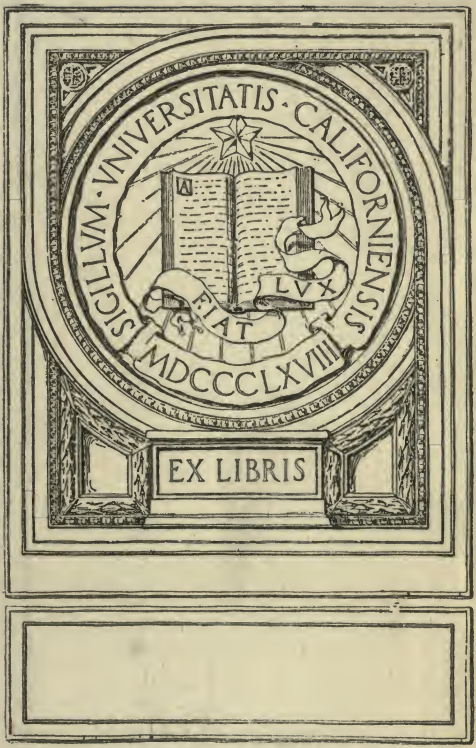
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PORTRAIT OF LITTLE ANTOINETTE FEUARDENT

Photograph—Braun, Clément & Co.]

MILLET

BY

ROMAIN ROLLAND

PROFESSOR OF THE HISTORY OF ART AT THE
ÉCOLE NORMALE SUPÉRIEURE, PARIS

LONDON. DUCKWORTH & CO.

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Translated from the French text of
M. Romain Rolland by Miss Clementina Black.

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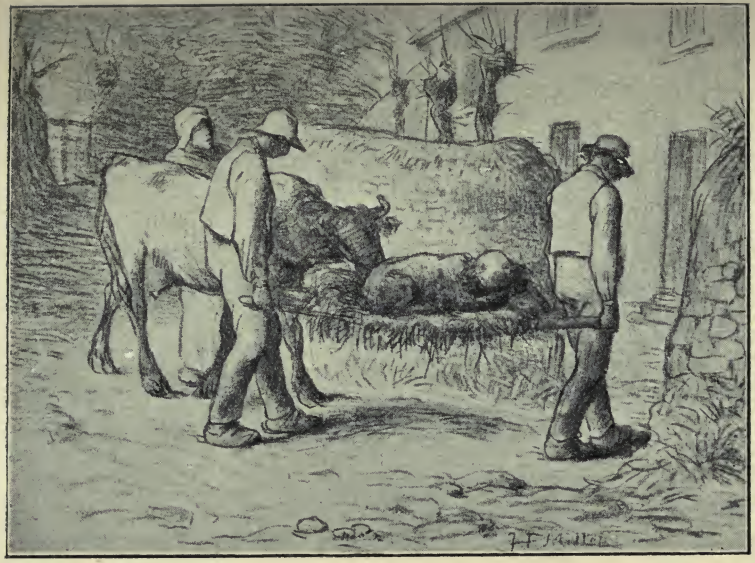
Moral Character of Millet and of his Work—His Place in French Art

The personality of Millet is a surprising one in the France of the nineteenth century. He seems to be a man belonging to another time, another race, a different form of thought. In French art he is a solitary, almost an alien. He was equally misunderstood by his admirers and his detractors. The former hailed him as the bold and truthful interpreter of the new democracy. The latter regarded him as a declaiming socialist who set before the dominating middle classes a melodramatic picture of the suffering workers. Criticism saw political allusions in all his works. The gesture of the *Sower* appeared to be a threat of the populace, casting to heaven "handfuls of grape-shot." *The Gleaners* were called by Paul de St Victor "the three Fates of Pauperism." Baudelaire and Huysmans attribute to his peasants the souls of revolutionary orators. All of them look for political and social theses in his pictures or else for

dramatic effects. Nothing, however, was farther from Millet's mind: he detested sentimental and melodramatic painting; he was indifferent to politics; he repudiated socialism.

Millet was never able to understand the declamatory meanings attributed to him by his critics. "My critics," he said, "are, I imagine, people of taste and instruction; but I cannot put myself into their skins, and as I have never seen anything in my life except the fields, I try to tell simply, and as best I can, what I have seen." When certain persons took the trouble to explain in a most literary and elaborate manner the expression of his *Peasants carrying home a calf born in the fields*, he remarked with ironical common sense that "the expression of two men carrying something on a hand-barrow is determined by the weight hanging at the end of their arms. . . . If the weight be equal, whether they are carrying the ark of the temple or a calf, a nugget of gold or a stone, they will be subject to the law of the weight and their expression can indicate nothing but that weight." On more than one occasion he declared in violent



THE DEATH OF THE CALF

Photograph—Giraudon]

terms his aversion from the theatrical tendencies of contemporary art, and even from the theatre. "The Luxembourg gallery," said he, "has given me an antipathy to the theatre. I have always had a marked dislike to the exaggerations, the falsities and simperings of actors and actresses. I have seen a little of the people belonging to that particular sphere and have become convinced that by dint of trying to assume the personality of someone else they cease to know their own, that they come to speak only according to their parts, and that they lose truth, common sense and the simple feelings of plastic art. If one would produce true and natural art, one must avoid the theatre."

More energetically still did he protest against the claim made by his friends and his enemies to reckon him with the socialist camp. Like many other French artists who lived at the time of the 1848 Revolution, he felt, naturally enough, a fraternal sympathy that drew him towards the people; but it should be noted that neither Millet nor, with the exception of Courbet, any of the greatest among these painters joined in the popular

demands. Corot lived entirely outside of politics, not knowing what was going on around him, gentle and calm, hating revolutions and saying that "art is love." Theodore Rousseau, with his thirst for solitude and his scorn for all political or artistic cliques, said: "What has art to do with those things? Art will never come except from some little disregarded corner where some isolated man is studying the mysteries of nature, fully assured that the answer which he finds and which is good for him is good also for humanity, whatever may be the number of succeeding generations." Millet, who was more directly touched than the others by the appellation of socialist because he was not only a painter of landscapes but also and especially a painter of peasants whom he represented with unvarnished realism, protested all his life against the label applied to him. "I repudiate with all my might the *democ.* (democratic) side, as understood in club language," he wrote on the 23rd of April 1867. "I am a peasant of peasants." He thought with Corot that "the mission of art is a mission of love, not of hate, and that, when it presents the sufferings of the poor, it should

not aim at exciting envy towards the wealthy classes." He had no feeling of enmity to the rich, but much rather of compassion. "Poor little prince!" said he pityingly, one day when the glories of the Prince Imperial's christening were described to him. Nor did his love of the country lead him into any illusions as to the faults of the peasants. Far from desiring to paint men in revolt marching towards emancipation and progress, he writes that he wishes "the beings whom he represents to have an appearance of being bound to their position so that it should be impossible to imagine them having an idea of being anything different." He does not believe in progress; or he believes only in technical progress, which has nothing to do with the supposed social or moral progress. "What everyone ought to do," said he in 1854, "is to seek progress, in his own profession. To me that is the only way. Everything else is dream or calculation." The idea of the eternity and immutability of things was deeply engraven on his soul. Nothing could be more opposed to the revolutionary idea, or indeed to any political idea. How comes it then that such ideas have been attributed to him?

The cause of this error is the existence in Millet of an extraordinary power of pessimism, an extraordinary intensity of sadness. Everybody has seen it; everybody has been struck by it. But everybody has misinterpreted it; everybody has read into it a sort of bitter criticism, a sort of condemnation of society. The mind of no single French writer or artist has succeeded in perceiving that this pessimism, this sadness, were not the agitated state of a rebel but the natural, normal state of a man who had received their impress so deeply that he could scarcely conceive of any person being different. All French art for nearly a century has been so remote from Christianity—it may even be said, as a whole, so anti-Christian—that the Christian point of view which sees suffering as a law and as a good has become almost incomprehensible. Some people look suffering in the face but only to fight and curse it. Others turn their eyes from it as an ugly, unpleasing spectacle which they try to forget; and they devote themselves to the pursuit, the attainment or the imagination of joy. None among them could understand that a Millet might find an austere and religious joy in pain.

None of them guessed when they looked at *The Gleaners* or *The Man with the Hoe,* oppressed by fatigue, bowed over the earth like beasts beneath a yoke, that the artist who painted them thought their pains natural, good because moral, and beautiful because good.

"You are sitting under the trees," he wrote in 1851, "feeling all the ease, all the tranquillity that can possibly be enjoyed; you see some poor figure laden with a faggot come turning out of some little path. The unexpected and always striking way in which this figure appears to you carries your mind instantly to the sadness of human life. . . .

'Quel plaisir a-t-il eu depuis qu'il est au monde?
En est-il un plus pauvre en la machine ronde?'[1]
LA FONTAINE, 'Death and the Woodcutter.'

. . . In tilled lands you see these figures digging and delving. From time to time you see one straighten his loins and wipe his forehead with the back of his hand. Is this the gay frolicsome work in which some people

[1] In all the world what pleasure has he seen?
Lives any poorer on this round machine?

would have us believe? *Yet here for me is the real humanity, the great poetry.*"

Thus, to show the pains of work, and to show at the same time all the poetry and all the beauty of life in these severe pains, was the final aim of Millet's thoughts and of his art. "*My programme is work. Every man is doomed to bodily punishment.* 'In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread' was written ages ago: *an immovable fate that will never change*" (1854). We see that there is no protest here; no desire to make life better. Life is sad but Millet loves it as it is. It might almost be said that if sadness did not exist, Millet would have made it afresh, so singular is the charm which it had for him. "I would on no account be deprived of winter," he says somewhere. "Oh! sadness of the fields and woods, not to behold you would be too great a loss!" (1866). To him it was a deep, inborn need: "the basis of melancholy upon which I am established," he writes on the 25th of November 1872. From his childhood up, those who knew him were struck by his melancholy temper. "Ah, my poor child," said the old *curé* of his village, "you have a heart which will give you a deal

THE RETURN OF THE WOODCUTTER

Photograph—Braun, Clement & Co.]

of trouble; you don't know how much you will suffer." Like old Michael Angelo who said that the birthday of a human being should be regarded not as a day of joy but as a day of mourning, Millet was never so sad as on days that seemed to most men joyful, such as the beginnings and endings of years, for then the sadness of his memories mingled with the sadness of his presentiments. "Here is another year finishing to-night," he cries. "How sad! I wish all of you as few years as possible." He says himself that he did not know joy. "The joyful side never appears to me. I do not know what it is. *I have never seen it.* The most cheerful things I know are calm and silence—" (1851). He shows, however, no symptom of uneasiness or depression; his is a serious and peaceful melancholy that has its secret sweetness for souls of his stamp—"the dark pleasure of a melancholy heart," of which La Fontaine speaks. But with La Fontaine the feeling had a dilettante note. With Millet there was nothing of the kind. He was not an artist observing poverty from afar and in other people while keeping himself carefully sheltered. He knew poverty in his own

person and accepted it without surprise and without rebellion.

The lives of the principal French painters of his day and of the great landscape painters in particular, constitute a sad martyrology. Except in very few instances, such as those of Corot and Jules Duprè, almost all suffered cruelly from want, indigence, hunger, illness and ill-luck of every kind. The great Theodore Rousseau lived for the greater part of his days in terrible poverty and loneliness and died, struck down by general paralysis, with a mad wife beside him. Troyon died insane. Marilhat died insane. Decamps tormented himself his life long, lived without friends, and died in a tragic way. Paul Huet literally nearly died of hunger and lost his health owing to privations. Even Diaz was acquainted with black poverty and bodily sufferings. It cannot therefore be said that Millet was exceptionally treated by fortune, and he himself refuses to think so. "I do not pretend to be unhappier than many others" (1859); "I feel no resentment against anyone, not thinking myself more of a victim than are many others" (1857). He shared the common fate; he suffered like

others from poverty, loneliness and indifference. But that which is exceptional in him and distinguishes him from others is the tranquillity with which he accepts his ill-fortune, as a matter of necessity, a superior and beneficent fate. Human folly, spite and egoism never disturb his admirable calm. "Yes, there are bad people," he says simply, "but there are good ones, and one good makes up to us for many bad. . . . I do not complain" (1844). How often he came to the end of his supplies! The baker refuses him bread, the tradesmen put in the bailiffs; at one time in 1853 he is left with exactly two francs. Again and again the burden of his letters is: "How shall I get my month's rent? For after all the first thing is that the children must eat" (1856). In 1857, the year of the *Gleaners*, poverty would have driven him to suicide, but that his conscience shrank in horror from the thought. In 1859, the year of the *Angelus*, he writes, in midwinter: "We only have wood for two or three days and do not know how to get any more. My wife will be confined next month and I shall be without anything."

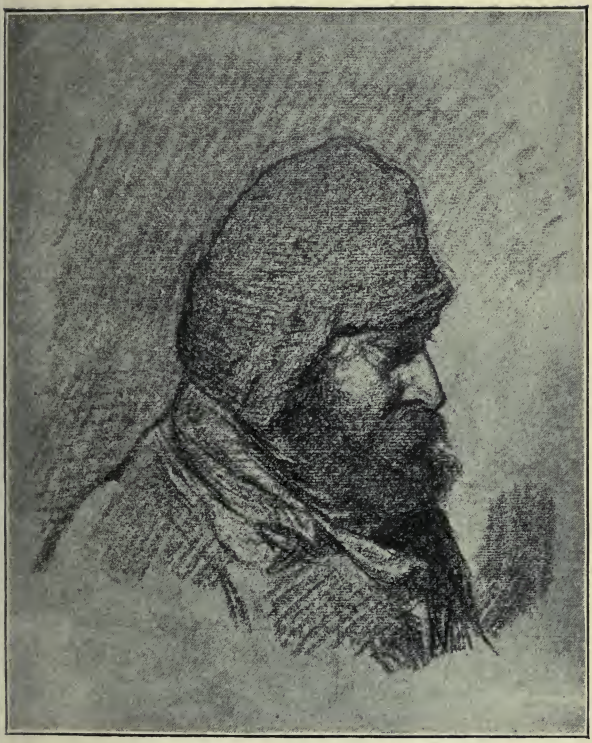
In addition to all this he was often ill, worn out in spite of his robust peasant constitution by the hard life that he was compelled to live; several times he was at death's door: in 1838 when he was *in extremis*; in 1848 when hope was given up, when he lay delirious for a month and was penniless; in 1859 when he was on the point of going blind, and was spitting blood. Moreover, he continually suffered, sometimes for weeks at a time, from frightful sick headaches and pains in the eyes. He hardly complains, is never angry, never astonished at the hardness of his lot. One day when his means were completely exhausted, a friend brought him some small alms extracted from the government; he found Millet at home without fire, without light, seated on a trunk with his shoulders bent like a person suffering from cold. Millet said simply: "Thank you, it comes at the right time; we have eaten nothing for two days; but the great point is that the children have not suffered. They have had food up to the present time." He called his wife. "There," said he, "I will go and buy some wood for I am very cold." He did not say

another word nor refer to the matter again[1] (1848). It may be said that sorrow was his best friend, and gave him an austere delight. "Art is not a diversion," he wrote once. "It is a conflict, a complication of wheels in which one is crushed. I am not a philosopher. *I do not wish to do away with pain,* nor to find a formula that will make me stoical and indifferent. *Pain is perhaps the thing that gives artists the strongest power of expression*" (1847). And in truth he is attracted, fascinated by the expression of pain. It is this that he looks for in the work of his favourite masters; it seems to exercise a mystic spell upon him. "There were moments when *I felt as though I were pierced by the arrows of a Saint Sebastian*

[1] A. Sensier, "The Life and Work of J. F. Millet," 1881. I shall often have recourse to this book, which is a most precious collection of documents (letters and conversations) on the subject of Millet. Alfred Sensier (1815-1877), who was the intimate friend of Millet and Rousseau, and assisted them with touching devotion, was a second clerk in the Ministry of the Interior. His name deserves to remain associated with those of his great friends to whom he did so much good in their lives and whose features and souls he has preserved to posterity.

as I looked at Mantegna's martyrs. These masters are like mesmerists." And in another place, "When I saw Michael Angelo's drawing that represents a man in a swoon, the expression of the relaxed muscles, the planes and reliefs of that face sinking under bodily suffering, gave me quite a succession of sensations. *I felt myself like him, tormented by pain.* I pitied him. *I suffered in the same body, with the same limbs.*" This approaches the sort of ecstatic intoxication experienced by a Saint Francis or a Saint Catherine of Siena at the vision of the crucified Christ whose wounds and stigmata became impressed upon their own bodies.

