

TO

AUGUSTE RODIN

CONTENTS

1. Classic Painting,
 1. Character and origin.
 2. Claude and Poussin.
 3. Lebrun and Lesueur.
 4. Louis Quinze.
 5. Greuze and Chardin.
 6. David, Ingres, and Prudhon.
2. Romantic Painting,
 1. Romanticism.
 2. Géricault and Delacroix.
 3. The Fontainebleau Group.
 4. The Academic Painters.
 5. Couture, Puvis de Chavannes, and Regnault.
3. Realistic Painting,
 1. Realism.
 2. Courbet and Bastien-Lepage.
 3. The Landscape Painters; Fromentin and Guillaumet.
 4. Historical and Portrait Painters.
 5. Baudry, Delaunay, Bonvin, Vollon, Gervex, Duez, Roll, L'Hermitte, Lerolle, Béraud, The Illustrators.
 6. Manet and Monet.
 7. Impressionism; Degas.
 8. The Outlook.
4. Classic Sculpture,
 1. Claux Sluters.
 2. Jean Goujon.
 3. Style.
 4. Clodion, Pradier, and Etex.
 5. Houdon, David d'Angers, and Rude.
 6. Carpeaux and Barye.
5. Academic Sculpture,
 1. Its Italianate Character.
 2. Chapu.
 3. Dubois.
 4. Saint-Marceaux and Mercié.

5. Tyranny of Style.
 6. Falguière, Barrias, Delaplanche, and Le Feuvre.
 7. Frémiet.
 8. The Institute School in General.
6. The New Movement in Sculpture,
 1. Rodin.
 2. Dalou.

I

CLASSIC PAINTING

I

More than that of any other modern people French art is a national expression. It epitomizes very definitely the national æsthetic judgment and feeling, and if its manifestations are even more varied than are elsewhere to be met with, they share a certain character that is very salient. Of almost any French picture or statue of any modern epoch one's first thought is that it is French. The national quite overshadows the personal quality. In the field of the fine arts, as in nearly every other in which the French genius shows itself, the results are evident of an intellectual co-operation which insures the development of a common standard and tends to subordinate idiosyncrasy. The fine arts, as well as every other department of mental activity, reveal the effect of that social instinct which is so much more powerful in France than it is anywhere else, or has ever been elsewhere, except possibly in the case of the Athenian republic. Add to this influence that of the intellectual as distinguished from the sensuous instinct, and one has, I think, the key to this salient characteristic of French art which strikes one so sharply and always as so plainly French. As one walks through the French rooms at the Louvre, through the galleries of the Luxembourg, through the unending rooms of the *Salon* he is impressed by the splendid competence everywhere displayed, the high standard of culture universally attested, by the overwhelming evidence that France stands at the head of the modern world æsthetically—but not less, I think, does one feel the absence of imagination, opportunity, of spirituality, of poetry in a word. The French themselves feel something of this. At the great Exposition of 1889 no pictures were so much admired by them as the English, in which appeared, even to an excessive degree, just the qualities in which French art is lacking, and which less than those of any other school showed traces of the now all but universal influence of French art. The most distinct and durable impression left by any exhibition of French pictures is that the French æsthetic genius is at once admirably artistic and extremely little poetic.

It is a corollary of the predominance of the intellectual over the sensuous instinct that the true should be preferred to the beautiful, and some French critics are so far from denying this preference of French art that they express pride in it, and, indeed, defend it in a way that makes one feel slightly amateurish and fanciful in thinking of beauty apart from truth. A walk through the Louvre, however, suffices to restore one's confidence in his own convictions. The French rooms, at least until modern periods are reached, are a demonstration that in the sphere of æsthetics science does not produce the greatest artists—that something other than intelligent interest and technical accomplishment are requisite to that end, and that system is fatal to spontaneity. M. Eugène Véron is the mouth-piece of his countrymen in asserting absolute beauty to be an abstraction, but the practice of the mass of French painters is, by comparison with that of the great Italians and Dutchmen, eloquent of the lack of poetry that results from a scepticism of abstractions. The French classic painters—and the classic-spirit, in spite of every force that the modern world brings to its destruction, persists wonderfully in France—show little absorption, little delight in their subject. Contrasted with the great names in painting they are eclectic and traditional, too purely expert. They are too cultivated to invent. Selection has taken the place of discovery in their inspiration. They are addicted to the rational and the regulated. Their substance is never sentimental and incommunicable. Their works have a distinctly professional air. They distrust what cannot be expressed; what can only be suggested does not seem to them worth the trouble of trying to conceive. Beside the world of mystery and the wealth of emotion forming an imaginative penumbra around such a design as Raphael's *Vision of Ezekiel*, for instance, Poussin's treatment of essentially the same subject is a diagram.

