

# THÉODORE ROUSSEAU

## AND THE FRENCH LANDSCAPE SCHOOL.

### I.



WOULD suppose that the bearded man of firm and gentle face whose portrait one sees carved on a boulder in the Forest of Fontainebleau had ever been called the Antichrist of Art? The head beside his represents Millet, the painter of "The Angelus," and their portraits are thus associated because till death intervened theirs was a friendship which neither hardships nor successes on one side or the other sufficed to shake. Moreover, Théodore Rousseau, who was the first to die, was never an extremist, never an active revolutionist, never the noisy freethinker to whom such terms as antichrist are commonly applied.

What a change in the last half-century! When Rousseau was middle-aged the battle against the cold classicists was by no means won, while now to us the landscapes of that painter seem to contain the repose, the grandeur, the sobriety and inner beauty, which go to form a classic. The proscribed of one generation is already the idol of conservatives in the next.

As we stand before a great landscape by Rousseau like the "Ravines of Apremont" lately in the collection of M. Marmontel, or of the "Hoar-frost" in that of Mr. Walters at Baltimore, one must call up a powerfully built man of middle size with a full brown beard; a wide, high forehead, which his friends declared Olympian; a shapely, straight nose; hair worn rather long, after the fashion of forty years ago; direct limpid gaze from eyes of unusual largeness and grayish-blue in color; and a mouth whose lines indicate the absorbed man and the reticent. He was an extremely thoughtful man, not by any means smileless and the farthest remove from stupid; he was one of those who are hard to win for a friend, but, once a friend, eminently the person with whom to pass weeks in the pursuit of a worthy study. There is the sympathetic man who talks, and the sympathetic man who is silent. Rousseau was the latter. Yet he could talk, and talk well, on nature, art, and music; and he wrote a charming letter.

### II.

THE year 1836 was a landmark in Rousseau's life, because the jury of the Salon

fused his "Descent of the Cattle, Mountains of the Jura." He then came into collision with the certainty that to succeed in his profession the canons in art laid down by the majority of a jury appointed from the fourth class of the French Institute must be accepted — a class which contained musicians, engravers, sculptors, and painters. Even now it is wise for a young artist in France to train with a party, for if he dares to stand alone he gets little mercy. Be it said to the honor of Ary Scheffer, who was in favor with the authorities, that he dared to publish his indignation at the rejection of the Jura landscape by showing it at his own studio in the Rue Chaptal. But at any rate Rousseau was in good company — with Delacroix and many others. No picture by him appeared at the Salon till 1849, when the Republic had been again declared; then he received a gold medal. Not that he ceased at once to ask justice of men blinded by the hatred of politics and their profession. In 1837 he offered, only to be rebuffed, the famous "Avenue of Chestnut Trees," concerning the boldness and originality of which there is but one opinion nowadays.

The original minds were with him — Delacroix, George Sand, the art critic Thoré, who fought so well his cause that in 1840 the Government offered 2000 francs for the "Avenue of Chestnut Trees." Some years later it was bought by Khalil Bey for 15,000 francs, and its present owner, Mme. de Cassin, paid certainly more than the 27,000 for which it went at the Bey's sale. In 1838 he had the courage of despair and tried a final assault on the Salon. He sent a "View of the Park and Château of Broglie," ordered by the Duke of that name as a present to Guizot. The Salon refused it. At last Rousseau had reached the point whence no return was possible, and he left Paris to take up his abode for months at a time among the oaks and silver birches of the Fontainebleau woods. A monologue reported by his friend and executor Sensier explains the attitude he assumed to nature and the comfort his genius was able to extract from defeat.

