

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY SCHOOL IN ART.

So much has been said and written of Turner and his influence upon English painters, that the following notice of Constable and his followers, prepared from an article in the *Nineteenth Century*, ought—in connection with the progress of art in Canada, so ably treated of lately by Lord Lansdowne, in his speeches at Montreal, on the opening of the Royal Canadian Academy, and in Toronto, at the distribution of prizes at the Art School,—to be of great interest to all those who are not such ardent disciples and admirers of Turner as Mr. Ruskin would wish them.

THE present fashion of pitting one century against another may be as fairly followed in art as in literature. From the early struggles into freedom of the Florentines and Siennese down to the confident facility of our own time, each century has had its characteristic movement; of this the centre has been now in Italy, now in the Low Countries, now mainly in France and England. The interest of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries is chiefly historical; of the early sixteenth, ideal; of the seventeenth, in Holland, descriptive, showing a record of human life and habits; of the eighteenth, under the guidance of France, reproductive of the past; the nineteenth century is scientific and analytic of the elements of natural beauty. The ideality of the early Italians and the humanity of the Dutchmen require no advocate; but the curiosity of the nineteenth century, in France and England, can scarcely be put on the same level with these other inspirations. Looking down from the height of over eighty years of the last hundred, it is clear that in the youth of the present century a new aim appeared in art; until then all painting had been more or less constructive. From the Madonnas of Duccio and Cimabue down to the landscapes of Claude, and his English and French disciples, a balance based on symmetry had never been absent long. Even in the freest of the Dutchmen this decorative idea, this regard for something outside the frame which harmonised with something within, was never absent. The aim of Ruysdael, Hobbema, and Van de Velds, was not to search for truth, and record it, but to take facts in their breadth, and out of them create a whole, which should have the unity of a Doric column. They had no belief, and none who lived up to their time, had either, in the unity of truth. In their view, tints, forms, natural arrangements, had to be profoundly modified before they could be fit for art. Of all landscape painters, Jacob Ruysdael was, no doubt, the *purest* artist, without the human sympathies which have made Hobbema, Cuyp, and Claude so popular in England. He had a finer instinct than any of them for those effects of nature which could be welded into unity. In his best pictures we find—and it is very rare—an active knowledge of what paint could *not* do. His conceptions are based on the obvious features of his own world. There is little in them that indicates research; but they are well arranged and complete: nothing can be taken from or added to them with impunity. His inspiration was rather from within than from without; he was content; he never wanted to learn; he beheld Nature without a spark of the true modern fire of curiosity being kindled within him, and he did not pry too closely into her secrets. In his works there is none of the variety of a modern landscape painter; his whole range might be displayed in two or three pictures.

In all this Ruysdael was true to the time in which he lived; so much of the character of his art is given, because the late Eugene Fromentin traces the great French school of landscape—the school of Rousseau and Corot and Diaz—to his example, though there is an essential difference between his work and theirs. With Ruysdael, landscape was a half-unconscious outlet for deep and narrow feelings; while Rousseau and his French brethren were intensely conscious. Their attitude was objective rather than subjective, rather external than internal; they went to Nature for knowledge rather than sympathy, watching every change in the sky, every characteristic mood of light, every form and tint in tree or hill. Rousseau especially, instead of being content to reduce a favourite effect to its simplest expression, and to repeat that again and again, studied Nature in all shapes and seasons. He discovered a thousand unpublished beauties; his store of sympathies was immense.

Looking back on the first bloom of modern painting in the sixteenth century, Italy, we observe, was influenced by the intellectual progress of the day, by the authors, poets, sculptors, and architects of the Renaissance. It will be seen in the present day, that art is affected in a similar way by literature and science, and the distinctive spirit of the whole is curiosity, a new-born readiness to be content with research, to collect materials, to lay foundations, and, in art, to believe, more than ever before, that what is, is beautiful; in other words, a realistic spirit is abroad.

The progenitors, or at least the forerunners, of the new movement were a poet and a painter—Wordsworth, born in 1770, and Constable, in 1776. Each in his own way set the example afterwards followed by Darwin, viz.: they trusted to Nature. They went to the fields and the hillsides, not to adapt the view to ideas already formed, but to take what they found there, selecting, of course, those facts that their art could grasp and reproduce, caring for no tradition, and turning a deaf ear both to praise and blame. Constable did not intend that art should be imitative, or that to sit down in a field, and copy all one found there, would make a picture. He meant that landscape should be true, as a novel is true; that a painter's fame should depend upon his treatment of his subject, and the impression it was capable of producing upon the observer.

