THOMAS COUTURE.

WITH PICTURES BY THOMAS COUTURE IN THE COLLECTION OF F. BARBEDIENNE.

MY first meeting with Couture, who became one of my best and dearest friends, was odd and characteristic. It was in 1834; I was not yet one and twenty, and had just arrived from the United States, well provided for in the way of courage and determination, with a goodly stock of youthful illusions, and very little besides. I was just beginning to understand a few words of French, and had entered the studio of the great and unfortunate painter Gros. If I understood but few of the things the master and pupils said to me, I understood the language of the pencil, and worked all the harder that I was more estranged.

One day, as the model was resting, and I was looking at my morning's work in a somewhat melancholy state of mind, a short, thickset young man, with bright brown eyes and shaggy hair, unceremoniously pushed me aside, saying, "Donne moi ta place, petit." I was going to protest, when I saw my fellow-student so absorbed that I grew interested in what he was doing. He coolly turned over my sheet of gray paper and sketched the model, who, resting, had fallen into a far better attitude than that which we had copied. The outline drawing was so strong, so full of life, so easily done, that I never received a better lesson. When he had finished, he left my place as coolly as he had taken it, seemingly quite unconscious of my existence.

I did not then know the name of this free-and-easy comrade, but I kept the drawing and prized it. I am sorry to say that the woman intrusted with the care of my room had but small respect for the fine arts, and being one day in need of paper to light my fire, took a number of drawings for that purpose. Among those drawings was the outline sketch by Thomas Couture.

I was scarcely able to profit much by my illustrious master's directions. Baron Gros had been a very successful as well as a very great painter. His "Battle of Eylau" and his "Plague of Jaffa" at the Louvre show what he was capable of doing. But little by little fashion changed; other painters became the favorites of the moment, and Gros was left somewhat in the background. There are but few sorrows more cruel than such a sorrow — to feel one's own power; to know that one's rivals are less truly artists than one's self; and yet to assist, powerless, at the crumbling away of one's own fame. And, as often happens, the very public, so eager formerly to praise, seems to find a cruel delight in throwing mud at the fallen idol. The criticisms which were not spared Baron Gros when his last picture was exhibited at the Salon so cut him to the heart that he threw himself into the Seine. His body was found near Saint-Cloud.

Gros's pupils dispersed, and I had no opportunity to make further acquaintance with my eccentric fellow-student.

Some years later, when the estranged boy that I was in 1834 had become a young man, I happened to pass with a comrade, a young Englishman named Coplis, near the shop of Desforges, who sold canvases and paints, and who also exhibited pictures in his window. I was greatly struck by a picture representing a young Venetian, and endeavored to excite my companion to enthusiasm. Coplis was hungry, and at first thought more of his delayed lunch than of the painting. But he soon forgot his hunger, and exclaimed, "By Jove! I must get my brother to buy that." Lucky fellow! I had a certain respect for a painter whose brother was rich enough to buy pictures. In those days painters were by no means able to build their own grand studios, and to fill them with wonderful draperies and precious bric-à-brac; as a usual thing, they belonged to modest families, who mourned over the son and brother who had embraced such a profession.

Mr. Coplis bought the picture signed Thomas Couture, and paid the color-dealer a thousand francs for it. I afterward found out that the artist received only three hundred francs. As it happened, it was I who was commissioned to go to his studio. As soon as I entered I saw that Couture was no other than the fellow-student who had so unceremoniously taken my place. I was so delighted at the coincidence that Couture, who naturally did not recognize me at all, thought me a little crazy. I exclaimed, "I am so glad that it is you!" I must now confess a little weakness of mine. When I am excited and pleased by any unexpected event, I rather enjoy the bewilderment of those who are not in the secret. After all, each must find his pleasure where he can. But after a while Couture understood that I was not the rich amateur who had bought his picture, but only a poor devil of a painter like him-

ENGRAVED BY H. DAVIDSON.