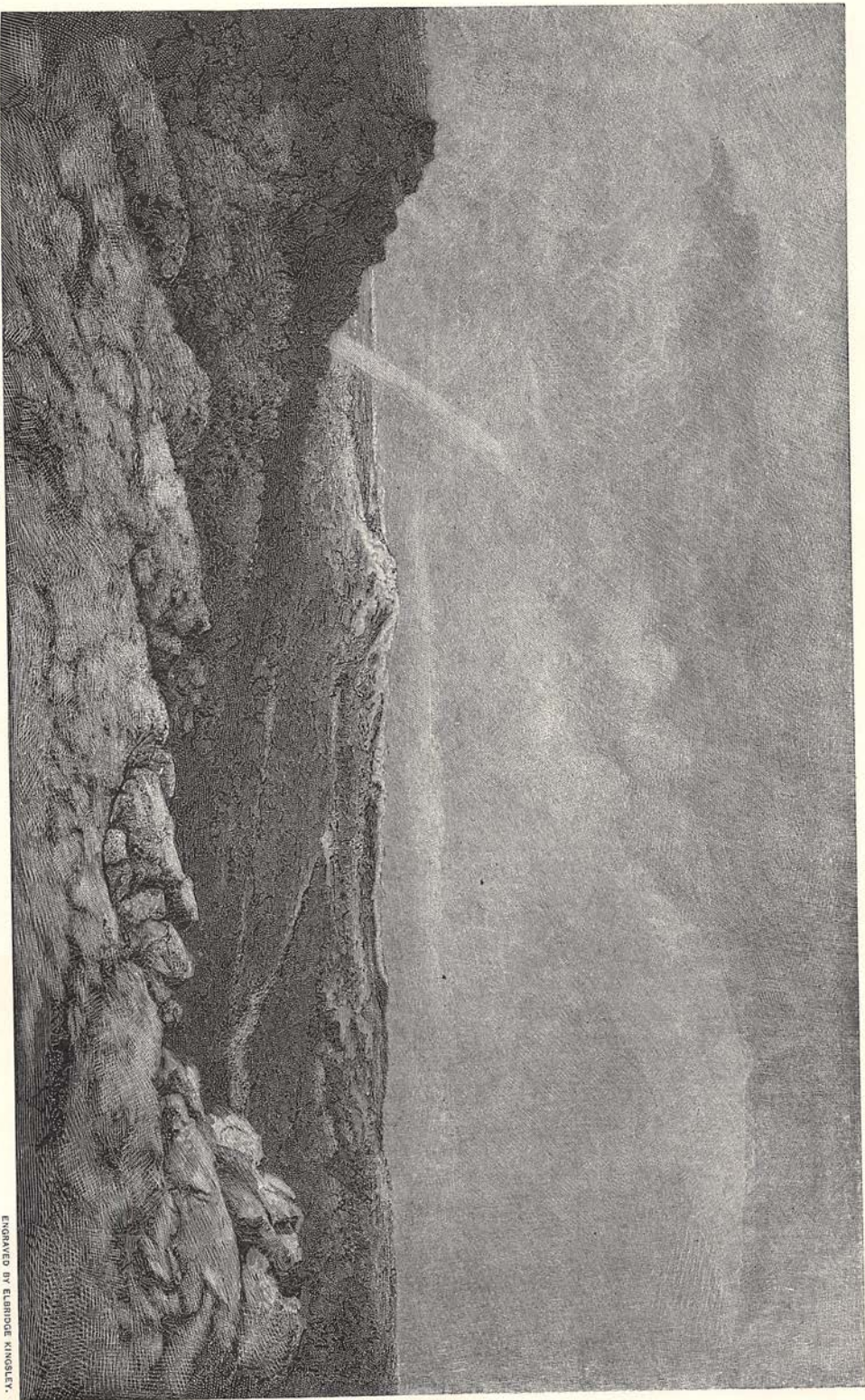
Ah, yes — silence is golden indeed! When I was in my observatory at Belle Croix (the hut of a wood-cutter) I did not dare to budge, for the silence opened up the channel of discoveries. Then the whole family of the forest began to move; as I sat



THE "RAVINES OF APREMONT," BY ROUSSEAU.

IN THE COLLECTION OF M. MARNONTELL, PROFESSOR AT THE PARIS CONSERVATORY OF MUSIC.