Constable, apart from the glory that belongs to him as an originator, stands in the very front rank of artists. His pictures have a repose almost as profound as Ruysdael's. During the last year, this celebrated artist could be well studied in London. The famous "Hay Wain" was presented to the National Gallery by Mr. Henry Vaughan, being in the

same room as the "Cornfield," and the "Valley Farm." At South Kensington, there are six examples in the Permanent Collection, two of which are among his finest works. All these pictures, except the "Valley Farm," were painted between 1810 and 1831. In England, in those years, landscape of another kind flourished in the hands of Turner, the painter of Norwich, and the growing school of masters in water colours. In France, it was practically non-existent. Corot, the first born of the great men, was twenty years younger than Constable, and came late to maturity. The only Frenchman who painted landscapes with some original power in the earlier years of the century was Georges Michel, and he was so little known, even in his native Paris, that men believed him dead twenty years before he actually laid down his brush. Corot was born in 1796; Camille Hers, in 1802; Jules Dupré, in 1809; Diaz, also in 1809; Rousseau, in 1812; Troyon in 1813; Millet, in 1816; so that in the year 1825, when one of Constable's pictures won a gold medal at the Salon, and another a similar prize at Lille, the oldest of the great Frenchmen was under thirty, and the youngest not yet ten. The sensation the English canvasses made was great. Critics abused them, painters understood them, and in a day they gave their author a fame in France scarcely less wide and secure than two generations have built for him in England.

Of those who confessed their debt to Constable, Rousseau was by far the greatest. As an artist, pure and simple, he was inferior to him; his pictures, as a rule, are without the Englishman's unity. As a colourist (in the abstract) he was, however, at least as good as Constable; while in the difficult art of modelling landscape he had no rival. We can walk under and about his trees, down his lanes, over the brow of his hills, with a sense of ease and space. Rousseau is the most thorough of landscape painters; a botanist can enjoy himself in his entangled underwoods.

Dupré had more sense of unity than Rousseau. His paintings possess more constructive quality, but his colour is often lurid, resembling nothing in nature so much as the light which gleams across a landscape from a break in thunderclouds. His connection with the movement of his time, however, is obvious enough, in spite of the more stately features of his work. Constant Troyon is generally classed among the animal painters; but, like Cuyp, he showed his genius more in the landscape surrounding his cows than in the cows themselves. Like Dupré, he was inclined to become false in colour; but the signs of Nature-study are never absent from his work. Millet, Corot, and Daubigny are divided from these men by their greater subservience to general traditions. They have none of the variety of Rousseau, and little of the simplicity of Constable, Dupré, or Troyon. With Corot and Millet landscape is more of a means to an end than with the rest and in that they are less entirely in the movement of their time; but, so far as they go, their pictures are painted wholly on the modern principle. The facts are gathered under the blue sky, and the decorative idea is never allowed to do harm. With Daubigny, the last and least of the constellation, appear the first sure signs of a new mannerism which is fast reducing landscape in France to a condition not much above that from which Constable and his successors freed it. The men named above were followed by the Impressionists, who, in anything like a complete history of the movement, would occupy the unenviable place of those who kill an idea by stretching it to its utmost capacity. It is curious how little foothold this school has gained on the other side of the channel.

It has been said that, as far as England was concerned, the movement started by Constable came to an end with him. This is only partially true. Correctly speaking, Constable found no immediate followers in his own medium. Even when he died, his name was by no means a household word in his native land, and his works brought but very small prices. Turner and the Claudists held the field. English patrons did not indeed leave Constable to starve as the French did Millet; but they gave little encouragement to others to follow in his steps, and when Constable's career came to a sudden end in 1837, there was but one man in England who applied his principles with sincerity and success, and that was David Cox. Another preventing cause was the influence of Turner. Ideas vary, and may yet vary for years, as to the rank of Turner's own work, but there can be no two opinions as to the injurious example he set. Under his hand paint became unnatural, sensational. It was taken into a sphere for which it was so unfitted that it could only be kept alive there at all by personal genius. All the men, and they were a good deal more numerous than is sometimes thought, who tried to follow the same road came to grief on the way. The true aims of landscape were obscured, so that artists, who otherwise might have been content to go about it in the natural but reserved fashion of Constable exhausted themselves in the attempt to achieve impossibilities. Three things, therefore, combined to neutralise Constable. 1. The fidelity of the upper classes to Claude and the Dutchmen, which deprived the English painter of substantial success in his lifetime. 2. The preference for water colour of the best artists living at Constable's death. 3. The influence of Turner. To these causes may be traced what is a very curious phenomenon in art history, that of a prolific example set in one country (England) and followed mainly in another country (France).

For the full scope of the revolution effected by Constable we must turn to other arts than his own. The most interesting development of the last few years has been the revival of etching. Ever since the time of Rembrandt, of course, artists have etched; but it is only in the last thirty years that the etched line has been used as it was two centuries ago, with a comprehension of its peculiar powers. The immediate honour of the revival belongs, no doubt, to men like Seymour Haden, Meryon, and Whistler; but their work, and especially that of the first named, would have been impossible but for the new standards elevated by Constable.

At the present date the ideas of which the source has been suggested above seem to be gaining in England, and losing in France. On the