



238 Putnam Avenue
Cambridge, MA 02139
June 29, 1990



Dear 

Re: Eastman Johnson, Child at Prayer, oil on canvas mounted on board, 36 x 27 inches. Not dated; signed L. R. "E. Johnson."

As you know I examined this painting on June 7, 1990, at the residence of 
 It is a well painted picture, rich in beige, cream and brown colors, and true in modeling. In my opinion, it was certainly painted by the American genre painter Eastman Johnson (1824-1906).

The painting includes characteristics typical of Johnson's paintings: a thin sienna underpainting, graphite (pencil) defining some of the details such as the bed post, and the averted face of the child. Moreover, the sentiment expressed--the simple piety of a child--is also characteristic of Johnson's subjects.

Johnson did other paintings of children in quiet moments: dressing a doll, reading a book, cuddling a rabbit. What is impressive about Child at Prayer is the size. Most of his paintings of single children are smaller.

I looked at the painting with an ultra-violet light and noted that there has been some retouching, such as strengthening of the paint on the ear and parts of his hair and on the gown at the back. The painting also seems to have been overcleaned. Nevertheless, the painting is handsome.

Child at Prayer was listed in John I. H. Baur's checklist of Johnson paintings, which was included as an appendix to his An American Genre Painter: Eastman Johnson, 1824-1906 (Brooklyn: Brooklyn Museum, 1940), p. 64, entry 88. At that time the owners were The Misses F. Pearl and Elizabeth Browning. They owned several of Johnson's paintings and I am not certain what their relationship was to the family. The Brooklyn Museum has a photograph of the painting which I saw about 1970 or 1971.

Johnson was a sentimental man who seems to have had ties with several Protestant denominations. His sister Harriet Charles Johnson was married to the Reverend Joseph May of Newburyport, Massachusetts, whom he painted; he was friends of Henry Ward Beecher, the famous Congregational preacher, and he painted the Reverend Henry C. Potter of Grace Church in New York. (Ten years after his portrait of Potter [1886], his daughter was married in Grace Church.) He also painted The Reverend Eliphalet Nott Porter of Union College and the Reverend Dr. James McCosh of Princeton.

In 1864 Johnson painted a work called Devotion which was sold at auction at the sale of the Edward Runge collection held at the American Art Galleries in 1902. It was described as follows: "A woman in black, with a black veil covering her head and shoulders, kneels in prayer before a carved-wood prie-Dieu that stands against the wall, under a large picture. Behind her, to the left is a couch, with wooden rails enclosing a red coverlet, and a high wooden head, with curtains of the same color." As you can tell from the description, that painting contained a great deal of detail for its size (21 x 17 inches). (I have a photograph of in my file which may be representing the same Devotion.)

I would suggest that the painting was executed in the early 1870s, based on the broad handling of form.

I will include the picture in my catalogue raisonne of Johnson's work.

Sincerely yours,

Patricia Hills
Art historian and author,
Eastman Johnson, 1972.