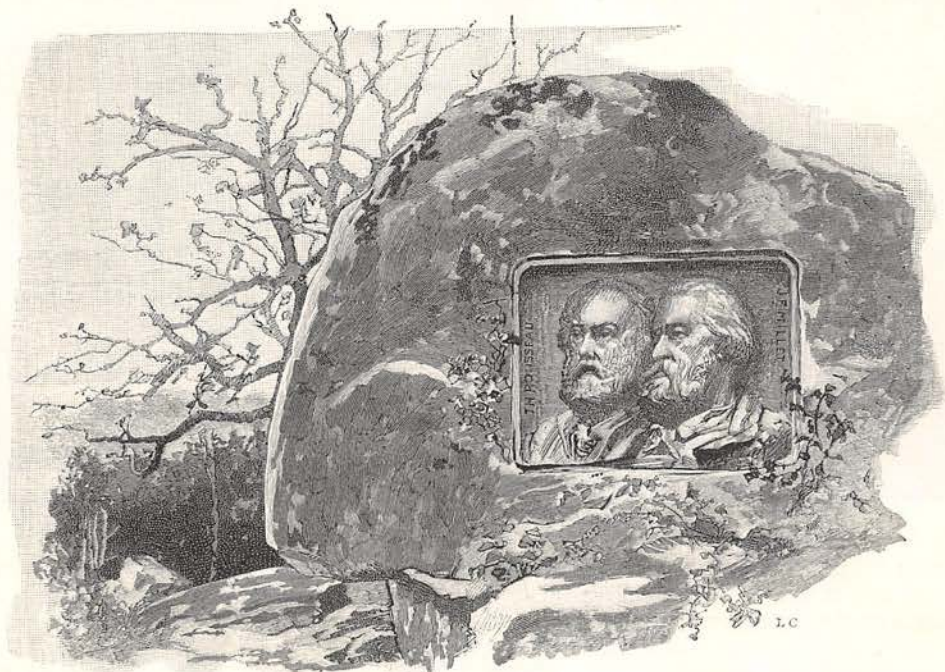
ENGRAVED BY ELLIOTT KINGSLEY.





motionless on the trunk of a tree it was the silence that permitted me to see the deer in its covert and at its toilet, observe the habits of the water-rat, the otter, and the salamander—fantastic amphibian! He who lives within silence becomes the center-point of a world. It needed little—and I might have thought myself the sun of a little cosmos, had it not been that the study before me recalled the fact that it took so much trouble to ape a poor tree or one tuft of heather.

lest kind. He has not realism enough to fetter the attention of skimmers over the field of painting; but even they, should they live with paintings by Rousseau, would gradually succumb to the unobtrusive ideality that distills from all but his latest works. He strikes with marvelous precision that point between the real and the ideal where we accept the picture as a transcript of nature, but do not feel drawn