There is more in this than mere analogy. It was not for nothing that the patron saint of François Millet was Francis of Assisi. In his strange asceticism, in the attraction exercised on him by suffering, I recognise the powerful impression of Christian thought. Millet (and this is the fundamental reason of his moral originality amid his contemporaries), Millet was religious in his soul. We shall see, later on, how passionately Christian was the environment from which he sprang and how Jansenist, how



PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST IN A KNITTED CAP

Photograph—Braun, Clément & Co.]

almost Puritan was the atmosphere in which his character was formed. When he had to leave home to go to Paris his grandmother, who had a great influence upon his mind, said to him: "I would rather see you dead than apostate and unfaithful to God's commands." At a later time when he had begun to make his way in Paris she reminded him again: "Remember, my François, that you were a Christian before you were a painter; do not sacrifice to things indecent. . . . Paint for eternity, and think that the trump which will call to judgment is on the eve of sounding." These religious admonitions were in complete accord with Millet's feelings. From his childhood he had been brought up on devotional books, the Fathers of the Church, the ecclesiastical orators of the seventeenth century and above all the Bible, which he called "The Painters' Book." His first attempts were inspired by the Bible. "Some old Bible engravings," says Sensier, "gave him a wish to imitate them." When he first presented himself to a painter as a would-be pupil, he brought a drawing, the subject of which was taken from Saint Luke. He continually sought

the Scriptures for allusions to his own thoughts or state, and translated these into pictures. In 1846 he expressed the evil attractions of Paris in a *Temptation of Saint Jerome.* In 1848 his exile from his mother and his kin inspired a *Babylonish Captivity* and a *Hagar and Ishmael in the Desert.* In 1851, racked by the thought of his mother, ill and far away, who "did not know either how to live or how to die, so greatly did she long to see him again," and was to die without having seen him because he had not money enough for the journey from Paris to Greville in Normandy, he painted *Tobias and his Wife waiting, in the hope of their son's return.* In this way he continued to mingle the Scriptures with his life. According to Burty, he had a scheme of "taking up, like Rembrandt, but from a French point of view, the interpretation of the Bible." In this department he confined himself to some attempts, such as *Ruth and Boaz,* and if in these he was not particularly successful, the reason is that his realistic genius lacked the poetic invention necessary to evoke scenes for which nature did not afford him models; he was closely bound to what he saw; but into

all that he saw, he breathed the spirit of the Scriptures. His mind was full of them, he quoted them often (even a little too often for the taste of some of his friends); towards the end of his life he used often to read them of an evening to his family. In them lies the explanation of his pictures and of that ceaseless struggle of man with the earth which he never tired of painting and of which the significance is neither political nor social, but religious, and is expressed by those verses of Genesis that Millet so often repeated, verses which are the motto of his life and of his work:

"Cursed is the ground. . . . Thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread!"

*

* *

It was essential that attention should be called at the very beginning of this study to such exceptional religious and moral originality. This, far more even than his

genius as an artist, assures to Millet his special place in French art of the nineteenth century—or, one might almost say, outside of that art. Few persons have felt this thoroughly. The comprehension of it demands a religious heart. It is not strange, therefore, that it should have struck Tolstoy, who in his book, "What is Art?" after bringing so severe an indictment against civilisation, excepts Millet and ranks his *Angelus*, and still more his *Man with the Hoe*, among the few paintings "which impart the Christian feeling of love for God and one's neighbour," the works of art which may be called "religious," and which fulfil the words of St John: "The union of men with God and with one another."

It is easily conceivable that such a view did not occur to the chosen minds of France. But the same reasons that set Millet apart from the chosen set him closer to the people, of whom he is almost the sole interpreter. It may be said that French art has remained no less aristocratic than in the seventeenth century, and that nothing links it to the main body of the nation. It is above all a Parisian art, and while the works of some few hundred dilettante

THE REST

Photograph—Giraudon]

and worldlings present France as a land of pleasure and free thought—*which, in reality, it is not*—Millet has this interest of his own : that he is the voice of those who are the majority and who do not speak because they are busy doing ; those millions of dwellers in rural France who have remained obscurely religious and harshly enslaved by sorrow, who are, in fact, inimical to Paris, and, until the last few years, were indifferent to and apart from the apparent evolution of society. As Burty aptly says, Millet had genius enough to "draw forth the passive virtue of an agricultural race." The reason was that he belonged to that race. His whole life, from childhood to death, was spent amid the labours of peasants. He had all their passions and all their prejudices, the hatred of Paris and of the Parisian spirit and the ardent love of the land. He knew not only how to paint the ground but how to till it. He had been a good ploughman and was proud of it, and, on occasion, as he walked around Barbizon would set his hand to the plough and draw long, straight furrows across the plain. One of his friends, speaking of a portrait taken of him about 1861, which shows him standing

against a wall, his head raised, his hat in his hand and his hair pushed back, his feet shod with heavy wooden shoes, compares him to "a peasant chief about to be shot." To the end he violently proclaimed his country origin as opposed to Paris. "I will never be made to bow. I will never have the art of Parisian drawing-rooms forced upon me. A peasant I was born, a peasant I will die. I will stay on my own soil without yielding so much as the breadth of a wooden shoe."

Finally, before beginning to study the life and work of Millet, I have to make one observation which especially concerns an English public. It is that this great peasant painter, the faithful representative in contemporary art of the French people, is by his temperament and his Biblical spirit more akin to the intellectual oligarchy of England or America than to that of France. Indeed it was by American and English people (as we shall see) that he was earliest understood; among them that he immediately found his first purchasers and his first pupils; and it is in their countries, I am convinced, that moral comprehension and love of his work will remain

most pure. The one aim of this essay is to help in making Millet even better known and loved in England by showing how many affinities this great man—though so French in mind and style—had with England.

II

Millet's Life up to the Time of his Settling at Barbizon

Millet was a Norman. He was born on the 4th of October 1814 in the hamlet of Gruchy, in the parish of Gréville, the district of Beaumont, and the department of La Manche, north of Cotentin, in a region conspicuous for solid good sense and wild country. He was the second of eight children. The name of Jean was given to him after his father, and that of François in honour of St Francis of Assisi.

His family was a fine instance of that reserve of moral strength and dignified thought which often exists among the poorer French people. Tolstoy said, about one of the most famous realistic novels that have appeared in France during the last twenty years: "If the French people were such as it is depicted in this book, the whole history of France would become incomprehensible to me." How, indeed, could beings devoid of any ideal explain a history that is so frequently and so con-

spicuously full of idealism? The life of Millet would have satisfied him better; in it, he would have recognised types of some of those men who make the real greatness of a nation and often impart to its doings a character of heroism.

Strong bodily and moral health, absolute purity of conduct, strong religious faith and seriousness of mind distinguished all Millet's relatives. His father, Jean Louis Nicolas, was precentor of the parish church; he had some knowledge of music and conducted the rustic choir. It is curious to notice how nature sometimes tries her hand on the father before she succeeds in evolving the genius that will be realised in the son. Jean Louis Nicolas was a gentle, meditative man who had vague artistic instincts. He tried to model in clay and to carve in wood; he liked to observe animals, plants and people, and it was he who first showed François the beauty of the fields. He transmitted to him too his moral austerity, his chastity of mind and disgust for loose talking and jesting.

Millet's mother, Aimée Henriette Adelaide Henry, called du Perron, belonged to a family

of rich farmers who had been reckoned gentlefolk. One of her great-uncles was a priest who had risked his life during the Revolution by his proud refusal to take the oath to the Constitution and deny his uncompromising faith; he, in person, was a Hercules and took pleasure in field labour. Another great-uncle was learned in chemistry; a third, a miller, used to read Pascal, Nicole, Montaigne and Charron. But the most original person of the family and the one who had most influence upon Millet was his grandmother, Louise Jumelin. She was an old countrywoman of intense religious faith, a Catholic Puritan living in God like a woman of Port Royal, seeing everything in God and mingling God in every scene of nature and every act of life. One of Millet's earliest recollections was of his grandmother awakening him when he was quite a little child and saying to him: "Up my little François! If you only knew what a long time the birds have been singing the glory of God."

These rare, aristocratic peasants had amazing libraries. The Port Royal books, Bossuet, Fénélon, St Francis of Sales, St Jerome and

St Augustin were to be found in them. The boy Millet devoured this strong intellectual food. He had an especial passion for the Bible, which he read in Latin, and for Virgil, beloved by many other great French painters of the period: Delacroix, Corot and Rousseau. The Bucolics and the Georgics enchanted him. He tells us himself that when he came to the line: "It is the hour when the great shadows seek the plain"

> Et jam summa procul villarum culmina fumant
> Majoresque cadunt altes de montibus umbrae.[1]

he felt quite disturbed and seized by emotion. As to the Bible, it has been said already that an old illustrated edition first inspired him with the idea of expressing himself in art. To this earliest stratum of his reading which gave him, unawares, the soul of a Frenchman of the seventeenth century, he by and by added a great number of other books. Millet all his life was a great reader. At twenty he discovered Homer, Shakespeare, Byron, Walter

[1] "And now all around and afar smoke rises from the roofs of farms and the large shadows fall from the high mountains."

THE READING LESSON

Photograph—Braun, Clément & Co.]

Scott[1] and Goethe's Faust; Victor Hugo and Chateaubriand made a great impression upon him. It does not, however, appear that he ever underwent the fascination that romanticism exercised upon the young of his day. He always indeed retained a secret distaste for that touch of the morbid and fevered which belonged to some of the most attractive and most beloved of the romantic writers, such as Musset. "Musset gives one a fever," he said at a later time to his friend Marolle. "It is the only thing he can do. His is a charming, fanciful, deeply poisoned mind; he can only disenchant, deprive of hope or corrupt. The fever passes and leaves one enfeebled, like a man recovering from illness who needs fresh air, sunshine and stars." For his part he returned to the fresh air and the sunshine of the Bible, Homer and Virgil. To these he added Theocritus, with whom he was delighted and whom, according to Piédagnel, he came at last to prefer to his dear Virgil; then Dante and Milton, some of whose lines awoke a deep

[1] On reading Scott again at a later time he perceived that he no longer found any pleasure in his works.

echo in him. Robert Burns, for whom he had a close fellow-feeling—Montaigne, Bernard Palissy, O. de Serres, Poussin's letters and Bernardin de St Pierre.[1] Thus his literary knowledge was solid and essentially classical. He drew from it his sanity of mind, his balance and that calm manliness which detesting sentimentality, simper and inflation, speaks simply, soberly and strongly.

Much deeper than the impressions received from books must have been those made upon the boy Millet by nature. He has written his recollections of his early childhood cradled by the hum of spinning wheels, the noises of geese and cocks, the throb of the flail amid the grain, the church bells and ghost stories. His home, the picture of which he exhibited in the Salon of 1866, was a large thatched building of rough stones standing exposed to all the winds at the edge of a cliff and neighboured by an aged and stunted elm-tree. The sea was a

[1] On the other hand his scientific knowledge was extremely weak and indeed almost non-existent. In mathematics, he says himself that he did not go beyond addition. "I understand nothing about subtraction or the later rules."

little way from the village; it edged the horizon and filled the child with a sort of terror. He retained throughout life the remembrance of a storm when five or six vessels were wrecked hard by and when he saw a heap of dead bodies lying on the beach under a great sail. As soon as he was old enough to help his father and mother he worked with them in the fields, mowing, making hay, winnowing, ploughing, manuring, sowing, and so taking part personally in all those acts of rustic life, the poetic and mysterious grandeur of which he was afterwards to express. Through them he became more and more deeply attached to the soil and especially to that Norman soil which he never ceased to love. He never forgot his own country. "Oh how I belong to my own place!" he wrote, when he saw it again on the 12th of August 1871, a few years before his death.

His artistic proclivities showed themselves very early. As a child, when his relations were taking their afternoon sleep, he would draw the fields. His father knew enough to see and understand his vocation, but the family was poor, and the ground had to be tilled.

Without a murmur, without a protest, little François submitted; and quite simply, with that entire absence of selfish ambition, that inborn stoicism which he showed throughout his life, he sacrificed his tastes in order to fulfil his duties to those around him. His father was remorseful. One day when François showed him a charcoal portrait done from memory of a bowed old man, he said: "My poor François, I see plainly that you are tormented by that idea; I should have been very glad to send you to learn that painting business which they say is such a fine one, but I could not; you are the eldest of the boys and I needed you too much. Now your brothers are growing up and I will not keep you from learning what you wish so much to know." They went together to Cherbourg to see a painter of the school of David, called Mouchel, an artist of no great distinction but a peasant at heart. Millet showed him two drawings of his own invention: one represented two shepherds, the other a man coming out of a house at night and distributing loaves, with these words of St Luke: "*Et si non dabit illi surgeus eo quod amicus ejus sit, propter*

improbitatem tamen ejus surget et dabit illi quot-quot habet necessarios."[1] The stupefied painter said to the father: "You will be damned for having kept him back so long, for there is the stuff of a great artist in your boy." It was only from that day that Millet's artistic education began. He was then over twenty years of age.

