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GUSTAVE COURBET, ARTIST AND COMMUNIST.

It is a lovely, unvisited region,—unvisited by Americans and English at least,—the ancient province of Franche-Comté. Lying upon the eastern limits of France, its hills divide the streams of the through-routes, the travel toward the Rhine going to the north, the travel to Switzerland passing by on either hand; so that the greater part of the region still remains unknown to the tourist,—a sort of water-shed of travel. But the new railway from Besançon to Locle will soon change that. Already, from the sweet valley of the Doubs, the parting genii have been sent, and construction trains are rolling to and fro upon the very face of those romantic precipices. As yet, however, the only tourist who has made a book about this region is Miss Betham Edwards, with her pleasant "Holidays in Eastern France." Two summers ago I found a new route into this land of hills. From New York I took the new and in every way excellent line of steamers direct to Bordeaux; and thence, a cross-lot route through central France, stopping overnight, or longer, at Périgueux, Tulle, Clermont-Ferrand, Paray-le-Monial, and Bourg, and so to Besançon, the ancient capital of the ancient province.

Province, of course, it has not been for many a year, at least administratively and cartographically. The old division is still convenient for several purposes; but the modern maps of France do not often mark other political divisions of the country than those of 1792 into departments. The ancient Franche-Comté is distributed into three—the Haute-Saône and the Doubs, named from their rivers, and the Jura, named from its mountains. The two last-named departments border upon Switzerland; from the nearest point of the French boundary, in the Jura, Geneva is distant scarcely twice the range of modern

cannon-shot. These four thousand square miles of mountain, valley, meadow, and forest form one of the most beautiful regions in France or in Europe. The Jura and the Doubs are Courbet's country.

Ornans, in the Doubs, was the painter's birthplace. The little stone-built village stands in the valley of the Loue, a stream that slips down between grassy banks to the Doubs, and so to the Saône, and so to the Rhone, and so to the Mediterranean. What an inland place is Ornans! what woodland glades are there, what still haunts and romantic *combes*,—small deep valleys, walled in by green turf on three sides, and without water-courses. It is a region of magical beauty. Ornans is a place for Keats to have been born in, or Claude. Victor Hugo was born a few miles away, under the citadel of Vauban, in Besançon. But it was quite out of keeping for the rude-striding figure of Gustave Courbet, the iconoclast artist, to appear in that vale of Rasselas, Ornans in the Doubs.

There, however, with nature's too frequent disregard of the proprieties, Courbet was born (June 10th, 1819), and there still reside the survivors of his father's family and his oldest friends. Among the latter his name is not yet "rehabilitated." For them, and indeed for most Frenchmen, Courbet is less an artist than a vandal. After the events of the Commune, his friends turned upon him. A painter notorious rather than distinguished in France, and little known outside of France, an agitator and a Communist, he achieved infamy by destroying works of art when he found that he could not win fame by creating them,—this, or something like it, is the substance of the judgments you will hear from his countrymen to-day. Ornans is visited by many artists, who seek to fix the visionary

beauty which generally eluded the sturdy, realistic art of Courbet; but his birthplace is not a shrine for his countrymen, who more than most other people seek to do honor to the memory of those whom they consider worthy.

Let us ask how much of his countrymen's censure is deserved by the painter of Ornans; and for the better answering, let us not take sides in the quarrel which still goes on respecting his merits as a painter and as a man. It is the vice of criticism to reduce itself to terms of praise and blame. Is it not better to study Courbet neither as a praiseworthy nor a blamable, but simply as an interesting person?

Courbet's father was an independent farmer, and an uneducated man except in his own business. He had a relative in the University of Paris, a law professor; but Courbet *père* was chiefly acquainted with the soil, the changes of crops, the spots where the wine and the fruit would ripen best; he had personal acquaintance, after the pottering way of French farmers, with every quince and peach in his orchard. He was well to do; and, like most French farmers, he was contented; he was satisfied with his life and his position. If, now, he could only have been induced to take interest in the affairs of the rest of the world,—say in European politics or in American progress! But the French farmer is painfully narrow; he persists in understanding his own things, in caring for his own things, and in caring but little for the things of other people. He is content to be prosperous and happy at home; and he shows a sad apathy to the claims of politics and literature. That eminent critic of Bœotia, Dr. Samuel Johnson, used to say that the Athenians were "brutes" because they had no newspapers. The French farmer has his newspaper, but he cares less for the news than for the regular installments of the *feuilleton*. Love of the soil and of the home is his deepest feeling,—a narrowness for which he is commiserated by most of my countrymen. Yes, it is a sad thing to be contented and happy! Yet we may remark that the French farmer has at least this much of good fortune: he does not spend his life in merely hoping to be, at some future time in this world or the next, contented and happy.

From such stock came Gustave Courbet,—himself a man of quite different qualities. He inherited one trait, of which I have not spoken,—a certain willfulness that had stood more than once in the way of his parents' own interests, and came in part from their possession of independent means. On the Courbet farm one may see, or might have seen last September a year, an unusual thing in

thrifty France; to wit, a large pile of fire-wood decaying in the open air. The nearest neighbor of the Courbets, Dr. C——, told me that years ago the old farmer had cut the wood to sell, offering it at a certain figure. No one would give his price; and when some of the neighbors offered less, Courbet *père* was nettled. "My price or none," said he. But, the neighbors having their own mind about it too, the wood has lain there rotting ever since,—a Declaration of Independence that is years older than the French Republic.

