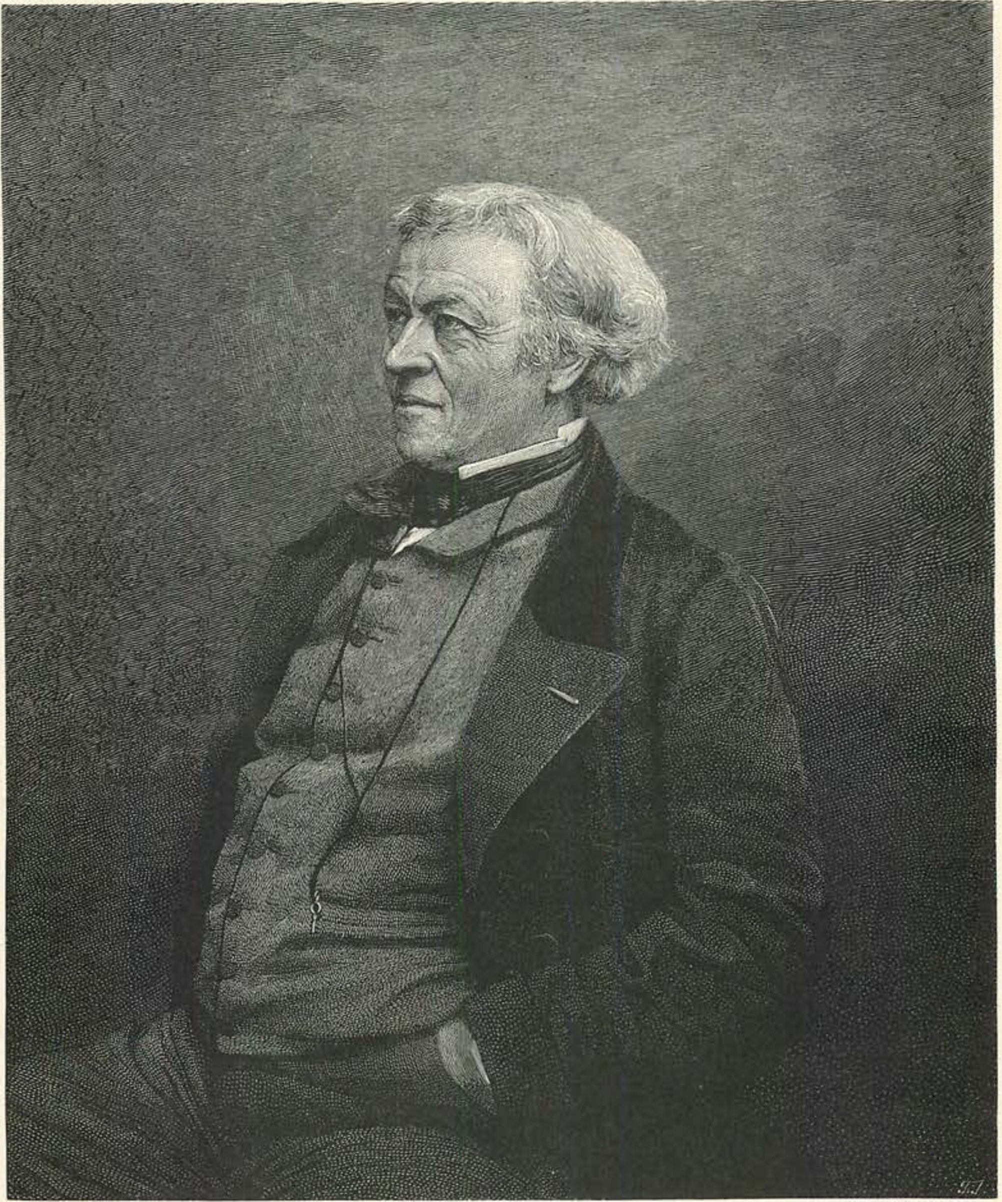
COROT.

COROT AT WORK. (FROM A DRAWING BY WYATT EATON.)

HAT do we understand by the interest that attaches to an artist's work? First, I think, the interest that may lie in any one of his creations separately judged — in its peculiarities as a piece of beauty and as an interpretation of some aspect of nature or mood of the mind. Then, the larger interest we find when his work is considered as a whole and its revelation of his gifts and methods is thoroughly understood. And, finally, the interest of the work and the man together as factors in the history of art — as proofs of the development of antecedent tendencies, or types of the general temper of art in their time, or prophets or leaders of the future course of things.

Sometimes an artist who is not very important in himself is extremely important from the historical point of view. But when one who has produced very fine and individual work has likewise been a potent influence in art at large — then, indeed, his claim upon us is insistent. This is the case with Corot. He was one



ENGRAVED BY T. JOHNSON

AFTER A PHOTOGRAPH BY NADAR.

C. Corot

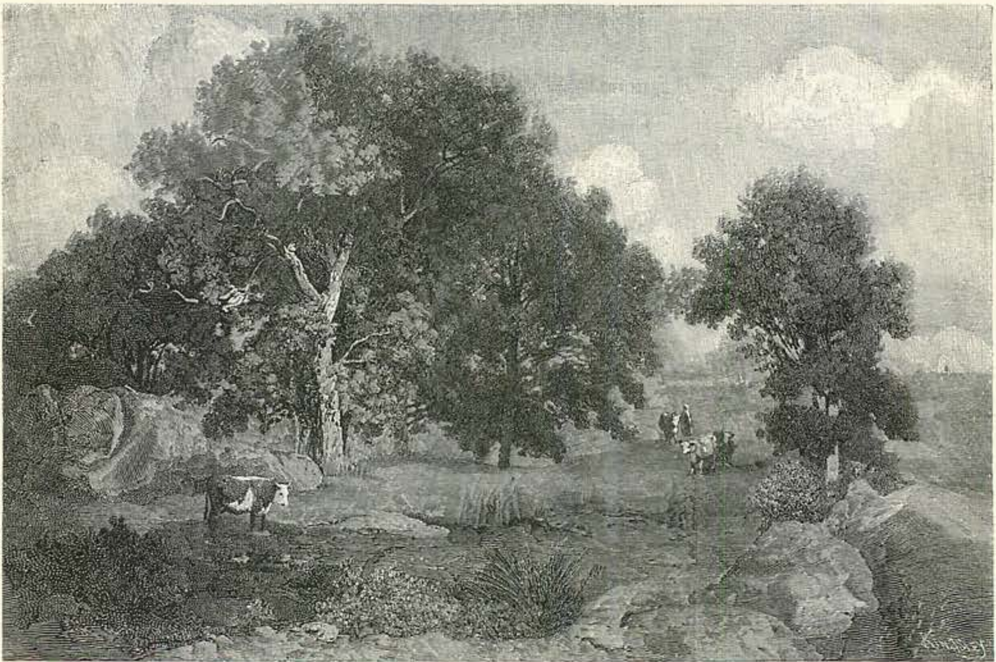
of the greatest landscape painters who has ever lived, and one of the most influential leaders and teachers that our century has seen.

