

Two Scenes from Burne-Jones's 'St George' Series Rediscovered

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Source: *The Burlington Magazine*, May, 1997, Vol. 139, No. 1130 (May, 1997), pp. 330-334

Published by: (PUB) Burlington Magazine Publications Ltd.

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/887315>

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Palmer. The terracotta was a copy of the much admired *Boy on a dolphin* which Garrick probably commissioned from Nollekens.<sup>10</sup> Garrick's letters during and after his trip to Italy do not make any reference to the sardonyx he obtained from Kaye, and while on his Grand Tour he kept a journal only in 1763. I have found no further information on any antiquities Garrick might have owned, let alone this much-admired cameo.<sup>11</sup>

Garrick clearly kept in touch with Richard Kaye. In a letter to him of 2nd January 1766 he refers to the copy he was having made of the Batoni portrait: 'Yr picture has not yet been out of my house, for the Copyer is so busy, he can't begin till ye latter End of next Week, & I would not let him have it, till he can begin & finish it out of hand – once more I thank You in ye Name of Me & ye family'.<sup>12</sup> Clark and Bowron identified two copies of the Ashmolean picture.<sup>13</sup> Garrick commissioned other portraits of himself during his brief Italian sojourn, including a bust by Joseph Nollekens and paintings by Nathaniel Dance and Angelica Kauffman, and with characteristic impulsiveness and panache he seems generally to have given these away.<sup>14</sup> He may have particularly admired the Batoni and wanted a reminder of it or he may have intended to display the copy of the portrait together with the antique cameo. In any case, Garrick desired to commemorate – on his own and his family's behalf, as he wrote – the successful exchange of gifts which had taken place at Rome.

*Ashmolean Museum, Oxford*

<sup>10</sup>See s. HOWARD: 'Nollekens and Caveceppi', *Art Bulletin*, XLVI [1964], p.180.

<sup>11</sup>Garrick as a collector of antiquities does not appear in the principal sources on British collectors in Rome, such as A. MICHAELIS: *Ancient Marbles in Great Britain*, Cambridge [1882], or s. HOWARD: *Bartolomeo Cavaceppi*, London [1982]. Both Gerard Vaughan and Martyn Anglessea have kindly confirmed my view that Garrick's antiquarian activities are largely unknown.

<sup>12</sup>*Letters of David Garrick* ed. D.M. LITTLE and G.M. KARHL: Cambridge, Mass. [1963], no. 382.

<sup>13</sup>CLARK *loc. cit.* at note 1 above. One was sold at Sotheby's, London, 18th February 1953, lot 76; the other at Sotheby's, London, 15th June 1960, lot 173 as by Allan Ramsay.

<sup>14</sup>See WALCH, *loc. cit.* at note 2 above, for further discussion.

## Two scenes from Burne-Jones's 'St George' series rediscovered

BY JOHN FRANKLIN MARTIN

AS the centenary of Sir Edward Burne-Jones's death approaches in 1998, it is fitting that two of his most important early paintings should have come to light. *The petition to the king* (Fig. 42) and *The princess drawing the lot* (Fig. 44), from the series of *St George and the dragon* painted for Myles Birket Foster, were last publicly exhibited in

England at Burlington House in 1906.<sup>1</sup> Since then their whereabouts have been unrecorded in the literature. In fact, since 1939 they have been hanging in a dormitory at Hanover College, a small liberal arts school in southern Indiana. Although they have been seen by generations of students in Donner Hall, their subjects and history had been forgotten until I came across them in 1994.

The Hanover paintings formed part of the first of Burne-Jones's well-known narrative cycles, *The legend of St George and the dragon*,<sup>2</sup> commissioned as a series of seven works in 1864 for the house of Myles Birket Foster, at the time one of England's most successful book illustrators and water-colourists. Birket Foster's elaborately half-timbered house, The Hill, which no longer stands, was in Witley, near Godalming, Surrey, on a lofty site with spectacular views extending as far as the church tower of Petworth some thirty miles distant. Designed largely by the artist himself and completed in 1863, it anticipated the English Domestic Revival of Norman Shaw and has been described by Nicholas Pevsner as 'remarkably progressive for its date'.<sup>3</sup>