The young artist thus came of a self-willed stock; and his own self-will was shown in a very early and a very resolute bent toward painting. He began with caricature while at school in Ornans (his first teacher was the Abbé Gousset, since a well-known cardinal). In school and out of it, he caricatured everybody—teachers, comrades, family and friends. The wife of my informant just mentioned, Dr. C——, was one of his involuntary sitters. At church he caricatured the priests and the choir-singers; he was getting his hand in for the coarse but telling assaults upon the priesthood which are among the best known of his later pictures.

As the boy grew up, his parents sent him to the college at Besançon. Here there were brief studies and long rambles among those beautiful hills and along the Doubs. When his course was finished they found him a teacher in mathematics, a Mr. Delby; but the amiable Delby secretly favored his inclination for painting. While ostensibly struggling with co-sines and other disagreeable things of that sort, he was doing the first art-work of which I have been able to find any trace; and it is curious enough. M. Auguste Castan, the accomplished librarian of the great library in Besançon, showed me, a year ago, a little book of poems, excessively rare, by Max Buchon, the first publication by that author, who became famous in his country before his death: and Buchon's venture was illustrated by his friend Courbet's first engraved work, four small vignettes. The title-page reads: "Essais poétiques, par Max B. Vignettes par Gust. C. Besançon, 1839." The vignettes are quite boyish and commonplace. "Both the pictures and the verses are bad enough to break your heart," says Max Claudet, the gifted sculptor of Salins, and an old intimate of both Buchon and Courbet. But they show the strong story-telling bent of the artist—the dominating impulse, as we shall see, in all of Courbet's work outside of pure landscape; and they show, too, his dominating trait as a man, his egotism. These distracting little vignettes (I wish they were



THE FAIR DUTCHWOMAN.

worth reproducing here) are signed in full. Other bad vignettes have been made before and since, but I doubt whether an equally intelligent artist has often set his name to work as poor as this. M. Paul Mantz, in the "Gazette des Beaux-Arts," compares Courbet to Vacca, an artist of the sixteenth century, whose epitaph, composed by himself, may still be read in the Pantheon at Rome: "Here lies Flaminius Vacca, a Roman sculptor, who satisfied himself in none of his works." The inscription supplies a contrast rather than a comparison. The fitting epitaph of the painter of Ornans would read as follows: "Here lies Courbet, a painter who more than satisfied himself in all his works."

School and college ended, what was to be done with the energetic youth? His father, as we have seen, had a learned cousin in Paris; and thither young Courbet was sent, in the year 1839, to study the learned cousin's profession of law. But law was not for Courbet, neither in books nor in art nor in life. He abandoned himself to painting and to the pleasures for which in our country Paris is chiefly reputed. He tried his hand at figure-drawing and at landscape: his first efforts in landscape date from 1841,—views in the forest of Fontainebleau. In 1842 he painted his own

portrait, and for several successive years he sent it to the Salon. Each time it was refused. But portraits of himself, more or less flattered, appear more than a few times in the course of his work; as in "The Lovers in the Country," and, notably, in "The Man with the Leather Girdle" (*L'Homme à la Ceinture de Cuir*), now No. 424 in the Luxembourg gallery. In this powerful portrait the head is too ideal for Courbet's at any time, unless, possibly, for the year or two during his college life when he studied Goethe, and even painted a scene from the "Walpurgis Night." But Courbet had as little of poetry or of the dramatic gift in his nature as any painter who ever painted; and in later years, looking on this scene as treason to his rigid doctrine of realism, he obliterated it by painting another picture over it.

Courbet's first exhibited pictures, portraits of himself and of his dogs (1844), attracted little attention. But before long his work began to tell upon the public and the critics. The "After Dinner at Ornans," in 1849, was especially noticed. In 1850 Courbet awoke and found himself famous. Two of his most important works were upon the Salon walls that year: "A Burial Scene at Ornans" (*Un Enterrement à Ornans*), and *Les Casseurs*

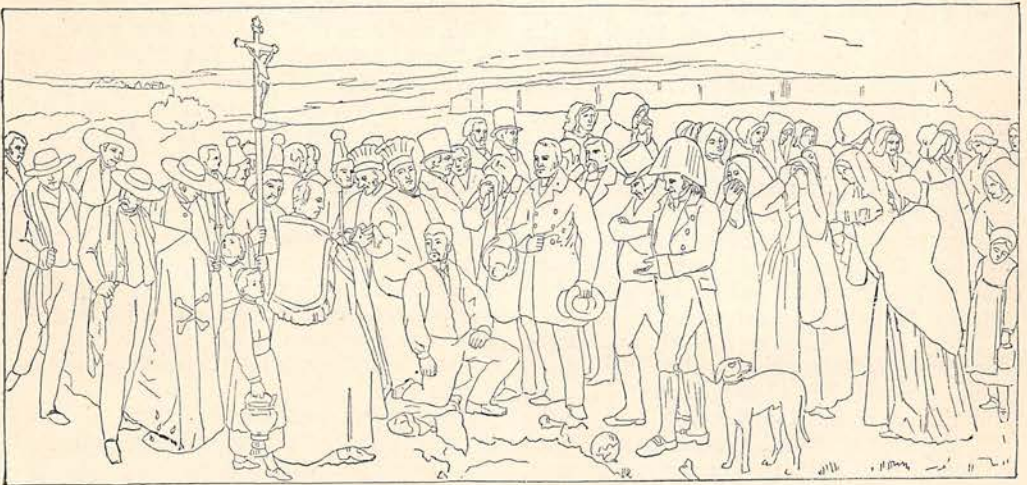
de Pierres ("The Stone-Breakers"). These works placed him at once among the men who cannot be put aside; right or wrong, here was a new force in European art. De Maistre says: "He who has not conquered at thirty years will never conquer." Is not the aphorism a little too stringent, a little too brilliant? Doubtless; yet Courbet's first pictures illustrated the aphorism. When he conquered he was not yet thirty-one.

