



THE LATE MR. HUNT, WATER-COLOUR PAINTER.—FROM "THE ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS."

WILLIAM HENRY HUNT, the eminent water-colour painter, died on the 10th of February, 1864, at the goodly age of seventy-four, when the (Old) Society of Painters in Water Colours, and, let us add, the whole English school of painting, lost in his death an artist of great originality, and some of whose powers were, we firmly believe, unparalleled. It is a bold thing to claim unique excellence for any artist of our own day; yet we hazard the assertion that, within certain limits of comparison and in respect to a few special qualities, William Hunt is the *facile princeps* of all known painters of still-life. Now, in the still-life drawing of William Hunt there is, in the first place, the same complete command of the material resources of art, and we think we shall offend no one by saying that the deceased has left none behind him so completely master of the materials of water-colour painting. In whatever other qualities he may have transcended him, even Turner has not exemplified the power of colour and force of relief we find in some works by William Hunt. In the next place, Hunt has the negative merit of being—almost, by-the-way, for the first time in the history of still-life art—entirely free from that definite, limited, and assignable finality of the copyist. But

the quality which places Hunt's still-life supreme and apart is the (in a sense) positive one of being mysteriously and illimitably suggestive. Every touch is so. All that is artistically beautiful in the object he imitates is, as it were, reduced to its essential component grain, and each grain readjusted on the paper without confusion or loss of identity. It is the very alchemy of art, exemplifying in one and the same instance the opposite processes of analysis and synthesis. He, for the first time in still-life painting, unites perfect finish with perfect freedom, and optical illusion, which is a necessary property of comprehensive imitation, with that feeling in selection which is the higher characteristic of artistic representation. We see, in short, the poetic suggestions wedded to the prose facts of arts, and set to each other "like perfect music unto noble words." In looking at a Dutch flower-piece one instantly thinks of the painter's patient laboriousness, and often ends by commiserating him for his toilsome drudgery; but we no more dream of effort or labour in a drawing of fruit or flowers by Hunt than we do in gazing at the flowers of the field themselves, which "toil not, neither do they spin."