He was hardly established at Cherbourg when his father fell ill of a brain fever; he returned hurriedly to the village, where he arrived in time to be present at the death-bed of his father, who died without recognising him (November 1835). Millet desired to give up painting once more, so as to stay at Gruchy, devote himself to his family and become the head of the household. It was his grandmother who told him that he "must accept the will of God," and obliged him to go back to Cherbourg. He there entered the studio of Langlois, who was a pupil of Gros, and regarded in the neighbourhood as a great

[1] "Though he will not rise and give him because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth."—LUKE xi. 8.

man. Langlois, struck by his progress, begged an allowance from the town to enable Millet to go and study in Paris. 400 francs (£20) were given him.

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Millet left for Paris in January 1837. His family were very uneasy at beholding him go away to the city of perdition, to Babylon. He himself was full of remorse for leaving his mother and grandmother. The journey was a sad one. The country round Paris seemed to him "stage scenery." He arrived one January Saturday evening, when it was snowing, in "black, muddy, smoky Paris." He has narrated in an admirably written page, that depicts all the dark sadness and austere grandeur of his soul, the agonies that he, a humble peasant, healthy, religious and pure-minded, experienced on his first contact with the corrupt civilisation of a large town.

"The light of the street lamps, half quenched by the fog, the vast number of horses and carriages, jostling and crossing one another,

the narrow streets, the smell and the atmosphere of Paris affected my head and my heart as if they would suffocate me. I was overtaken by a burst of sobs which I could not stop. I wished to be stronger than my feelings, but they overcame me with their whole power. I only succeeded in checking my tears by throwing into my face handfuls of water that I took from a street fountain. There was a print-seller there, and I looked at his pictures while I crunched my last apple from home. The lithographs displeased me greatly; they were scenes with *grisettes* in low dresses, women bathing, women dressing. Paris seemed to me lugubrious and insipid. I went away to a lodging-house where I spent my first night in a sort of continual nightmare. My room was but an ill-smelling hole with no daylight. At dawn I got up and rushed out into the air; light had come and I regained calm and determination; sadness remained and I remembered the lamentations of Job: "Let the day perish in which I was born, and the night in which it was said, 'There is a man child conceived.' It was thus that I accosted Paris, not cursing it, but in terror

at understanding nothing of its material and spiritual life."

He had many things to suffer from Paris. It stifled him physically and morally. He could not breathe. His large countryman's appetite was distressed. He used to take his meals in taverns with coachmen from his own part of the country. He had letters of introduction of which he did not make use. He was morbidly touchy and so much afraid of Parisian mockery that he did not dare to speak to anyone, nor make any enquiries, nor even to ask his way to "the old museum," that is to say the Louvre, for which he consequently spent several days in searching, wandering haphazard about Paris. He was jealous of his independence and would not enter the Ecole des Beaux Arts because he dreaded the discipline. The pleasures and balls of the students disgusted him. He was absolutely alone and perishing of *ennui*. He fell ill of a fever which endangered his life. He would have gone home again but for the Louvre, the pictures and drawings in which (especially those of the Early Italians, of Michael Angelo and of Poussin) filled him with real ecstasy. We shall

return, in the last chapter, to the estimates which he made of them and in which, while judging the masters whom he loved, he unconsciously depicted himself. It is to be remarked, however, that he made, so to speak, no copy of these works.

He finally decided to enter Delaroche's studio, where he had Couture, Hébert, Yvon and Feyen-Perrin for companions. He kept himself apart from the others. "The incomprehensible, weariful studio-slang and the puns tired him to death." As he was not of a patient temper and had great physical strength (as a child he had exercised his muscles in school battles) nobody dared to make too much fun of him; he was nick-named "the man of the woods." Delaroche, who had no genius at all but a great deal of intelligence and an intuition of genius, treated him with a mixture of esteem and hostility. Sometimes he would tell him harshly that he needed to be "ruled with a rod of iron," sometimes he would look at his work, sigh and go away without saying anything or giving any sort of advice; but when Millet left his studio he made endeavours to bring him back, saying to him: "You are

not like everybody else." Millet worked his best and drew obediently from the antique; at a later date he told a friend that Delaroche used to make his pupils draw the statue of Germanicus once a fortnight, "which was a good deal." At last he could bear it no longer. As Delaroche himself said, "he knew too much and not enough" to follow these academic lessons. He left the studio and took a room with a companion in the Val de Grâce quarter. He went to the Bibliothèque Sainte Geneviève to study the works of Leonardo da Vinci, Dürer, Jean Cousin, Michael Angelo, Poussin, Vasari's Lives, and everything that could help him to closer intimacy with his great friends of the past.

These were years of bitter poverty. In order to live, Millet had to paint imitations of Watteau, whom he did not like, and of Boucher, who disgusted him. He held out a long time against this humiliation but his comrade persuaded him. Sometimes he returned to the Bible and painted *Jacob in the tents of Laban* or *Ruth and Boaz.* He sold these works at from five to ten francs apiece. Every year from 1838 to 1840 he went to spend some

PORTRAIT OF MILLET PAINTED BY HIMSELF

Photograph—Braun, Clément & Co.]

weeks at Gruchy, where he took portraits of his relations. He managed to lose the wretched pension of 300 francs which the municipality of Cherbourg paid him irregularly, by painting too realistic a likeness, which was not considered sufficiently respectful, of a recently deceased mayor. On the other hand, the stir made by this affair and the success of his first exhibited work in the Salon where a portrait by him was hung in 1840, attracted to him the sympathies of young people in his own neighbourhood. A young girl fell in love with him and he married her in November 1841. This happiness was a source of fresh and cruel sorrows to Millet. His wife was delicate; she was constantly ill during the few years she spent beside him; their life was very hard; in 1842 the Salon refused Millet's pictures; it was a daily struggle for existence. The poor wife was too weak to resist. She died, after long sufferings, in April 1844. Millet was again alone. He did not long remain so. On another journey to Cherbourg he made the acquaintance of a young girl who loved him silently, Catherine Lemaire, of Lorient. He married her in 1845. She was to be

the faithful partner of his whole life, the unshaken friend who shared his trials with him, and like him, patiently and stoically.

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Trials were not wanting. When once Millet bad gone back to Paris with his wife, he was now without means of leaving it to see his mother again. "I was nailed to a rock," he said, "and condemned to hard labour without end." He painted a *Saint Jerome*, which was refused by the Salon of 1846. Not having money enough to buy another canvas, he painted *Oedipus released from the Tree* upon the same. He made visible efforts, at this time, to conquer the hostility of his judges by a scrupulous regard to form, and did not yet give his mind to expressing his personal thought. If these efforts had no success with the general public, they at least attracted the attention of critics like Théophile Gautier and Thoré, and painters like Diaz, Couture and Troyon. It was at this date too that he made the acquaintance of Alfred Sensier,

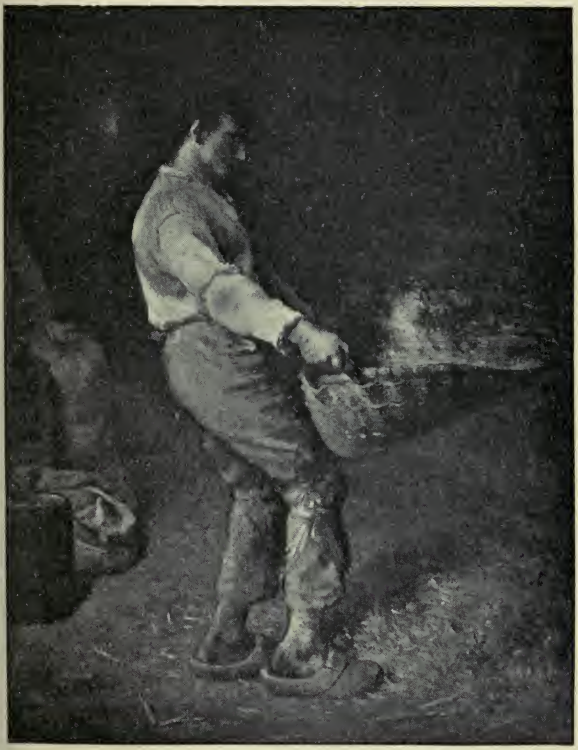
whose beautiful book was to preserve for us so faithful and pious an image of him. Children had been born to him. His indigence was extreme; his wife and he concealed it with dignity. But life in Paris became more and more burdensome to him; he liked no part of it; he remained indifferent and an alien, in the bottom of his heart hostile to the artistic, literary and philosophic movement and the political agitations that eventually brought about the Revolution of 1848.

The Revolution, however, was not useless to him. When it broke out Millet was at the end of his resources and was seriously ill. The Salon of 1848 was opened freely to everybody; the Republic had abolished the hanging committee. Millet who for some time past had been trying his hand at painting national types, mechanics, quarrymen, navvies, the poverty-stricken beggars, etc., exhibited his first great picture of the people's life—*The Winnower*.[1] This marks a date in French art

[1] Millet sent a *Babylonish Captivity* to the Salon at the same time, the canvas of which he afterwards made use of (as he had done with the *St Jerome*) for the *Woman Sheep-Shearing*.

and it is noteworthy that it so exactly coincides with the popular revolution. Théophile Gautier was much struck by *The Winnower*. The new government which displayed an interest in all innovators and had just been showing particular favour to Theodore Rousseau and Dupré, gave Millet 500 francs for his picture; and Ledru Rollin gave him a commission for 1200 francs. These marks of the Republic's good will to artists did, no doubt, attract Millet for the moment towards politics; for we find him taking part—not successfully, however—in a competition for a projected statue of the Republic. He represented her without a red cap, crowned with ears of wheat and holding out in one hand honey-cakes and in the other a palette and brushes—such, in a word, as his imagination must have dreamed her, a goddess of the peasant and the artist. He also made a couple of chalk drawings in which the sentiment is much more high flown, and which still exist; in one of them Liberty is to be seen dragging kings by the hair of the head, in the other victoriously brandishing her spear.

This attack of Jacobinism did not last long. The insurrection of July broke out; poverty



THE WINNOWER

Photograph—Braun, Clément & Co.]

came back. Millet drew title-pages for songs and did not get paid for them; he was brought to the point of exchanging drawings for shoes and pictures for a bed; in a fortunate moment when he was quite destitute, an order came in for 30 francs from a midwife who wanted a sign-board. His distaste for politics received the finishing touch when he was obliged to defend the Assembly against the insurgents, and to assist in taking the barricades in the Rochechouart quarter. These scenes inspired him with a horror of war. To escape these sad impressions he went out of Paris as much as he could; he would go to the plain of Montmartre or to St Ouen, filling his eyes and his memory with everyday rustic scenes, and when he got home would paint his impressions: horses at a drinking trough, or oxen being led to the slaughter-house. Thus, he made his way dimly towards the decisive hour in which he was to attain full comprehension of his genius and to break every link with Parisian art.

For some years he had been feeling his way, hesitating to declare himself and continuing to paint pictures of peasant life and academic

pictures at the same time. The words of an unknown speaker brought the crisis. Walking one day in Paris, Millet paused to look at a reproduction of one of his works in a shop window. He heard a passer-by say to a friend: "That's by Millet, who paints nothing but naked women." To him these words were the cruellest of insults. He went home and said to his wife: "If you choose, I will never do any more of this sort of painting; our life will be harder than ever, and you will have to suffer, but I shall be free and accomplish what has long filled my mind." Without any discussion Madame Millet courageously replied, "I am ready; do what you wish." Thenceforward Millet became Millet the peasant painter.

III

Millet at Barbizon

In 1849 Millet went to Barbizon. Theodore Rousseau had been there as early as 1833, and had pretty well settled there about 1837 at the same time as Aligny and Diaz.

For some twenty years or more before this time, French painters had felt the need of diving deep into nature and living in intimate communion with her. As late as 1824 Constable could still write: "The French landscape painters study much but only pictures; and they know no more of nature than cab-horses do of meadows. The worst of it is that they generally paint detached objects such as leaves, rocks and stones, so that they only see isolated bits detached from the whole, and neglect the general aspect of nature as well as its different effects." It is precisely that feeling of the "general aspect" of a landscape and of its living and moving "different effects" that the Barbizon masters were about to acquire in all its fulness. Of the

vanguard in that glorious phalanx of French landscape painters, especially Paul Huet owed much to the example of English landscape painters and of Constable and Bonnington in particular; the masters were soon out-stripped by the pupils, and the painting of French landscapes attained a greatness unknown since Poussin and Claude Lorraine.

Barbizon at that time was a hamlet buried amid heaths and woods, scarcely so much as a village, without a church, without a burying-ground, without a post-office, a schoolhouse, a market or shops—even without a public-house: everything had to be fetched from Chailly, the nearest village. It had no visitors except a few artists, unknown at that time; and its inhabitants were wood-cutters and labourers poorly enough off. Alfred Sensier tells us the sort of life—half that of an artist, half that of a Trappist monk—that Rousseau led in this country place which was so near Paris, but at that time seemed so remote. Rousseau spent the autumns and winters alone in the dull, low and cold house of a wood-cutter; there he dreamed and created, undisturbed, having no companions but the crows

and the cows, sleeping little, always deep in thought, not speaking at all and in continual ecstasies over the trees of the forest whose mysterious life he watched in silence for days at a time. "I heard the voice of the trees;" he said himself, "the surprises of their movements, their varieties of form and even the strangeness of their attraction to the light suddenly revealed to me the language of forests. This whole leafy world was a world of the dumb, whose signs I guessed and whose passions I discovered."

This same religious emotion seized upon Millet from the moment that he set foot on the soil of this silent forest where there are no streams and no song-birds. He came for a few weeks. He was to remain at Barbizon twenty-seven years—until his death.

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Here is the moment to sketch a portrait of Millet at home.