These are strong pictures; they have great faults, too, if one judge them by any canons of perfection. Certainly I do not; I am content to take them, as other works of art, for their own merits and defects, for what they are in themselves and in their expression of their time. It is better to judge a picture by what is in it than by what is out of it. And these pictures are at least full of truth after their own kind.

The "Burial Scene at Ornans" (now in the Salle des Colonnades at the Louvre) is a "stunning stroke" of realism. Into a canvas ten feet by twenty-two are hustled nearly fifty heads and figures of life-size: you can count forty-nine and a dog. They are hustled upon the canvas, as I say. There is no composition there, no beauty of expression in the faces; but there is severe truth in the greater part of the picture, even in the details of the background landscape. The overhanging cliffs of the valley of the Loue, for instance, will recall the country to any one who knows it well. The picture is truthful, yet not wholly true:

are still living; and the portraits are quite the reverse of flattered. And one might say that even in the technique of the handling there was a pugilistic spirit. The delicate French criticism complained of a "brutality in some of the dark tones and in some of the reds"; but, on the other hand, a certain tenderness of sentiment cannot be denied to the group of women mourners who stand toward the right. This unwonted note of gentleness, was welcomed by Courbet's critics; it led some of them to hope that Courbet might come to value and to reproduce in his art more delicate things than the "paint-slinger," as in their equivalent phrases they called him, had theretofore chosen to render,—some such tender beauty as that which his birth-mate in years, Édouard Frère, was already producing. But nature loves to make opposites of her twins. Frère she consecrated to tenderness and poetry, Courbet to "brutality"—so far, at least, as relates to his dealing with human sentiment. Courbet was a realist, but a narrow realist in spite of his power; for to him emotion was merely a sentimentalism, instead of a prime truth with which art is concerned. He excluded the fruitful emotions from his pictures; and this deficiency is their main demerit.

But, as if in compensation for this, Courbet had great sympathy with animals. This you feel, for instance, in that spirited "At Bay" (*L'Hallali du Cerf*). How ardently the dogs bound upon the scene, breaking out from



A BURIAL SCENE AT ORNANS.

there is a strong note of caricature in the portraits of the priests and beadles, whom Courbet hated; he has made their faces radiant with vulgarity. They, and the rest of the group, are portraits of actual persons, many of whom

every copse and cover; in what a rapture of excitement they tremble between fear of the master huntsman, who towers over them with his long whip, and dread of the wounded stag, who has already sent one of the pack to

bite the snow. Never was such a tempest of the chase, such a stirring tumult of hounds. The life and action of the work are extraordinary; the picture, in spite of more than a little bad drawing, is a fascinating one, because it is full of vitality; it thrills; its errors of execution are overlooked because it tells a story with extraordinary vividness and power.*

In the "Hallali" our sympathies go with the chase, with that excited and intelligent democracy of hunting-dogs. There is a companion picture, the antithesis of this, "The Doe Run Down in the Snow" (*La Chevette forcée à la Neige*). It is the end of the chase; the poor creature can run or stand no longer; she has fallen breathless on her track. The hunter blows a strong blast, the horn rings out the fatal *hallali*; all four feet in the air at once, the dogs are bounding down the hill-side like demons; in a minute they will be upon her. For those last few seconds she takes her tranquil rest there in the snow.

A companion piece, "The Quarry" (*La Curée du Chevreuil*), an interesting work, in spite of faulty drawing and an inexplicable perspective, was exhibited in the same Salon (1857), and was bought by the Allston Club of Boston.

But I am a little in advance of the record. At the Salon of 1850-51, beside the "Burial Scene," another of Courbet's chief works appeared, "The Stone-Breakers" (*Les Casseurs de Pierres*). This, too, is transcribed from the life; and the figures are portraits and life-size, as if Courbet feared to lose any detail of the scene. A hard, laborious scene it is,—the true presentation of men outworn, *swinked*, in Chaucer's phrase, with labor and travail. The painting was held by the susceptible critics of the Salon to have a message, an extra-æsthetic significance. Proudhon declared that "The Stone-Breakers" signified *morality in action*; he said that certain good peasants had wished to see the painting used for an altar-piece,—in the church of the agnostics, I presume. The active intelligence of the French is continually detecting and, it must be in fairness added, continually expressing meanings in art that lie quite outside of the pictorial or technical values of the work. But through his art Courbet did not discourse as a preacher; he raised the laugh as a satirist.

During the few years immediately after 1851 Courbet painted much that seemed done less in neglect than in actual defiance of natural beauty; he created what one of his biographers calls, and not unjustly, "types of reasoned ugliness." The only exception that

I know is a portrait, "The Fair Dutchwoman" (*La Belle Hollandaise*). In this picture is presented the most refined type of beauty that Courbet ever painted. "The Spanish Lady" (*La Dame Espagnole*) has a certain degree of distinction, though the subject is not attractive. But most of his studies were made from peasant girls and women, as the *Demoiselles de Village* (1852), the *Baigneuses* (1853), and many others.