I.

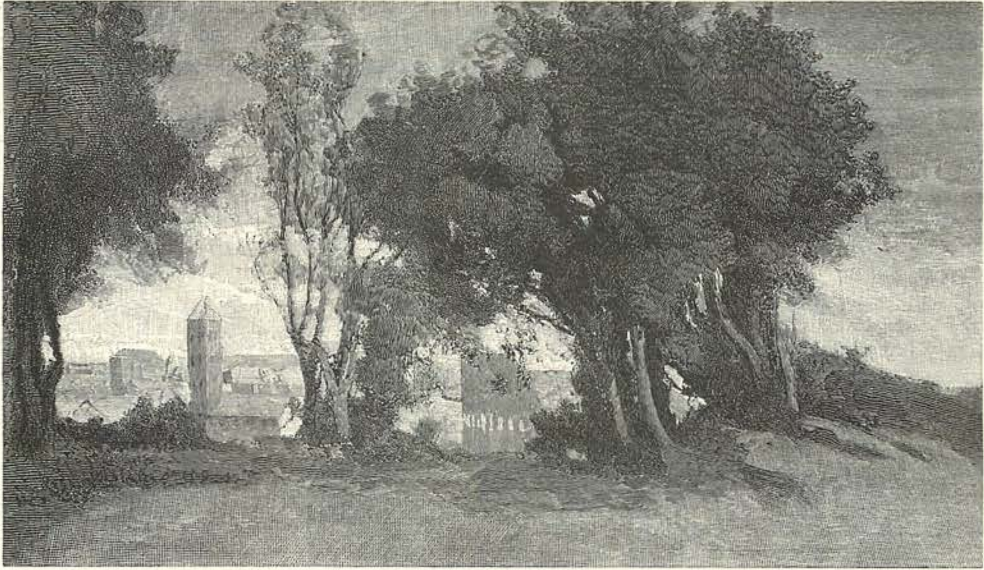
JEAN BAPTISTE CAMILLE COROT was born in Paris in the year 1796. His father, a native of Rouen, had been a hair-dresser, but, marrying a milliner, transferred his talents to her service, and in their little shop on the Rue du Bac gradually amassed a snug bit of a fortune. An artist in his way was this elder Corot, and not deprived of such fame as the Muse of Fashion can bestow — advertised in a popular comedy which held the stage of the Français for years. "I have just come from Corot's," cries one of the actors, "but I could not see him. He had retired to his *cabinet* to compose a *bonnet à la Sicilienne*."

Meanwhile Camille was at school in Rouen, where he remained seven years and gained the whole of his education. From school he went to a cloth-merchant's shop in the Rue de Richelieu, and here eight years were passed. Then his love for art broke through the uncongenial tie. While at Rouen his holidays had been spent with an old friend of his father's in long walks beside the borders of the Seine; and later the unwilling "dry-goods clerk" found solace in summer days at Ville d'Avray, where his people had a little country home. A love for nature was thus gradually fostered in a soul which by birth was peculiarly receptive; and we read of long night-watches at his bedroom window filled with vague poetic musings, visions of nymphs, and aspirations towards some more congenial tool than the yardstick. Indeed, the brush was soon the yardstick's rival. An easel was set up in the humble bedroom; a sketch-book was always in hand out-of-doors; and lithographic stones and sheets of scribbled paper strewed the merchant's counter, underneath which they retired with Corot during the pause between one customer and the next.

A casual acquaintance with the young painter Michallon brought about the crisis long deferred by Camille's sweet and docile temper. The tale is the old one of loud parental opposition, but is not followed by the usual sequel of lasting bitterness. When once convinced that there was nothing else to do, Corot *père* made a rather sharp bargain with his son, but stuck to it ever after in good faith, if for thirty years with no slightest mitigation of its sharpness. "Your sisters' dowries have been promptly paid, and I meant soon to set you at the head of a respectable shop. But if you insist upon painting, you will have no capital to dispose of as long as I live. I will make you a pension of fifteen hundred francs. Don't count upon ever having more, but see whether you can pull yourself through with that." And Camille, "much moved," fell upon the neck of the artist in Sicilian caps: "A thousand thanks! It is all I



FOREST OF FONTAINEBLEAU. (OWNED BY MRS. S. D. WARREN.)



VIEW OF THE COLISEUM, ROME. (OWNED BY ERWIN DAVIS.)

need, and you make me very happy." He too kept his word. For thirty years he lived on his three hundred annual dollars, pulled himself very well through, and was one of the happiest mortals in Paris.

The first day he was free he took easel and brush and set himself down before the first thing he saw — a view of the Cité from a spot near the Pont Royal. "The girls from my father's shop," he said in later life, "used to run down to the quay to see how Monsieur Camille was getting on. There was a Mademoiselle Rose, for instance, who came most often. She is still alive, and is still Mademoiselle Rose, and still comes to see me now and then. Last week she was here, and oh, my friends, what a change and what reflections it gave birth to! My picture has not budged. It is as young as ever, and keeps still the hour and the weather when it was done. But Mademoiselle Rose? But I? What are we?"

Michallon taught Corot at first and gave him counsel good for a youngster — to put himself face to face with nature, to try to render her exactly, to paint what he saw, and translate the impression he received. But soon he died, and Corot, seeking help elsewhere, chose Victor Bertin, who had been Michallon's own master. Bertin was a landscape painter of the classic school, worshiping Poussin's mastery of form, but in his own execution cold, measured, mechanical, and hard. He might have taught Corot more and hurt him more had he not been forestalled by the long apprenticeship to nature, and an inborn gift. As it was, he taught him two things of priceless value — accurate drawing, and a sense for "style" in composition.

In 1825 Corot went to Rome, where most of his fellow-artists laughed at his work, but where all of them loved the worker, gay in spirit as he was, with a good voice for a song, and a modest, patient ear for the spoken words of others. Encouragement first came from Aligny, who, surprising him at work on a study of the Coliseum, declared that it had qualities of the first value — exactness, skillful treatment, and an air of style. Corot smiled as at the chaffing of a friend; but the friend was an authority in the artist circle at the Café Grec, and, repeating there what he had said in private,— protesting that Corot might some day be the master of them all,— the bashful young clerk soon found that his art was respected and his future believed in. Many years later, when Aligny's body was brought from Lyons to be re-interred in Paris, Corot was one of the very few who followed it; a "sacred duty," as he said,— the duty of gratitude to his first champion,— bringing him forth in his white hairs under the swirling snow of a bitter winter dawn.

Naples as well as Rome was visited at this time, and perhaps Venice too. In 1827 Corot returned to France and sent his first picture to the Salon exhibition; and thereafter, until his death, in 1875, he was never once absent from its walls. In 1834 he went again to Italy, but got no farther than Venice, coming promptly home when his father wrote how much he missed him. In 1842 it was Italy again for some five or six months. In 1847 his father died. During all his later years Corot traveled much in Switzerland and various parts of France, and once he went to England and the

Netherlands. In 1874 the widowed sister with whom he had lived for many years died, and his own health broke down. And on the 23d of February, 1875, his spirit passed away.