Millet was above the middle height and

strongly built,[1] with the neck and shoulders of a bull and "ploughman's hands." His curly dark hair was brushed back and showed a fine attentively serious brow. His eyebrows were apt to frown. His eyes, grey or very dark blue and not widely opened, "penetrated to the depths of the soul"; their expression was often melancholy and stern, sometimes a little ironical. The nose was correct and not particularly characteristic. A very thick black beard covered the rather full cheeks. The jaw was solid and a little prominent, and the neck thick. Judging from his portraits, his countenance was marked not so much by thought or feeling as by will. The refinement of certain features too is striking and contrasts with the general aspect of the rather heavy head and with its suggestion of a good, intelligent big dog. Millet had "the drawl of the Lower Normans and stammered a little." Other writers say, "a slight hesitation in his speech and slow movements." With people whom he did not know he was conspicuously reserved, measured his words and expressed

[1] As he grew old he became rather stout. Otherwise his appearance changed but little.

himself in rather a formal way, but with "a mixture of cordiality and dignified reserve." In his own home and among his friends he "resumed his distinguished judgment about men and things, his extreme good temper and his natural speech." Piédagnel says that he spoke concisely, with picturesque and unexpected turns. Wheelwright, who was much struck by "the dignity of his manners and the serious charm of his conversation," says that "when he grew warm over some favourite subject he would talk for an hour or two with extraordinary clearness, eloquence and choice of expressions." He possessed a remarkable memory and genuine erudition, fed chiefly by the Bible, Theocritus and Virgil. His dress was of the simplest and pretty negligent. When Sensier saw him for the first time in 1847, he found him wearing a brown cloak and a woollen cap like a coachman, and presenting the appearance, he says, of a mediæval painter. At Barbizon he dressed more rustically still in an old red jersey or a knitted vest that met his trousers but imperfectly and allowed a glimpse of shirt at the waist, an old straw hat limp from exposure to many rains, so

that its wide brim dropped in a bell shape on his head, and heavy wooden shoes on his feet.[1]

Madame Millet was "a woman of simple habits, accustomed from childhood to the life of the fields; she considered her husband as altogether a superior being." She bore Millet nine children; the first being born in 1846, and the last in 1863. Millet loved her very much. Wheelwright says he always remembers the affectionate tenderness with which Millet used to call her "my old woman," as he rested his hand on her shoulder. Burty describes them at the family meal: "Millet with his deep chest and grave head, presiding at the long table which had no cloth, and around which half-a-dozen children passed up their earthen plates to the smoking soup tureen. Madame Millet would be trying to put a child to sleep on her lap. There would be great pauses of silence in which no sound was heard but the purring of the cats curled up before the stove."

Millet's dwelling was a peasant's house,

[1] This portrait is composed from the recollections of Sensier, Burty and Wheelwright, and from Millet's portraits of himself.

THE MEAL (LA BECQUÉE)

Photograph—Braun, Clément & Co.]

comprising at first three low rooms: the studio, the kitchen, and a bedroom for his wife and his three first children. Then, as six more children came, two other rooms were added, and a studio was built on the other side of the garden. Clematis, ivy and jasmine covered the walls. Flowers, vegetables and fruits grew in disorder in the garden. Beyond the garden came a farmyard, then an orchard, then a thick copse. Ten minutes from the house began the forest. The studio was excessively humble, built like a barn, but with a large window upon the street. It was a high room with an inlaid floor, and contained an iron stove, a little iron bed in one corner, some casts of the Parthenon friezes and the bas-reliefs on Trajan's column, and a collection of rags of every shape and colour, which Millet called "his museum." There was nothing for show; everything was in great disorder. The easel became a matter of legend among Millet's friends. "It was too small to hold any of his pictures; its deal framework was so loose in the joints and so worm-eaten that one was always dreading to see the canvas

that was placed upon it fall." Rustic simplicity reigned throughout the house. When Millet entered Rousseau's studio for the first time—a studio by no means opulent—he was alarmed at the luxuriousness of the furniture, which consisted in a sofa covered with very dusty Utrecht velvet. It was something very different when Rousseau took him to see Corot, and they dined together. "At every fresh dish the plates and knives and forks were changed," he wrote to Sensier. "I was more embarrassed than delighted at this way of dining; and more than once I glanced out of the corner of my eye at those who had helped themselves before me, so that I might do much about the same."

In the morning Millet worked in his garden, dug, planted and gathered. Sometimes he even built, like a mason. He and his brother Pierre entirely built a little straw-thatched structure at the end of the garden. After this exercise he used to work in the studio, sometimes sketching the ideas that occurred to him on the walls. When his headaches took hold of him he used to wander about in the forest. "I know no pleasure,"

he said, "equal to that of lying on the ferns and looking at the clouds." The forest filled him with rapture and terror. "If you were to see how beautiful the forest is! I run there sometimes at the end of the day, when my day's work is over, and I come back every time crushed! The calmness and grandeur are appalling, so much so that I find myself feeling really frightened. I don't know what those rascals of trees say to one another, but they say something and we don't understand it, because we don't talk the same language, that is all. Only I don't think they make puns." In the evenings he busied himself with his children, his "toads," as he laughingly called them, and would tell them fanciful stories or read aloud. A charming letter to Rousseau which has recently come to light, and which dates no doubt from 1855 or 1856, shows us Millet in a cheerful mood, amid the noisy little throng whom he worshipped, in the intimacy of his family life, and amid the peace of the august forest whose lofty and restful silence surrounded his home.[1]

[1] Published by Charavay in the review "Cosmopolis" in April 1898.

"My Dear Rousseau,—Ask me to describe an earthquake, a very complicated aurora borealis, the veneration of old Ganne (the innkeeper) for a five franc piece, the stupefaction of an Englishman expecting to arrive first at the top of some inaccessible peak and finding himself face to face with another Englishman, and many other things all very difficult to describe, I should do any of them fully as easily as I could make you understand the admiration, the frenzied enthusiasm of my toads over the opening of the famous hamper.[1]

"Imagine beings who lack the power to express themselves with their tongues and whose most vehement and spontaneous excitement can only command shrieks and stamps, and you will have but a faint idea of what it was. When the moment of greatest frenzy was over they began to guess your name, which was uttered with great warmth. 'Is it M. Rousseau who has given us this, Papa?' 'Yes, my children.' And the tumult breaks out again. François found himself compelled to abandon ordinary language, the expressions

[1] Rousseau had sent Millet's children a hamper of toys and sweets.

THE FIRST STEPS

Photograph—Braun, Clément & Co.]

being too weak, and resorted to the use of terms which were more energetic and therefore better fitted to depict the situation. . . .

"Without knowing what your fine festivities are at Notre Dame and the Hotel de Ville,[1] I prefer the more modest ones that are prepared for me, when I choose to go and see them, by the trees, the forest rocks, the black flights of crows dropping down to the plain, or even by the dilapidated roof whose chimney sends out the smoke that spreads so poetically into the air and tells of the woman cooking supper for the tired home-coming field-workers; or even the little star shining from a cloud, as we saw it one evening after a splendid sunset, or the human outline advancing solemnly on the heights, and many other things dear to those who do not think the noise of omnibus wheels or the music of a *marchand de robinets*[2] the finest things in the world. Only these tastes must not be confessed to everyone, for they are regarded as great weaknesses and cause

[1] Probably rejoicings over the Prince Imperial's christening.

[2] Sellers of taps or cocks—a variety of the hawker *genus* peculiar to Paris.—TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.

one to be called by most disagreeable names. I only speak of them to you because I know that you suffer from the same infirmities. . . ."

It was in these surroundings that Millet spent the greater part of his life. Its principal episodes are his works and the continually recurring struggles with poverty.

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In 1850 Millet sent *The Sower* and *The Binders of Hay* to the Salon. We have already spoken of the revolutionary allusions attributed by critics to the figure of the sower, that wild-looking young man in the red jacket and blue trousers, casting the seed, broadcast, with a violent action, amid the clouds of rooks that are sweeping down upon the field. The picture made some stir, although Corot was attracting the chief attention that year by his *Funeral at Ornans.* At the same period Millet painted *Peasants going to work in the fields*; a *Woman beating Hemp*; *Wood Gatherers in the forest*; a *Virgin* for the signboard of a fancy

shop at the corner of the Rue de Notre Dame de Lorette and the Rue St Lazare; *Young women sewing,* a *Man spreading Manure,* and *The Four Seasons.* He was also busy upon a picture of *Ruth and Boaz.*

In 1851 he lost his grandmother. She had had a paralytic stroke but retained all her mental powers to the end. Her death threw Millet into deep despair. He remained obstinately silent for many days. His mother was now alone, in the country, far from him; she wrote painful and plaintive entreaties that he would come and embrace her before she too passed away. Millet's heart was rent by this pressing appeal; but he was short of money and unable to take the journey. "My poor child," wrote his mother, "if you could only come before the winter! I have a great longing to see you this one little time more. I have done without everything; there is nothing left for me but to suffer and die. I am so worried with suffering in my body and my mind, when I think of what is to become of you all in the future, with no provision; I neither sleep nor rest. You tell me that you wish very much to come and see me and stay some

time with me. I wish it very much too; but it seems you have none too much money; how do you manage to live? My poor child, when the thought of that comes over me, I am very uneasy. Ah, I hope you will come and take us by surprise just when we are least looking for you; as for me, I don't know either how to live or to die, I want to see you again so much." The poor woman was to die, in 1853, without seeing him again. We may imagine what these years of anguish and mourning were to Millet.

In 1853 Millet was awarded a second-class medal at the Salon; he had sent three pictures: *The Reapers' Meal*, or *Ruth and Boaz*; *The Shepherd* and the *Woman shearing Sheep*. The antique majesty of their realism struck the critics, especially Théophile Gautier and Paul de St Victor. But Millet was not satisfied. He had not yet found his true style.

From this time onward his work began to have a singular attraction for the English and American colony at Paris and Barbizon. It was among its members that he, like Rousseau, then found most sympathisers. Especially noteworthy were W. Morris Hunt of Boston,

THE WOOD GATHERERS

Photograph—Braun, Clément & Co.]

author of "Talks on Art" (1875) who bought the *Woman shearing Sheep* and *The Shepherd*, and of whom Millet once said that "he was the best and most intimate friend he ever had"; Edward Wheelwright who was his pupil in 1855 and who wrote in the "Atlantic Monthly" of September 1876 an article which (Sensier's great book excepted) is the most intelligent study and the fullest of interesting memories that we have; Shaw, the American for whom Millet subsequently painted *The Priory of Vauville*; Richard Hearn, the Irishman; William Babcock, etc. It was also an American who bought *The Reapers*. Others besides made purchases from him. This help was the more precious because at this date (1853-54) he was absolutely short of money and worried by tradespeople. "Try, my poor Sensier," he wrote to his friend, "try to turn my pictures into money; sell them no matter at what price but send me 100 francs, 50 or even 30." His life was wearing him out but he said without anger and with a resigned and manly sadness: "In art, one has to stake one's skin." He was killing himself with work for his family, and Rousseau who had

gradually drawn near to him and become intimate with him, as may be seen by the affectionate letter printed above, saw an image of the cares that besieged Millet at this season in that fine and serious picture—one of the very purest he ever painted—the *Peasant grafting a Tree.* Rousseau was moved to tears by it. He saw in it a symbol of a father exhausting himself in silence for the life of his family. "Yes, Millet works for those who belong to him," he said, "he exhausts himself like a tree that produces too much blossom and fruit; he wears himself out to keep his children alive. He grafts the shoots of a civilised branch upon a sturdy wild stock, and thinks, like Virgil:

'Insere, Daphni, pyros; carpent tux poma nepotes.'" [1]

His poverty reached such a point that Millet had but two francs left.

Rousseau succeeded in making his friend known to some picture-lovers and they bought some drawings and paintings from him.

[1] Engraft your pear-trees, Daphnis; your grandchildren will eat your apples.

WOMAN SHEARING SHEEP

Photograph—Braun, Clement & Co.]

Rousseau himself bought the *Peasant spreading Manure* and with touching kindness concealed from Millet that he was the purchaser and made him believe that an American had bought it. It was Rousseau, too, who bought the *Peasant grafting a Tree.*

With the proceeds of the *Woman feeding Chickens,* for which the amateur Letrône paid 2000 francs, a sum that seemed to him fabulous, Millet was able to take a little journey and spend four months with his children in his native district at La Hague (June 1854). He painted with pious precision everything that had belonged to his family, the homestead, the garden, the cider-press and the stables ; he made fourteen paintings, twenty drawings, and filled two sketch-books. After his mother's death the inheritance had been divided among the eight children. Millet gave up his share of the house and land ; he only asked for the books and the old oak cupboard. He undertook the education of two of his brothers who wished to become artists too, and who came to live with him at Barbizon.

This was the period of Rousseau's greatest

popularity. At his house Millet met Diaz, Barye, Daumier, Ziem, Etcheverry, etc. A plan was made by several of them: Barye, Dupré, Delacroix, Rousseau, Daumier, Diaz and Millet, to collaborate in illustrating La Fontaine's Fables; but the work was interrupted when only a few drawings had been made. A little later Millet made the acquaintance of Decamps, who came and took him by surprise in an odd way, almost *incognito*, had long talks with him, admired his pictures and said that he should have liked to paint so, but who would never consent to enter the house. Millet was much struck by his visits. He wrote about Decamps, giving in a few lines a portrait of which the psychology is searching: "I never heard him speak a word from the heart. His witticisms were cruel, his sarcasm crushing, his criticism very just, even about his own painting. One could see that he suffered like a man looking for his way and always losing it. His was a superior mind in a troubled soul."

But in spite of these distinguished friendships, in spite of the success which was beginning to come (partly owing to that

THE FARMER'S WIFE

Photograph—Giraudon

revolutionary reputation against which Millet protested in vain), in spite of the success of the *Peasant grafting a Tree* at the Universal Exhibition in 1855, trials began again, starvation and bailiffs once more impended. "My heart is all shrouded in black," he writes. "If you knew how dark the future looks to me, and no distant future either! . . . Suppose I don't succeed in getting my month's rent!" Sensier had to get up a raffle to send him one hundred francs. In 1857, Millet was so unhappy that the idea of suicide beset him; and in order to drive away these morbid thoughts, which his religious soul severely condemned, he made a sketch in black chalk representing a painter dead at the foot of his easel, and a woman crying out in terror: "Suicide marks a dishonourable man!"

During these years it was that he produced his finest works: in 1856-57 a series of shepherds: *Shepherd in the fold at night, Shepherd bringing home his flock at sunset, Cowherd standing and leaning on his staff.* He had been attracted by that most mysterious of all country figures: the contemplative peasant, the pastor, and by the poetic solitudes of

great pastures, vast plains asleep in the last hours of the day, or at night under the cold rays of the moon when the damp vapour of the meadow and the warm exhalations rising from the flock float in the air. Thus his selection of this figure of the Shepherd naturally drew him to give a greater place in his work to the landscape which he had hitherto sacrificed to the persons.

In 1857 appeared *The Gleaners*, those three never to be forgotten figures bowed over the earth which they seem to probe with their nails in the eagerness of their hunt for the forgotten ears. Shrieks of indignation were raised against them by the critics. Millet's former defenders, Paul de St Victor among them, turned against him. "These are scare-crows set up in a field," he wrote. "M. Millet seems to think that poor execution suits pictures of poverty; his ugliness has no accentuation, his vulgarity no relief." People refused to see in the picture anything but a political work, an indictment against the poverty of the masses. Edmond About was almost the only person who understood the "austere simplicity" of the work It found

THE GLEANERS

Photograph—Neurdein Brothers]

few admirers and was finally sold for 2000 francs. It is not recorded how it came to pass that the Pope about this time ordered from Millet an *Immaculate Conception* for his state railway carriage. The work is not now known; but Sensier tells us that in it Millet in no way changed his manner and that he took for his type "a very young country girl with gentle luminous eyes, a broad brow covered with bunches of hair, her mouth open like a creature amazed at the mystery that is within her."