Portraits and landscapes were not wanting during this period; nor were critics wanting to labor with him in behalf of the ideal. They sought to reclaim him to a more poetical treatment of life and nature; they expounded to him the idea of archetypal beauty, etc., etc. To all of which Courbet made answer, as also to his friends who urged him to marry and to become a pillar of society, by exclaiming "*Quelle balançoire!*"*

About the year 1854 Courbet gave exhibitions of his works in Besançon, Dijon, Munich, and Frankfort,—everywhere dismaying the critics, and awaking a moderate degree of popular interest. In Munich he made the acquaintance of an artist named Leibl. Courbet could not speak a word of German, Leibl could not speak a word of French; but the two men were united by a deep love of painting and of beer. They admired each other and each other's works; and they made the round of the Munich galleries together. Neither of the comrades tried to learn the first phrase of the other's language; but they gazed admiringly together upon the great pictures, and slapped each other's backs by way of genial criticism, these interpretations being helped out by the circumstance that Leibl was a skillful mimic and pantomimist. But it was over the beer of Munich that the boon companions came to their first understanding of Munich's art. Both the Frenchman and the German were mighty drinkers; and each was no less astonished than delighted at the prowess of the other. Neither of the men had dreamed that such great qualities could exist outside of his own country. Here was true communion. Not a word was exchanged during Courbet's visit; but the two artists parted eternal friends.

In Ormans I went to Courbet's favorite *café*. "Many an afternoon has he passed in that corner," said the tidy woman who kept the place; many a *bock* of beer had she brought him there; and as she mentioned Courbet's name, a sitter at another table, apparently an *habitué*, said to his companion,

* It is not my fault that this slang is not elegantly translatable. "Don't tear your shirt" is, I fear, what a New York or Chicago Bohemian would say under corresponding provocation.

* This picture, too, is in the Louvre; it is eleven by sixteen feet, and cost the government 33,900 francs.

"Courbet used to drink forty glasses at a sitting." Here, too, he would put in from time to time, like a ship in distress, to mend his tackle—a bit of twine serving to repair some accident to the contrivances of his "original" apparel. There was a boyishness in his character to the last, as in that of many another old bachelor.

At the Universal Exposition of 1855, in Paris, Courbet hung eleven pictures, and made a private exhibition of thirty-eight more. A noticeable profession of Courbet's art-creed appears in the preface to his catalogue of this private exhibition; the document, however (so his reviewers say), was touched by a friendly critic's hand before the printers saw it. He says: "I have studied ancient art and modern art, and without committing myself to any system or party. Nor have I imitated the old or copied the new. I have simply sought to nurture, through a complete knowledge of the record of art, my own intelligent and independent individuality. To know in order to achieve,—such has been my aim."

An admirable purpose; the words, too, are admirable. "Through a complete knowledge of the record of art." Alas! of that particular thing, the record of art, our egotist had least of all a sufficient knowledge; and if his knowledge had been sufficient, his temperament would scarcely the less have held him to his limited range of work.

Meanwhile, Courbet was getting well talked about,—not always quite as he would like, but still talked about; a good thing for one's immediate necessities of vanity, and a form of ambition which is common and perennial among both painters and writers. My courteous informant, Dr. C——, once asked him if he liked being abused as he was. "All those people advertise me well," was Courbet's answer. The desire to be talked about, or, as he would have put it, to be "original," was a leading trait of Courbet's character. He would not even dress well, lest he should be taken for a commonplace citizen. More than one of his old acquaintance have described to me his "original" wardrobe: two shirts, one on his back, and two pairs of socks; as for outer clothes, he seldom had any others than those he wore. "In 1864," says Max Buchon, "when cold weather came, he bought a bed-quilt from a Jew; he made a hole in the middle of it for his head; that was his winter overcoat." This was all for oddity's sake, for Courbet had abundant means to dress decently. These manners naturally gave him an odd reputation among the critics. Champfleury writes: "It is believed by some that Courbet is a wild creature, who has studied painting in the interests of his toil as a swine-herd." It

is true that Courbet had about him a good deal of the bucolic rudeness of the mountaineer and the peasant. Courbet did not Osricize. Even his affectations were forcible. But on the other hand, he purposely accented his own tricks and affectations, as this of rude simplicity, of playing the *montagnard*. He made himself more of a peasant than he really was. Most men have their affectations. It was Courbet's affectation to be natural. That charming man and artist, my friend M. Paul Franceschi, of Besançon, another of Courbet's old acquaintances, thus expressed the thought to me: "*C'était sa coquetterie de n'être pas coquet.*"

I have noticed Courbet's chief work of 1857. In 1858 he visited the south of France and the Mediterranean, and in the following year went to Belgium. It was a time of reserve with the artist; he put forth no work which distracted the critics. In 1861 he had them all by the ears again. The cause was his important picture, the "Stags Fighting" (*Rut du Printemps* or *Combat de Cerfs*)—a title which I would paraphrase "The Struggle for Existence." A stirring scene, an *arcantum* of nature, is revealed upon this spacious canvas; but much of its merit is necessarily lost in the engraving. All painting does not lose in engraving, but most paintings do; the paintings of Courbet lose more than most others. His strongest point, technically, was color; his weakest points were drawing and composition; it must be added, however, that he professed at least to despise composition. Engraving, then, necessarily reproduces not the essential merit, but the essential faults of his work. As an apostle of realism, Courbet did not hesitate to make the leading lines in the "Fighting Stags" fall into an arrangement of rhomboidal figures; one cannot avoid remarking the parallel lines, the equal acute angles that are formed by the legs of the animals. But in the painting you scarcely notice this; you are deep within the ancient wood, the dark green forests of the Jura deepen beyond, the cool stream flows down from the heart of the glade; and, in contrast, the fury of the conflicting stags is given, and the flight of the mortally wounded creature that tosses up its head in agony. We are present at a woodland mystery, and far more really present than when we read the poets and essayists who falsely tell us that the "spirit of nature" is a spirit of rest and peace.

