American cooperation by forgotten heroes, strayed far from home. At Sir Edward Watkin's passing in 1901 Rose Hill and its contents were left to his son, Sir Alfred Mellor Watkin, who almost immediately sold the estate to William J. Parkyn, J. P.[10] Parkyn held the property for thirteen years until 1915 when he, in turn, disposed of Rose Hill to the Manchester Union, but not before diverting the painting as a gift "in perpetuity" to the "Church Room" (Church Hall) of St. Wilfred's Church, Northenden.[11] Although the parishioners publicly thanked Parkyn for his generous donation of "a valuable work of art," they obviously were uninformed — or did not trouble themselves — about either the artist's identity or the correct title of their windfall. Their expressed confidence that the work "will greatly enhance the general brightness and beauty of the room" likewise proved superficial. Six years later the painting was returned to its former home because it had obstructed recent performances of Shakespeare's *As You Like It* given in the Hall by a local drama club. Back in Rose Hill, unframed for many years, covered by an accumulating oily surface dirt, and minutely disfigured when one of the boys living at the Rose Hill Remand Home for Boys scratched in his signature, it remained neglected on the large light-colored wall above the main staircase (fig. 53) until 1979.

In our own century the cry of "Icebergs!" has excited the diverse creativities of Ralph Vaugh-Williams, Leni Riefenstahl and Clive Cussler, while the tragedy of the *Titanic* has continued to haunt the public imagination until this day. When Church's painting burst upon the scene in 1979 after more than a century of obscurity, the cry was raised again to overwhelming press and public response.

If one considers that in August 1980 there were reports of the findings of both the Titanic and of a mid-19th-century ship used in the search for Sir John Franklin, it is safe to say that the painted forms of Church's canvas are merely the tip — of an ongoing fascination.

NOTES TO CHAPTER V

1 See above, chapter I, note 13; chapter II, note 13. The London showing of *Chimborazo* likewise was the first anywhere.

2 H. B. H., "A Visit to the Studios of Some American Painters," *Art-Journal* (London), December 1865, 362. *The Aurora Borealis* and *Rainy Season in the Tropics* are also a pair. Although the latter was completed in 1866, Church worked on these two contrasting prismatic celestial displays, one northern and one southern, at the same time; the pairing is similar to that of *The Heart of the Andes* and *The Icebergs*. See *Evening Post* (New York), 16 February 1865.

3 Francis J. Woodward, *Portrait of Jane, a Life of Lady Franklin* (London, 1951), p. 330; *Reader* (London), 7 May 1864, 596; *Evening Post* (New York), 2 June 1864.

4 *Reader* (London), 7 May 1864, 595.

5 For Bradford, see especially John Wilmerding, *William Bradford 1823-1892* (De Cordova Museum and Whaling Museum of New Bedford, 1970). Bradford's largest canvas, *Sealers Crushed by Icebergs* (1866), which was acquired by the Whaling Museum of New Bedford in 1972, was exhibited and chromolithographed in Berlin; see *Daily Evening Transcript* (Boston), 4 August 1868. For an indication of the accessibility of Bradford's studio, see *New York Times*, 14 March 1867.

6 *Evening Post* (New York), 18 February 1865. Evidently this was the same painting exhibited at the Boston Athenaeum in 1867 (no. 291), and at the Yale College School of Fine Arts in the same year (*New York Times*, 22 July 1867). A painting answering this description is now in the collection of the Hon. Roderic Henderson. Another occasional American practitioner of iceberg scenes was Herman Herzog (1831-1932); see *Herman Herzog, 1831-1932* (New York, Chapellier Galleries, 1973).

7 *Spectres of the North* was first shown at the Salmagundi Club in New York City in mid-January 1891, and then at the National Academy of Design in April of that year. See Thurman Wilkins, *Thomas Moran, Artist of the Mountains* (Norman, Oklahoma, 1965), pp. 190-191.

8 Letter from Church to E. D. Palmer, dated Olana, 19 April 1891 (copy at Olana). The 1891 *Iceberg* painting is discussed by Huntington, *Landscapes*, pp. 110-111.

9 The same letter (see note 8) conveys a mood of fatalism as well as of enthusiasm. After discussing his recent pleasure in working on new paintings and re-working old ones, Church added: "About the time that a man has learned and tested rules of health by which, if in the first instance he had adopted would have enabled him to live forever, he steps out of this world . . ."

10 Advertisements of the sale in Manchester newspapers did not mention Church's painting. See e.g. *Manchester Courier and Evening Mail Property Circular*, July 1902. I would like to thank Jean M. Ayton for this reference.

11 The following data comes from the *St. Wilfred's, Northenden, Parish Magazine*, April 1915; letter from Charles H. Hoyle to James McDonald, dated Manchester 10 June 1921; letters from McDonald to Hoyle dated Manchester 22 June, 29 July 1921. Copies of the three letters are in the Manchester City Archives. Charles Hoyle, who was Hororary Secretary of the Church Room Committee, estimated that Sir Edward Watkin originally had paid £300 ($1500) for *The Icebergs*. I am indebted to the Rev. Greg Forster, Rector of St. Wilfred's, for bringing these references to my attention.

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