This is not much to tell of a life which lasted seventy-nine years; but it is all there is to be said about Corot's, except as it was bound up with his art. He never married, for, he said, he had a wife already — a little fairy called Imagination, who came at his call and vanished when he did not need her. He lived chiefly at Ville d'Avray, with always a *pied-à-terre* and studio in Paris, and mixed in no society but that of his brother artists.

II.

IN 1833 Corot got a minor medal for one of his exhibited pictures; but almost the first mention of his name that can be traced in print is where Alfred de Musset, writing of the Salon of 1836 in the "Revue des Deux Mondes," speaks of "Corot, whose 'Roman Campagna' has its admirers." The next year Gustave Planche praised a "St. Jerome," which now hangs (the gift of Corot) in the little church at Ville d'Avray. In 1846 he was decorated for a scene in the forest of Fontainebleau. In 1855 he received a first class medal, and in 1867, oddly enough, one of the second class, but accompanied by the higher decoration of the Legion of Honor; and year by year artists and critics were louder in his praise. But the public was long in learning the fact that he even existed, and his father was quite as long in believing that his art was really art. When the first decoration came, "Tell me," he said to one of Corot's comrades, "has Camille actually any talent?" Nothing would convince him that he was "the best of us all"; nevertheless he doubled his pension.

Fifty years old when he thus achieved an income of six hundred dollars, Corot was sixty before any one bought his pictures, save now and then a brother artist. When the first customer departed with his purchase, "Alas!" he cried in humorous despair, "my collection has been so long complete, and now it is broken!" And when others followed he could hardly believe them serious, or be induced to set prices on his work. "It is worth such and such a sum; but no one will give that, and I will not sell it for less. I can give my things away if I see fit, but I cannot degrade my art by selling them below their value." When he actually dared to price one at ten thousand francs, and heard that it had been sold, he was sure he had dropped a zero in marking the figures, and wrote to the Salon secretary repeating the sum in written-out words. When a sale of his works was held at the Hôtel Drouot in 1858 he accused his friends of kindly cheating because it brought him $2846; yet there were thirty-eight pictures, and among them five of great importance.

Fortunately, Corot lived long enough to see the prices he thought no one would pay increased twenty-fold at public sales. A picture he had sold for 700 francs went many years later in the auction-room for 12,000, and Corot "swam in happiness," for, he felt, "it is not I that have changed, but the constancy of my principles that has triumphed." Never, indeed, did artist pursue his own path with a steadier disregard of public praise; and rarely has an artist so persistently neglected lived to enjoy his fame so long. It is a record to set against Millet's for the reviving of faith in the justice of Heaven.

Yet even had Corot died at seventy-nine without seeing a ray of the coming aureole, we can fancy no despairing exit. Material cares never weighed upon him in his bachelorhood, and he had the merry heart that goes all the day with less discomfort than a somber spirit finds in the first mile or two. The fact of living and the act of painting were almost enough for him, and the appreciation of a few brother artists filled his cup. We read of seasons of brief discouragement, and there were tears in his eyes sometimes when he came home from a Salon where his pictures were obscurely placed and he had overheard a scoffing phrase. But a look at his easel soon brought comfort, and the darling children of his hand were there in a "complete collection" to assure him that he had not lived in vain. "It must be confessed," he once exclaimed, "that if painting is a folly it is a sweet one — one that should excite envy, not forgiveness. Study my looks and my health and I defy any one to find a trace of those cares, ambitions, and remorseful thoughts which ravage the features of so many unfortunate folk. Ought one not to love the art which procures peace and contentment and even health to him who knows how to regulate his life?" But just here was Corot's talisman, shared, alas, with how few! He knew how to regulate his life, and knew that it meant to live for his painting and to paint for himself.

In his young days he was the liveliest among the lively. Tall of stature and herculean in build, possessed of perfect health, high spirits, and a gentle temper, student balls and studio suppers were his delight, and he was the delight of their frequenters. Yet wherever he was he never failed to disappear for a while at 9 o'clock, when *la belle dame*, as he called his mother, awaited him for a hand at cards. In his old age he was "Papa Corot" to the whole artist world of Paris — no one more respected, more beloved and cherished; no one so ready with

THE WOODGATHERERS. (OWNED BY THE CORCORAN GALLERY, WASHINGTON.)

a helping hand full of money, a helping tongue full of cheer and wise advice.

Of book-learning he had little, and his interest in the world outside his art was never very great. He often bought books from the stalls along the quays, but merely for the sake of their shape and color. He had an odd superstition that he ought to read "Polyeucte" through, and began it perhaps a score of times; but he never got to the end, and we find no record of attempts with other works. Music, however, he loved with passion and rare intelligence. Nature he adored, understood, and explained with singular felicity of speech. In his walks abroad he wore a long black coat and a high satin stock; in his studio, a blouse, a gay striped cotton night-cap, and invariably smoked a long clay pipe; and with his shock of white hair and smooth-shaven face — where the very wrinkles did but define a smile around the vigorous mouth — we can well believe that he looked at first sight less like a poetical painter than a *roi d'Yvetot* or a jolly Norman carter. We smile back with pleasure even at his printed portrait, and wish ourselves among the students of Paris as they clustered, charmed, about the clever, wise, benevolent, and brave old man.

There seems to have been no serious cloud upon his life until the fatal year when France was slaughtered. Then he said he should have gone mad had he not had the refuge of his easel. It was not only wrong but stupid — *bête* I must write, the French word means so much more — to kill people and destroy the face of nature and the works of man. "Compare the savage hate of war with art, which at the bottom means simply love!" Yet with the instinct of a patriot he came back to Paris when the siege seemed certain, and gave largely from his slender purse not only to relieve the sick but "to drive the Prussians out of the woods of Ville d'Avray." His brush and his summer memories filled part of his time, and the rest was spent among the poor and suffering. During the whole siege he ministered and worked, and some of his loveliest pictures date from these dreary weeks.

LANDSCAPE WITH CATTLE. (OWNED BY P. H. SEARS. PHOTOGRAPHED IN THE AMERICAN ART GALLERY.)

When they were shown in 1874 he narrowly missed, for the second time, the grand medal of honor. But a better reward came to him in a letter from a group of artists saying that after all "the greatest honor is to be called Corot." And soon after the same impulse found still more emphatic expression. A gold medal was subscribed for by a long list of artists and amateurs and presented to the venerable master. The state never had a chance to retrieve its error. This was the year when Corot's sister died, and when her death proved the beginning of his own. The day when the medal was given him at a big banquet in the Grand Hotel, when he read its inscription, "To Corot, his brethren and admirers," and could only whisper through deep emotion, "It makes one very happy to be loved like this"

(*loved*, let me emphasize the characteristic word) — this was the last day he was seen in public, and even then he was nervous, weak, and broken.

