



Life, Literature and Education.

[Contributions on all subjects of popular interest are always welcome in this Department.]

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES.

COROT.

Until the earlier part of the nineteenth century, landscape painting was all done in the studio, and it never seemed to dawn upon the world that such compositions must be, of necessity, artificial, uninspired, untrue both in conception and coloring. To the Barbizon School belongs the credit of beginning to turn out work of a different order. This school was simply a coterie of artists who settled, for the purpose of studying nature and painting her from herself, at the little town of Barbizon, on the edge of the Forest of Fontainebleau. Here lived Rousseau and Diaz; then Millet came, and others, but Corot, who was really the father of the new nature-movement, never resided there.

Jean Baptiste Camille Corot was born on the 26th of July, 1796, in the very heart of Paris. His mother was of Swiss origin, and was a dress-maker; his father was a thrifty merchant, whose great ambition was to make his son a draper, as he himself had been. When the lad was ten years of age he was sent to the beautiful City of Rouen to be educated. Here he remained for seven years, then, in accordance with his father's wishes, entered a draper's shop in Paris, where he worked conscientiously until he was twenty-six years of age. During this time, however, his brush was not idle. He spent much of his spare time painting, and held steadily to the idea of being at some time an artist. It is told of him that, regularly on his father's birthday he sought his consent to his giving himself up to his profession. The elder Corot was for many years obdurate, considering the idea impracticable, but, at last, wearied, perhaps, by the youth's importunity, he gave way, qualifying his approval, however, with the proviso that he would allow the budding artist but 1,500 francs a year upon which to subsist. Corot, however, was quite satisfied with this. His wants were

few, his work everything; so, at the age when most men are considering settling down in life, he began his studies, first with Michallon. Later he received instruction from Bertin.

From the very first he seems to have been dissatisfied with this indoor practice, and soon came to the conclusion that the studio in which he should work was out of doors. In 1817 the grand opportunity came. His father then bought a place at Ville d'Avray, a beautiful spot beside a lake about four miles from Paris, and here the young artist, with great delight, took up his abode. The mists that so often hung over the lake were an especial fascination to him. He studied them at all hours, rambling along the shores, or leaning from his window at dawn, waiting until the first beams of the sun should have struck them into golden vapors. To this study is attributed his love for the misty effects so characteristic of his best pictures.

Shortly after the removal to Ville d'Avray, Corot went to Rome, where he spent two years, still scraping along on his 1,500 francs a year. While there he painted chiefly archi-

until his death, in 1875, he only once failed to exhibit.

At first his pictures were either "skied" or given other obscure positions. The public had not yet learned to appreciate pure landscape thrown as a bit of God's bright heaven and earth upon a bit of canvas for the enlightenment of the gloomy indoors, and, as a consequence, Corot's pictures came back unsold after each exhibition. But this troubled him little. He had his 1,500 francs, and he found ample reward for his work in the delight—simple-hearted as that of a child—which it afforded him. It is, perhaps, noteworthy that it never once entered his head to give up the line which he had chosen and paint the figures and artificial compositions which would have appealed to the market. "Blessed is he who has found his work." A letter to a friend, which has been preserved, shows, possibly, better than any amount of biographical description, his temperament and attitude of mind towards life and his art:

"A landscape painter's day is delightful. He gets up early, at three in the morning, before sunrise. He goes and sits under a tree and

gauze behind which the meadow and the valley and the hills on the horizon hide. The vapors still hang like silken tufts on the cold green grass.

"Bing! Bing! The sun's first ray—another ray. The little flowers seem to be waking in a joyful mood, and each one of them is drinking its drop of quivering dew. The leaves feel the cold, and are moving to and fro in the morning air. Under the leaves the unseen birds are singing—it sounds as if the flowers were singing their morning prayer. Amoretti with butterfly wings are perching on the meadow, and set the tall grasses swaying.

"We can see nothing, but the landscape is there, all-perfect, behind the translucent gauze of mist which rises—rises—rises, inhaled by the sun, and, as it rises, discloses the river silver-scaled, the meads, the trees, the cottages, the vanishing distance. We can distinguish now all that we divined before. Bam! the sun is risen. Bam! a peasant crosses the field, and a cart and oxen. Ding! Ding! says the bell of the ram who leads the flock of sheep. Bam! All things break forth into a glistening and glittering and shining in a full

flood of light, of pale, caressing light. . . . It is adorable! And I paint—and I paint. . . . Boum! Boum! The sun grows hot—the flowers droop—the birds are silent. Let us go home! We can see too much now."

Mark that last sentence, will you?—and the opening of the next paragraph, in which he describes evening:

"Bam! Bam! The sun is setting now in an explosion of orange, of cherry, of purple. Ah, that is pretentious and vulgar—I don't like that; I shall wait, and so will the patient, thirsty flowers, who know that the sylphs of evening are presently coming to sprinkle them with vapors of dew from their invisible arrosirs; and, at last, with a final Boum! of purple and gold the sun sinks out of sight. Good Lord! how beautiful it is! The sun has disappeared, and in the softened sky has only left behind a gauzy, vaporous

tint of the palest lemon, which melts and blends into the deep blue of the night, through all the tones of deepening green, of pallid turquoise, of inconceivable fineness, of a delicacy fluid and inappreciable.

"We can see it no more; we feel that it is all still there, while the fresh evening breeze is sobbing through the foliage, and the birds—



Dance of the Nymphs.

(From a painting by Corot.)

tectural subjects, with a landscape background, his canvases usually being very small, with every detail minutely worked out. In 1834 he went again to Italy, and this time spent some months in Venice studying the wonderful lights and shadows of the city of the waters. In the meantime he had begun exhibiting his pictures in the Paris Salon, and

watches and waits.

"There is not much to be seen at first.

"Nature is behind a white veil, on which some masses of form are vaguely indicated. Everything smells sweet. Everything trembles under the invigorating breezes of the dawn.

"Bing! The sun is becoming clear and begins to rend the veil of