THE LITTLE CONFECTIONER.

self, and that we both had been pupils of Gros. Our friendship dated from that moment.

There was in Couture's talent such vigor, such frankness, so much of life and truth, that my admiration for the artist equaled my liking for the man. He was apart among the painters of the day; as far removed from the cold academic school as from the new art, just then making its way, with Delacroix at its head. The famous quarrel between the classical and the romantic camps left him indifferent. He was, even then, of too independent a nature to follow any chief, however great. He was—himself. His great aim was to approach nature as near as possible, to give life and passion to his painted figures. And in that he succeeded wonderfully.

On that first visit of mine to his bare studio—a very different-looking place from the lovely boudoir-like studios of fashionable painters nowadays—I saw him at work on a picture only just sketched in. He exclaimed: "The amateur who will buy that canvas for a thousand francs will have his money's worth. Don't you think so?" A thousand francs! The picture was large, and represented the prodigal son, a life-size figure. The young man, seated by the wayside, a goatskin about his loins his only garment, thin, his deep-sunken eyes full of despair, his brow overshadowed by a thick shock of black hair, seems to ruminate over his past follies and their consequences. In the background pass a man and a woman: the young woman is full of compassion, while her companion points to the prodigal and seems to tell his story. The contrast between the prodigal son and these lovers is very happily indicated; and the rich tones of the man's red drapery relieve the somberness of the rest of the picture. While examining the sketch I said to my new friend: "My sitters pay me a thousand francs for a portrait. If you will allow me to pay you by instalments, I will be that amateur,—and a proud one too,—and I offer you not a thousand francs, but fifteen hundred."

ENGRAVED BY M. HAIDER.

STUDY FOR "THE LOVE OF GOLD."

I was very proud of my purchase, but a little troubled too. In those days my sitters were not very numerous, and I borrowed of Mr. Coplis, the brother of my fellow-student, the first sum paid to Couture. But I never regretted this youthful folly of mine. "The Prodigal Son" remained in my studio for many years, and I took it with me to America. Finally I gave it, with many other

ADVOCATE PLEADING.

ENGRAVED BY M. HAIDER.

pictures, to the city of Chicago. I am sorry to say that the whole collection was destroyed in the great fire of 1871. A small sketch of "The Prodigal Son," and a most spirited one, still exists; it belongs to M. Barbedienne, the famous bronze-dealer, who was a personal friend of Couture, and possesses a number of pictures, drawings, and sketches by the master.

Thomas Couture was of humble origin, and had to fight his way in life; he fought it bravely and successfully. He was born in Senlis, not far from Paris, on the 21st of December, 1815. Sturdy, thick-set, short, with a big voice and somewhat rough manners, he was by no means what is called a "lady's man." He never frequented society, and had a profound contempt for those who did. He was a great worker, in his youth especially, for later he grew much fonder of his ease. He cared only for the life of the studio and for artists' jokes, and, I am sorry to say, practical jokes were his particular delight.

If he had not been a painter, he might have been a most inimitable comic actor. When he told a story (and he told funny stories by the dozen), he would act it; his face would turn and twist, his eyes would dance, his nose, with its peculiar nostrils opening upward, would sniff, and he managed so admirably to render the tone of voice and the gestures of those he imitated that he actually looked like them. I remember that many years later, happening to speak of a very fussy old lady whom we both knew, and whom he had known when she was young, he so caught the twist of her head, the pleading of her eyes, the flattery of her society phrases, that I saw her before me, and not only as she was then, but as she must have been twenty or thirty years before.

Couture was a stanch and faithful friend. We were often separated, as I continually went to America or to England; but when I returned to Paris I was sure to find my old comrade such as he had been when we parted. When I married, and presented him to my young wife, the impression was not so favorable as I should have liked. His big, loud voice, his free-and-easy manners, and especially his practical jokes, which he did not always reserve for the painting-room, greatly disturbed the shy young Englishwoman. At one time he never came to dine with us without bringing in his pocket a tame lizard, which would run up his back and nestle against his neck, or would play the same trick with unsuspecting strangers. He did his best to inspire a disgust for oysters by showing the creatures to be living at the moment when they were swallowed. Many other

ENGRAVED BY CHARLES STATE.