On the other hand, qualities intimately associated with these defects are quite as noticeable in the old French rooms of the Louvre. Clearness, compactness, measure, and balance are evident in nearly every canvas. Everywhere is the air of reserve, of intellectual good-breeding, of avoidance of extravagance. That French painting is at the head of contemporary painting, as far and away incontestably it is, is due to the fact that it alone has kept alive the traditions of art which, elsewhere than in France, have given place to other and

more material ideals. From the first its practitioners have been artists rather than poets, have possessed, that is to say, the constructive rather than the creative, the organizing rather than the imaginative temperament, but they have rarely been perfunctory and never common. French painting in its preference of truth to beauty, of intelligence to the beatific vision, of form to color, in a word, has nevertheless, and perhaps *à fortiori*, always been the expression of ideas. These ideas almost invariably have been expressed in rigorous form—form which at times fringes the lifelessness of symbolism. But even less frequently, I think, than other peoples have the French exhibited in their painting that contentment with painting in itself that is the dry rot of art. With all their addiction to truth and form they have followed this ideal so systematically that they have never suffered it to become mechanical, merely *formal*—as is so often the case elsewhere (in England and among ourselves, everyone will have remarked) in instances where form has been mainly considered and where sentiment happens to be lacking. Even when care for form is so excessive as to imply an absence of character, the form itself is apt to be so distinguished as itself to supply the element of character, and character consequently particularly refined and immaterial. And one quality is always present: elegance is always evidently aimed at and measurably achieved. Native or foreign, real or factitious as the inspiration of French classicism may be, the sense of style and of that perfection of style which we know as elegance is invariably noticeable in its productions. So that, we may say, from Poussin to Puvis de Chavannes, from Clouet to Meissonier, *taste*—a refined and cultivated sense of what is sound, estimable, competent, reserved, satisfactory, up to the mark, and above all, elegant and distinguished—has been at once the arbiter and the stimulus of excellence in French painting. It is this which has made the France of the past three centuries, and especially the France of to-day—as we get farther and farther away from the great art epochs—both in amount and general excellence of artistic activity, comparable only with the Italy of the Renaissance and the Greece of antiquity.

Moreover, it is an error to assume, because form in French painting appeals to us more strikingly than substance, that French painting is lacking in substance. In its perfection form appeals to every

appreciation; it is in art, one may say, the one universal language. But just in proportion as form in a work of art approaches perfection, or universality, just in that proportion does the substance which it clothes, which it expresses, seem unimportant to those to whom this substance is foreign. Some critics have even fancied, for example, that Greek architecture and sculpture—the only Greek art we know anything about—were chiefly concerned with form, and that the ideas behind their perfection of form were very simple and elementary ideas, not at all comparable in complexity and elaborateness with those that confuse and distinguish the modern world. When one comes to French art it is still more difficult for us to realize that the ideas underlying its expression are ideas of import, validity, and attachment. The truth is largely that French ideas are not our ideas; not that the French who—except possibly the ancient Greeks and the modern Germans—of all peoples in the world are, as one may say, addicted to ideas, are lacking in them. Technical excellence is simply the inseparable accompaniment, the outward expression of the kind of æsthetic ideas the French are enamoured of. Their substance is not our substance, but while it is perfectly legitimate for us to criticise their substance it is idle to maintain that they are lacking in substance. If we call a painting by Poussin pure style, a composition of David merely the perfection of convention, one of M. Rochegrosse's dramatic canvasses the rhetoric of technic and that only, we miss something. We miss the idea, the substance, behind these varying expressions. These are not the less real for being foreign to us. They are less spiritual and more material, less poetic and spontaneous, more schooled and traditional than we like to see associated with such adequacy of expression, but they are not for that reason more mechanical. They are ideas and substance that lend themselves to technical expression a thousand times more readily than do ours. They are, in fact, exquisitely adapted to technical expression.

The substance and ideas which we desire fully expressed in color, form, or words are, indeed, very exactly in proportion to our esteem of them, inexpressible. We like hints of the unutterable, suggestions of significance that is mysterious and import that is incalculable. The light that "never was on sea or land" is the illumination we seek. The "Heaven," not the atmosphere that "lies about us" in our mature

age as "in our infancy," is what appeals most strongly to our subordination of the intellect and the senses to the imagination and the soul. Nothing with us very deeply impresses the mind if it does not arouse the emotions. Naturally, thus, we are predisposed insensibly to infer from French articulateness the absence of substance, to assume from the triumphant facility and felicity of French expression a certain insignificance of what is expressed. Inferences and assumptions based on temperament, however, almost invariably have the vice of superficiality, and it takes no very prolonged study of French art for candor and intelligence to perceive that if its substance is weak on the sentimental, the emotional, the poetic, the spiritual side, it is exceptionally strong in rhetorical, artistic, cultivated, æsthetically elevated ideas, as well as in that technical excellence which alone, owing to our own inexpertness, first strikes and longest impresses us.