The interior of The Hill was filled with Foster's wide-ranging art collection, which included works by Millais, Samuel Palmer, and many Turner water-colours. The mantels and wall shelves were crowded with oriental blue-and-white porcelain, an enthusiasm Foster shared with Dante Gabriel Rossetti, from whom he purchased his finest pieces. It was probably through Rossetti that Foster made the acquaintance of William Morris, who drew up ambitious plans for the interior design of the house,<sup>4</sup> one of the first major projects of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co. It contained furniture by Philip Webb, wallpapers by Morris, hand-painted tiled fireplaces and more than twenty stained-glass windows. Burne-Jones's own contribution to The Hill was extensive, including stained-glass designs as well as one of his earliest paintings, *The life of St Frideswide* (1859), a five-foot, eight-panelled standing screen based on a window design for Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford.<sup>5</sup> By 1864, when Birket Foster commissioned Burne-Jones to create the *St George* series for the dining room of The Hill,<sup>6</sup> he had become a vocal champion of the artist, supporting him over his controversial election that year as an Associate Member of the Society of Painters in Water-colours.<sup>7</sup>

Burne-Jones began the *St George* series, as was typical of his approach, by making numerous preparatory sketches, of which over sixty are preserved today in the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery and four in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. From these he worked up highly finished drawings, six of which are now in the British Museum. By the end of 1865, three of the paintings had been completed and were hung in the dining room of The Hill.<sup>8</sup> Because of the numerous commissions he had on hand at this time, Burne-Jones's progress on the remaining four scenes was slow, but his wife Georgiana recorded that the artist managed to finish them in 1867 with the help of Charles Fairfax Murray, who had joined Burne-Jones in November 1866, the first occasion on which he took on a studio assistant.<sup>9</sup>

The *St George* paintings are approximately 42 inches in height, with widths varying according to their position in the dining room. *The petition to the King*, the first of the two paintings now at Hanover College, both of which bear Burne-Jones's initials and the date

<sup>1</sup>*Exhibition of Works by the Old Masters*, Royal Academy, London, Winter Exhibition [1906]; see also H.M. CUNDALL: *Life of Birket Foster*, London [1904], pp.148–49.

<sup>2</sup>This series has been given several slightly different titles. MALCOLM BELL in his early monograph, *Sir Edward Burne-Jones*, London [1898], referred to it as 'the story of St. George'; FORTUNÉE DE LISLE, in *Burne-Jones*, New York [1904], called it 'The Legend of St. George', the title under which it was exhibited at McLean's Gallery in 1895, evidently with the artist's approval; GEORGIANA BURNE-JONES in her *Memorials*, London [1904], simply titled it 'St. George and the Dragon'. The titles and location of the seven paintings are as follows: 1. *The King's daughter* (Musée d'Orsay, Paris); 2. *The petition to the King* (Hanover College); 3. *The princess drawing the lot* (Hanover College); 4. *The princess led to the dragon* (private collection); 5. *The princess tied to the tree* (private collection); 6. *St George slaying the dragon* (Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney); 7. *The return of the princess* (Bristol City Art Gallery).

<sup>3</sup>N. PEVSNER: *The Buildings of England: Surrey*, Harmondsworth [1971], p.532.

<sup>4</sup>J. REYNOLDS: *Birket Foster*, London [1984], p.90.

<sup>5</sup>The panels were later detached, and the paintings today are in Cheltenham Ladies College. Many of the stained-glass windows and hand-painted tiles are in the Victoria and Albert Museum, the William Morris Gallery, Walthamstow, and other public and private collections.

<sup>6</sup>M. HARRISON and B. WATERS: *Burne-Jones*, New York [1973], p.89.

<sup>7</sup>REYNOLDS, *op. cit.* at note 4 above, p.96.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, p.99.

<sup>9</sup>'Also, with help, the last four pictures of "St. George and the Dragon" were finished: the other three were already in place. This was the first time that Edward called in aid to carry out his designs, and in his assistant he was fortunate beyond expectation. Mr. Charles Fairfax Murray was then a mere youth, but one whose intellectual and artistic power was visible at first sight.' BURNE-JONES, *op. cit.* at note 2 above, I, p.304.





42. *The petition to the king*, by Edward Burne-Jones. 1865–66. 106.7 by 103 cm. (Hanover College, Hanover IN).

1865–66, is the second in the cycle. In it the seated king of Egypt listens as the townspeople tell of the dragon's scourge. A kneeling man holds a bundled cloth – apparently all that remains of the most recent victim – while a cowed figure tells how the dragon tore into the victim's flesh, his curling fingers emulating the creature's claws. The figures are dressed in late medieval Italian costume, and the old man kneeling at right is strongly reminiscent of a kneeling magus from an *Adoration*. The Dante-like figure standing at the king's side will soon predict that the dragon can be appeased only with a virgin sacrifice. Lots must be drawn and the king's daughter will not be excluded.