Dropsy was the final stage of his disease, and he foresaw the fatal end. "I am almost resigned," he said to his pupil Français, watching by his bed, "but it is not easy, and I have been a long time getting to the point. Yet I have no reason to complain of my fate — far otherwise. I have had good health for seventy-eight years, and have been able to do nothing but paint for fifty. My family were honest folk. I have had good friends, and think I never did harm to any one. My lot in life has been excellent. Far from reproaching fate, I can only be grateful. I must go — I know it; but don't want to believe it. In spite of myself there is a little bit of hope left in me." The next day he asked for a priest, saying his father had done so, and he wished to die like his father. But his last thought was for his art. His feeble fingers believed they held a brush, and he exclaimed, "See how beautiful it is! I have never seen such beautiful landscapes." And then he died.

At his funeral the great church was more than full, and the crowd spread through the streets outside. Faure sang his requiem to an air Corot had himself selected — the slow movement from Beethoven's seventh symphony. And by the open grave M. de Chennevières, Director of the Beaux Arts, spoke about him in touching words: "All the youth of Paris loved him, for he loved youth, and his talent was youth eternally new. . . And in his immortal works he praised God in his skies and birds and trees."

As the last phrase was spoken, we are told, a linnet perched on a branch near by and burst into a gush of song; and when in 1880 a monument to the beloved great painter who talked so often of "*mes feuilles et mes petits oiseaux*" was set up by his brethren on the border of the little lake at Ville d'Avray, the sculptor carved on it the branch and the singing bird.

III.

EVERY one knows that Corot was a landscape painter with an especial love for the neighborhoods of Ville d'Avray and for effects of springtime foliage and early morning or evening light. But it is a great mistake to think of him as confined to such effects, or even as narrowly devoted to landscape painting. He painted all hours of the day and now and then moonlight too, and all seasons of the year save those when snow lies on the ground. Figures enliven nearly all his landscapes. Sometimes they are peasants laboring in wood or field; more often classic nymphs or dancers in surroundings that reveal his memories of southern scenes; and occasionally the characters of some antique fable. Twice, for instance, Corot painted Orpheus and once Silenus, Diana at the bath, Homer with a group of shepherds, Democritus, Daphne and Chloe, Biblis, and Virgil serving as a guide to Dante. Sacred history likewise attracted him. Nothing he produced is more remarkable than the "St. Sebastian" now in Baltimore; and he often drew upon the life of Christ and the stories of the Old Testament. He also painted flowers, and still-life subjects and interiors; many street and distant city views; animals; large draped figures and studies of the nude, and no less than forty portraits. Mural decoration he essayed whenever he got the chance — which was by no means so often as he wished. In his later years he etched some delightfully characteristic plates. And whoever glanced through his sketch-book or his letters saw that nothing which had met his eye had appealed to his hand in vain.

But the grossest misconception with regard to Corot is not the one which ignores his width of range. It is a much more serious mistake to believe that because he "idealized" nature he did not represent her faithfully, because he suppressed details he did not see or could not render them, because his maturer work looks "very free" he had not studied conscientiously. Nothing so afflicts a real student of Corot as to hear him called an exponent of superficiality or "dash."

If ever a man worked hard at his art it was Corot. The number of his preparatory studies was immense, and they were made in his latest as well as his earliest years. "Conscience" was his watch-word, the nickname his scholars gave him, the one recipe he gave them when they asked him how to learn to paint. The first thing to produce, he said, were "studies in submission"; later came the time for studies in picture-making. He did not approve of academies and schools, and deemed it enough to study the old masters with the eye, without much attempt at actual copying. He thought the great school of nature might suffice to form soul and sight and hand; but this school one should never desert and could not frequent too diligently. It is true, as a friend once said, that what Corot wanted to paint was "not so much nature as his love for her." But to love her meant to peruse her with patient care, to know her well and fully; and to paint his love meant not to alter her charm, but to bring into clear relief those elements therein which most appealed to him. Individuality in art no man prized more highly. But he defined it as "the individual expression of a truth"; and said

ORPHEUS GREETING THE MORN. (IN THE POSSESSION OF COTTIER & CO.)

LAKE NEMI. (OWNED BY THOMAS NEWCOMB. PHOTOGRAPHED IN THE AMERICAN ART GALLERY.)

that to develop it one must work "with an ardor that knows no concessions." His whole life was given up to work, and his whole work was an effort to see nature with more and more distinctness and to render her with more and more fidelity. A gray-haired man, a master among his fellows, a poet before the world, he was to the end a child at the great mother's knee; and to the end a conscientious, often a despairing, aspirant when he had a brush in hand.

No one can doubt Corot's accurate vision and patient labor who has seen his earlier pictures. Certain of his noblest qualities appear in them all — his care for harmony in composition and for dignity and grace of line, his belief that the whole is of more importance than any one part, and his desire to speak from a personal point of view. But there is none of the breadth, freedom, synthesis, which characterize his later works. Conscientiousness is apparent as well as real; details are carefully expressed, and the touch is dry, slow, and not a little heavy. Even the splendid "Forest of Fontainebleau" here reproduced, which was painted in 1846 and won the cross of the Legion of Honor, might not be recognized as a Corot by superficial students of those later pictures with which in this country we are more familiar. But a wiser critic would feel sure that an "early Corot" must be pretty much what we find it: he would know that truth cannot be based on ignorance, and that knowledge cannot be acquired except through patient labor.

Corot's aim was always to simplify expression, to disengage the thing he wished to say — the main idea and meaning, the picture he had in mind — from the thousand minor pictures and ideas that had been wound up with it in nature. As he lived and labored his power to do this increased. When he retouched an early canvas he never added anything; improvement always meant suppression — some broadening, simplifying touch. But the fact is a proof of growing knowledge, not of waning interest in truth. What he wanted to repeat were not nature's statistics, but their sum total; not her minutiæ, but the result she had wrought with them; not the elements with which she had built up a landscape, but the landscape itself as his eye had embraced and his soul had felt it. This he wanted to paint, and this he did paint with extraordinary truth as well as charm and individuality. But can any superficial brush do this? Can any one know the things to say without knowing the things to omit, build up broad truths in ignorance of the minor truths which compose them, reproduce an impression without remembering what elements

had worked together to create it and which had been of preponderant, controlling value?

No: the real lesson taught by Corot's pictures and Corot's life is that breadth in painting (if it is not meaningless and empty) must repose on accurate knowledge; that freedom (if it is not mere idle license) must have its basis in fidelity to facts; that feeling must be guided by reason and self-restraint. Corot's knowledge of natural facts — within the cycle of such scenes as he preferred to paint — was greater probably than that of any painter who has ever lived, except Théodore Rousseau; and the loving patience of his efforts to express it has never been surpassed. These are the reasons why he could permit himself to be the most free and personal and poetic of all landscape painters.

IV.