In 1859 Millet exhibited his famous *Angelus* which was far from making the success that it afterwards achieved, and which was purchased a little later by the Belgian minister Van Präet. The whole world is acquainted with this famous picture; incredible advances in price and millions of reproductions have declared its universal popularity. An exaggerated reaction has now set in against the perhaps excessive enthusiasm aroused by it. Critics are attacking the faults of the composition such as the too high horizon, the stiffness of the figures, the basket in the foreground serving to mask an empty space in front of a wheelbarrow. People are right when they

say that Millet has painted pictures of more strength and meaning than this. *The Angelus* nevertheless has a musical charm of its own. Millet meant the sounds of a country evening, the distant chime of bells, to be heard in it. He deeply felt and has expressed the melancholy poetry of the hour when man's struggle with the earth passes into peace, and the august grandeur of the simple lonely prayer in the vast deserted plain at twilight.

Together with *The Angelus* Millet sent a dramatic picture to the Salon, *Death and the Woodcutter,* which was refused by the hanging committee.[1] The refusal made a great stir. Friends and foes of Millet's alike, all felt that by this time he was an artistic and moral force; and all were indignant that the committee should have dared to treat him with so little respect. Alexandre Dumas took up Millet's defence and Mantz began a campaign against the committee in the "Gazette des Beaux Arts" (15th June 1859). In the same year

[1] The committee was composed at the time of Ingres, Horace Vernet, Heim, Abel de Pujol, Picot, Schnetz, Couder, Brascassat, Cogniet, Robert Fleury and Hersent.

Millet passed through another bout of dangerous illness, of which his sturdy constitution got the better.

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In 1860 Millet at last escaped from his position of indigence. He signed an agreement for three years, by which in return for a payment of a thousand francs monthly, he engaged to sell an art-patron all the pictures and drawings that he could produce in that space of time. He managed, however, to arrange his affairs so badly that, on the conclusion of the agreement, he owed nearly six thousand francs and undertook to pay the amount in paintings. This was, at least, a period of tranquillity in his life and the works belonging to this time reflect its peacefulness. In 1860 he painted, and in 1861 exhibited at the Salon, the *Woman feeding her Child, La Becquée,*[1] the *Woman carrying Pails, Waiting,* and

[1] There is no English word corresponding to this term, since although we say "mouthful" we do not admit "beakful."—TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.

Sheep-shearing, in which he had tried, he says, "to paint a happy place where life is kind amid its roughness, a pure air and a fine August day." In spite of their charm, these pictures gave rise to violent debates. Millet's old admirers, Théophile Gautier and Paul de St Victor, had become his fiercest enemies. Corot would give no opinion, did not understand, was scared by this sort of painting, and preferred, as he said, "his little tunes." On the other hand, Delacroix and Barye were on Millet's side, and with them Daumier, Diaz, Meissonier, Stevens and Gerôme. Such names were enough to outweigh the *critiques* of literary men.

In 1862 Millet painted, and in 1863 exhibited at the Salon, *Winter and the Crows*, *Potato Planters*, *Sheep grazing*, *Woman carding Flax*, *The Stag*, and the *Man with the Hoe*. In painting the last of these pictures he foresaw pretty clearly towards what a battle he was marching. It was a sort of challenge flung at Parisian taste. Labour was presented in its sternest and most painful shape, as a torture, racking man's limbs and killing his mind, dragging him down almost to the level of the beast.

THE ANGELUS

Photograph—Braun, Clément & Co.]

Never has any figure recalled more strongly La Bruyère's famous description. The two have often been bracketed together:

"Certain wild animals may be seen scattered over the country, males and females, black, livid, and burnt up by the sun, bound to the earth, in which they poke and fumble with invincible obstinacy: they have a kind of articulate speech, and when they rise upon their feet they show a human countenance, and indeed are men." [1]

"*The Man with the Hoe* will cause me to be abused by many people who do not like to have their minds filled with things that do not belong to their own circle nor to be disturbed," wrote Millet. This result duly followed. Gautier and St Victor were merciless. It was declared that Millet slandered the peasant and could not see the beauty of the country. He replied in a letter of magnificent religious grandeur. "The things said of my *Man with the Hoe* seem to me very strange. Is it impossible, then, to receive quite simply the ideas that occur to the mind on seeing a man

[1] La Bruyère, "Characters," Chapter xi., "Of man."

doomed to earn his living in the sweat of his brow? Some people say that I deny the charms of the country. I find much more in it than charms—infinite splendours; I see as they do, the little flowers of which Christ said, 'I say unto you that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.' I see the haloes of the dandelions, and the sun breaking forth yonder, far beyond these regions, and its glory amid the clouds. None the less do I see the horses in the plain, smoking as they plough; and then, in some rocky spot, a man completely *errené*, whose panting gasps have sounded since morning, and who tries to stand upright a little to get breath. The drama is surrounded by splendours; it is no invention of mine."

Yet it might have been replied that in Millet's picture the hardship of the drama makes us a little oblivious of the poetry with which nature surrounds it. Millet himself probably felt this; for we find him, after a fresh incursion into religious subjects (drawings of two *Flights into Egypt* and of a *Resurrection* in which Christ arises from the tomb and ascends to heaven with the irresistible violence of a burst of thunder), diving deep into the

THE MAN WITH THE HOE

Photograph—Giraudon]

poets: Theocritus, Burns, Shakespeare and Dante. Under the charm of Theocritus he wished to illustrate one of his idylls: Tircis playing the Pan's pipes and a goat-herd listening. He wished also to represent the subject of Tircis's song—the death of Daphne, as well as three bas-reliefs of a vase described by the poet. These three were: "A beautiful woman, a masterpiece of the gods, for whom two men are fighting. An old man on a rock, fishing in the sea with a net. A boy sitting by a hedge to guard a vine, but so busy weaving a straw cage for grasshoppers that he does not see two foxes, one of which makes off with his breakfast while the other eats the best grapes off the vine." The same disposition of mind shows itself in the four decorative paintings which he did for the dining-room of a hotel on the Boulevard Haussmann, and in which antique subjects are treated under the name of *The Four Seasons.* They represent: Daphnis and Chloe, Ceres, a frozen cupid being warmed by a woman, etc.

But though he had a sincere love for antique art, he was not at ease in it; and even in these hotel decorations, the most original part is the

ceiling, where his realism found fuller scope. He painted on it a gap in the blue sky, bordered by light clouds, and in it, flying children pursuing owls and bats; all round ran a border from which stood out fowls on the spit, haunches of venison, melons, flowers, vases and musical instruments, all painted in perspective.

He soon left these mythological fancies and returned wholly to his rough rural poems. In the Salon of 1864 he exhibited both the charming *Shepherdess and her Flock*, and the *Peasants carrying home a Calf born in the Fields*, which aroused fresh protests, jeers and caricatures. The sceptical "society" public could not understand the importance which Millet's peasants attach to the smallest acts of life. They are wholly absorbed in what they are doing; they believe in it absolutely. This did not harmonise with the dilettantism of Paris, nor with truth as it appears on the stage. Theodore Rousseau had the courage to write a severe letter to Théophile Gautier: "You have been exploring art since 1830," he said. "Sailing as on an ocean, you have doubled many capes, passed through many breakers;

yours has been the genius that always sees the right rallying point; like Christopher Columbus, you knew where America lay. Well, now, take care; I see the point of your vessel over the torrent, and torrents only lead to the abyss. You are in contact with vulgarity, and I defy you to stay there without feeling its infection. You have already given way to the allurements of the cockney spirit by receiving ill *the only true painter* that has appeared since 1830. I mean François Millet."

In 1866 Millet, who had been back to Normandy on account of his sister Emilie's death, exhibited a *Landscape: Gréville,* which had no success. His wife, who was ill, was sent to Vichy and he went with her. The Bourbonnais country interested him greatly. He plunged afresh into a rustic life simpler than that of Barbizon, where the influence exerted by the neighbourhood of Paris was growing year by year more perceptible. "The country is bright," he wrote to Sensier, "and has some likeness to many parts of Normandy. The country people are far more really peasants than those of Barbizon; they have a good, stupid awkwardness. The women's faces in

general bespeak the reverse of any evil disposition, and are quite the type of many countenances in Gothic art." He filled his sketch-books with material to the amount of more than fifty drawings and water-colours. A few days' journey into the adjacent district of Auvergne moved him even more deeply. "My head is full of all I have seen," he said. "Everything is dancing pell-mell in my brain: expanses of burnt-up earth, sharp rocks, subsidences, arid stretches and patches of greenness. The glory of God resting on the heights. Other heights in shadow." These vivid impressions of nature turned his talent more and more towards landscape. He worked at a *Winter* and a *Sunset* "stamped with sadness."

At the Universal Exhibition of 1867, Millet exhibited his greatest creations of previous years: *The Gleaners, The Angelus, Death and the Woodcutter, The Woman Shearing Sheep, The Shepherd, The Sheep-Fold, Potato Planters, the Potato Harvest.* He also sent to the Salon in the same year, *The Goose Girl* and *Winter.* The collection of these masterpieces was a revelation to the general public. Millet received a first-class medal. The decoration

of The Legion of Honour followed in the next year. This year, however, was darkened by one of the deepest sorrows of his life. His friend and equal, Theodore Rousseau, who had been attacked some months before by paralysis affecting the brain, died in his arms at Barbizon, after terrible sufferings, on the 22nd of December 1867.

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In 1868 Millet made a second stay at Vichy, and travelled into Alsace and Switzerland, visiting Bâle, Lucerne, Berne and Zurich. He does not seem to have felt the beauty of the Alps so keenly as Rousseau, who found in them his earliest and his latest inspirations. To the Salon of 1869 he sent, besides *The Knitting Lesson* and the *Woman at a Spinning Wheel*, the *Pig-Killers*, which excited hardly less sarcasm than the *Peasants carrying a Calf*, or the *Man with the Hoe*. It is a work of savage realism. All the old brutality of man revives in this struggle of heavy, hoggish

human beings, against this great bulk of living flesh in its desperate resistance, a struggle carried on in a farmyard shut in by great dark walls under a gloomy leaden sky. "It is a drama," said Millet.

The war of 1870 broke out. Millet left Barbizon and went with his family to Cherbourg. He was nearly taken for a Prussian spy, because he was drawing the harbour. He was arrested and taken to a military station; after enquiries had been made he was set free, but was urgently advised not even to seem to hold a pencil in the open street, or he would run the risk of being cut to pieces by the crowd, or shot! Indeed he had no inclination to paint. He was overwhelmed by the disasters of his country. "Ah! how I hate whatever is German," he wrote to Sensier. "I am in a constant state of boiling over. Curses and ruin upon them!" He tried in vain to put these horrible things out of his mind and immerse himself in his work. The fights in Paris, the conflagrations and massacres completed his heart-break. The Commune had inscribed his name among the *Federation of Artists*; he wrote to protest,

THE PIG-KILLERS

Photograph—Braun, Clément & Co.]

affirming on this decisive occasion, his absolute dissociation from the socialists and revolutionaries among whom people had, all his life, insisted upon including him. On the other hand, his Biblical temper awoke into greater ardour and inspiration under the blows and the shames of the period that he calls "the time of the great killing." He cries with the prophet: "Oh, sword of the Lord, wilt thou never take rest!" In order to drive away these sad thoughts, he went with Sensier to pay a long visit to the scenes of his childhood, and to his dear village which he loved with so passionate a tenderness. He found there fresh subjects of sadness. Where were now the dear beings whom he had once known and loved in these places? "I feel my heart so full that I cannot bear it," he writes on the 20th of June 1871. "Where are the poor eyes which used to look out with me over the immense expanse of the sea?"

He returned to Barbizon in November 1871. His health was much impaired, and from this time grew worse and worse. He was surrounded by family affection; he was on the

eve of becoming a grandfather; and in this last stage of his life when his soul had found calm, he became the painter of children. From 1871 to 1873 appeared a charming series of pictures and drawings into which Millet put a delicacy of feeling and a tenderness that are quite maternal: *Evening, The Sick Child,* the *Little Girl keeping Geese, The First Steps,* the *Young Mother putting her Child to Sleep.* Complete success had come. He saw his pictures, once scorned, now selling for considerable prices[1] (though far short indeed of the amazing figures to which they have attained of late years, in the course of those famous sales in which actual battles of wealth were fought between Europe and America for the possession of them). At last the State remembered Millet and Mr de Chennevières got a commission given to him for eight pictures intended for the decoration of the Pantheon: *The Miracle of les Ardents,* and *The Procession of the Shrine of St Geneviève.* For these works Millet was to receive 50,000 francs.

His illness, however, was making rapid pro-

[1] *The Woman with the Lamp,* 38,500 francs. *The Flock of Geese,* 25,000 francs.

THE SHEPHERDESS

Photograph—Braun, Clément & Co.]

gress. He was, as he said, "*en bien grande démolition*"—"very thoroughly breaking up." In 1872 he suffered from headache, from pains in the eyes and disturbances of the nerves which often obliged him to keep his bed. In 1873 the lungs were attacked and he had a violent hæmorrhage. "My cough has killed me," he wrote in the September of this year. In 1874 he felt his case hopeless. He said that he was dying too soon, passing away at the moment when he was but beginning to have a clear idea of nature and art. He took to his bed in December. On January 20th, 1875, he died in the midst of his family.

Some days before, a sad and poetic omen that had the beauty of a legend had foretold his death. A poor stag pursued by dogs had come to die in his garden. It was a touching symbol of that fellowship of all beings in suffering and in death which had been the very soul of Millet's genius, the constant inspiration of this great painter of the sorrow of the world.

IV

The Work and the Artistic Theory of Millet

Relatively speaking, Millet produced little. He began to exhibit in 1840 and did not cease work until his death, that is for more than thirty years. Yet he left only about eighty pictures, nearly all—with a few exceptions, such as the *Woman shearing Sheep*—of small dimensions. The reason is that, though he brought much fire and energy to bear in painting certain works, he generally spent much time in meditation, often began again and was seldom satisfied. His nature was one of the least complex imaginable; his was a soul all of one piece, in which feelings, ideas, and the vision of external things did not vary from the beginning of his life to the end. He felt this inclination of his mind to repeat itself, and was not the man to fix himself in a formula. Therefore he never ceased working to enlarge his thought and to enrich and vary his technical methods. He even tried for some years, not without

success, to engage in paths remote from his real vocation. Then he perceived that he was going the wrong way and consented to remain within the limits of his nature, never, however, relaxing his efforts to improve every part of his artistic domain and to penetrate more deeply into the spirit of the things and beings that he observed.