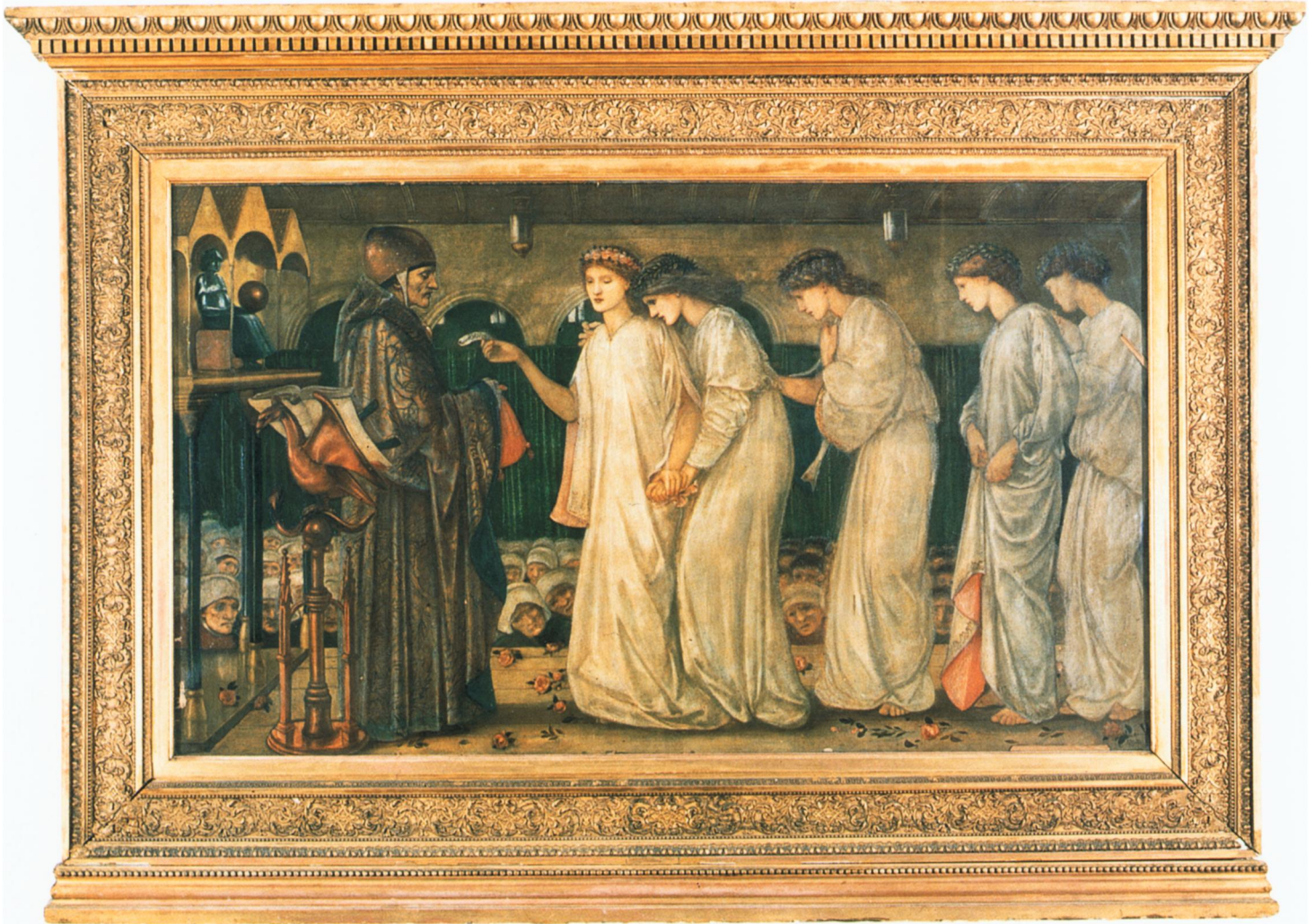
Burne-Jones made significant revisions to the composition as he worked on this scene. A preliminary sketch in Birmingham (Fig.45) shows two instead of three figures in the central area in front of the king, while a guard on the right holds back the angry townspeople. Having decided to introduce the supplicating figure, Burne-Jones made a detailed drawing for it, one of his most expressive studies (Fig.43). The inscription 'Story of S. George/The bones brought to King' gives us the clue to the contents of the cloth pulled from the basket in the final drawing (Fig.46), where the enraged populace are replaced by three calmly kneeling figures on the right. Further, but less significant changes were made between the final drawing and the painting itself. Indeterminate plants have been replaced by a rich frieze-like arrangement of virginal white lilies behind the figures, with pink roses at the king's back. Burne-Jones has also removed the tree trunk, which in the drawing clumsily appears to be growing from the head of one of the figures. The 'magus's' staff is now topped by a gilded classical statue of a youth holding an orb.