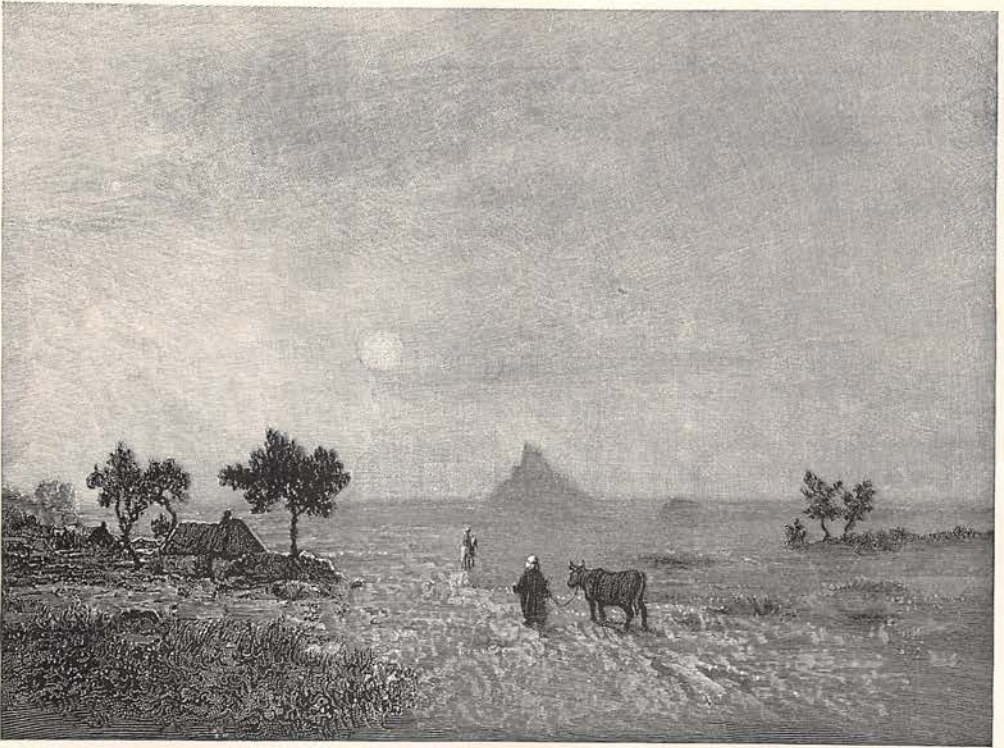
MONUMENT TO ROUSSEAU AND MILLET, FOREST OF FONTAINEBLEAU. (AFTER A PHOTOGRAPH BY C. BODMER.)

The last sentence suggests what a vast amount of labor Rousseau bestowed on his pictures. Before all things they are virile, robust. And yet at first glance there is a deceptive smoothness about many of them which leaves an ardent amateur cold. They are so carefully touched, so broken up, so lacking in *bravura* masses and big, sweeping strokes! Then their subjects are nearly always those which a thousand other artists paint. For the wider circle there is the further drawback that Rousseau seems to grudge the introduction of a human being, and makes no great effort to include cattle. It is only after an apprenticeship to Rousseau that his surprising originality and vigor steal into your mind. It is merely begging the question to say that this comes from Rousseau's extraordinary realism. There are plenty of painters who are more photographic of nature than he. In one sense it is realism; but the truth is that this famous apostle of realism, this so-called founder of realism, whose reputation as a realist was first his ruin and then his glory, is an idealist of the sub-

down from the skies by thoughts of the handling and by calculations of the artist's dexterity. He is like Wordsworth in English poetry, a painter for mature minds rather than for the young, a transcriber at length of things common enough if considered with a heart set towards other matters, but full of the most glorious vistas into the infinite when treated in that leisure and with that silence which Rousseau celebrated in the speech above.

The robustness of Rousseau's work is more seen of the world in his sketches in pencil and ink. There we see the skeletons of landscapes — if he has been content to let the sketch remain and not touched and retouched it into a little picture, as sometimes is the case. It is related of him somewhere that he would show one of his pictures covered with white tissue papers, through which only the great dark masses and heaviest outlines peered. Then he would drop the outer sheet and reveal the parts next in power, then the third, and finally leave the canvas unhid. This amusement was at once a lesson not unworthy of a professional





"ST. MICHAEL'S MOUNT," OFF THE COAST OF NORMANDY. (IN POSSESSION OF C. VANDERBILT.)

teacher of drawing and an evidence of the logical way in which he built up his pictures. He was an obstinate man, and in some degree a methodical — method, logic, and obstinacy being three things much commoner among the French than we suppose. Sometimes, it is more than probable, these traits were carried to an extreme and ended by making a painting less beautiful at last than it was at a slightly earlier stage. He became so absorbed in his work that he no longer realized that allowance should be made for eyes less skilled than his own, and that the effort to follow him so far might fatigue, rather than delight, his admirers. Yet Sensier has pointed out that this very tendency was vigorously combated by Rousseau as a very young man when he was sketching near Compiègne and in Normandy with that French prototype of the English Preraphaelites, Charles Delaberge. An example of too great attention to details on the part of Rousseau is the "Valley of Tiffauges," an otherwise noble work, now owned by Mr. Ames of Boston.