HARLEQUIN PLEADING.

such trifles were set down against him at first; but with time, and especially after he himself, rather late in life, married, these eccentricities were softened down, and his real sterling qualities — the good heart, the faithfulness, the sturdy courage, and the manly energy — grew to be more thoroughly appreciated.

These strong qualities did not go without a certain rough independence of character which did not help him to success and official dignities. He divided the world into two distinct classes: artists,— that is, those whom God created to be the masters of the world,— and the others, whom he called with infinite contempt "les bourgeois." The greatest statesmen, kings, noblemen, or shopkeepers were all bourgeois,— that is, inferior beings, who should consider it an honor to buy pictures or statues at the highest possible rates. As to allowing them a voice in the matter, the right of directing in any way the artist they employed, that was not to be thought of. Their first duty was to be eternally satisfied, grateful, and enthusiastic.

At the time that Guizot published his work on Washington I was commissioned by a group of Americans to paint a portrait of the great statesman. The sittings were most agreeable, and conversation between the painter and the sitter never flagged. I happened to mention Couture, and I spoke so warmly of my fellow-student that Guizot expressed a wish to see him. The picture of "The Prodigal Son," which he had admired during his sittings, proved to him that my enthusiasm was not inspired merely by friendship. We therefore went together to Couture's studio. He had utilized one of his bare walls to sketch in the picture which was to become so celebrated under the title of "The Romans of the Decadence." Even in that rough state it was easy to see what a strong work it was, and the visitor was very much struck by it. Guizot was then all-powerful, and a more courtier-like painter would have shown himself more flattered by this visit than did Couture; he considered it but his due. When the statesman asked him whether he had no order for this picture, he answered, "J' attends." The orders should come to him; he would never run after them. Guizot smiled, but continued most graciously:

"Who was your master?"

"Delaroche."

After the death of Gros, Couture had entered Delaroche's atelier, but remained only a short time under a master whom he did not admire.

"M. Delaroche is a friend of mine," answered Guizot; "I shall have great pleasure in speaking of you to him."

And he evidently did speak to Delaroche of his pupil, for a short time after this visit Couture happened to meet his old master, the most successful artist of the day, the favorite painter of Louis Philippe and of all his family. Delaroche went up to him and said:

"M. Guizot seems to have been struck by your work; he told me so. I replied that you had been my favorite pupil, you had natural talent, but you have strayed from the true path, and I cannot recommend you."

Probably the favorite court-painter influenced his royal patrons, for when the "Decadence" was exhibited at the Louvre — in those days the "Salon" took place in the long gallery, the modern canvases hiding the works of the old masters — the King, Louis Philippe, when he visited the exhibition, managed to turn his back on Couture's picture, both in coming and in going. The painter's contempt for "bourgeois" taste by no means kept him from feeling this royal behavior most keenly. However, the picture had such great success, was so generally praised, suddenly causing its author to become famous in a day, that the state bought it for the very large sum of 6000 francs. This sudden reputation of his ex-pupil probably caused Delaroche to modify his judgment. At any rate, he called on Couture some time after the purchase of his picture, and said:

"Monsieur Couture, I have greatly disapproved, I still disapprove, of your conception of art, but I do not deny that you have talent. You have made for yourself a place in art; let us be friends."

But Couture was not a man to be taken by a few pleasant words; he drew back and answered:

"Monsieur Delaroche, you have had immense success, you are a member of the Institute, you have innumerable admirers. I never was, I never can be, among those admirers. Therefore there can be no question of friendship between us two."

And, bowing, he left the great man somewhat astonished at this manner of responding to his advances.