The second Hanover College canvas, *The princess drawing the lot*



43. *Study for the figure kneeling behind the basket*, by Edward Burne-Jones. Pencil, 17.5 by 9.5 cm. (Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery).





44. *Princess Sabra drawing the lot*, by Edward Burne-Jones. 1865–66. 106.7 by 183 cm. (Hanover College, Hanover IN).

shows a pagan priest wearing cope and mitre and holding a pouch filled with lots. He stands like a Christian priest before a high altar table adorned with a seated Egyptian idol holding a large globe. Princess Sabra has just drawn her lot, and reads the word 'MORTU-RA', her death sentence. Her face remains composed while the fingers of her left hand extend to grasp the maiden beside her, who leans forward in a gesture of consolation and sadness – creating an arching movement that continues through the other figures in a graceful chain.

The scene takes place in a flat-roofed building somewhat reminiscent of a basilica, with a curtain drawn across the side wall, which is pierced by four round arches. In the preparatory drawing (Fig. 47) these afford views of the pitched roofs of a town on the left and sailing ships on the open sea at the right. The beginning of a barrel vault is also apparent in the drawing.<sup>10</sup> The artist placed so much visual emphasis at the top of the composition that he must have intended the viewer to be shocked when finally noticing the sea of elderly, white-coifed faces below, who press tightly against the raised dais to witness the outcome of the draw. Some hope of rescue is offered in the symbolism of the large lectern in front of the priest, formed from a bird with extended wings subduing a serpent in its talons. The gothic style of the lectern with its pointed arches

and crocketed finials also seem to prefigure the sweeping away of paganism by Christianity. According to the St George legend, after the dragon was slain, the people of this Egyptian town were converted to the new religion. The princess's halo of pink roses, which does not appear in the drawing, and the strewn roses on the floor replacing the drawing's oriental carpet, further emphasise the virgin princess's rôle as the chosen one who will draw the saviour to her.

In creating the story of St George and the dragon, Burne-Jones would have known both Morris's and Rossetti's earlier treatments of the same theme.<sup>11</sup> Rossetti's six designs for stained-glass windows were made around 1862 for The Firm. Burne-Jones essentially adopted the same subjects while adding a seventh, *The king's daughter* (Fig. 48), as an introduction. Although the choice of subjects is similar, Burne-Jones's treatment shows him stylistically moving away from Rossetti, his early mentor. Rossetti gave his *Princess Sabra drawing the lot* an expressionistic feeling with strong movement, and a flat, dense, medievalised design. In contrast, Burne-Jones shows classical restraint and a style reflecting the impact of his 1862 journey to Italy with Ruskin. In essence, the *St George* series spanned the critical period when Burne-Jones was developing his own highly personal and introspective manner.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup>Bell's mention of 'glimpses of a city and a sail-flecked ocean' in his description of this scene (*op. cit.* at note 2 above, p. 36) makes it clear that he was not working from the painting (although he gives its dimensions), but from the drawing now in the British Museum.

<sup>11</sup>Morris's *Legend of St George* in the Victoria and Albert Museum, was painted on a cabinet designed by Philip Webb, and shown at the International Exhibition in Lon-

don in 1862. For Rossetti's windows 'The Story of Saint George and the Dragon', also in the V. and A., see s. WILDMAN: *Vision of Love And Life: Pre-Raphaelite Art from the Birmingham Collection, England*, exh. cat., Alexandria VA [1995], pp. 202–13.

<sup>12</sup>For the most intelligent analysis of Burne-Jones's style, see J. CHRISTIAN: 'A Serious Talk: Ruskin's Place in Burne-Jones's Artistic Development', in *Pre-Raphaelite Papers*, ed. L. PARRIS, London [1984], pp. 184–205.

