

## Light of the World

A Painting by Holman Hunt (1827-1910)

Painted in 1854 and probably the best known of Hunt's works, this painting caused a sensation in both the religious and artistic establishments, being both attacked and admired.

Ruskin described it as "one of the very noblest works of sacred art ever produced in this or any age."

The painting illustrates a passage from Revelation:

"Behold I stand at the door, and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."

Hunt began the painting at night in the orchard of Worcester Park Farm, in the winter of 1851. A disused hut, overgrown with ivy and brambles, was used as a model for the door. Ruskin, in a defense of the painting in THE TIMES, dwelt on this door, 'knitted and bound' like the human soul.

The original was purchased by Thomas Combe, Printer to the University of Oxford. Following his death in 1872, the painting was offered to Keble College, Oxford.

Hunt was not happy with the way that Keble College kept the picture in the Library. It had been a transforming experience for him, causing him to forsake his agnosticism; he wanted it to be more visible. So twenty-five years later he decided to paint another one.

The new version, painted with the help of a pupil since Hunt was losing his eyesight, was four times the size of the original and sold on the understanding that the buyer would send it round the world to help transform others. Having taken three years to paint, it was also requested of the buyer that he had color reproductions made that could be sold at a moderate price.

The large picture travelled thousands of miles. In Australia and New Zealand alone over 4/5 of the population saw it, many traveling hundreds of miles. Finally it was hung in St. Paul's Cathedral, London, in 1904. At the service that took place there, to mark the event, Hunt, now old and almost blind, had to be led out of the cathedral weeping.

The original version of 1853 hangs in The Side Chapel at Keble College, Oxford.  
The second version still resides in St. Paul's Cathedral, London.