

FRENCH POETS OF TO-DAY.

II.

FRANÇOIS COPPÉE.

François Coppée was born in Paris in 1843. He has published successively: "Le Reliquaire" (1866); "Les Intimités" (1868); "Les Poèmes Modernes" (1869); "Les Humbles" (1871); "Le Cahier Rouge" (1874); "Olivier" (1876); "L'Exilée" (1877); "Le Passant," a comedy in verse, performed at the Odéon; "Les Deux Douleurs," at the Comédie Française; "L'Abandonnée," at the Gymnase; "Le Petit Marquis," at the Odéon, the latter piece being a comedy in prose, written in conjunction with M. Armand d'Artois. Also, two grand dramas in verse, "La Guerre de Cent Ans," and "Le Psautier," and "L'Idylle pendant le Siège," a romance in prose. [Also this year (1879), "Les Récits et les Élégies."]

The poet became celebrated when quite young, and suddenly. "Le Passant," a delightful poetic dialogue, given at the Odéon, excited general enthusiasm, and the public has ever since looked with favor upon François Coppée. It is not without a certain pride that I record this fact, for I witnessed the earliest unfoldings of this young talent, and perhaps exercised some influence over them. The following reminiscences may justify the present assertion.

It was in the earlier days of our group (some of us were already partially known to the poetical public)—that I received, one morning, a copy of verses entitled "Les Fleurs Mortelles," enclosed in an envelope. Before perusing them I noted two points: the verses were written in a remarkably fair hand, and they were unsigned. I read and found them charming. True, they showed some inexperience and a tendency to the elegiac, which was altogether antipathetic to me; but their freshness of idea, aptness and novelty of imagery, and their felicity of expression, evinced clearly a vocation to the Muse which needed only determined application to develop into a true and pure gift. I read the poem to my friends the same evening; it was generally approved of, and each of us set about discovering the author. Various suppositions were made, and discussed with animation. There was in fact only one present who did not join in it, a young man who had but recently been admitted into our circle, introduced by the Hungarian poet, Emmanuel Glaser. One easily divined a rare and delicate intelligence from the clean-cut features, the refined smile, and the thoughtful air, tinged perhaps with sadness, of the newcomer; but as he talked seldom on the subject of poetry, we were far from guessing him a poet; and all we knew of him consisted in the facts that he was twenty-four years of age, and held a position in the "Ministère des Finances." Rising, however, he took me aside, and with some embarrassment confessed himself the author of "Les Fleurs Mortelles." "C'est moi, mais je vous prie de ne pas le dire!" As my name was easily supposed, I did precisely the contrary, and the new poet was warmly acclaimed.

The next day he set himself courageously to work at my side. What was wanting in his talent he had not hesitated to tell him, and he knew it already; he was born a poet, but he had yet to become an artist. Endowed with a firm will and rare instinct, he made rapid progress; all the principles of modern art, with science of composition and form, were acquired in the space of a few weeks; and he who had condescended to be my pupil became at once my master!

This anecdote was perhaps unnecessary here, but, under the influence of a gratitude which friendship exaggerates, François Coppée frequently dwells upon these reminiscences himself and would have regretted its omission.

"Le Reliquaire" appeared. Nothing is more delicious than the short pieces of this collection—somewhat sad, at times perhaps morbid, but always characterized by a tenderness of thought and expression which penetrates and dwells in the heart. Let us take at random the following as a specimen:

THE GRANDAMS.

(Les Aïeules.)

Empty the village is in late July.
For livid clouds already sometime since
Brought threat of storm up-brewing in the west,
And fears for harvest to the husbandman.
So now 'tis harvest time, and vintage soon,
The scythes are sharpened and the barns clean swept,
And reapers meeting joyously at dawn
Go forth to gala days among the grain.

Now all this while the grandams left behind
Sit in the sunshine at the village doors,
A staff supporting hands and quivering chin,
For labor crippled them long years ago.
In homely skirt of fustian, with large white
Sun-bonnet, and a kerchief gaudy yet
With some old battle scene, they sit all day
Upon a bench, content with never a word
Or thought, perhaps, unless the quiet smile
Conveys mute benediction to the sun
That glides the old church-tower, and makes so ripe
The ears of even their sons have gone to reap.

Ah! 'tis the best-loved time with these old dames!
The freshest stories of long winter eves
Source suit them now. The grandire, their good man,
Is dead, and one gets lonely being old.
The daughter cannot leave her washing tub,
The son-in-law is busy at the vine.
'Tis forlorn, true; and yet not all so bad
In summer when the bright sun warms you well.

