

## AN ARTIST'S IDYL.

BY THEOPHILE GAUTIER.

"My young friend, modesty is a worthy sentiment, but you need not blush in that way. There is no harm in drawing if one does not neglect other duties. There is a good deal of merit in the picture—the trees are true to life and the shrubs each have the leaves that belong to them. You must have been a close observer before you could have reproduced anything from what you saw—how much more merit to be able to originate anything."

This was the first encouragement Petit Pierre ever had; it gave him the first confidence in his genius that was to be so great. "Go on, my son," continued the good pastor, "perhaps you will be another Giotto. He, like you, was a poor shepherd, but acquired so much skill that one of his pictures was carried in procession by the enthusiastic citizens of Florence."

During the long winter evenings the good priest taught Petit Pierre how to read and write, the two keys of knowledge. The shepherd progressed rapidly, for he learnt with his heart as well as with his head.

Another summer rolled around. Petit Pierre was once more abroad with his sheep, but this summer he had developed wonderfully, physically and mentally. He had eaten of the tree of knowledge under the wise tuition of the priest.

The intoxication of ambition fired his soul—fortunately Petit Pierre had no admiring friends—neither the trees nor the rocks could flatter him. The immensity of nature that he was constantly brought into contact with showed him very soon his own littleness. Furnished by the cure with all the paper and crayons he wanted, he made a great number of studies. But he never saw the beautiful lady again save in his dreams; then she always appeared radiant and encouraging, saying: "That is well, my friend; persevere, and you will have your reward."

An event, very simple in itself, which was destined to affect the whole of Petit Pierre's life, suddenly came to pass. "It is always the unexpected that happens," and nothing could be more so than the advent of a new picture for the little church. The painter, a rising artist, careful of his pictures, attended to the transportation of this one himself, and, after the proper placing of the picture, repaired to the cure's home, where the latter showed the visitor some of Petit Pierre's drawings. The boy, pale as death, leaned heavily against the table, pressing his hand against his heart, for it seemed as though it would burst, then waited in silence for the condemnation of all his dreams. He could not imagine a man so well-dressed, well-gloved, and with a knot of red ribbon in his buttonhole, the author of a picture surrounded with a gold frame, could find any merit in charcoal sketches on gray paper. The painter picked up and threw aside several sketches without saying a word. Then the colour mounted to his cheeks, and he uttered short exclamations in studio phrases.

"This is glorious! And this, how natural! And this, chic. Corot could not do better. This charcoal sketch would craze Delaberg. This sleeping lamb is in Paul Potter's style."

When he had finished he rose, walked over to Petit Pierre and shook him cordially by the hand, saying:

"Pardieu! though it is not considered very honourable among artists to say so, I must tell you, my dear boy, you know more than all my scholars put together. Come to Paris with me; in six months I will teach you the details of manner and style; then you will be able to walk alone. If nothing unforeseen happens, I can predict, without compromising myself, you will be very successful."

Petit Pierre, well warned of the dangers of modern Babylon, left with the painter, taking Fidele with him. The painter, with that goodness of heart that usually accompanies talent, thought a familiar figure would have a beneficial effect on his pupil amid strange surroundings. Fidele would not allow himself to be lifted into the stage, but followed on foot as fast as his astonishment would allow, reassured from time to time by his master's face.

It would be impossible to follow Petit Pierre's progress.

The works of the great masters, of whom he made frequent copies, were of the greatest service to him. He passed from the severe style of Poussin to the languishing of Claude Lorraine; from the bold hardihood of Salvator Rossa to the mosaic-like detail of Ruysdael; but he did not adopt any particular style. Originality was too much a part of himself. He was no studio painter, who took photographs or sketches from nature for six weeks in summer to enlarge or finish them in winter. Petit Pierre's pictures seemed impregnated with the aroma of the woods; one felt looking at them, as if he had passed into the forest through the canvas. The instructions of art had come soon enough to prevent his taking a wrong route in style, but too late to spoil his originality.

After two years of hard study, Petit Pierre had a picture at the salon that had obtained honorable mention, and every day he would linger in the neighbourhood of his picture, and leaning on the railing pretend to attentively consider paintings near his canvas, hearing in this way the criticisms of the spectators.

With the delight of his first success came the thought, "the beautiful lady" would like this, and he prayed that she might see it—as yet his wish to see her had never been gratified; he had sought for her on the promenades, at the churches and the theatres. He did not know her name, he only knew how she looked, and he thought, as she drew herself, it would be only natural she would visit the exhibitions. In fact, one morning before the crowd came Petit Pierre saw a young lady in black coming toward his picture as if attracted irresistibly by the memory of something she hardly remembered. It was the lady of his dream—the lady who at first inspired his waking genius. He recognized her, though in deep mourning, with that unerring *coup d'œil* habitual to artists. But her mourning troubled Petit Pierre. "Whom has she lost? Her father, or mother, or is she free?" he said to himself in the innermost recesses of his heart. The landscape painted by the young artist was an exact representation of the spot drawn by the lady, where he himself, Fidele, and the sheep had posed as models. Petit Pierre, in the simple adoration of his heart for the spot and the inspirer of his genius, had chosen this for his first picture. The exquisite verdure, with the gray rocks arising here and there; the dismantled oak, its trunk torn in twain by the lightning, were all represented with scrupulous exactness. Petit Pierre was leaning on his crook with a dreamy air, Fidele dreaming in reality at his feet.

The young woman gazed a long time at Petit Pierre's picture—examining attentively all the details, advancing and retreating as if not only judging the effect, but as if weighing something in her mind. In a preoccupied way she opened the catalogue and looked for the number of the picture, the subject and the artist's name—but the latter was unknown to her, and the picture had only the title, "A Landscape." Suddenly, as if recollecting something, she said a few words to the companion with her, and looking in an absent fashion at a few other pictures, she left the gallery. Petit Pierre found himself following her, almost without knowing it, fearing to lose this suddenly acquired clue. He saw her enter a carriage, and to throw himself into a cab and tell the driver not to lose sight of a blue carriage with chamois liveries, took but a moment, while the driver whipped up his horse and started in pursuit. The carriage entered the courtyard, and the gates closed behind her. Here, then, the beautiful lady lived. To know the number of the street where one's ideal lived was something.

There remained for him now to know the name of his lady love, to be received at her house, and to make her love him—three trifling formalities that decidedly disturbed the artist. Fortunately chance came to his aid, and the way opened itself for him. One morning a little oblong letter scented with violets was brought to him, containing the following:

SIR,—I saw in the salon a charming picture painted by you. I would be very glad to have it in my little gallery. If I am not too late, if it still belongs to you, be good enough to promise me you will not sell it to any one else, and to send it after the exposition is finished to Rue St. H—, number ——. Your price shall be mine.

G. DE L'ESCARIS.