"TRUTH," said Corot, "is the first thing in art and the second and the third." But the whole truth cannot be told at once. A selection from the mass of nature's truths is what the artist shows — a few things at a time, and with sufficient emphasis to make them clearly felt. You cannot paint summer and winter on a single canvas. No two successive hours of a summer's day are just alike, and you cannot paint them both. Nor, as certainly, can you paint everything you see at the chosen moment. Crowd in too much and you spoil the picture, weaken the impression, conceal your meaning, falsify everything in the attempt to be too true.

This was Corot's creed. What now were the truths that he interpreted at the necessary sacrifice of others which were less important in his eyes? They are implied, I think, in the words I have already written.

Corot prized effects rather than what the non-artistic world calls solid facts. But effects are as truly facts as are the individual features and details which make them. Indeed, they are the most essential as well as interesting of all facts. It is effects that we see first when we are in nature's presence, that impress us most, and dwell the longest in our minds. Outlines, modeling, local colors, minor details — these shift, appear, and disappear, or alter vastly as light and shadow change; and most of them we never really see at all until we take time to analyze. Look at the same scene on a sunny morning or by cloudy sunset light. It is not the same scene. The features are the same, but their effect has changed, and this means a new landscape, a novel picture. The mistake of too many modern painters, especially in England, is that they paint from analysis, not from sight. They paint the things they know are there, not the things they perceive just as they perceive them. This Corot never did. He studied analytically and learned all he could about solid facts; but he painted synthetically — omitting many things that he knew about, and even many that he saw at the moment, in order to portray more clearly the general result. And this general result he found in the main lines of the scene before him and its dominant tone; in the broad relationships of one mass of color with all others; in the aspect of the sky, the character of the atmosphere, and the play of light; and in the palpitating incessant movement of sky and air and leaf.

Look at one of Corot's foregrounds and you will see whether it is soft or hard, wet with dew or dry in the sun: you will see its color, its mobility. Look at his trees, and you will see their mass, their diversities in denseness, their pliability and vital freshness. Look at his sky, and you will see its shimmering, pulsating quality: it has the softness of a blue which means vast depths of distance, or of a gray which means layer upon layer of imponderable mist, and the whiteness of clouds which shine as bright as pearls but would dissipate at a touch. And everywhere, over all, behind all, in all, you will see the enveloping air and the light which infiltrates this thing and transfigures that — the air and the light which make all things what they are, which create the landscape by creating its color, its expression, its effect; the air and the light which are the movement, the spirit, the very essence of nature. No man had ever perfectly painted the atmosphere till Corot did it, or the diffused, pervading quality of light; and for this reason no one had painted such delicate, infinite distances, such deep, luminous, palpitating skies.

See now how Corot managed to paint like this — to interpret the life, mood, and meaning of the scene he drew. It was just through that process of omission and suppression which the superficial misread as proof that he did not really "render" nature at all. Even the smallest, simplest natural fact cannot be "rendered" in the sense of being literally reproduced; and to attempt the literal imitation of large features is merely to sacrifice the whole in favor of what must remain but a partial rendering of a part. A leaf can be painted, but not a myriad leaves at once; we are soon forced to generalize, condense, suppress. And to try to paint too many leaves is to lose the tree; for the tree is not a congregation of countless individual leaves distinctly seen — it is a mass of leaves which are shot through and through with light and air, and always more or less merged together and moving. It is an entity, and a live one; and which is the more important — that we should see the living thing, or the items that compose it? What we ask the painter is, not just how his tree was

constructed, but just how it looked as a feature in the beauty and aliveness of the scene. What we want is its general effect and the way it harmonized with the effect of its surroundings.

Does it matter, then, if he omits many things, or even if he alters some things, to get this right result? Such altering is not falsifying. It is merely emphasis — a stress laid here and a blank left there that (since all facts cannot possibly be given) the accented fact shall at least be plain. The generalized structure of Corot's trees, their blurred contours and flying, feathery spray — these are not untruths. They are merely compromises with the stern necessities of paint — devices he employed, not because he was unable to draw trees with precision, but because, had he done this, his foliage would have been too solid and inert for truth. A twig is never long in one position. It cannot be painted in two positions at once. But a twig that is blurred to the eye because it is passing from one position to another — this can be painted, and this Corot preferred to paint rather than ramifications with exactness or leaf-outlines with a narrow care. So his trees are alive, and, as he loved to say, the light can reach their inmost leaves and the little birds can fly among their branches.

It is the same thing with color. The color schemes to which Corot kept were never as strong and vivid as those we find with some of his contemporaries and many of his successors. Browns and grays and pale greens predominate on his canvas with rarely an acuter accent, a louder note. But he fitted his themes to his brush, so that we feel no lack; or, in other words, he chose his color schemes in accordance with the character of the natural effects that he loved best. And within the scale he chose his coloring is perfect. His tone (the harmony, or, as used to be said, the "keeping" of his result) is admirable beyond praise. But it is gained at no sacrifice of truth in local color. There are cheap processes for securing tone which are indeed falsifications of nature — ways of carrying over into one object the color of another, throwing things out of their right relationships, harmonizing with some universal gauze of brown or gray. But Corot's was not a process like any of these. His power to harmonize and unify his colors sprung from the fact that he studied colors with a more careful and penetrating eye than ever before had been brought to bear, and never forgot their mutual relationships. Look at one of his pictures where the general effect, perhaps, is of soft delicious greens. Everything in it is not greenish. The sky is pure blue and the clouds are purest white. The water is rightly related to the sky, and where things were gray in nature, or brown, or even black, they are so on canvas. Harmony does not mean monotony. Tone does not mean untruth. And this Corot could accomplish because he studied "values" as no painter before him had studied them.

This word — new in our language but indispensable — has been a little hard of comprehension to those who know nothing of the painter's problems and devices. But it means, as simply as I can say it, the difference between given colors as severally compared with the highest note in the scale (white) and the lowest (black); the difference between them as containing, so to speak, more light or more dark. This does not mean the same thing as the relative degrees of illumination and shadow which may fall upon them. The one quality may be involved in or dependent upon the other, but the two are distinct to the painter's eye.

It is not easy even to perceive differences in value. Given two shades of the same tint, as of a blue-green or a yellow-green, it is easy enough to say which is the darker; but it is more difficult when a yellow-green is compared with a blue-green, and still more when we set a brown beside a green or a blue beside a yellow. Yet the painter must not only learn to see values in nature but to transpose them correctly on canvas — for color can never be exactly copied on canvas; from the nature of paint there must always be transposition, adaptation, compromise. Corot mastered the difficulty as no one else had done; and this mastery has made him the guide and teacher of all the landscape painters who have since been born.[1]

V.

"THERE are four things for a painter," Corot was wont to say. "These are: form, which he gets through drawing; color, which results from truth to values; sentiment, which is born of the received impression; and finally the execution, the rendering of the whole. As to myself, I think I have sentiment; that is, a little poetry in the soul which leads me to see, or to complete what I see, in a certain way. But I have not always color, and I possess only imperfect elements of the power to draw. In execution I also fail sometimes — which is the reason why I labor harder than ever, little though some people may imagine it."