Not long ago they had the child to rock,
And the old hearts of country talks bent slow
And time them with the cradle's easy pace.
But now the babes are grown; the youngest birds
Have tried their wings, and want such cares no more.
So the old dames, children again themselves,
Have lost their second childhood's pastime now.

They might have turned the spinning-wheel, but Time
Over their faded eyes has drawn a veil,
And their thin fingers weary of the thread;
For those same hands of theirs, now blanched with age,
Have all too often urged the distaff on,
Making the last and garment, fair and white,
For loved ones whom they buried long ago.
Yet not long poverty, the death of flocks,
The eldest son made conscript; not the year
Of dreadful famine following scanty crops,
Nor thanksless tasks no more murmuringly done;
Not even the fretting when the eldest girl
In service far away forgot to write,
With thousand woes that make poor mothers weep
Silently in the night; not even the sign
From heaven when God's own lightning struck the mill;
Nor now that voice that speaks from all the past
In yonder quiet ground against the church,
Where between schools the children played with flowers
Twined around many a well-known cross of wood—
Not one nor all of these ere shook their faith
Nor turned their Christian and heroic hearts.

And now their hearts' own time is come for rest;
And nothing seems more pleasant than to sit
In summer on a stone bench in the sun,
Watching with quiet joy the waterfowl,
Blue heads and green heads, splashing about the slits,
Catching a snatch of singing now and then.
From busy scenes around the washing-tub,
Counting the wagon horses come to drink,
Their child-like smile and tremulous white brows
Speak candor and content, as though past griefs
Vex them no more, and they have pardoned all.
And had that 'tis enough to have at length,
After all else for ever put away,
For only solace of their fourscore years,
The kindly sun, ever the peasant's friend.

Very shortly after "Le Reliquaire," François Coppée published "Les Intimités," tender and subtle settings of Parisian love, redolent of the *boudoir*, and in which the simplest wood flowers exchange their fragrance for the clinging kiss of lips. It may be affirmed that pages more voluptuous were never written, while versification was in them brought to a perfection astonishing to the ablest handlers of rhythm and rhyme. To this *recueil* others diverse in character and qualities succeeded, full of such as "L'Attente," or that powerfully-wrought poem, "La Bénédiction," one of the most robust narratives I know of; and at the present moment the reputation of François Coppée, popularized by theatrical successes, is one of the most solidly established in modern literature.

I may not, however, ignore the reproach frequently urged against our illustrious comrade by criticism which is perhaps somewhat cynical. The author of "Le Passant" is accused of condescending too readily, especially of late, to the common tastes, as by a sort of gratitude for the popular success which he has so constantly enjoyed; and some persons go so far as to insinuate that François Coppée was always in reality a *bourgeois* poet, whom the influence and example of friends induced for a time to seek certain elevations of thought and manner, and who, simply, and without malice aforethought, returns into his natural self, the moment he is left alone, with the superadded confidence gained by success. In this there is both injustice and error. Beyond a doubt, François Coppée committed a mistake when he depicted *le blanc*, whether resort to *l'ourlouveau* and his *purse*, a episode too redolent of Paul de Kock; in the lovely poem, "L'Angelus," two or three vulgar details occur; in "Les Humbles" we must deprecate such pieces as "La Nourrice," and, above all, "Le Petit Epicier de Montreuil," however the author's keen observation and constant care for dignity and form may be urged in their favor. Incontestably there are some pages which we could well spare from the work of François Coppée; but why judge the whole by these? Are they, after all, so frequent, and are they not simply compensated for by so many other compensations which are irrefragable? If, indeed, we blame some of the "dizains" as a little too realistic, we cannot but accept the greater number of them as pure *chefs-d'œuvre*, in which familiarity is exquisitely allied with poetry. Judge for instance of this one:—

Sometimes beside my fire I sit and brood
On a bird dying somewhere in the wood.
The long sad days of dismal winter through
The nest hang empty, desolate nests whence flew
The birds last year; winds rock them to and fro.
Ah, how the birds must die in the winter snow!
And yet, when time of violets comes round,
Their delicate corpses will not strew the ground.
Where we may run beneath the April sky.
Say, do the birds, then, hide themselves to die?

It seems but yesterday that François Coppée published "L'Exilée," those delicious love-liters, of which the two following are not by any means the sweetest.

I. THE THREE BIRDS.

I said to the dove, Thou canst fly above me,
Go where the corn-fields are;
And find me the flower that will make her love me:
The dove said—"Tis too far.

I said to the eagle, Heavens! I before thee,
Help me to win her and die;
Go fetch me the fire of Jove, I implore thee:
The eagle said—"Tis too high.

I said to the vulture, Tear out and devour
Or love in my heart: to lone fate
Leave only what has escaped her power:
The vulture said—"Tis too late.