Couture was a good painter, but a very bad courtier; he proved it every time he was placed in contact with the great ones of this world, whether sovereigns or members of the Institute of France. That was not the way to make of his talent a popular talent. The rough independence of his nature could admit of no sort of compromise. He had several opportunities of making his way to honors and to fortune — opportunities which another might have utilized, but which he wasted. Doubtless he made good resolutions, but when the time came he was unable to control his impatience and his sharp retorts.

If Louis Philippe did not appreciate the painter of the "Decadence," his reputation was

ENGRAVED BY T. JOHNSON.

STUDY OF AN AMERICAN GIRL. (MADE IN ONE SITTING.)

so well established when Napoleon III. took possession of the throne that it was impossible to treat him slightingly, though Couture's talent was not such as courts, as a usual thing, care to encourage. The favorite painter of the Third Empire was Winterhalter, as Delaroche had been of the Orleans family. However, an order was given to Couture for a large picture representing the baptism of the little Prince Imperial. He went to work with great ardor, making sketches, and preparing a vast composition. In the course of the work he had to have sittings from the various members of the imperial family and their immediate followers. If a portrait-painter, when his sitters are ordinary mortals, has nearly always to undergo many unpleasant scenes, it is easy to judge how his temper is tried, and his nerves unstrung, when those sitters are princes or sovereigns. It is likely that in Couture's case the sittings were not agreeable either to the painter or to his models. Napoleon III. wished to direct his artist, and of all artists Couture was the least easy to direct. Finally, one day, goaded beyond endurance, the painter turned around and said:

"Sire, who is to paint this picture — your Majesty, or I?" And neither painted it! The Emperor gave no more sittings, turned his back on the painter, and his courtieıs turned theirs also. The order was not maintained, and all the work of many months was wasted.

Couture never recovered from this bitter disappointment. He shook the dust from his feet, and returned contempt for contempt. From that day on he never sent any work to the annual Salon, and, little by little, so retired from the world that many thought him dead. For many of his contemporaries he remained the

painter of the "Decadence," as though he had painted only that one picture. How many times have I not heard young painters exclaim: "Couture—ah, yes, Couture of the Romans. But he died ages ago. Or, if he still vegetates somewhere, he must be very old indeed. No one has heard of him for many a long year!" In reality, when Couture died, in March, 1879, he was not sixty-four years of age.

The truth is that Couture never ceased working, though he worked after a somewhat irregular fashion, giving himself numerous holidays. If he was neglected by the great mass of his countrymen, he was appreciated elsewhere. One of his most charming works, the "Falconer," of which I made a copy the size of the original, is in Germany. But most of his pictures were bought, I am glad to say, by Americans. It is rather odd that the "nation of shopkeepers," as ours is often termed, should have a love of art, and the instinct of the real amateur, more fully developed than many an Old World country. When Millet was still, if not unknown, at least violently criticized in France, America already possessed some of his best works. Barye found his most fervent admirers in the United States. Couture painted almost exclusively for Americans.

Couture married rather late in life, and had two children, both girls. He was adored by his wife and daughters, and his married life was a very happy one. Perhaps, with our ideas on such matters, we might consider that his theory of the superiority of the male creature, and his right to absolute devotion on the part of his womenfolk, was a reprehensible theory. But he made an excellent father and husband in spite of his conviction that a man was not made to be faithful to one woman, and that education for girls was a dangerous modern notion, not to be encouraged by a reasonable man.

In 1869 he purchased a country place at Villiers-le-Bel, a short distance from Paris. The house dated from the time of Francis I., and the garden, or rather park, was filled with grand old trees. Here he resided during the last ten years of his life, going to Paris only during a few months in winter. His peculiar ideas of happiness caused him to live in what other mortals might consider great discomfort. Under pretext that nature managed things for the best, he never allowed a gardener to work on his grounds. He was, besides, quite convinced that such hirelings made it a point to sell his vegetables and to steal his fruit. As a natural consequence the beautiful place went to ruin; the trees brought forth no fruit, and the earth yielded no vegetables. He himself took great delight in wearing peasant's garments and in walking in *sabots*—they at least had nothing to do with civilization! But as he had a thorough appreciation of the delights of a good table, he employed an excellent cook, and his devoted wife took care that his meals should be of the best and his truffles of the largest. But for the rest of the service a village girl was quite sufficient, and he deemed it by no means beneath their dignity to utilize his wife and daughters in domestic duties of the most active sort.