Let us endeavour to sum up this evolution. His first works have not been preserved to us, but the choice of subjects and the reminiscences left by contemporaries testify clearly to the unity of his life. From his very beginning as a painter his two sources of inspiration, his two models, are the natural scenes of daily life and the Scriptures. One of his earliest drawings represents an old man bent double, broken by age and sufferings. Of the two drawings which he brought to the Cherbourg teacher, one was an illustration of St Luke and one a pastoral scene. Under Delaroche he conscientiously applied himself to draw from the *Holy Family* of Francis the First and from the antique; but beneath the academic garb that he assumed, his heavy and violent peasant temperament was always

THE NEW-BORN LAMB

Photograph—Giraudon]

breaking out. His companions used to joke about his figures "in the fashions of Caen," and he wearied those around him by his admiration for Michael Angelo. Then poverty compelled him to make imitations of the fashionable painters of the eighteenth century, whom he could not bear. This compulsion had at least the advantage that it taught him the mastery of his brush; he freed himself from Delaroche's blacks and opaque shadows; he studied Correggio; and so successful were his endeavours to acquire those qualities wherein he chiefly fell short that by about 1844 his most striking quality in the eyes of his contemporaries was his colour. He had charming flower-like tones of grey and pink. He painted easily and he pleased. The best example of his works of this period is the *Portrait of little Antoinette Feuardent* at six years old. Her head is covered by a pink silk kerchief; she is kneeling barefooted before a looking-glass, looking at herself and making little grimaces. In the year after his second marriage up to about 1847 he had an exuberance of sensuous spontaneous ardour, very unusual with him, which showed itself in

Bacchantes, in mythological canvases and *Offerings to Pan,* amorous idylls that are yet simple and innocent. He worked on and on at the improvement of his qualities of form; and having in the previous years rather neglected correctness of drawing in his pursuit of colour, he set himself in his *Oedipus unfastened from the Tree* to make a perfect study of the nude. But all these were but trials which could neither permanently nor successfully deceive others nor himself as to his true nature; nature breaks through these disguises and discerning judges were not blinded by them. Gautier and Thoré noted, even in the *Oedipus,* a barbaric energy that vainly attempted to conceal itself beneath academic frigidity. Diaz said of the *Women Bathing* that they "came out of a stable," and Millet, although wounded by this speech which failed to recognise the rustic and half heroic grandeur perceptible even in these *Women Bathing,* felt well enough that he was out of his element in this world of fine conventions and was ashamed to see himself in it. He shared to some degree the feeling of Paul Huet, who said that when he saw his pictures

in exhibitions beside "alarmingly clean Parisian canvases, he felt like a man with muddy shoes in a drawing-room." To console himself for these untruthful works he studied the workman types of Paris and the country round Paris, and prefaced his great rustic pictures by *The Winnower* in 1848.

Finally he broke sharply with all fashionable art and in 1849 gave himself up definitely to studying the country. Into this pursuit he threw himself with enthusiastic ardour. Every day during the early part of his residence at Barbizon, and sometimes in a couple of hours, he would paint a rustic scene; and in a letter to Sensier dated 1849 he says that he has five pictures finished and three more in hand. The first *Sower* of 1850 was painted in so furious an impulse that Millet presently found his canvas too short and had to repaint the figure, tracing the outline. The works of this first Barbizon period are distinguished by their violence and heavy execution. Gautier who, speaking of the *Winnower*, had pointed out to Millet, as early as 1848, the thickness of his *impasto*, says that all these canvases are "as rugged as shagreen leather."

Millet himself was not satisfied, but his self-criticism differed from that of his critics; he was anxious not to decrease, but on the contrary to accentuate, the harshness of his manner, and did not yet consider his way of painting strong enough. He wrote in 1853: "I seem to myself like a man who sings true but with a weak voice and who is hardly heard." He was helped by the advice of Rousseau, with whom he had become intimate, and with whom he had at this time some idea of collaborating,[1] as some letters remain to testify.[1] Exposed thus to a powerful influence that strengthened the natural development of his genius, his manner broadened; about 1856 the landscape began to assume more importance, and he arrived at the style of the *Gleaners* and *The Angelus,* a style that was concentrated, sober, simple, austere—his enemies said poverty-stricken,—because he tried to efface himself behind his subject.

[1] My Dear Rousseau,—I do not know whether the two sketches I send you will be of any good to you. I am only trying to show where I should put my figures in your composition.

THE SOWER

Photograph—Braun, Clément & Co.]

The rejection of *Death and the Woodcutter* in 1859 awoke his combative instincts, and he answered it in 1862-63 by the challenge of the *Man with a hoe,* in which he made a clean sweep of everything that could possibly please, and displayed his roughness absolutely bare. It was, as he said himself, the sheer "cry of the earth" in all its savage reality.

This almost excessive affirmation of his individuality eased him; and, moved less by the criticisms which his work aroused than by the secret objections which his own taste raised against this passionate exaggeration of his style, he immediately went, in the impulse of reaction, to the other extreme. He wished to paint mythological pictures and illustrate Greek idylls. This, too, was the moment at which he made some decorative paintings. Though some of his friends, such as Burty and Piédagnel profess to admire these works, they savour too much of the awkward roughness of a modern peasant, transplanted suddenly into the world of Hellenic legend.

Millet returned to reality and to realism with the *Peasants carrying a calf,* in 1864

and the *Pig-killers* of 1869. But the greater part of his time from 1864 to 1870 was given up to a considerable series of drawings and pastels. He said that in these he wished to try the effects of his future oil paintings. In reality it was, as we shall presently try to show, his instinct which drew him to these media as the most perfect expression of his thought, his real artistic language. At this same period his travels, especially into Auvergne, in 1866, gave him new impressions and yet further increased the proportion of landscape in his work. He tried to express nature in a more complex way, to penetrate more deeply into it, "to grope into the bowels of it with constancy and labour" as he wrote after Bernard Palissy. Burty says that, in his last years he even came to "trying to put too many things into his painting. On a wall, a stone, the bark of a tree, he tried to make us see the successive deposits laid by time." But if his mind became more rich and complex, his heart grew more pure and tender with age; and his dark vision of country life was pierced towards the close of his days by a calmer feeling and by a domestic gentleness

that finds its expression especially in his pictures of children.

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Having now marked out the main lines of his artistic development, let us try to define the technical methods and the style of Millet.

The first point to be noted is, that like most of the great French landscape painters of his time he did not paint nature from nature; he painted it in his studio. Some peasants and his maid served him as models. Most frequently however he contented himself with a few studies, rapid sketches, or even with the impression that he brought home from his lonely walks and long meditations. "He did not feel, he often said to me" (Wheelwright is the speaker) "the need of studying nature upon the spot, though he did sometimes take rudimentary notes in a pocket-sketch book no larger than one's hand. All the scenes that he desired to reproduce were fixed in his

memory with marvellous exactness. He therefore attached great importance to exercise of the memory. He said that his own was naturally refractory, but that he had succeeded in training it, and that a memory-picture of this sort is more faithful, as to the general impression than one made from nature." From this cause comes the simplification of his landscapes and figures, the mind having retained only the leading features and eliminated those accessory details which do not immediately depend upon the impression as a whole. Thence, too, comes the rather planned, the almost abstract character of his realism. All that he says is true but it is rather a summary than a complete view.

The very studio in which Millet painted was of a special kind. Light hardly came into it. He said so himself: "You never saw me paint except in shadow; it is that half-light which I need to make my sight keen and my brain clear." It must be owned that this is a strange enough way of painting full daylight effects,—the high light of noonday in the open fields. Let us not forget that Millet's eyes often troubled him and that he

A MOWER

Photograph—Braun, Clement & Co.]

was in danger of losing his sight. All this explains some characteristics of his painting and especially his rather murky light. This is especially noticeable in some of his most celebrated pictures, like the *Gleaners,* in which the illumination should be intense. About, who was a warm partisan of Millet did not fail to remark this fault but he excused it or wittily explained it in his *Salon* of 1857. "The August sun," he said, "sheds a powerful warmth upon the canvas, but you will not surprise any of these capricious rays which gambol like holiday schoolboys in pictures by Diaz; this is a grave sunshine which ripens wheat and makes men sweat and does not waste its time in frolics." But this "grave sunshine,"—too grave indeed—has not in reality the overwhelming splendour which is supposed by the three panting figures bowed above the burned ears of wheat; and Millet would not have failed to give it that splendour and so to impart the full value to his thought —if he had been able. It is surprising that neither this need of avoiding a strong light which he felt both in his eyesight and in his mind, nor yet his melancholy should have led

him more frequently to represent the dark hours of the woods, and the poetry of shadow. But he mistrusted these too easy effects; he was afraid of sentimentality and might well have said, as Michael Angelo did to Francis of Holland: "good painting will never draw a tear." He particularly delighted in the first and last hours of the day, when the light falls level upon the upturned furrows as in *The Angelus* and when the distances are bathed in a fine powdery light, as in some of his *Shepherds* and *Shepherdesses*. And in spite of all this it cannot be said that he is a painter of half-tones. That term conveys an implication of softness and moderation that ill accord with the rather rough energy of his genius. To conclude, though he well knew how to express the soft glow of a warm light as he did in *Gréville Church*, in the Louvre, or the dramatic contrast between an opaque black sky full of storm and clear sunshine upon meadows and flowery orchards as he did in *Spring* in the same gallery, yet he was never, properly speaking, a great painter of light, still less a great colourist. He has been justly reproached with too often painting earth, flesh and stuffs all "with the

GREVILLE CHURCH

Photograph—Neurdein Brothers]

same woolly and monotonous touch."[1] Yet he had a certain curiosity about the shades of stuffs. Wheelwright says that he had in his studio a collection of rags, handkerchiefs, skirts, and blouses, to suggest shades to him. "Blue was his favourite colour." He had innumerable shades of it, "from the crude indigo of the new blouse to the delicate tone of garments that had grown almost white by washing. He revelled in them." But his execution very often remains heavy and uniform; and our contemporary criticism which is but too much inclined to judge painting wholly and solely in respect of colouring has a good case against Millet. Huysmans does not know how to be angry enough with "his monotonous stingy oils, commonplace and rank, false and obliterated," "his rough and scurvy pictures, old and deaf," and "his uniform, russet figures under a hard sky;" and distinguishing the painter in pastels, whom he

[1] Sensier gives from one of Millet's letters a list of the colours that he used, which were all the most common earths "3 burnt sienna; 2 raw sienna; 3 Naples yellow; 1 burnt Roman ochre; 2 yellow ochre; 2 burnt umber.

admires (and to whom we shall return) from the painter in oils, whom he abhors, he sees the latter as "a heavy worker on canvas imbued with the old scruples about a scheme of colour and the old ceremonies."

But it is not enough to say that Millet was possessed by classic traditions and prejudices. In reality he was himself a classic painter, a great French classic of the race of Poussin; and if we would appreciate him justly we must judge him from that point of view and according to those principles. Far from seeing in him one of those revolutionary painters who create a new art, we must see him as a mind and painter of the seventeenth century transplanted into our world and applying an art of former days to the presentation of our contemporary world.[1] This is precisely his originality. His faults and his merits are those of a whole

[1] It should be added that this transposition is rendered easier by his choice of subjects. The world painted by Millet is the world of the common people and of the country, which is least subject to the laws of change and retains, even at the present day, many features in common with the life of two centuries ago.

race of men of genius with whom, as we shall presently see, his relationship is very close.

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Millet himself has informed us clearly of his profound affinity with certain masters of the past. Nothing can be more interesting if we wish to know him than to read his written judgments of the paintings in the galleries of the Louvre.

We have seen already that, when he first stayed in Paris, the Louvre was the only thing which made him able to endure life in a city odious to him. There he found his only friends.

In the Louvre itself, however, his friendships were extremely exclusive. He scornfully repelled the advances of the enticing masters who belonged to the eighteenth century. He treats Boucher almost as severely as Diderot did. Like Diderot he would be ready to call aloud to him: "Leave the *Salon*! Leave the *Salon*!" He despises the "pornographic"

painter[1] and his "melancholy women with their slender legs, their feet bruised in high heeled shoes, their waists diminished by stays, their useless hands and bloodless bosoms.[2] Boucher is nothing but an allurer." He is not disarmed even by Watteau who seems to him mournful. With a singular psychological penetration (which I have noted already in what he says of Decamps), Millet discovers the genuinely morbid and sad temperament of Watteau beneath the disguises of *Fêtes galantes*. He sees the "hidden melancholy of these theatrical puppets who are condemned to laugh." They remind him of marionettes, and he imagines that "all this little company was going to be put back into the box when the show was over, and weep there over its fate." He has a certain taste for some of Murillo's

[1] "What do you expect Boucher to put on the canvas? What he has in his imagination; and what can there be in the imagination of a man who spends his life with women of the lowest stamp." (Diderot.)

[2] "Our clothing depraves form. Our legs are cut by garters; the bodies of our women are stifled by bodices, our feet are disfigured by narrow hard shoes." (Diderot.)

THE FALL OF THE LEAF

Photograph—Braun, Clement & Co.]

portraits, and for Ribera's *St Bartholomew* and *Centaurs*. It was curious that he did not at first fully understand Rembrandt; he was probably alienated by the thing that generally attracts: the magic of his light. I imagine that, at first sight Rembrandt must have appeared to him too much of a "virtuoso;" and he could never endure "virtuosity." "Rembrandt," he said, "did not repel me, but he blinded me." Only by degrees did Millet reach the profound truth and the sublime heart of Rembrandt. On the other hand though he was shocked by Ruoens he forgave him everything because he was "strong." "I always liked what was powerful, and would have given all Boucher for a naked woman by Rubens." Millet passionately loved strength; and his usual designation of the masters was *the strong men*. His love of power and abundance led him sometimes to like artists most remote from himself: painters of the Italian decadence like the Rossos and Primatices at Fontainebleau, whose taste is poor and sometimes detestable, but who are full of the pulse of life: "They belong to the decadence, it is true. The accessories of their people are

often ridiculous and their good taste doubtful; but what a power of creation, and how their rough good humour recalls past times! It is all as childish as a fairy-tale and as real as the simplicity of bygone ages. There are recollections in their art of the Lancelots and the Amadises. One could stay for hours before these kind giants." The most curious and characteristic of these judgments of Millet's is, in its very narrowness that which he delivers in a single line upon Velasquez. He never liked him. He understands, he says, the beauty of his painting: "but his compositions seem to me to have nothing in them."

His favourite masters were the Italian primitives, the French masters of the seventeenth century, and Michael Angelo.