II. THE THREE WISHES.

Blushing, I see her finger,
I see her smile as of old;
Make for the loved one's finger
A beautiful ring of gold!

All's over. Still I shall find her:
I wait and scarce repine;
For all that she left behind her
Make me a silver shrine!

Nay, but life grows too dreary,
Heavy the heart and head;
O exile! I am weary:
Make me a coffin of lead!

Finally, "Les Récits Épiques," lofty inspiration and powerful of treatment, are fresh in our recollection. Space is limited, and I can, therefore, only quote one of these poems, and that not the finest, but the shortest:

THE JUDGMENT OF THE SWORD.

When iron-browed Guntz returned from Palestine,
Lying one night awake beside his wife
Hilda, Sueno's daughter, in her dream
Low muttering, he heard her speak a name,
A man's name, his whose lands adjoined his own.
Jealousy seized him; he believed her false,
And, taking down his sword, half drew the blade.
But lo! the candor of that sleeping face,
Half-hid in wealth of chestnut hair, and lit
By lingering fond looks of the moon, arrests
His hand; he hesitates, and now, rough lord
Though he is, feels love a moment more than honor.
Yet sure was Guntz his ear had heard aright.
Then Guntz took counsel of his sword—that sword
His fathers banded down inviolable,
He set it up, half asked as it was,
Before the crucifix, and then he spake:

"O sword, my sword, trusty Afton,
Relinquish in the blood of Sueno's
So lately, speak! resolve me now! My wife
Low muttering to her dream pronounced a name
His name whose lands are joined unto my own:
I fear her false, but yet I am not sure.
Resolve me now; I know that treachery
Aye found thee fatal, and my line's fair fame
I trust in thee, since thou hast kept it fair.
Judge now my wife! thy clear keen look of steel
Alone shall read her innocent or false;
I know thou wouldst not have me lie beside
One among womanhood less true than thou;
Whether I strike her now, or strike her not,
Judge, therefore, thou!"

Then, true and sore, the sword,
Knowing that, though her heart had suffered fatal,
Hilda had never shined the dream of sin
With him whose name she muttered in her dream—
Then generous, yes, and yet as ever true,
Not still that the warrior should smile,
Like an assassin, sharply, of itself
The sword of Guntz slid back into the sheath.

A WONDERFUL CLOCK.

THE CURIOUS MACHINE THAT A MAN HAS BEEN WORKING ON FOR SEVENTEEN YEARS.

For the past seventeen years a gentleman of Altoona, Pa., has been engaged in the construction of a curious clock, which he expects to have completed by the first of January next. A representative of the *Call* accidentally came across it the other day, and was kindly given the following description of it by the inventor, who exacted a promise that his name should not be given to the public at the present time:

It consists of sixty-five automatic figures and workmen. The base represents a hill of stone upon which is a large structure. To the left is a beer garden with beer on draught, which one figure occasionally draws and passes to another near by.

Two more figures—a lady and a gentleman—are seated beneath a tree in the attitude of lovers. The lady is reading, and at intervals turns her head toward her companion as if for his approval.

The next representation is of an old-fashioned lined-up mill. Here are workmen engaged in the various parts of the business. One carries a large vessel and empties it into the hoppers to be pressed by the stampers. On the outside is a carpenter, hatchet in hand, who attends a ladder in a perfectly natural manner, stopping when halfway up, as if to look over the mill to see that all is right.

Adjoining this is a blacksmith shop, in the background of which are workmen heating iron, who change the piece after allowing it to heat. A man is also engaged in shoeing a horse, and strikes his first blows gently; he gradually increases them until the last is a strong one, calculated to drive the nail home. Another is at the anvil, and occasionally rests when his wife brings him some refreshments.

A fountain plays near by, and in a small summer-house where a professor is reading, and when he becomes excited over some passage, raises his hand and brings it down upon the page in an excited and emphatic manner. Below is a workman engaged in splitting stone. He strikes repeated blows upon a wedge until the stone cracks, falls away, and then replaces itself. Above the blacksmith shop is a sawmill where a log is being sawed. When the end is reached the boards are taken away and the flame replaced.

Still above this is a shoe factory, where a half dozen men and women are engaged in the different duties requisite for the manufacture of shoes. One is waxing, another cutting out, another pegging, another sewing, and still another beveling.