Wordsworth has been taken as a comparison — which brings us to the old statement of Rousseau's obligations to Constable and the English school. Some critics add Turner to Constable as another prime influence on the art of Rousseau. Sensier is, however, quite right

when he makes little or nothing of the influence of Constable, and does not consider Turner at all.

No, after sitting at the feet of Claude Lorraine Rousseau got his impulse from the old landscapists of Holland, just as Georges Michel did before him — the same sources whence Constable drew. Like Constable, but quite independently, he perfected his genius by laying siege to nature in silence, with infinite leisure and infinite labor.

### III.

PIERRE ÉTIENNE THÉODORE ROUSSEAU was born in Paris at No. 4 Rue Neuve, St. Eustache, on the 15th of April, 1812. His father was a merchant tailor from the Jura, who bore among several baptismal names that of Catherine, to our ears an odd name for a male. His grandfather Rousseau was a carriage-gilder for royalty; grandfather Colombet was a marble-cutter; while his maternal uncle, Gabriel Colombet, was a portrait painter and a pupil of David, against whose school Théodore Rousseau was to protest after his own fashion. Another relative was the painter of landscapes, T. P. de Saint-Martin, whose studio he loved to visit. So Théodore came rightfully by his turn for art; he was born into an artis-



tic atmosphere and sprang from the ranks of artisans, which we will widen sufficiently to include that brave wielder of the shears, his father.

We all know what a vivid impression the town boy receives when he is first allowed to see nature in a somewhat wilder state than exists in a suburb. When Théodore was twelve he was sent with a contractor for firewood to the forests of Franche Comté as a helper, his duties being to write letters and keep the accounts. For a year he lived among the woodsmen. This was the year when Constable received his second gold medal at Lille from foreigners, more appreciative of his genius than the English. Apparently Rousseau was an advanced boy, for, after these clerical duties were over, and he had returned to Paris, he took it into his own head to paint a view of the Montmartre hill. Then his uncle, Pau de Saint-Martin, was called in and advised that he should be placed with the landscapist Rémond. With such a dry stick of a classicist as Rémond there was no sympathy possible, and so the boy played truant when he could, and then had to copy big classical pictures to pay for his expeditions into the country about Paris. Finally he

abandoned Rémond and took to copying the Claude Lorraines in the Louvre and going to the studio of Guillon Lethière to learn to draw the figure.

As he refused to try for the Prix de Rome while with Rémond, so he hardly was known in after life to cross the French frontier. La belle France was enough for him—more, he knew, than he could ever do justice to. But in the limits of France he was no mean traveler. Thus in 1830 he made a tour in search of the picturesque, choosing by preference the gloomiest ravines and most desolate tracts of wilderness in Auvergne, that spot where the ethnologists are now locating one of the oldest races of Europe, the Auvergnats, who furnish Paris with laborers and standards of penury. It was there that Rousseau took his first full outing, made his first flight from the parent nest, and thence he returned as the new handler of landscape who scandalized alike his teachers and the noble army of jurors—Ingres excepted.

## IV.

ROUSSEAU contributed to that famous Salon of 1831 in which many of the best artistic youth figured. He sent a "View in Auvergne"