There are great faults of handling in the work; there is also great power. The mere critic sees nothing but its handling. But what, for instance, would Blake's art be if we looked to the handling only? In every feature of his technique Blake was cruder than Courbet, and Martin was more accom-



THE MUSICIAN.

(ENGRAVED BY T. COLE, FROM THE PAINTING BY COURBET IN THE POSSESSION OF ERWIN DAVIS.)

plished than either; but Martin's "Beishazar" and all other extant Martins are forgotten, because Martin did not build on truth. Blake and Courbet must be remembered for their truth—for the spiritual realism of the one, for the material realism of the other.

I may add that Courbet has not neglected to paint repose. "The Hay-makers' Nooning" (*La Sieste*) is one of his best examples of a pastoral scene.

In 1862 Courbet was urged to admit students to his studio. He declined to do this; it would have been too conventional a thing, at least to open his studio formally. For a short time, however, he gave "advice" to students, and a cow was quartered in his studio for a model. Except for the advantage of this cow, it is hard to make out the difference between Courbet's advising and the routine privileges of any other master's studio. During the following year Courbet exhibited at his studio, because it was refused at the Salon as a libel upon religion, the work by which I dare say he is better known than by any other—the "Priests Returning from the Conference" (*Retour d'une Conférence*). The satire of it is extremely coarse and telling, and all the more so in Courbet's country because the story is substantially a true one; the figures depicted are portraits of which I could name the originals. Several of them, indeed, are still living. It is the custom of the clergy to meet at stated times at one another's houses, both for social and professional purposes; and in this case there was a good cellar, and the genial *curés* drank too much. One does not often see tipsy folk in France, least of all among the clergy. Thirty years ago, both in Europe and in America, it was the fashion to drink more than is drunk now; but even then the occurrence was rare enough to cause scandal, which Courbet remembered as such and caricatured in his painting. One of the *convives* was too "mellow" to walk, and the rest of the company actually propped him upon a donkey, as set forth in the picture. It is full of telling points. One remarks especially the peasants at the left of the consecrated oak-tree; the husband is convulsed with laughter, but his wife, though in dismay at the scene, has fallen on her knees from the old habit of reverence to the priest. Courbet painted three companion scenes to this picture, still more vulgar caricatures of the priests and their failings. Their injustice is the common injustice of caricature of manners—the effort to make an unusual incident or accident appear as the usual course of things.

I have mentioned the best known of Courbet's paintings; but we need not try to follow in detail the long catalogue of this prolific

artist's work. We have now reached the most fortunate period of his life, his culminating time,—from 1860 to the year of the Commune. Let us follow him back from his Paris studio into his beloved Franche-Comté on his summer tours. He made frequent visits to Ornans. The son of one of my informants lived directly opposite to his studio; the two houses are the first that you come to on entering Ornans by the road from Besançon. The young man was very fond of music; the father, Dr. C——, intended him to study medicine; Courbet urged him to give up all for music: "You have a talent for music, as I have for painting; give up all for music." "But my father?" said the young man. "Your father is a *vieille ganache*" (an old imbecile), said Courbet. Dr. C——'s eyes twinkled as he told me this. I asked him, "What did your son do?" "He studied medicine," said Dr. C——. But art was not forgotten in the doctor's house. The open piano is still in the parlor; and every summer painters come for his permission to paint the hills of Ornans from his balcony.

The gifted sculptor of Salins shall describe one of these summer episodes of artist life. Max Claudet was the youngest of the joyous trio who wandered in the deep valley of the Lison. I translate from his brochure, "Souvenirs de Courbet" (Besançon, 1880):

"One day in 1864 Buchon said to me, 'They tell me that Courbet is at Nans. You ought to go and find him, and bring him down to spend a few days with us.'

"It was the end of September; and September is the finest month in our mountains of the Jura. The country was alive with a swarm of vintagers.

"I set out at ten A. M. with one companion. We went afoot; it would be sacrilege to ride through a country so unspeakably lovely that you have to pause at every other step to admire great nature.

"Nans is a wonderful place; it is a corner of Switzerland strayed into the French Jura. The road finds its way thither through a wood; first the village appears, with its beautiful houses; then the Saracen's Grotto, a niche among the rocks, worthy of the Lago di Maggiore; then the source of the Lison, and the Creux-Billard, the wildest of cascades. It is the region that now is full of artists during the season of good weather; Courbet, indeed, in good part set them the fashion.

"We found him at the inn, just finishing his dinner.

"'You have come for me, then?' said he. 'The diable! but I have a picture to paint this afternoon,—the source of the Lison. You want us to leave at five o'clock? Well, there is time enough, but I can't fool around any. You sit down and eat; I will go on ahead with Jerome, and you shall come on after me!' Jerome was a handsome donkey that Courbet had provided, with a little wagon, to carry all his artist 'traps' when he went on his painting excursions near Ornans.

"I confess that I was somewhat incredulous as to the birth of a landscape which should be begun at two o'clock and finished by four. However, we lost no time in following Courbet. It is two kilometers from the inn to the outpouring fountain of the river. There we found the painter installed upon a level spot,

facing the torrent-spring; the canvas was upon the easel; Jerome was grazing philosophically by his side.

"A high wind was blowing. Just as we arrived upon the scene the easel blew over; and, to make matters worse, one of the forks of the easel was forced through the canvas.

"That's nothing!" said Courbet. He set up his apparatus again; he smeared some pigment upon the torn place; he stuck on a piece of paper, and said: 'You won't see anything.'