It was a moral sympathy which drew him particularly to the primitives. He loved "these gentle masters who have made the creature so fervent, that it becomes beautiful—and so nobly beautiful, that it becomes good." Their piety, their simplicity and their suffering moved him. "I have retained," he said, "my first leaning towards the primitive masters, towards their subjects which are as simple as child-

hood, their unconscious expressions, their individualities which say nothing, but feel themselves overburdened by life, or suffer patiently without cries or complainings, undergoing the human law without even having an idea of asking satisfaction from any body. These men did not produce an art of revolt like ours today." Fra Angelico "gave him visions." But of all the Italians of the fifteenth century, the one who seems to have moved him most deeply is the harsh and tragic Mantegna. "Masters of his kind have an incomparable power. They throw in your face the joys and sorrows that possess them."[1]

Beside this great Italian school of the fifteenth century, he gave a place in his admiration, to the great French School of the seventeenth century: Le Brun and Jouvenet

[1] He had also a great predilection for Spanish primitives, like Greco, who in his day was very little known. He had a picture by him hanging in his room near his bed and used to look at it with emotion in his last illness. He said: "I know few pictures which touch me, I will not say more, but so much; a man must have had a great deal of feeling to paint a thing like that."

whom he considered "very strong"; Lesueur, "one of the great souls of our school"; and above all Poussin, "who is the prophet, the wise man and the philosopher of it, and also the most eloquent arranger of a scene. I could spend my life looking at Poussin's work, and never be satisfied."

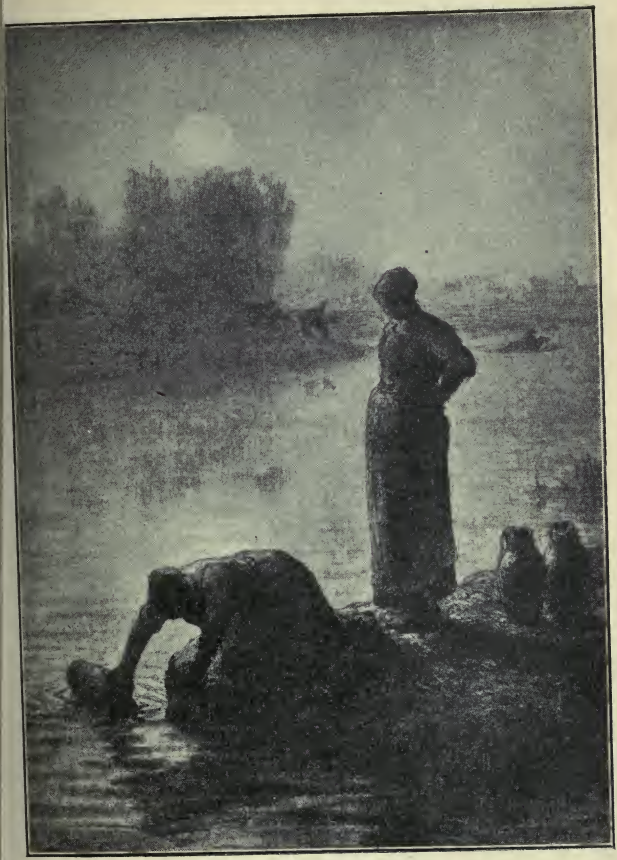
But the master of masters who overwhelmed him and dominated him tyrannically, the genius whom he preferred to all others, was Michael Angelo. I have already quoted the passage in which Millet describes his first meeting with Michael Angelo's work, and the contagion of pain by which he was suddenly overcome at the sight of a drawing which represented a man in a swoon. "I saw very well," he added, "that the man who had done that was capable of personifying the good and evil of humanity in a single figure. It was Michael Angelo. To say that is to say everything. I had already seen some poor engravings at Cherbourg; but here I touched the heart, and heard the voice of *him who haunted me so strongly all my life.*"

Such were his great friends. Among the moderns, Delacroix alone, whom he loved and

defended violently against his enemies, and fifty of whose sketches he contrived in spite of poverty to purchase at the public exhibition of his works in 1864, was judged by Millet to take rank with Theodore Rousseau, and perhaps Barye among these, his chosen few. All the other contemporary artists, the painters of the Luxembourg gallery, seemed to him "repulsively insipid" and his antipathy to modern art applies not only to the productions, but to the very essence of this art. He explains himself clearly upon the point. "With us, art is no longer anything more than an accessory, a drawing room accomplishment, whereas formerly, and even down to the middle ages it was one of the columns of ancient society, *its conscience and the expression of its religious feeling.*" The blame of this decadence lies not only with the artists; it rests on the whole of society and especially upon those who direct it or claim to direct it, the intellectual aristocracy: "What have the best brains of our period done for art? Less than nothing. Lamartine (I saw him choosing out his favourite pictures in the Salon of 1848) was only touched by a subject that corres-

ponded with his political or literary interests. He would never have placed a picture of Rembrandt's in his own house. Victor Hugo puts Louis Boulanger and Delacroix on the same level. George Sand has a woman's prudence, and gets out of the question with fine musical words. Alexander Dumas is under the thumb of Delacroix, and apart from him does not think freely. I have not been able to dig out a single really felt page in Balzac, Eugène Sue, Frédéric Soulié, Barbier, Méry, etc.—a single page that might serve us as a guide, or that bears witness to a real understanding of art. Proudhon's work on art is a magnificent bit of special pleading, full of ingenious sallies, but it is a lecture fit for the blind asylum." [1]

[1] This is P. J. Proudhon's work "On the Principles and Social Destination of Art." At first sight it would seem as though Millet might have sympathised with the programme put forth by Proudhon; "To paint men in the sincerity of their nature and their habits, at their work, accomplishing their civic and domestic duties, with their actual countenances, above all without posturing; to surprise them in the undress of their consciousness, as an aim of general educa-



THE DRAWERS OF WATER

Photograph—Braun, Clément & Co.]

Millet, then, felt himself almost completely separated from all his period; and lived in communion of thought across the centuries, with a few great men: Mantegna, Michael Angelo, and Poussin. Let us endeavour to extricate from this selection and these judgments of Millet's the features which may serve to draw his own character.

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We must note, to begin with, the unceremonious disdain with which Millet treats the colourists: Velasquez and Watteau. As to the painters of plastic beauty: Leonardo and Raphael he does not seem even to have given heed to them. His three preferred masters are the masters, pre-eminently, of style. A

tion: such seems to me the real starting point of modern art." But Proudhon wished to make art subserve political ends, and Millet would not have that. Moreover Proudhon does not so much as name Millet, and his whole book seems written to extol Courbet alone.

fine, clear, strong and expressive utterance: this was their ideal. The word "style" is never more fitly employed than in speaking of Mantegna, Michael Angelo and Poussin, and of this last in particular. Poussin himself in speaking of his works, said: "those who know how to *read* them properly." And Bernini, enraptured with Poussin's *Extreme Unction*, says that "it produced the same effect as a fine sermon, to which the hearer listens with very great attention and from which he goes away in silence but feeling the effect within." [1] Poussin and Mantegna unhesitatingly sacrifice beauty to style, and neither Poussin nor Mantegna, nor yet Michael Angelo is, truly speaking, a colourist; their colour is their weak point and Poussin, who recognizes this, does not hesitate to hold colour very cheap. "The singular application bestowed on the study of colour," said he, "is an obstacle which prevents people from attaining the real aim of painting; and the man who attaches himself to the main thing

[1] "Journal of the Travels in France of the Cavalière Bernini," by M. de Chantelou ("Gazette des Beaux Arts," 1877-85).

THE DIGGER

Photograph—Braun, Clément & Co.]

will acquire by practice a fine enough manner of painting."[1] And in another passage: "Colours in painting are as it were allurements to persuade the eye; and the same thing is true of the beauty of the verse in poetry."[2] No doubt it is praiseworthy to say things that are beautiful, but the essential is to say things that are clear and strong. To think rightly and speak one's thought clearly is the ideal of Poussin. It is also that of Millet.

One cannot be too careful to keep in mind Poussin's theories if one wishes to judge Millet. Millet had fed upon them. Very many points of his nature resembled Poussin's. Like him he was a Norman. He had a kindred mind, the same admixture of religion and philosophy, of high thinking with the good sense of a realist. He had also Poussin's rather dull and darkened eye, and his heavy hand. He had long been used to read Poussin's *Letters* and had assimilated his ideas. They may readily be recognized in his own expressed theories about art. Indeed, he does

[1] Quoted by Reynolds in his fifth Lecture.

[2] Quoted by Bellori.

not conceal their origin but explicitly rests them upon Poussin.

"When Poussin," writes Millet in some notes upon art to Sensier who had asked for them, "when Poussin sent his picture of *Manna* to M. de Chantelou he did not say to him: See what a fine bit of colour, see how bold, see how it is put in, or any of the things of that kind to which so many painters seem to attach importance, I don't know why. He said: If you remember the letter which I wrote you touching the movement of the figures that I promised to put into it, and if you consider the picture altogether, I think you will easily recognize which are those that are languishing, those that are full of pity, and those that are performing charitable actions."

The matter would rather seem to be a book than a picture. "*Characterisation, that is the aim,*" wrote Millet again. "In art one must have a main thought, express it eloquently, preserve it in oneself and communicate it to others strongly as though by the die of a medal." Note the words "thought" and "eloquently"; they conform closely to the

intellectual ideal of the seventeenth century. The aim of art is not form but expression. "To have done a certain number of things which say nothing is not to have produced something. He writes to Sensier on the 21st of October 1854, "There is only production where there is expression." Therefore Millet hated mere executive skill. "Woe to the artist who shows his talent rather than his picture! It would be laughable indeed if the wrist were to take the first place"; and he calls the hand "the very humble servant of the thought." He did not even allow that his way of painting might be admired, or that endeavours should be made to explain it. "As to explanations that may be given of my manners of painting, they would be lengthy, for I have not concerned myself with that matter; and if there are any manners, they can only have come from the way of entering more or less deeply into my subject, and from the difficulties of life, etc." Thus, the thought only should be a matter of attention. The point is not to seek a factitious originality, or a personal *technique*. The point is to think justly. Every line, every touch,

as he showed Wheelwright, has a meaning. One must make oneself master of it. One must learn to see, that is to say, to draw [1]—to seize the "drawing of things," that is to say the vital and essential qualities of things. "The drawing of things," as Poussin says, "must be the exact expression of *the ideas* of things."

This point can only be reached if we are strongly moved by what we see. *Impression forces expression.* "I should like to do nothing which was not the result of an impression received from the appearance of nature, either in landscape or in figures. . . . Art began to weaken from the moment when people no longer rested directly and simply upon impressions coming from nature, and when executive cleverness at once came to take nature's place: then began the decadence."

The majority of critics make for themselves an abstract ideal of beauty, and judge all works according to this ideal, condemning them unless they find it observed and applied. Millet protests against these pedantic claims. In judging an artist one must inquire, not

[1] "*To see is to draw*," said Millet to Wheelwright.

THE PASSAGE OF THE WILD GEESE

Photograph—Braun, Clément & Co.]

whether his figures or colouring conform to a certain general idea of beauty, but what is his personal idea, and whether he has expressed it well. "Our matter of concern with the artist is his aim and the manner in which he has attained it," wrote Millet to Camille Lemonnier in 1872. And elsewhere, in a letter written in June 1863 to the critic Pelloquet, on the subject of the *Man with a hoe*: "It is not so much the things represented which make beauty as the necessity which has been felt of representing them; and that very necessity creates the degree of power with which the task has been executed." He means (for Millet's style, like Poussin's, is often abstract and obscure, and a commentary is not unnecessary), he means, that the beauty or ugliness of the object represented matters little. The thing that counts in art is the passionate impulse that compels the artist to create his work, and it is this passion which gives the work its power of expression, and consequently its beauty; for it is the same thing. "Beauty does not dwell in the face; it glows in the entirety of a figure, and in whatever suits the action of the subject.

Beauty is expression." Thus beauty is in the mind not in the body. Poussin wrote in the same way: "Beauty is altogether apart from the material body." And Lomazzo, the theorist of Michael Angelo's school, said: "La bellezza è lontana dalla materia."[1] Millet continues: "We may say that everything is beautiful if it comes in its right time and place, and on the contrary that nothing can be beautiful if it comes in the wrong place. Which is more beautiful, a straight tree or a twisted tree? That which best suits its position. I conclude this, then: The beautiful is the suitable—or in other words, is that which is in the right place and says well what it means to say.

It is evident that all this does not deal with plastic beauty. The only beauties that Millet seems to require from painting are clearness and force. "I would rather say nothing than express myself feebly." His are the conceptions of a writer, an orator, a man of action, a great intellectual artist whose aim is less to please by his work than to move men by his thought and his will.

[1] "Beauty is remote from matter."

THE CHURNER

Photograph—Neurdein Brothers]

Thence arise all those great qualities of Millet's work which may be called oratorical: their solid composition, their logic, their feeling of rhythm, their imperious unity which forces itself upon the mind like a fine speech. He taught Wheelwright the necessity of concentrating his attention upon his subject, seeing the principal point, and subordinating all the rest to it. A picture demands unity, equilibrium, poise and harmony, and this ought, according to Millet, to exist even between the picture and its frame. Like Poussin, he attached great importance to the frame, and often retouched the picture after it was framed. "A picture should be finished in its frame. It must be in harmony with its frame, as well as with itself." The unity of the work is the first principle. "Nothing is of account but the foundamental. I try to make things seem, not put together by chance and for this one occasion, but so that they have an indispensable and compulsory connection. A work should be all of a piece; I desire to put in fully every thing that is necessary, but I profess the greatest horror of the unnecessary, however brilliant." We

seem to hear a French writer of the seventeenth century and of the school of Boileau, speaking. Everywhere must be a ruling idea, the "mother-idea," which governs the work, and according to the laws of which all the elements that contribute to the action are co-ordinated on a rigorous plan—all others being mercilessly shorn away as useless.

It is well to remark, however, that these principles are not those of Millet alone, but of Théodore Rousseau too, though he appears so unlike Millet and so much occupied with technical method and with arrangement of colours. The Barbizon painters are not, whatever may be supposed, essentially colourists; they have, above all, the classic French sense of composition, of the central idea and the unity of the whole. "Form is the first thing to be observed," said Rousseau to one of his pupils, M. L. Letronne. "Every touch is to be of value to the whole and to express something." "He always insisted upon this," continues Letronne, "and spoke but very little to me of colour. 'You thought perhaps,' said he, 'that in coming to a colourist you would be spared drawing?' Another day he

said: 'What "finishes" a picture is not the quantity of details, it is the truth of the whole. No matter what the subject may be, there is always a principal object upon which your eye rests continually; the other objects are but complementary, they interest you less; beyond them, there is nothing for your eye: this is the true limit of the picture. This principal object must also chiefly strike those who look at your work. You must therefore come back to it again and again and assert its colour more and more.' He quoted the example of Rembrandt. 'If on the contrary your picture contains exquisite detail, equal from one end of the canvas to the other, the spectator will look at it with indifference. Everything interesting him alike, nothing will interest him. There will be no limit. Your picture may prolong itself indefinitely; you will never reach the end of it. You will never have finished. The whole is the only thing that is finished in a picture. *Strictly speaking you might do without colour, but you can do nothing without harmony.*'"

There are so many points of resemblance between some passages of this fine painting

lesson and Millet's judgments that we may believe these principles to have been brought to maturity by the two friends in common, and that both must often have studied Poussin. When for instance Rousseau says: "The picture ought to be made in the first place in our brain. The painter does not make it spring into life on the canvas: *he removes one after another the veils which concealed it,*" do we not seem to hear Poussin saying in his pride of intellect, after conceiving the idea of a picture: "The thought of it has been fixed, and that is the principal thing."