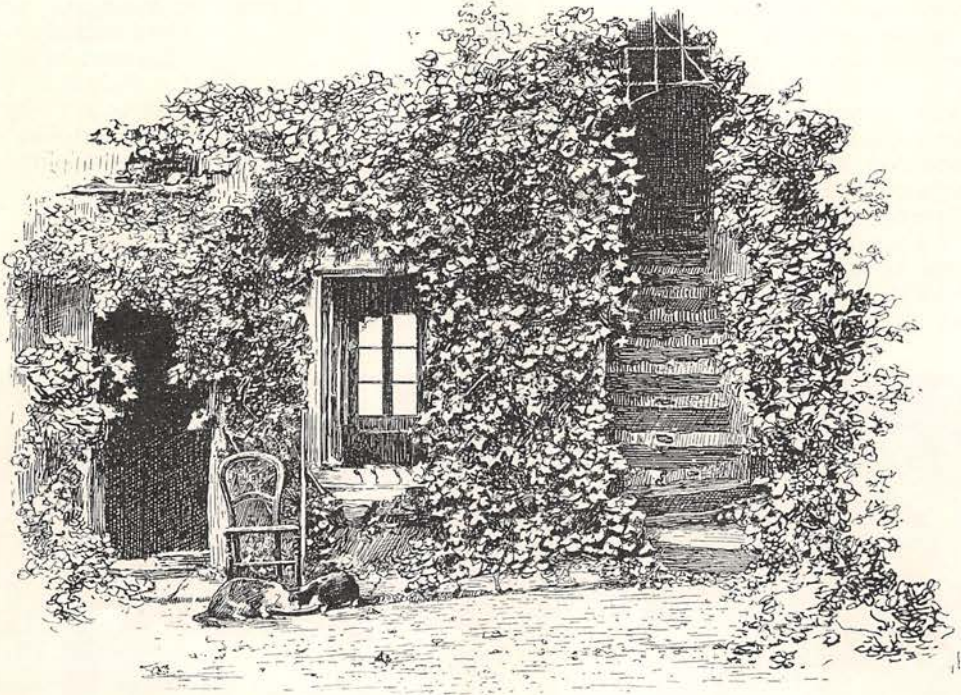


"THE FARM." (IN POSSESSION OF J. A. GARLAND.)



to keep company with works by Delacroix, Scheffer, Decamps, Diaz, Dupré, and the sculptor Barye. From the accounts given of it, this picture did not possess the charm or the originality of the later landscapes. It was a composed landscape that must have betrayed his reluctance to sever connection altogether with the old painters in tobacco-juice who wrought, according to the slang of the studios, with *chique*. It was painted in the garret of one of his aunts, and is said to have shown great similarity to the landscapes of Claude Lorraine. Thus Constable in 1794 and Rousseau in 1830 were both subject to the powerful fascination

of Rousseau as well as of Barye. In 1833 he bought the "Border of Felled Woods, Forest of Compiègne." Barye survived Rousseau eight years, as did Millet, with whom he had even a closer friendship; and, as each was easily the leader in that specialty to which he had devoted his life, each found that neglect and recognition came at about the same time in the train of political events. For the deep interest taken by the Government and its officials in affairs of art in France has its fine side, which one is apt to see first: but it has a reverse also; and that reverse is the tendency of politics to class an artist with a party and



LYELL CARR

ROUSSEAU'S HOME AT THE TIME OF HIS DEATH, IN 1867. (AFTER A PHOTOGRAPH BY C. BODMER.)

of Claude — a suggestion if not a proof that the appearance of Constable's picture in Paris in 1824 had nothing directly to do with Rousseau's art.

There are points of similarity between Rousseau and the sculptor Barye which show as early as this period. Both were silent men who thought much. Both were favorable to the Romantic movement, but disliked the tumult of discussion and withdrew from the crowd. Both were at first spared by the common adversary, but as the quarrel ripened between Classic and Romantic both were deliberately excluded from the Salon, the victims of the hot-headedness of their talking and intriguing friends. The Duke of Orleans was a patron

treat him accordingly. It is evident that such a tendency increases the number of cases in which mediocrity is encouraged and genius starved.

Between 1831 and 1836 must have been Rousseau's happiest years. He was in the electric atmosphere of the revolt against formalism, yet kept apart, so that no responsibility fell upon him. He was considered one of the promises made by the new school to introduce a modern spirit into the dry bones of classicism. He had youth and fine health, a loving mother and a father honored for his probity, hosts of friends — including those who love to talk and dearly cherish a good listener. In 1832 fell a tour in Normandy, and in 1834 a





IN POSSESSION OF CALVIN S. BRICE.

“TWILIGHT,” BY ROUSSEAU.