[1] A conspicuous example of what is meant by the falsification of values may be seen in photographs taken by any of the usual processes. Chemical action deals differently with different colors, so that a light yellow, for instance, comes out darker than a dark blue. The trouble has been obviated in some of the newer methods. But it is easy to see that this question is of vast importance in all translations into black and white. In nothing has the success of American wood-engravers been more remarkable than in this.

In accepting these words about himself we must make allowance for that spirit of aspiration which always leads a true artist to remember his ideal as better than the best possible rendering. It is natural that Corot should have thought he often failed to get his values right, although the world gradually saw that he had at least come nearer right than any one before him; and of course he knew that he had not even attempted many schemes and scales of color which he perceived in the actual world. As regards his power to draw he spoke with stricter verity. A lifetime of study in the woods and fields had enabled him to draw landscapes fully and exactly when he chose, and some of his portrait-heads are wonderfully true. But in our modern world schools alone can give scientific knowledge of the figure; and for the lack of this Corot's figures are weak in anatomy and loose in modeling, though often most delightful in color and sentiment.

It is the same with his execution. Born at a time when few painters painted really well, and trained almost wholly by his own efforts, he is not one of the supreme masters of the brush — one of those whose every line and touch delights the connoisseur in handling. But he painted well enough to express with charm as well as clearness the impressions he received; and as these were the impressions of a very great and individual artist, the verdict is still a high one. Had his growth been assisted by stronger outside influences he would doubtless have reached technical skill more quickly, and perhaps have conquered it more completely; but something of the personality of his manner might have perished. So we are content with his technical shortcomings, and after all they are far from serious. Although a few men have painted landscapes still more beautifully, Corot's surely satisfy the eye while delighting and moving the soul.

If but a single phrase of Corot's had been recorded I should wish it the one which says that sentiment in art is a poetic power to see things or *to complete* them in some personal way. Here the whole import of idealism in art lies crystallized in a word. Not to depart from nature, but to complete her, is the true idealization; not to conceive an ideal foreign to her own, but to perceive her own with so much sympathy that it can be more perfectly revealed than, on this imperfect earth, she herself is often able to reveal it; not to be untrue to fact, but to choose and arrange particular facts so that the type, the ideal, towards which they tend shall be most clearly shown.

The whole world prizes such work as this when it is the poet's or even the figure-painter's. Why is it so often disallowed when the landscape painter brings it? A drama of Shakspere's never happened, yet we feel it is truer than any literally reported scene of the police-court, or "realistic" stage-play or novel. The character of a man, we know, is a higher fact than any of his daily deeds; why, then, is not the aspect of a landscape a higher fact than any of its details? More significant than any individual character, again, is the essence of human nature; why, then, does not the essence of some kind or type of natural beauty mean more and purer truth than the aspect of any one actual spot? Must not an artist see broadly, synthetically, if he is to show us general aspects? And must he not see imaginatively, poetically,— must he not "complete" what he sees,— if he is to search out and render the ideal therein suggested? All his interpretations must be based on facts which he has observed in this place or that; but to make a good picture and a true one he need not confine himself to facts which he has chanced to see together. Very likely Corot never painted a scene without omitting some features and adding others; and in more than one of his works there are elements both of French and of Italian origin. But there is never disharmony in the result, for his knowledge was too great and his imagination too artistic — which means too logical and too sympathetic. He made no mere patchwork pictures. He created landscapes of his own out of the elements with which, in nature's presence, he had stored his sketch-books and his memory. He might alter a scene — he did not alter nature. He but completed the beautiful message she had been suggesting here and half revealing there.

It is easy to prove that Corot's painted poetry was true — much truer than the realist's painted prose. We have only to consult our own experience with him as an interpreter of nature. Here and there, at home or abroad, we may recognize some scene which some realist has faithfully portrayed; but Corot's scenes are everywhere — by the little lakes and brooks of France, in the forest glens of Italy, in the misty glades of England, and along the river borders of our own far western world. What he painted were not items from nature, but certain broad beauties and moods of nature; and though we may rarely be able to put a finger on documentary proof of his veracity, we carry it about with us in a new sensitiveness of eye, a new receptiveness of mood. Everywhere, I say, we see from time to time some beautiful living Corot; but should we see it so quickly or would it seem so beautiful had he not taught us how to value it? The commonplace painter shows us things that we had seen and felt in the same way ourselves. The true artist selects more delicate yet more general facts, explains

them with poetic stress, shows us things which probably we had not remarked before, and makes them forever ours. We may never possess a picture by Corot, but how immeasurably poorer we should be had he painted none! His message is our own if his canvases are not; and who shall say this of a painter unless he is as true as truth, yet personal, poetical, in that creative way which alone means the highest art?

The special character of Corot's idealism shows first of all in his choice of subject-matter. He was most attracted by the most idyllic scenes and moods of nature. Grandeur, force, terror, sadness, did not appeal to him. He had no taste for storms and rugged wildness; he loved high noon less than the glinting tender prophecies of morn or the mysterious grace of twilight; and if it was high noon he painted, still it was not prosaic clearness, but noon in a day of soft veiling mists and passing gleams and shadows. The peculiar broad softness of his touch — a softness which lacks neither delicacy nor nerve — fits well with the sentiment of these favorite themes. But to keep feeling and execution of this sort above mere sentimentality and vagueness, a painter needs the great gift of style. This gift Corot had in a very high degree — the power to give his pictures a quality which every one will understand when I call it classic. No one could be more thoroughly modern, more thoroughly Gallic, than Corot; but no one in modern art has been more classic in the fundamental meaning of the word. It was not because he often painted classic subjects — how many have done this and given us a breath from English firesides, a blast from the Parisian boulevard, in pictures which have perhaps all other virtues, but are conspicuously devoid of style! It was because he felt things with Greek simplicity, joy, and freshness, and saw them in a way which meant Greek dignity, harmony, and repose, and a real yet ideal grace. If his figures are often dreams of Hellas it was simply because he saw the landscape he was painting in such a way that it could be most fittingly peopled thus. The idyllic, classic note was in the voice of the man and would have rung out in his work whatever the themes he chose. It must have been his by birth, though it was happily fostered by the course of his student years. From Bertin and Aligny he imbibed sobriety in taste and that love for harmonious composition which more than any other single element means style in painting; and his long Italian months had enforced the lesson, showing him broad reposeful tones as well as lines. Yet had he not already dreamed of nymphs and fountains in his boyhood by the window at Ville d'Avray?

VI.