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One of the natural consequences of Millet's intellectuality is that he was perhaps even greater still in his drawings than in his paintings. He felt himself more at ease in them. To pastels and drawings he gave his best work in the last stage of his life, after 1864. He began by a number of drawings in black chalk dealing with the whole range of peasant life;

THE DIGGERS

Photograph—Braun, Clément & Co.]

then little by little he introduced pastels, adding pale shades of colour; and finally used coloured chalks only, producing in this way about a hundred large subjects. In these he impresses us as a genuinely great master. Even those who, like Huysmans, are most opposed to Millet's art, recognise the equal power and originality both of his feeling and his *technique* in this medium. His faults disappear. The air is more buoyant, the light more liquid. Connoisseurs delight in the novelty of his method in pastel, in "his black chalk work, his thread-like outlines, his trails of pins, his borders with their cunning flavour of coloured chalks." Here we feel Millet to be in his own province of pure expression reduced to its essential elements. Here we feel that he is in direct contact with nature; the spontaneous impression which he receives from her is not stopped upon its way and chilled or falsified by manual difficulties or by that laborious application which is sometimes felt a little too much in some of his pictures. He says directly what he thinks, and his beholder seizes the meaning wholly, freely, and at first sight;—

in the same way that some great musician, Schumann, for example, whose technical training, acquired late, often hampers his inspiration in his great orchestral works, delivers himself much more sincerely and with more simplicity and greatness in his *Lieder* and pieces for the piano. And while Millet's faults are mitigated here, his virtues show themselves at their full value. His modelling is magnificent and his touch large; these chalk drawings are works made to be seen at a distance, tone melts into tone, and their general effect is decorative.

In the case of an artist who subordinates the whole work to one leading idea, the value of the work is the value of the idea; details can never save it. It will be frankly good or bad; there is no middle course. This is the case with Millet, as About remarked: "What I adore in him," he wrote in 1866, "is that he sometimes goes wrong and makes absolutely earth-quaking false steps. When he happens to set his foot upon uncertain ground, he sinks in up to the neck. I like him better thus than if he had learned from a master the habit of always doing pretty well." His system

SHEPHERD BRINGING BACK HIS FLOCK AT THE APPROACH OF THE STORM

Photograph—Braun, Clement & Co.]

of simplification sometimes approaches exaggeration, and gives to the movements of some of his figures an automatic character that comes within a hair's breadth of caricature.

But, most frequently, he renders the characteristic essential features of his people as well as of the natural scenery to which they belong, with wonderful success. He imprints the moral physiognomy of beings and things in an indelible way. His vigorous mind, clear and free from complexities, imparts relief and noble expression to the outline, to the drawing that marks the limits of an object or a figure; he suppresses secondary details; he generalises the scheme. By these means he attains effects of epic power. A humble figure, a shed, an abandoned plough in a desert expanse, assume aspects of grandeur; the smallest gesture acquires a large solemnity. A *Return to the Farm*, by him, will involuntarily evoke the idea of a "Holy Family" or "Flight into Egypt." It would not be surprising to see the cradle of Moses floating on the majestic stream of that calm river over which his *Women drawing water* are bending. A simple sketch of a *Woodcutter* bowed double beneath his

faggot, staggering under the burden, thin, wan, hollow-cheeked and lean of body, seems an emblem of man crushed by fate, unresisting, and knowing all struggles to be in vain.

The same spirit of generalisation causes Millet to be always seeking the type behind the individual. "If it were only a question of my will," he wrote to Lemonnier on the 15th of February 1873, "I should express the type very strongly, *the type being, to my mind, the most powerful truth.* You are perfectly right in attributing to me the intention of doing so." And this French classic, who devotes himself less to the observation of individuals than to the comprehension of social types, and less to passing gestures than to permanent acts, setting his whole strength to discriminate the transitor from the abiding, felt nothing and expressed nothing more firmly and more greatly than that primordial and Eternal existence from which everything comes and to which everything returns—the Earth. The earth is the real hero of his rustic poem; and living creatures are, to use André Michel's expression, only "lumps of it

THE RETURN TO THE FARM

Photograph—Braun, Clément & Co.]

slowly brought to life." Huysmans justly remarks that it is as a painter of the Earth that Millet is especially distinguished. "Brute matter, the earth rises out of the framework, alive and exuberant. We feel it thick and heavy; through its clods and grasses, we feel it running deep and full. We breathe the scent of it, we could crumble it between our fingers. In most landscape painters the soil is superficial; in Millet it is deep." "Generally," said Burty, "the clods of earth and plots of grass come to the edge of the frame, their massing and drawing are exact, their values observed with knowledge, not predominating but giving a logical and solid groundwork to the various planes unfolded one beyond another until they merge into the sky amid the mists of the horizon." Let us recall the foregrounds of *The Angelus* and of *The Sower*, with their solidity, their living truth; and the immense plains stretching to the distance bathed in light and fading at the horizon into a fine haze. "The sky recedes beyond our sight, the fields are bathed in air." "Every landscape," said Millet to Wheelwright, "however small it may be, ought to suggest

the possibility of indefinite extension; the tiniest corner of the horizon ought to be so painted as to make us feel that it is but a segment of the great circle which bounds our sight." And this, indeed, is the impression given by each of his pictures; none has the character of an isolated fact; it is part of a great whole. As the figures cannot be separated from the landscapes of Millet, as it would be impossible to take away the peasants seen in the open air "which makes them grey, brown and dull like the larks, the partridges and the hares of the field," so likewise none of his landscapes can be divided in our thoughts from the whole of nature, but calls up the vast expanses of the world that surround it. We feel that Millet, like Rousseau, "saw the universal before everything and in everything."

There was, moreover, as it were, a pre-established harmony between his genius and the scenery amid which he had chosen to dwell. The plain around the forest of Fontainebleau of which Millet had made the central point of his artistic existence, and of which the stretch is so vast, is not, as Wheel-

wright aptly remarks, in some respects unlike the Roman Campagna. Its details melt into an impression of grand and simple unity. The constant contemplation of these wide horizons with their classical element was well adapted to inspire Millet and to strengthen his natural inclination towards the simplified, the unified, and the abstract. The plain of Fontainebleau was to Millet very much what the Campagna of Rome was to Poussin.[1]

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Friends and enemies alike acknowledged the classic character of Millet's style and spirit.

[1] To note one more point of resemblance between these two masters, it may be remarked that most of the paintings of both are conceived like large pictures and carried out on a small scale, so that they often produce the effect of being reductions from large decorative compositions. This is another result of the power of simplication and generalisation which characterises their genius.

Some criticised while others admired their application to the subjects which he treated; but none found it possible to deny their existence. The names of Homer, Michael Angelo and Raphael, recollections of the Bible and comparisons with antique art appear again and again when Millet's work is spoken of in articles upon the Salons from 1853 to 1875. Gautier said of the *Harvesters' meal* of 1853; "Some of these thick-set peasants display a Florentine air and lie in attitudes that might be those of Michael Angelo's statues. They have the majesty of toilers in touch with nature." Paul de St Victor, in turn, writes: "The picture of the *Harvesters* is a Homeric idyll translated into a rustic dialect. The countrymen seated in the shadow of the heaped up corn have a splendid animal, primitive ugliness, like that of the Æginetic statues and of the figures of captives sculptured on Egyptian tombs." Gautier says of the *Peasant grafting a tree,* in 1855: "The man has the appearance of accomplishing some rite of a mystic ceremonial, or of being the obscure priest of some rustic deity." About the *Gleaners* he says, "I might almost say that

THE HAY-TRUSSERS

Photograph—Giraudon]

it presents itself as a religious painting," and Gerôme: "He is a Jupiter in wooden shoes." Theophile Silvestre remarks: "His pictures are expressed like psalms. This is the antique in painting." Even Baudelaire, when he desires to criticise Millet whom he does not like, does so not by denying but by emphasising the classical nature of his talent. "M. Millet," he says, "particularly aims at style; he does not conceal the fact, he displays it and glories in it. But style does not succeed with him. Instead of simply drawing out the poetry inherent in his subject, he wishes, at all costs, to add something to it. All his peasants are outcasts on a small scale and have pretensions to philosophy, and melancholy, and the Raphaelesque." Baudelaire had too little simplicity of mind to understand that any man of his own day could still be naturally and simply classical as Millet was; but his ill-will did not prevent him from noting pretty fairly the essential characteristics of this art which was so much opposed to his own. He is quite right in saying that "Millet always adds something" to his subject. It is indeed the principal interest of his works that he

always adds the soul of Millet to them. That is what gives them their greatness and makes them touching in so unique a way. At the first blush, there may seem something strange in a comparison between the noble poems of Raphael or Poussin and these representations of rough peasant life. But piercing through these scenes of humble realism, we feel a spirit that is inwardly sublime and that radiates sublimity. "One must know how," he said, "to make the trivial serve to express the sublime; in that lies real strength."[1] No man ever did this more constantly and more naturally than he. To him visible shapes were but a means of reaching the soul of things: "Ah, I wish I could make those who

[1] He was far, however, from desiring to confine art to his own personal province of rustic art. On the contrary, in opposition to Proudhon, he fiercely defended the right of art to represent other subjects than those of contemporary life. "Where, then, is personal impression? Cannot one be moved by a book that speaks of the past? Where would the picture of the *Crusaders at Constantinople* be if Delacroix had been compelled to paint the taking of the Trocadero or the opening of the Legislative Chambers?"

THE FARM GIRL

Photograph—Giraudon]

look at what I do, see the terrors and the splendours of night. I wish I could make them hear the songs, the silences, the rustlings of the air. *I wish I could make infinity perceptible.*"

He mingled the poetry and emotion of his heart with everything that he saw. He is unique rather through the heart than through his art as a painter. That lofty, melancholy heart of his had none like it, save the heart of Michael Angelo. He is a kind of democratic Michael Angelo. "O Dante of the yokels, Michael Angelo of clowns" Robert Contaz called him, in a sonnet, in 1863. Some of his friends perceived, indeed, a certain physical likeness between Michael Angelo and him (rather, I imagine, in the general expression than in actual feature). See the portrait of Millet in a woollen cap, of the year 1847.

Assuredly Millet's disposition was remote from the heroic poetry and frenzied passion of the great Florentine. But he had an austere and pure realism of his own. He had also his amazing and eternal gravity. No ray of gaiety ever lightens his work. Everything

is grave, the figures whom he choses and the actions which he assigns to them. There is no love; there are few or no anecdotes; he rarely paints young men; and the women whom he represents are all at work; they are sewing, turning hay, shearing sheep, carrying pails or fulfilling motherly duties, feeding and teaching children. The highest poetry and the only joy of his work lies in family affection. There is no room here for useless beauty. Millet said of Jules Breton's country girl: "They are too pretty to stay in the village." On every man and every woman he imposes the necessity of work. "My programme is work."

And, undoubtedly, it would be an exaggeration to say that this work is always sad. There are moments of calm, and of gentle content, the effect of which is perhaps the more agreeable for not being habitual. Then comes the deep comfort of hours of rest and silence.[1]

[1] Millet had met with an expression in Milton which had struck him greatly as according with his own feeling: "Silence listens." (It is curious to add that this expression is not Milton's but that of

Then we see the quiet and silent tenderness of home, motherly cares, *The Meal,* given to these nestlings, *The Reading Lesson* to the very attentive little maiden, the great events of childhood, *The first steps.* But the groundwork is always serious; and as soon as work resumes its place, there comes a character of tragedy. We feel the pressure of a divine law, a religious fate, weighing upon all creatures. Everywhere man is seen in conflict with the earth. It is a vast battle of which the year beholds the epic incidents: seed-time, harvest, red sunsets, pallid dawns, storms, the fall of the leaf, the passage of migrating birds, the succession of days and months; for nothing is insignificant, everything seems to play its part in this warfare between man and nature. Even in landscapes from which the human figure is absent, and in which day is breaking over sleeping lands, the conflict is heard muttering, ready to break out afresh. Thus we feel it in a chalk drawing that represents *A plain at daybreak,* empty, with a harrow

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his French translator, Delille; Milton wrote: "Silence was pleased."

lying in the fields and a plough standing upright beneath a cloud of rooks. Here we behold as Huysmans says again: "a truce between the earth and man; but the truce is on the point of being broken; and we feel that directly the sun is up "the dumb battle will begin again between the persistent peasant and the hard earth." Another chalk drawing again represents a vast plain in the first glow of dawn; and here, in the distance, the enemy is already seen advancing: a shepherd with his flock. "His tall figure black against the light has an indescribable air of hostility." And as the hours of the day go on, this silent struggle continues, ever harsher, ever fiercer beneath the consuming sun, until man is worn out; conquered by his own victory like the *Man with a hoe,* standing, bent, his body broken, his mind annihilated, in the glory of the light, or the *Vine-dresser resting,* with his burning eyes, his open mouth, his arms dropping between his outstretched legs, sitting, damp with sweat, stifled with heat;— until at last the inevitable end comes, and Death sets a limit to the long task and the many hardships:

"A la sueur de ton visaige
Tu gagneras ta pauvre vie ;
Après long travail et usaige
Voicy la mort qui te convie." [1]

Millet's work has been justly considered as a poem of country life wherein all the occupations of the year are described. It has been likened to the poems of Hesiod, where the mystic abstraction of the thinker is found side by side with the familiar precepts of the *Almanach du bon laboureur*. In particular his work recalls, to some minds, those mediaeval calenders in which cathedral sculptors and Franco-Flemish illuminators, presented with untiring interest the larger scenes of country life.

But Millet's calender is one that has no

[1] "Thy life thou shalt gain
In the sweat of thy brow ;
After long toil and pain
Death beckons thee now."
This old verse is to be found beneath an engraving by Holbein described by George Sand in her *Mare au Diable*, the reading of which greatly impressed Millet and partly inspired his *Death and the Woodcutter*.

festivals, a gospel of labour and domesticity. On its title, as has been truly said,[1] must be written the words of the *Imitation*: "Renounce frivolous matters." "*Relinque curiosa.*"

[1] By Ernest Chesneau.

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