

[For the CANADIAN ILLUSTRATED NEWS.]

A GREAT PAINTER.

Imagine a robust peasant whose gestures and words are full of the flavor of youth; place on his white and abundant hair one of those maroon birettas with which Hans Holbein capped his portraits; throw a workman's blouse over his solid shoulders; illumine his honest face with a candid smile; hook to his lips a briar-root pipe, and charge his bronzed hands with a palette and a dozen of brushes, and you have Corot.

No life was ever better filled. He worked always and everywhere. An early riser, like all those who go to bed betimes, he seized his pencils at the dawn and laid them aside only at nightfall. The coming of darkness always annoyed him, but he would say gaily:

"Well, well, the good God is putting out my lamp."

He then sorted his colors, doffed his blouse, and retired to a copious dinner, for, during the whole day, he had taken only a dish of soup, gorged with bread and floating with vegetables which the good Adèle, his housekeeper, served up to him regularly at eleven o'clock, on a little table, in a corner of his studio.

His last spoonful was scarcely swallowed when he returned to his work. He always sang while he painted. When he had reached the accessories of his landscape, he rose, studied his canvas, and took his final determination. He had seen by what details he should complete his work. He then sat down again before his easel, and humming, planted here and there the touches necessary to the general effect.

His remarks and experiences were very original. He would say:

"People are astonished that painters can spread upon a canvas which they almost touch with their noses, colors whose ensemble viewed at a distance produce such and such an effect. This is the result of experience. When one begins to paint, he daubs, and then he stands off from his easel to judge of the pell-mell at a distance. Then he returns to place other tones upon it, goes back, returns again until the work is finished. My first attempts thus cost me a walk of one hundred and fifty miles each. Later,



COROT, THE GREAT LANDSCAPE PAINTER.

with the aid of habit, I reduced my walks. Now my hand is so sure that I could name many of my paintings which I did not inspect until they were signed, framed and sold."

This great man who has been justly styled the first of modern landscapists, was especially remarkable for the vagueness and ideality of his sketches. He felt and reproduced the poetry of nature. On this subject, he used to say:

"In my youth, I was always furious when, wishing to paint a sky, I saw the clouds moving. Stop, I cried to them as Joshua said to the sun. But the clouds would go on sailing through the azure, changing color and form and mocking me with their metamorphoses. I have since learned a lesson from nature. An immoveable sky is no sky at all. The talent of the painter consists precisely in rendering the changeable tints and the majestic movement of those vast luminous or murky masses which float through space, before the breath of the wind. I am delighted when a connoisseur tells me, looking at my canvas: 'your clouds run well.'"

Corot adored the country. Fontainebleau had his sympathies, but he spent the greater part of the fine season at Coubron, near Drancy. The parish priest of the village was his best friend, they dined almost every evening together, and the master, who was an intrepid drinker, used to joke pleasantly at the sobriety of the abbé. He always returned to Paris from these excursions with his portfolio full of studies, out of which he produced those magnificent works which have made him immortal. He lived to the age of seventy-nine, painting to the last, and his last canvases are his chief masterpieces.

A few weeks before his death, which took place last February, he underwent an operation for cancer in the stomach, but his powerful constitution was undermined. Through the open window at his bedside, he looked up and said:

"I see a sky full of roses."

But he was destined not to paint them. His agony was long and painful. He continually agitated his right thumb after the manner of painters who wish to indicate the dominant points of their pictures. And it must be observed that Corot painted with his thumb. He used it as a flat knife to spread out tones on his canvas and to extinguish notes that were too vigorous. A few minutes before his death, he tossed somewhat on his mahogany bed, turned his face to the wall, fixedly gazed on the golden medal of honor which had been awarded him by his European colleagues, and gathering the fingers of his right hand into a sheaf, as if they were holding the brush, he made the sign of the painter. The nun who was attending him approached to see if he still breathed. Corot was dead.

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COROT AT WORK IN HIS STUDIO.