In his country retreat he was not, however, abandoned. Pupils gathered about him, living in the village so as to profit by the master's advice. Among these were many Americans. Mr. Ernest Longfellow, son of the poet, was of the number. Couture was an excellent master, and took great interest in the progress of his pupils. His great precept was, "Look at nature; copy nature." He published a little book full of good advice to young artists, giving the result of many years' experience. All his pupils were fond of him, which proves that the exterior peculiarities which sometimes shocked strangers were soon overlooked by those who were able to appreciate his sterling qualities. A man who is loved by the members of his family, to whom all his friends remain faithful, and who is appreciated by young people, is sure to be of a thoroughly lovable nature. Still, it must be owned that the first impression was not always quite agreeable. On one occasion an American, a rather shy and exquisitely polite gentleman, and a great admirer of Couture's talent, went, provided with a letter of introduction, to pay his respects to the master. The master was in his bath, but when his wife told him of the visit, "Let him come in!" exclaimed he, and, much to our countryman's confusion, he was received by Couture, soaking placidly in his bath. He rather splashed his visitor, for, like many Frenchmen, he gesticulated freely while conversing.

Couture was fond of telling the story of his first pupil. He was still a young man when, one morning, he heard a timid knock at his door. "Come in!" said he, in that big, gruff voice of his, scarcely calculated to encourage shy visitors. A young fellow, slightly deformed, dressed like a well-to-do countryman, entered, and, not without much hesitation and much stuttering, begged the painter to take him in as pupil. "I have no pupils; and I wish for none," was the discouraging answer. But the youth, if he was timid, was tenacious; he would be so discreet; his master need not feel his presence; all he asked for was a corner of the atelier from which he could see the great artist at work; he would make himself of use, wash the brushes, set the palette, run errands—do anything, in short, that was required of him. Couture continued to say no; the young man continued to plead. Finally the artist impatiently took up his pipe and found that his tobacco-pouch was

empty. "Go and buy me some tobacco!" he cried. The young man disappeared, reappearing soon; Couture smoked, was mollified — and yielded.

This strange pupil remained with him for more than a year. Couture often wondered how he managed to live. He seemed poor, but he never borrowed money. He spent all his time working, without showing very great natural talent, and Couture's excellent heart was much concerned. How was that poor fellow ever to get salt for his porridge with his painting?

One day the pupil begged a great favor of his master — to let him invite him to dinner. Couture consented, and, to his amazement, the young man, dressed like a gentleman, took him to the best restaurant in Paris and ordered the best dinner that restaurant could provide.

The poor, humble pupil, who ran on his errands and washed his brushes, was a very rich amateur whose passion for painting had led him to seek the sincere and disinterested lessons of a master he admired. Later, Couture went to visit his ex-pupil in the latter's beautiful château in Normandy, which contained one of the finest collections of pictures and rare curiosities in all France. It is needless to say that the master was received with enthusiasm by the pupil. M. Dutuit (the pupil) left his magnificent collection, with a large endowment, to the city of Rouen. One of the pictures is a small whole length of Rembrandt, which I once copied.

Couture's method of giving a lesson to his pupils was as follows: While they looked on he painted a head from the model, and while he painted made judicious remarks as to the drawing, the color, the light and shade. Some of these heads, dashed off in two hours, are charming. M. Barbedienne, Couture's great friend and admirer, possesses several of them.