IF we can fix upon any one of Corot's pictures as the most famous it must be, I think, the "St. Sebastian" owned by Mr. Walters in Baltimore. Painted in 1851, it admirably represents Corot's art in that middle period which French critics have held to be his very best. His individuality had then fully developed — both his poetry in conception and his freedom in treatment; the difference from the "Forest of Fontainebleau," which he had painted only five years earlier, is immense. Yet a little of his early reserve of manner still clings about the "St. Sebastian," giving it more massiveness and grandeur than we find in pictures of a much later date. It seems to have been Corot's favorite work. He would never sell it, but in 1871 gave it to the lottery held for the benefit of the wounded defenders of France. Delacroix called it the most truly religious picture of modern times; and, indeed, to great external charm and purest poetry it adds a marvelous depth and solemnity of mood. It is the least idyllic, the most epic in sentiment, of all Corot's great works, yet instinct with a pathetic tenderness. The dying saint lies on the ground, cared for by two holy women, in a shadowy forest glen. On each side rise enormous trees, and between them, in far perspective, a little hill with horsemen silhouetted against the sky. Two baby angels float high above the saint, bearing the palms of martyrdom. The hour is twilight, and the shadows are dense beneath the trees; but there is a soft radiance still in the wonderful sky and the very breath of living nature in the atmosphere.

Not so grand, not so impressive, but still more beautiful, perhaps, is another work of this middle period, the "Orpheus Greeting the Morn," owned by Mr. Cottier in New York — another famous Corot and another that well deserves its fame. The upright shape of the large canvas (seen likewise in the "St. Sebastian") is characteristic of Corot, who loved a composition in which the dignity of vertical lines might be emphasized. In no picture is the very essence of morning more truthfully, exquisitely, portrayed: we are bathed in its air, steeped in its light; our ears are filled with the soft rustle of its wakening leaves; our souls are thrilled with its fresh and tender promise; and the infinite lovely distance draws us till we share the passionate poetic yearning of Orpheus himself. And in the execution what breadth combined with delicacy, what soft yet radiant color, what a sense of freedom, sincerity, inspiration! And what a delicious golden tone to compare with the darker yet silvery tone of the "St. Sebastian"! This, indeed, is the poetry of art — nature's poetry truthfully reported, yet

accented, explained, "completed" by a great artist's soul and sight and touch.

The "Orpheus" was painted in 1861, and in 1866 the splendid "Danse des Amours," which is also in New York, owned by Mr. Charles A. Dana — a surpassingly fine example of one of Corot's most characteristic themes. We need not ask whether this wood is of France or Italy, whether this little temple and these gracious, buoyant figures were painted from fact or fancy. It is the true ideal world — the world of actual nature, but seen in one of its most beautiful aspects, peopled by joyous figures, and with all its fair suggestions amplified and fulfilled.

The "Dante and Virgil" in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts is much less complete and magnificent than these, and it shows too clearly Corot's shortcomings as a draughtsman: the tigers crouching at the poet's feet were sketched in by Barye, but his outlines were lost in the painting. Nevertheless, the work is admirable as a whole and most interesting in sentiment — more strongly dramatic than any other Corot I have seen. Seldom has Dante been shown so nearly as he must have looked when, as the Florentine children said, he went down into hell.

The "Lake Nemi," the "Landscape with Cattle," and the "Wood-gatherers," here reproduced, were all in the Morgan collection. The "Nemi" seems to be a picture which, we are told, was painted at Ville d'Avray, but afterwards recast as a memory of the nymph-haunted southland. Its sky is a marvel. The "Wood-gatherers" is one of Corot's very latest works, shown at the last Salon held before his death. The tone is brown and rather dark and the handling very summary; but it has great strength and dignity, and impressive sentiment. In default of an "Orpheus," for example, it is a good Corot for the American public to possess. The placid, sunny little river landscape, with cattle, is a good type of many of Corot's smaller works. Its sky and its distance are its chief beauties, and no distance, no sky, could be lovelier. The "View of the Coliseum" is a much earlier work. It is deeper and stronger in tone, more solid in handling, more dignified in composition — an excellent example to set beside the delicate landscape and the poetic "Orpheus" as proof that Corot's range in art was not a narrow one.

Thus, it appears, there are Corots in America of the very highest quality; and, indeed, this list of them might be greatly lengthened. Mr. Jay Gould in New York owns a "Danse des Nymphes" only less admirable than the "Danse des Amours." In the collection of Mr. Quincy Shaw at Brookline, Massachusetts, are several perfect examples, representing different epochs from almost the very earliest. And in a hundred other American galleries hang Corots of more or less distinction. With the best, of course, there are many not so good, and others, alas, which are Corot's only in name. A superficial eye is easily deceived by imitations of Corot's slighter works, and such have been foisted on the public, abroad as well as here, in considerable numbers. But a really fine Corot has qualities beyond the reach of any plagiarist — qualities of truth on the one hand, of feeling on the other. We run no risk of seeing a fictitious "St. Sebastian" or a "Danse des Amours" which shall deceive a true lover of Corot.

VII.

To understand Corot's influence on art and artists we must recall the times when his work began.

The formalizing, pseudo-classic tendencies of the school of David had just lost their sovereignty. The "romantic" reaction was in its lusty youth under the leadership of Géricault and Delacroix. The fetters of academic tradition were loosened; freedom in thought and practice was proclaimed for every painter; the modern spirit of inquiry and inventiveness, the modern gospel of individuality, were daily winning new disciples. Oddly enough, as it now seems to us, the first fresh impulse in the field of landscape came from across the Channel: certain pictures by Constable and Bonington, exhibited in Paris, gave the first hint that landscape, too, might be painted in free and varied fashions, and made the medium for expressing simple local beauties and personal ideas. But the fact is easily explained: in France landscape painting had meant for generations nothing but a memory of Claude and Poussin, while in England the old Dutch masters — so much more simple, naïve, yet modern in their feeling — had never been lost to sight. Now the hint from England led Frenchmen back to the art of Holland, and its fructifying influence soon showed in France as it has never yet shown in England. Almost instantly a new school was born, a new development began — a school and a development which we must call the noblest and completest that modern painting counts.

Georges Michel was one of the very first to feel the new impulse. But he seems a survivor of the old Dutch school rather than a leader in the school of France — a weaker brother of Ruysdael, not his modernized descendant; a forerunner, not a fellow of Rousseau, Corot, Troyon, Millet, and Dupré. Paul Huet was another innovator, but he is better known to us by the influence he had in his time than by his actual work. Rousseau was the first of the

really complete new masters in landscape, and almost on a line with Rousseau stands Corot.

It is difficult to say just in how far Corot was formed by this influence or by that. Bonington's spirit seems very near akin to his — Mr. Henry Adams in Washington owns a little Bonington which might almost pass for a comparatively early Corot. But there can be no question as of teacher and scholar in the case. Corot can have had no more than a mere glimpse of Bonington's work, and his own was at once immeasurably wider, deeper, and more subtile. For Rousseau he had an immense admiration; but their natures were wholly unlike, and the longer they lived the further apart grew the lines on which they labored. We can say no more of Corot than that the hint of naturalism he got from England, the draught of classicism he imbibed from his first teachers and from the air of Italy, and the Dutch lesson of simplicity and sobriety, germinated and grew together in his soul while eye and hand were training themselves outdoors.