Over the lined-up mill is the grist mill. In front is a miller dressing a stone; another comes out of the room and empties a large vessel into the hopper. As the flour is ground and the bags accumulate a man carries them away. A large elevator bucket carries up the wheat and dumps it into a bin, making but one ascent to the before-mentioned man's two. To the left is a dwelling-house; in the kitchen a servant is at work, who passes about inside and out to attend to her duties. Upon the top is the residence of the owner of the respective mills. Here visitors occasionally call, with whom the mistress shakes hands and talks about her neighbors. The clock proper crowns the whole structure. It is in all about five feet in length and four feet high. Each figure has a different motion, and some have two motions, requiring very complex machinery to run the whole. Two buckets of water furnish an unending supply of power, as it is used over and over again. The saw and grist mill are run by this water falling on an

overshot wheel. Thence the water falls on another wheel which runs the lined mill. The water and all is kept in motion by an eighty-nine-and-a-half-pound weight. It is truly a work of art, and over seventeen years were occupied in its construction.

EMIGRATION TO CANADA.

THE LONDON "TIMES" URGES EMIGRANTS TO GO TO THE DOMINION—BRITISHERS SHOULD NOT RENOUNCE THEIR BIRTHRIGHT.

The London *Times*, of Oct. 24th, editorially says:

It is unquestionable that the facility for acquiring land in the United States has been the main reason why our agriculturists have gone thither. The same reason will continue to be potential in the cases of any who may now think of improving their condition by a change of country and of nationality. Liberal though the provisions of the United States' Homestead Act are, yet they involve on the part of our countrymen who profit by them a renunciation of their birthright as citizens of the British Empire. This is a sacrifice even more keenly felt by most of them than the severance from the place of their birth and beginning life anew in a strange land. This consideration has induced many emigrants to prefer the long voyage to New Zealand or one of the Australian Colonies to the far shorter trip across the Atlantic. The Dominion of Canada has always invited immigrants, but, till recently, that splendid country had nothing to offer which could rival the prairie States of the Far West. All this is changed, however, and the emigrant can now find in Canada as great inducements to settle there as Minnesota, or any other State in the Union, can offer. The Canadians, if more scrupulous, are less energetic in advertising their country than the citizens of the North American Republic. Continuous with Minnesota is the Province of Manitoba. All that Mr. Andrews has said in praise of the former may be truthfully repeated with regard to the latter. The area of Manitoba is but small in comparison with that of some Western States; yet it is twice as large as Massachusetts, and it can support many millions of people and furnish a large surplus of grain for exportation. Yet Manitoba is but a single Province in a territory which is open and ready for settlement—a territory covering 380,000 square miles, exceeding in extent France and Germany combined, and equal in fertility to any corresponding tract on the globe. In the Canadian North-West there is a Homestead Act under which the settler is treated still more generously than in the United States. He pays but \$10 for his title to the 160 acres which are granted to him on condition that he resides there three years, and he can obtain another piece of equal area on paying \$1 an acre. At the period of obtaining the land absolutely, he must be a British subject by birth or naturalization; this provision is one which gives the immigrants from the old country no concern. We do not advocate any measure of wholesale emigration, because we entertain the confident expectation that brighter days are in store for the suffering agriculturists in this country. The present crisis will pass away, as other times of trial have done, and will leave behind it some profitable if bitter and trying lessons. Yet our fellow-countrymen who are discontented with their lot, who have a practical knowledge of farming, who possess a little capital, and who are resolved to emigrate, will do well to inquire whether the prairie lands of Canada are not superior in some respects to those of the United States.

THE EMMA ABBOTT OPERA COMPANY.

As was to be anticipated, Mr. De Zouche's enterprise has so far between rewarded him with the success it so well deserved. Our going to press merely allows us to notice the first performance of this first class company. On Monday night, Victor Massé's "Paul et Virginie" was given before an audience distinguished equally for intelligence and social position, and the warmth of its reception betokened the high favor in which the artist's efforts were held. It may be taken for granted that the theme of the work is familiar to everybody, for the story was adapted in every tongue at once, and the original became a text-book in the English and other European French classes.

There are three grand tests in the opera for "Virginia," all of which she passed with emphatic success, the "Forgive, I pray," in the second act, displaying the expressive qualities of Miss Abbott's voice, and a passionate fervor which indicate the most exquisite sensibility and depth of feeling; the devotional and intensely sympathetic *leur motif*, "By the air that I breathe," and the "Bird Song." The last of these is exceedingly florid and intricate, and its successful accomplishment brought down the house with a burst of applause, which was repeated with equal energy after the *encore* in which it resulted. Indeed, Miss Abbott's performance both in point of dramatic power and vocal execution, was in the highest degree gratifying. She was exceedingly fortunate in the support rendered by Mrs. Seguin, Mr. Tom Karl and Mr. Ellis Ryse. It would be superfluous to say that Mrs. Seguin sang exquisitely, that her tones were rich, and that as a dramatic artist she was entirely equal to the rôle of "Mélisande." Mr. Karl's voice and action have both developed extraordinarily.