In the same collection are numerous drawings, sketches, half-finished pictures, most interesting to those who like to follow the workings of an original genius. Among these is the sketch for his picture, the "Love of Gold." Seated at a table, a man with a fiendish face grasps bags of gold, jewels, and precious stones; crowding about him, eager for the spoil, we see beautiful women, writers willing to sell their pen, artists their brushes, warriors their valor. Couture's love for symbolical painting grew with years, developed probably by solitude. In the very retired life which he led he did not follow the movement of modern art; he even refused to see what other artists did, declining to let them see his own works. Another of his symbolical pictures, of which M. Barbedienne possesses a large, nearly finished sketch, shows us a beautiful young woman seated in a carriage, whip in hand, driving, instead of horses, a group of men — among them a poet, a warrior, and a satyr-like old lover. I prefer, as a general thing, his simpler works. Among these I must speak of a little picture representing a boy carrying a tray on which are glasses full of wine or red syrup; his head is covered with a sort of white twisted cloth, and is singularly living and strongly painted. Couture's love of symbolical pictures sometimes carried him to the verge of caricature, as in his series of pictures

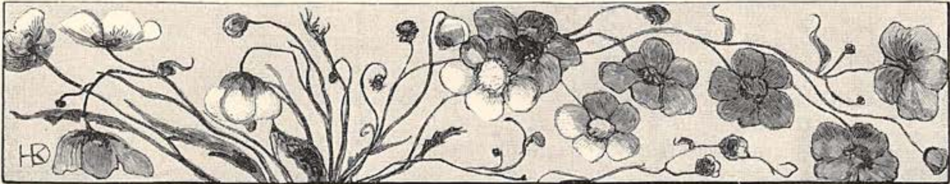
DRAWN BY MALCOLM FRASER, FROM A PHOTOGRAPH.

THE HOUSE OF COUTURE AT VILLIERS-LE-BEL.

of lawyers. He had two pet hatreds — lawyers and doctors. In M. Barbedienne's gallery are some very spirited drawings and sketches of lawyers speaking before the court, or sleeping during the discourse of their brother lawyers. As to doctors, he never would allow one in his house. He was so violent in his animosity that, when he fell ill, he refused all medical aid. And his was a terrible sort of disease, which could not be cured, although his sufferings might at least have been somewhat allayed.

My poor friend died of a cancer in the stomach on the 27th of March, 1879. His loss was a great sorrow to me. We had been young men together; we had seen years roll on without bringing any change in our mutual feelings, and when one of us experienced some success in life it was a joy to the other. For his talent I had a sincere and profound admiration; for his strong and manly nature the greatest sympathy. He was a friend in the broadest and best sense of the word.

George P. A. Healy.



"BECAUSE IT IS THE SPRING."

"I will be glad because it is the spring." AMY LEVY.

SHALL I be glad because the year is young?
 The shy, swift-coming green is on the trees;
The jonquil's passion to the wind is flung;
 I catch the May-flower's breath upon the breeze.

The birds, aware that mating-time has come,
 Swell their plumed, tuneful throats with love and glee;
The streams, beneath the winter's thraldom dumb,
 Set free at last, run singing to the sea.

Shall I be glad because the year is young?
 Nay; you yourself were young that other year:
Though sad and low the tender songs you sung,
 My fond heart heard them, and stood still to hear.

Can I forget the day you said good-by,
 And robbed the world and me for alien spheres?
Do I not know, when wild winds sob and die,
 Your voice is on them, sadder than my tears?

You come to tell me heaven itself is cold,—
 The world was warm from which you fled away,—
And moon and stars and sun are very old —
 And you? — oh, you were young in last year's May:

Now you, who were the very heart of spring,
 Are old, and share the secrets of the skies;
But I lack something that no year will bring,
 Since May no longer greets me with your eyes.

Can I be glad, then, in the year's glad youth?
 Nay; since for me the May has ceased to shine.
What shall I do but face the cruel truth?—
 You made my spring; and now spring is not mine.

Louise Chandler Moulton.