ENGRAVED BY ELIURIDGE KINGSLEY.



longer journey to the Jura and Switzerland.

At the end of the last century the poems of the Scottish bard Ossian had taken Europe by storm, and from the reflex action of that movement in literature back on England rose the verse of Byron and of Walter Scott. When by that singular kind of reverberation which plays between different countries these influences crossed the Channel again and reached France, they had a profound effect on the fine arts as well as on literature. They influenced Victor Hugo, to be sure; but they also startled Delacroix. In the earlier pictures of Rousseau, in the sketches he made in Switzerland, the French Jura, Normandy, Auvergne, and La Vendée, we may detect a certain amount of yielding to the literary movement of the day. His methods were fiery, his subjects were grand and gloomy, his touch was slightly Byronic compared with the work that appeared subsequent to 1836. It may have been this Byronic something about his work which put a special edge on the resentment of the jury of that year when they characterized the "Descent of the Cattle, Mountains of the Jura" as the product of a poisoned age, a demoniacal and obscene creation!

## v.

THE result of the artistic cabal against Rousseau was to throw him entirely back on himself and send him into the wilds, where he learned to conquer his enemies by conquering nature. It was at Barbizon, then scarcely known to artists, that Diaz learned by example and direct instruction from Rousseau how to make his profound feeling for color tell. His best works are richer than Rousseau's but not so powerful; yet there is a great bond of likeness between them.

In Diaz the colorist is slightly in preponderance, while in Rousseau drawing and color seem to balance each other exactly. This balance of qualities makes Rousseau the landscapist of all landscapists in the eyes of the French, who are not romantic by nature, as a general thing, and prefer drawing to color, logic to music, formalism to individuality, sculpture to painting. They enjoy intensely—those who accept the Barbizon painters at all—the structural power of Rousseau's landscapes, which is neither thrust forward so that one sees nothing else, and begins to reflect on perspectives and the balance of masses, nor so much dissembled as quite to escape impressing itself. We see the same tendency in the modern architecture of France down to 1870. His influence has extended to America and is still in action, many of the older and some of the younger landscapists of New York showing traces of the quiet but steady advance of Rousseau's style into their work. It may be ques-

tioned whether one can find in Jules Dupré any influence of Rousseau, yet he had no closer comrade for many years. Delacroix was his ideal, Dupré his special friend during the years of exile from the Academy; he saw much of Barye, Diaz, Chenavard, and Ary Scheffer. Paul Casimir Périer, H. Didier, Dr. Véron, and M. Collot were buyers who kept a little money in his pocket; but he was generally in financial straits, for his father's affairs went from bad to worse.

The truth is that Rousseau's paintings are not gay as a rule; they do not make one smile. When they are not pervaded by a spirit of sadness they lead to pensiveness. This is not attractive to the public, and sometimes rebuffs connoisseurs; yet, although Rousseau understood perfectly what was needed, he was far too dignified to attempt to please by anything that his own intelligence did not approve. Through the efforts of Jules Dupré about 1846 he was established in a good studio at Paris where he could be seen and see people; but the move was not particularly happy in financial results.

Yet here we come to one of the turning-points of his life, where his obstinacy and his poverty combined made him recoil from a step which might have been his making. He fell in love and his love was returned. In an unworldly way the match was excellent so far as sentiment is concerned; but there was hardship in prospect. From loyalty to his profession, from fear of making the girl he loved a sharer in his apparently hopeless poverty, he broke off the affair and returned to his solitary studies in the country. But a few years later, instead of a loving wife he had a woman on his hands who was neither his wife nor exactly a mistress; rather an unfortunate to whom he gave an asylum and who soon conquered a place in his heart. It was this poor creature who separated him from his friends, even from Jules Dupré, and whose attacks of the nerves troubled and frightened him. All his life he had been a solitary man. Now the solitude was invaded by a foolish girl who ended by becoming a lunatic. In 1847 or thereabouts Rousseau had determined to give up the woman he deeply loved; in 1849, after the Republic was proclaimed and the exiles from the Salon were the pets of the Government, it was found that a new departure had been taken by Rousseau, the celibate and hermit. He had made his choice in life, and in so doing took the false step which led gradually to inferior, stiffer, drier work, to failing health, to paralysis and the grave.