It is impossible, again, to attempt any weighing of the intrinsic merits of Corot and his great contemporaries. Odious in most connections, a process of definite comparison is nowhere so detestable as when applied to mighty artists. It is a sin against the first law of computation we were taught at school — it is an effort to reckon with unrelated quantities. It is as though we took an apple from a pile of peaches and declared the number of peaches less, or compared an apple with a fig to explain its rank among apples, or gauged the breadth of one stream by the depth of another. We may like best the peach or the fig or the apple and confidently declare our liking. But when it comes to comparisons, they should be of figs with figs, of Corots with Corots. To be an artist means to be individual; and individuality can be tested only by its own standard. A Corot is none the worse whatever Rousseau or Troyon may have painted; and it would be none the better had its creator been the only man who ever painted landscapes.

But from the historical standpoint the case is different. If we may not rightly ask of two great contemporaries which was the greater, we may very rightly ask which was the more typical of his time, the more influential upon the world of art. From this point of view Corot seems to me the most significant figure in his generation. Personal, individual, as were all his brethren; boldly, beautifully, as they all preached the gospel of freedom and freshness in art, none except Millet was quite so personal, none quite so fresh as Corot; and to an individuality as strong as Millet's he added other qualities all his own. No art of the time is so complex as Corot's, and its complexity gives it peculiar value to those who look deeper than the surface of paint. No one departed further from that mock classicism which means academic formality, bloodless self-suppression; yet no one then alive or now alive has done so much to prove the persistent value of true classicism. David tried for the form of ancient art and missed its spirit. Corot, the great apostle of modernness and personality, caught its spirit while casting utterly away its form. A Greek of the time of Pericles might easily prefer his paintings to any others we could show him: yet how thoroughly French they are; and yet, again, how close they lie to the heart of the American of to-day.

There is still another point in Corot's supremacy. The profound and accurate study of values — the knowledge how to keep tone perfect and yet keep color complete and true — is the greatest technical achievement of modern times. Here Corot led all his rivals, and therefore he has become the leader and teacher of all younger painters. In many ways they have carried his lesson further than he went himself. To paint things truthfully in the open air means to-day tasks of a variety and difficulty which Corot never essayed, results of a vividness and splendor he never achieved. But the whole development rests on his own. He was the first great "impressionist," and the modern impressionists are but his more daring sons. Sometimes we — and perhaps they themselves — forget the fact; for there is one great point of difference between him and most of his sons in art. He was a poet on canvas, and most of them are speakers of prose. It is their fashion to rave about "realism," to despise idealism — to exalt the mere facts they chance to see above the greater fact which Corot divined and gave. But, do what they will, the best among them are more idealistic than they think; and, say what they will, the world will never agree to rank the reporter above the poet. For the great body of lovers and students of art Corot's supreme merit is that he was the most poetic soul among those who have ever painted landscapes; and his chief value as a teacher is that he showed so well what poetry in painting means. Too many have thought it meant the effort to do with color the same thing that a writer does with words, and have lost the picture in the effort to paint a poem. But with Corot the picture is the first consideration — beautiful forms, beautiful tones, beautiful expression with the brush. The poetry is an infusion merely, an intangible essence breathed from the soul of the maker. Perhaps the time will come when Corot's teaching as regards this point will be more generally heeded than it is to-day. But, of course, conscious effort cannot determine the fact. Any painter can

learn much from Corot in the way of technical secrets; no one can learn from him how to idealize nature except a man who, like himself, chances to be born with a poet's heart; and we can do no more than hope that all new poets who may be born to paint shall be souls of Corot's sort. But we must indeed hope this; for what the world needs just now are not mournful temperaments, reading into nature the sorrow of the human race, but apostles of the joy and peace which those who seek can always find in her, valiant yet tender singers like Corot—happy singers of a glad new day.

VIII.

THE more we study Corot's art the more we love the man who stands behind it; and I have dwelt at some length on the record of his life because it completes the revelation of a strong and serious will, of perseverance, modesty, and self-reliance, of noble desires, unfailing courage, sincerity, and loving-kindness.

It is a little the fashion nowadays to think of artists as excusing themselves, on the strength of being artists, from the duties and virtues we demand of commoner clay. It is too much our way to think of them as eccentric, egotistic, nervously excitable or morbidly sensitive, at odds with a prosaic world and often at odds with themselves—pushed one way by the artistic impulse, pulled another by mere human loves and obligations. We think too often of them thus to pardon or condemn them according as we value art or care little for it as a factor in the progress and aspiration of the world.

Corot's story is of priceless value as proving how far wrong are these ideas; and all the more because it is not an exceptional story. Men like Corot, in all the essentials of what even a pharisaical world would call good conduct, have never been rare among artists and are not rare to-day; nor men as courageous and persevering in disappointment, as simple, modest, and laborious in success. As was Corot, so, in a more or less marked degree, were almost all the great painters and sculptors of his great time. Not all of them could be so cheery and happy, but most of them were as single-minded in their devotion to art, as generous and sincere in their dealings with their fellows.

Let me make a good ending now with a few more words from Corot's lips: "Do we know how to render the sky, a tree, or water? No; we can only try to give its appearance, try to translate it by an artifice which we must always seek to perfect. For this reason, although I do not know my craft so very badly, I am always trying to go further. Sometimes some one says: 'You know your business and don't need to study more.' But none of that, I say; we always need to learn. . . . Try to conquer the qualities you do not possess, but above all obey your own instinct, your own way of seeing. This is what I call conscience and sincerity. Do not trouble yourself about anything else, and you will have a good chance of being happy and of doing well."

M. G. van Rensselaer.

GENERAL LEE AFTER THE WAR.

IT would not be easy, for one who had not been in the midst of it, to realize the enthusiasm that existed among the Southern people for General Lee at the conclusion of the war. Nothing could exceed the veneration and love, the trust and absolute loyalty, which people and soldiery alike had manifested towards him through the struggle. But it was after the war had closed that the affection of the people seemed more than ever a consecrated one. The name given to him universally in the army, "Ole Mars' Robert," is an evidence of the peculiar tenderness with which he was regarded. But after defeat came, all this feeling was intensified by the added one of sympathy. Nowhere could he move abroad without being greeted with such demonstrations of love and interest as always touched his generous and gracious heart.

Living near General Lee as I did, from 1865 till his death, in 1870, I was cognizant of many little instances and scenes which illustrate this feeling, and also serve to bring out some of the finer points of his character in a way no stately biography would condescend to do. It may be worth while to focalize some of these minute side-lights, in order to indicate the less known characteristics of that inner life which shrunk from manifesting itself to the world at large.

A brief period only had passed after the surrender at Appomattox when offers of homes began to be pressed upon him. His family was originally English, and he had many relatives among titled people in the old country, who insisted upon his coming and sharing, for a time, the ease and luxury of their homes. But he positively declined to expatriate himself. "No," he said, "I will never forsake my people in their extremity; what they endure, I will endure, and I am ready to break my