"We were standing before a great cliff of many-colored rock; a forest crowned its summit. A vast cavity, like the nave of a church, opens in this cliff; its roof is sustained by rock pillars. From the depths of the chasm pours a stream of blue water, as cold as that which flows from glaciers. It falls in a cascade to the base of the cliff, and thence takes its way down the valley, bathing the foundations of the houses in Nans, the scene of the first love of Mirabeau and Sophie.

"Courbet stood before this beautiful scene, a black canvas at his side; it was still untouched, except for the torn place. We secured his easel as well as we could, with a wagon-frame and with heavy stones, so that the master could begin without fear of further mishap.

"'It surprises you that my ground is black?' said he. 'Nature is dark without the sun. I do as the sun does. Bring out the lights, and the picture is done.'

"He had a box containing tumblers filled with colors,—white, yellow, red, blue. With his knife he mixed them upon his palette; then, still with his knife, he began to cover the canvas; his strokes were firm and sure.

"'Let me see you paint rocks like those with a brush,' said he,—'rocks rusted in long veins from top to bottom by time and flowing water!'

"He painted in the water in the same way; the *ensemble* of the picture began to appear. 'A few trees here, some green grass in the foreground, and we shall soon be done,' said he; and his knife was running constantly over the canvas.

"At four o'clock the picture was actually complete: the hand of the master was in it, and his strong inspiration. We were stupefied by this swiftness of execution. Hardly two hours to cover a canvas more than a yard square!

"'Now,' said Courbet, 'en route for Salins!'

"All the traps were put into the little wagon; the picture was firmly secured behind; Jerome, who appeared vexed at this interruption of his dinner, was harnessed up, and we started. At the village we brought another donkey to the aid of Jerome, because the road is up-hill for nearly four miles. We followed on foot, watching the donkeys, who did not behave very well.

"When we got to the top of the hill we sent back the duplicate donkey. We had now an equal distance down-hill before us, and Courbet said, 'Now let us ride.'

"You should have seen us three in that wagon. We were crowded like herrings, for Courbet filled a good large place. Our donkey trotted along slowly; night fell; we were nearly in sight of Salins. The road is constructed upon giddy ground; the mountain rose up straight on our left hand; on our right was the profound gulf of a ravine.

"In this situation we met an ox-cart, weighted with an immense tun of the new vintage. We kept to the right, the outside, in order to get by. To our horror, Jerome took fright, and set off at full gallop.

"Courbet pulled the reins violently. The left rein broke. The right rein pulled the donkey's head over the precipice. Donkey, painter, passengers, wagon, and all, began to go over; it was an awful moment. Happily, the two hind wheels of the machine caught upon the stone parapet of the road, and held us hang-

ing. We scrambled out; we hauled back the donkey, the wagon, and the picture. Long after night-fall we got safely back to Salins. But none of us got into that wagon again!

"That picture remained with Buchon until his death. Then Courbet took it. Where is it now? I do not know. If its owner chances to read these lines, he will know the history of it."

It is a charming episode; and M. Claudet adds that Courbet, who came to Salins to remain a week, was still there after three months had passed away.

Here is another picture from those fortunate years before the trouble came,—a scene near Paris this time. Max Claudet will let me borrow once more, I am sure, from his charming "Souvenirs":

"I shall never forget a dinner that we had together one beautiful spring day, in the country near Paris.

"Our party met at the railway station at half-past one. Max Buchon and I were among the first on the ground; then came Champfleury with Castagnary and Courbet. The latter brought a spectacled young man with him, armed with a large umbrella, whom he introduced as M. Vermorel.

"We got off at Chatou, and walked to Bougival; there Courbet decided that we should get a better dinner at a hostelry on the Seine, opposite to the charming islet of Croissy; so we walked thither by the river-side, following a path that was traced lightly on the green grass. Courbet talked about painting.

"Arrived at our inn, he ordered dinner. We sat down. In the midst of our *festa* Gambetta came in. The future minister chatted a moment with us, then returned into the neighboring room.

"It was a merry dinner. Courbet told the funniest stories of Franche-Comté. The afternoon sped quickly in such company; in the evening we returned to Paris.

"To wind up the day properly, we went to a *braserie*. There we met Chaudey, the advocate, who argued, with his usual fire, that the artists were all fools,—men who hadn't enough wit to associate themselves for their mutual benefit, as even the shoe-makers do. Vermorel, as great a ranter as he, opposed him; Courbet fretted at being prevented from talking about his beloved painting; and Buchon stroked his mustache,—his habit whenever he was wearied of a discussion.

"Alas! what somber days were to come between these companions, then so droll and so merry!

"If a voice had spoken to us then and there, designating each one of the company: 'You, Chaudey, you will be shot by your own partisans! You, Vermorel, you will die upon a barricade in the midst of Paris, the city blazing and running with blood, and a hundred thousand Germans applauding! You, Courbet, will bid farewell to the arts, and go to die in exile! You, advocate of Cahors, you are to be Minister of War; you are to struggle in vain against the enemy, and to escape from Paris in a balloon [and, we may now add, to die prematurely, a full generation before your time]! And you, Buchon, who are so strong, so robust, always ready to sing the old songs of the Franche-Comté, you will not see all that—you will be dead the first!'—Ah, well; if a prophet had said that to us on that day, we should have dined less gayly, and even Courbet would have had an indigestion."

Then came the war, the invasion of Courbet's country; the German troops made of Courbet's studio a stable for mules, and kicked

their boots through his pictures on the walls. Let us glance at the later scenes of this active life. Courbet was no less a radical in politics than in religion, and from a similar love of oddity; but radicals of this cast are never devoted reformers. Reform implies reconstruction; but destruction is an easier work, and Courbet's most famous act was the destruction of the Vendôme Column.