## vi.

ROUSSEAU withdrew entirely to Barbizon, where he dwelt in the little house the door of which is shown in the sketch. He was a neighbor of Millet, whom he had learned to know



in 1847. At the Salon of 1849 he obtained the gold medal, but, much to his chagrin, not the Legion of Honor. In 1852 came that decoration, in 1854 a gold medal, and at the Universal Exposition in 1855 he reached his highest mark. Writing on the Salon of 1857, Edmond About speaks of him as for the past twenty-five years the first apostle of truth in landscape, and says that he broke down the barriers set by the Salon against the landscapists of the new school, although neither the public nor the Institute would confess his power. He continued to exhibit at the Salon nearly every year, including 1867, when he showed a "View of Mont Blanc" and an "Interior of the Forest." During his life the price of his work rose to extraordinary figures, but since his death it has gone to thousands where hundreds were asked before. The "Hoar-frost" was sold in 1873 at the Laurent-Richard sale for \$12,020. It is worth at least \$30,000 now. A magnificent Fontainebleau piece called "Mont Girard," owned by Mr. William Schaus, is held at \$45,000. It is dated 1854. One of the beauties of the Spencer collection was a little Rousseau called "A Hamlet," which shone and sparkled as if the painter had melted precious stones and used them to imitate the quivering of sunlight on rocks and trees.

In Mr. Schaus's hands is a beautiful autumn scene with rocks and brown heath in front, a shadow on the foreground, sunlight in the second plane, one silver birch to the right of the center, and a fringe of trees on the horizon. The sky near the trees has the most delicate, unobtrusive clouds, which reveal themselves unexpectedly. A landscape with the coloring of spring is also in this collection; it

represents the upper Seine where it forms various holms by separating its streams. On one is a grove of willows, on another sits a fisherman. A late "Sunset" recalls the "Twilight" given in the illustration; there is the same pool with reflections of trees in the middle distance. The dramatic intensity of many of Rousseau's landscapes will not easily escape observers. Their moods are various, but usually somber. An exception is the exquisite "Valley of the Oise," owned by Mr. Graves of Orange, N. J. It is a morning effect, the air full of diffused light, the atmospheric perspective most admirable. This peaceful, blond picture was shown at the Barye Monument Exhibition in New York, where it extorted admiration without stint. Its atmosphere is somewhat like that of the "St. Michael's Mount" figured here. There is a small Rousseau at the Metropolitan Museum; but it would not be possible to give any exact account of the Rousseaus owned in the United States, or even in New York. They are many, and among them are some of the finest of his works.

Few have carried the landscape to such a pitch of art as Théodore Rousseau. He was a masterly draftsman, and his sketches are much sought. He became a marvelously dexterous painter, knowing especially how to render sunlight on stone or tree-trunk with a brilliancy never surpassed. Then he became a master of atmosphere where he had been merely great before; he added the poetry of color to the perfection of drawing. Finally he carried his art to the highest point by expressing through landscape those obscure but powerful emotions we mean when, for want of a better term, we speak of the dramatic in art.

*Charles de Kay.*

## A MONODY ON THE DEATH OF WENDELL PHILLIPS.

### I.

ONE by one they go  
 Into the unknown dark —  
 Starlit brows of the brave,  
 Voices that drew men's souls.  
 Rich is the land, O Death,  
 Can give you dead like our dead! —  
 Such as he from whose hand  
 The magic web of romance  
 Slipt, and the art was lost!  
 Such as he who erewhile —  
 The last of the Titan brood —  
 With his thunder the Senate shook;  
 Or he who, beside the Charles,  
 Untoucht of envy or hate,  
 Tranced the world with his song;  
 Or that other, that gray-eyed seer  
 Who in pastoral Concord ways  
 With Plato and Hafiz walked.