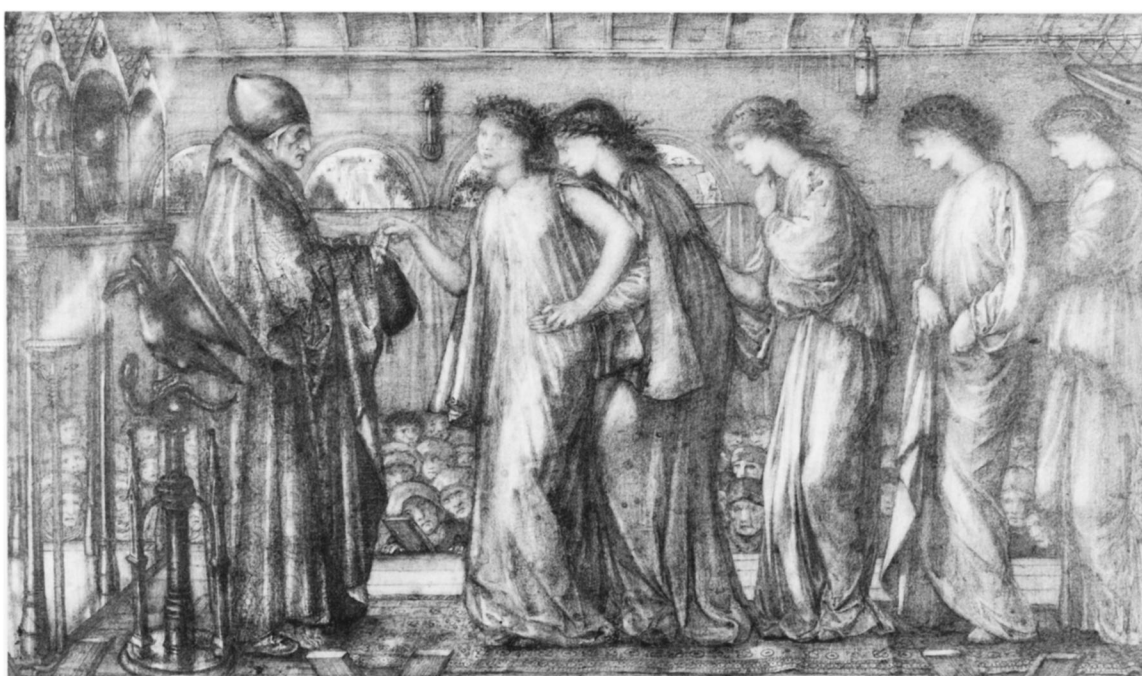




45. Sketch for *The petition to the king*, by Edward Burne-Jones. Pencil, 8.9 by 24.8 cm. (Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery).



46. *The petition to the king*, by Edward Burne-Jones. Pencil and black chalk, 35.2 by 60.4 cm. (British Museum, London).



47. *Princess Sabra drawing the fatal lot*, by Edward Burne-Jones. Pencil and black chalk, 35.1 by 60.5 cm. (British Museum, London).





48. *Princess Sabra in a garden*, by Edward Burne-Jones. Pencil, 35.8 by 19.8 cm. (British Museum, London).

Birket Foster was obliged to sell *The Hill* in 1893, and much of his collection, including the *St George* series, was auctioned at Christie's on 28th April the following year. In her *Memorials* Georgiana Burne-Jones describes her surprise at the degree of drama she found in the two scenes now at Hanover College:

The pictures were sent to Christie's, and on going there to see them again before the sale I was surprised by their dramatic character, especially in the scenes where the King looks at the blood-stained clothes of the girls who have been devoured by the Dragon, and where the poor mothers crowd into the Temple while the Princess draws the lot. I spoke of this to Edward afterwards, asking him whether he had not purposely suppressed the dramatic element in his later work, and he said yes, that was so – for no one can get every quality into a picture, and there were others that he desired more than the dramatic.<sup>13</sup>

At the auction the *St George* series was purchased by the dealer William Agnew who exhibited them at MacLean's Gallery, London, in February 1895. In a letter of 22nd February, Birket Foster wrote to his old friend Edmund Evans that his son Willie had acquired the reproduction rights to the series and intended to publish them in a mixed technique of photogravure and engraving, adding that 'they look simply splendid', having been 'varnished slightly which brings out the colour just as it was when they were painted'.<sup>14</sup>