In France and out of it the act provoked a storm of criticism. Why did he pull down



GUSTAVE COURBET, FROM A PHOTOGRAPH BY CARJAT & CO.

the Column? "In the interest of European peace," was Courbet's own professed defense. "In the interest of high art, to which the Column was a flagrant offense," said Courbet's friends. But I fear that Courbet did not have either the interest of the arts or of humanity very deeply at heart. There were other motives; the desire of notoriety, even the desire of money, was not absent. I am able to contribute something to the story of the destruction of this Column,—a story that has been discussed at great length, and with great heat, never fully told.*

* M. Castagnary has recently sought to rehabilitate his old friend in the esteem of the French. He argues that Courbet was not responsible for the destruction of the Column, by pointing out that he was not a member of the Communist committee who

It was no new idea of Courbet's. During the Commune he posted placards invoking destruction upon the Column, because it perpetuated the memory of so many French victories. Why record in eternal brass the humiliation of Germans, Italians, Spaniards, Swiss, and other good people? The Column, in short, he said, was a standing offense to the good-fellowship of European nations. This appeal was surprisingly humanitarian, considering the moment—that of the profound humiliation of his own country, his *patrie*; and it was, in any case, a little out of keeping, one would think, as addressed to the men of the Commune—a class of persons not eminent for humanitarian sentiment.

After the Column was pulled down, his friends took the other line of defense, as already noted. They said that the Column was a bad work of art; never was more atrocious taste; the sight of it galled the delicate sensibility of Courbet, and of other similarly organized persons. It was, in short, in a righteous rapture of iconoclasm that he threw it down; it was the logical consummation of his love of high art, and is not the love of high art an excellent thing?

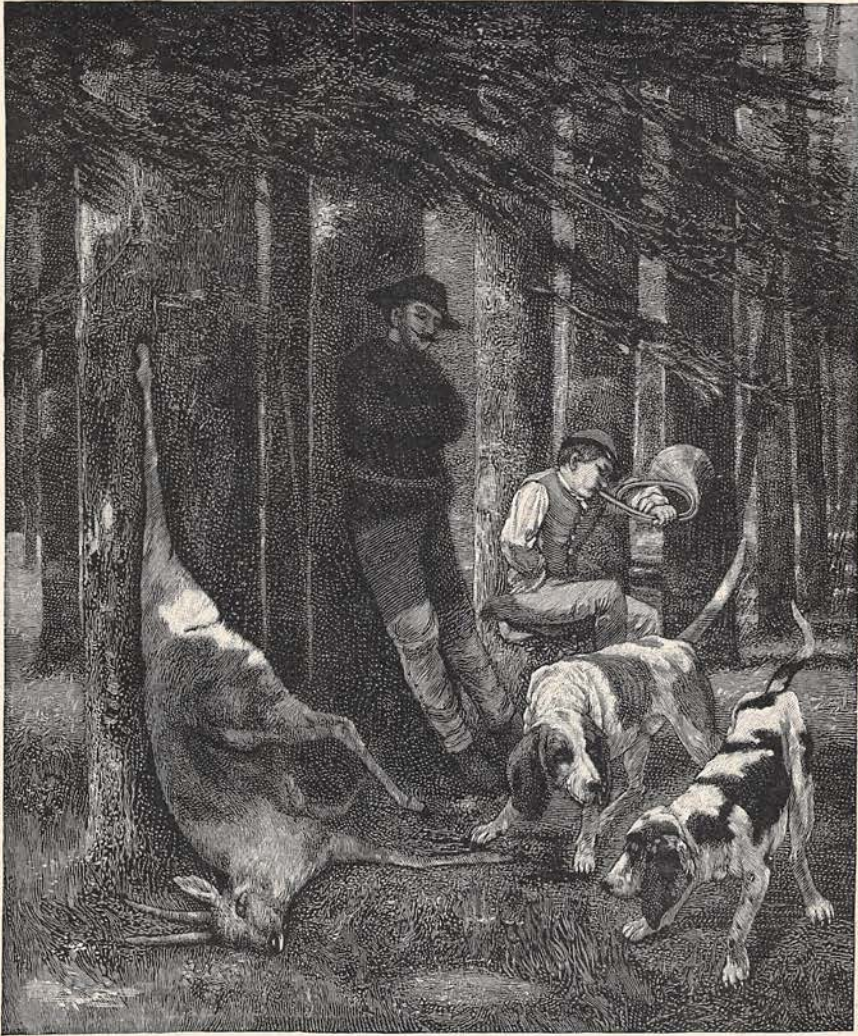
Doubtless; yet this claim, again, seems a little inconsonant with what we have seen of the man who scorned the ideal, and whom his best friends described as a *montagnard*, a "mountaineer."

A more genuine clew to Courbet's motives in destroying the Column was given me by Max Claudet. Though a younger man by some fifteen years than Courbet, he was one of his intimate associates during many years, and they were much in each other's studios; and years before the Franco-German war Courbet used to talk about the Vendôme Column. "You can quote me for the fact," said Claudet to me in his mountain studio in September, "that Courbet repeatedly told me, as much as ten years before the war, that he would like to destroy the Colonne Vendôme."

"And why?" I demanded. "Was it because of his devotion to high art, as his friends said? or because he regarded the Column as an offense against the friendship of nations, as he said himself?"

"For neither reason," answered the sculptor. "What Courbet more than once said to me was this: 'It took a vast quantity of bronze to build the Colonne Vendôme; it is very valuable. How I should like to pull it

ordered it to be thrown down until some days after the thing was actually done. He was none the less the inspiring spirit of the affair. It will be hard to prove that Courbet was not Courbet.