In his monograph on Burne-Jones, Malcolm Bell noted that the *St George* paintings were 'subsequently largely repainted by the artist',<sup>15</sup> and it was at this time that Burne-Jones added the elaborately-carved and gilded Renaissance frames, similar to a pattern he chose for his late works, as shown in a 1898 photograph of the artist's studio.<sup>16</sup> A possible reason for the renewed interest in the series was that they were to be sent in August 1897 to Germany for the *VII Internationale Kunstausstellung*, where they won a Gold Medal, just ten months before the artist's death.<sup>17</sup> The following year four of the paintings, including the two now at Hanover College, were acquired by C. Sidney Goldmann from the Anderson Gallery, and in 1906, still in Goldman's possession, they were shown at the Old Master exhibition at the Royal Academy.<sup>18</sup>

The two scenes under discussion here then entered the collection of Sir Edmund Davis at Chilham Castle, Kent, a Jacobean mansion purchased by Davis and his wife Mary to house their notable collection.<sup>19</sup> In the 1890s the Davises had met Charles Ricketts, a great admirer of Burne-Jones's work, who became their artistic mentor. Their collection included both old masters and contemporary art, including major works by Rodin, who was a frequent guest at Chilham, and Whistler's *At the piano*, now at the Taft Museum, Cincinnati. Auctioned as part of Davis's collection at Christie's on 7th July 1939, the two Burne-Jones paintings were purchased by William Henry Donner, a wealthy American industrialist, who had briefly attended Hanover College in his youth. In a letter to Hanover's president, Dr Albert Parker, Donner explains how he came to acquire the pair for the college:

I learned that the pictures of Sir Edmond Davis were to be sold at auction at Christie's, London. He had quite a noted collection. You may recall reading about thieves entering Chillam Castle and cutting several canvases out of their frames . . .

Mrs. Donner, Dora [their daughter] and I had the pleasure of lunching with Sir Edmond Davis the summer before last and he showed us his pictures and walked with us over his estate. He had a most beautiful place. His wife is not very well and does not want to live there, so everything is being sold.

After looking over the pictures, I concluded that two of them would be quite suitable for the college. They were painted by Sir Edward Burne-Jones. I succeeded in getting them for the college, and if they have not already been shipped, they will be very soon . . .<sup>20</sup>

The paintings arrived at Hanover College the following month and a local newspaper columnist gave this admiring description:

The dramatic quality in both is intense, especially when Princess Sabra, holding the fatal slip in one hand, almost crushes the hand of the virgin behind her with her other hand . . .

In the petition to the king the faces of the eight figures are caught at the supreme moment of supplication and anxiety. Each is worth delaying over long enough to feel the personality it is intended to convey and the result is so convincing that the canvas seems alive.

Add to this the mass of color in both pictures and the effect on the beholder is that of being present at some great living moment of the past where dignity, tragedy, and beauty march hand in hand.<sup>21</sup>

*Hanover College, Indiana*

<sup>13</sup>BURNE-JONES, *op. cit.* at note 2 above, I, pp.296–97.

<sup>14</sup>REYNOLDS, *op. cit.* at note 4 above, p.176.

<sup>15</sup>BELL, *op. cit.* at note 2 above, p.37.

<sup>16</sup>BURNE-JONES, *op. cit.* at note 2 above, p. 350.

<sup>17</sup>DE LISLE, *op. cit.* at note 2 above, p. 167.

<sup>18</sup>See CUNDALL, *loc. cit.* at note 1 above. The Hanover College paintings are listed by DE LISLE, *op. cit.* at note 2 above [1904], p.181, in the collection of C. Sidney Goldmann, purchased by him in 1898 from the Anderson Gallery. According to the Christie's auction catalogue of 1939, they were also exhibited at the New Gallery in

1899.

<sup>19</sup>For Davis, see s. REYNOLDS: 'Sir Edmund Davis, Collector and Patron of the Arts', *Apollo*, CXI [June 1980], pp.459–63. I am very grateful to John Christian for this reference.

<sup>20</sup>Quoted by C.E. HEBERHART: 'They Say and Do in the Country', *Madison Courier* [2nd August 1939]. Donner concluded his letter by writing: 'The sale come at a very bad time for the sellers, due to the business situation and the crisis. A Whistler sold for \$35,000 that I know he refused to sell at \$100,000'.

<sup>21</sup>HEBERHART, *ibid* [19th August 1939].