THE QUARRY.

ENGRAVED BY K. C. ATWOOD, FROM THE PAINTING OWNED BY HENRY SAYLES, ESQ., NOW IN THE BOSTON MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS.

down for the sake of the bronze that it contains!' Would you believe," said Claudet, "that Courbet actually supposed that the Column was made of massive bronze?"

On the 16th of May, 1871, at a quarter after four in the afternoon, the Vendôme Column, previously undermined by the masons, yielded, but only after many efforts and slowly, to the strain of powerful windlasses. It came down with a great crash, filling the adjacent streets and squares with dust. An immense crowd was in attendance; they saw Napoleon's statue roll headless in the débris. The Commune was suppressed; all of its leaders who had saved their lives were brought to trial. On the 3d of the following September, Courbet was duly sentenced to six months' imprison-

ment for destroying the Column, and to restore it at his own expense. The heavy cost of this was paid in part, and on Courbet's death his devoted sister, who had the Gallic dread of pecuniary dishonor to her family, assumed the remaining debt; which, however, was canceled by the Government. They restored the Column: they could not restore to the French mind the idea which fell with it,—that military glory is the first glory of a nation. Courbet unbuilded better than he knew when he threw the Column down. But his good time was over. Then followed sickness, neglect, the horror and aversion of his friends and countrymen, and voluntary exile to Switzerland. Courbet went to a little place near Vevay, Tour-de-Peil by name; it is not far from the bound-



PULLING DOWN THE VENDÔME COLUMN.

ary of the Jura; he painted a little there, but not much. November 18, 1877, his pictures were sold in Paris, or "slaughtered" rather, toward the payment of his fine; they brought only twelve thousand one hundred and ten francs. On the 31st of December following Courbet's troubled life had ended.

An exhibition of nearly two hundred of Courbet's works was held in the summer of 1882 in the *École des Beaux-Arts*, in Paris. There it was to be seen that in one important sense Courbet was a born painter. He had the unappeasable instinct of creation; he would paint anything, down to a broomstick, and call it good. Let us be thankful for the

"natural truthfulness" of his landscapes and his animals.

But in another sense he was not a painter at all, at least outside of his landscapes. In all his other work he was a story-teller. He did not paint for the sake of painting; neither for beauty's sake, nor even for the sake of the unbeautiful, like so many of our young realists, American and English, who are sated with beauty, and so devote themselves to Our Lady of Ugliness. Courbet cared for neither; he was a born story-teller and satirist, and he painted to tell stories and to satirize. As he once said, he was the "preappointed historian of the priests." He told stories of all kinds with the

brush. As pure art, his works have little value outside of their color. But they have a sturdy material verity. They are free from self-consciousness, and they tell us much about the French country and country life of our time. It is unfortunate that he took up, as over-willful men are apt to do, with a coarse theory, in his case the theory of a narrow realism in painting.

He had one of the characteristics of dilettante art: he never learned to draw thoroughly well. But, in its spirit, in its results, his work was virile, not dilettante. Dilettante and amateur work in general tells us more about the artist than about the object represented; it even describes the whims of his inner consciousness, which are dearer to many contemporary painters and poets than anything in the outer world, the world in which the true artist mainly lives. But it was egotism, and not dilettantism, which appeared in Courbet's work throughout. His faults as a painter were those of his temperament—coarseness of nerve-fiber, and consequent egotism. Courbet was in love with himself to a degree seldom exemplified. "As a matter almost of consequence, he had little sentiment or poetry in him, and that little he sought to exclude from his work. M. Silvestre says well of his landscapes: "They are true, but they express only the material truth of nature. They do not express her vast and mysterious aspects." Even of his own works his criticism was coarse; he could not tell his better from his poorer work. "*Il n'avait pas conscience* [critical insight] *sur ce qu'il avait fait*," said one of his old friends to me, speaking with the frankness which the truest friends permit themselves to use in France.

Courbet's art, of course, was the outcome of his character; not indeed of the visible traits only—but the art and the character hung together. A rude, masculine energy, a

ruling egotism, were at the foundation of his nature; but his abounding animal spirits made these traits more tolerable than they are in less abundant natures. He had an overflowing physical life, warmth and vivacity of feeling, energy of mind and body, and a sort of boyish freshness about him. Was he a good companion? Not always; that excessive self-love stood in the way. He was anything but catholic as regarded his intellectual companionships. He avoided his superiors; he did not get along very well with his equals; his inferiors were more to his taste,—a sure mark of deficient intellectual nobility. Courbet lived in a time of superior men, but he numbered few of them among his friends. Ste. Beuve was one of the few; it was the friendship of the sturdiest and one of the subtlest minds in France. They were drawn together by the frequent attraction of entirely opposite temperaments; they enjoyed each other's natures, and profited by each other. But in general Courbet did not show in his friendships any faculty of ascending fellowship; he preferred the descending fellowship with his flatterers. Of these, in Paris, a body-guard of some twenty or thirty was commonly in his train. He was like the chess-player who refuses to learn from an opponent stronger than himself. This egotism led him to the exhausting life of the *cafés*; too much beer and his heavy troubles broke that doughty form and rude mind at last. We may look upon him more gently than his countrymen can do. "*Comme homme, il n' a pas laissé un souvenir très regretté*" ("As a man, he is not very kindly remembered"), said one of his old fellows to me in the Jura. But with all his errors, he was an original and interesting figure in a passionately interesting time and society. With all his faults, and with all the faults of his work, it was still worth while for Courbet to have lived and painted.

Titus Munson Coan.