When we have no ideas to express, in a word, we rarely save our emptiness by any appearance of clever expression. When a Frenchman expresses ideas for which we do not care, with which we are temperamentally out of sympathy, we assume that his expression is equally empty. Matthew Arnold cites a passage from Mr. Palgrave, and comments significantly on it, in this sense. "The style," exclaims Mr. Palgrave, "which has filled London with the dead monotony of Gower or Harley Streets, or the pale commonplace of Belgravia, Tyburnia, and Kensington; which has pierced Paris and Madrid with the feeble frivolities of the Rue Rivoli and the Strada de Toledo." Upon which Arnold observes that "the architecture of the Rue Rivoli expresses show, splendor, pleasure, unworthy things, perhaps, to express alone and for their own sakes, but it expresses them; whereas, the architecture of Gower Street and Belgravia merely expresses the impotence of the architect to express anything."

And in characterizing the turn for poetry in French painting as comparatively inferior, it will be understood at once, I hope, that I am comparing it with the imaginativeness of the great Italians and Dutchmen, and with Rubens and Holbein and Turner, and not asserting the supremacy in elevated sentiment over Claude and Corot, Chardin, and Cazin, of the Royal Academy, or the New York Society of American Artists. And so far as an absolute rather than a comparative standard may be applied in matters so much too vast for

any hope of adequate treatment according to either method, we ought never to forget that in criticising French painting, as well as other things French, we are measuring it by an ideal that now and then we may appreciate better than Frenchmen, but rarely illustrate as well.

II

Furthermore, the qualities and defects of French painting—the predominance in it of national over individual force and distinction, its turn for style, the kind of ideas that inspire its substance, its classic spirit in fine—are explained hardly less by its historic origin than by the character of the French genius itself. French painting really began in connoisseurship, one may say. It arose in appreciation, that faculty in which the French have always been, and still are, unrivalled. Its syntheses were based on elements already in combination. It originated nothing. It was eclectic at the outset. Compared with the slow and suave evolution of Italian art, in whose earliest dawn its borrowed Byzantine painting served as a stimulus and suggestion to original views of natural material rather than as a model for imitation and modification, the painting that sprang into existence, Minerva-like, in full armor, at Fontainebleau under Francis I, was of the essence of artificiality. The court of France was far more splendid than, and equally enlightened with, that of Florence. The monarch felt his title to Mæcenasship as justified as that of the Medici. He created, accordingly, French painting out of hand—I mean, at all events, the French painting that stands at the beginning of the line of the present tradition. He summoned Leonardo, Andrea del Sarto, Rossi, Primaticcio, and founded the famous Fontainebleau school. Of necessity it was Italianate. It had no Giotto, Masaccio, Raphael behind it. Italian was the best art going; French appreciation was educated and keen; its choice between evolution and adoption was inevitable. It was very much in the position in which American appreciation finds itself to-day. Like our own painters, the French artists of the Renaissance found themselves familiar with masterpieces wholly beyond their power to create, and produced by a foreign people who had enjoyed the incomparable advantage of arriving at their artistic apogee through natural

stages of growth, beginning with impulse and culminating in expertness.

The situation had its advantages as well as its drawbacks, certainly. It saved French painting an immense amount of fumbling, of laborious experimentation, of crudity, of failure. But it stamped it with an essential artificiality from which it did not fully recover for over two hundred years, until, insensibly, it had built up its own traditions and gradually brought about its own inherent development. In a word, French painting had an intellectual rather than an emotional origin. Its first practitioners were men of culture rather than of feeling; they were inspired by the artistic, the constructive, the fashioning, rather than the poetic, spirit. And so evident is this inclination in even contemporary French painting—and indeed in all French æsthetic expression—that it cannot be ascribed wholly to the circumstances mentioned. The circumstances themselves need an explanation, and find it in the constitution itself of the French mind, which (owing, doubtless, to other circumstances, but that is extraneous) is fundamentally less imaginative and creative than coordinating and constructive.

Naturally thus, when the Italian influence wore itself out, and the Fontainebleau school gave way to a more purely national art; when France had definitely entered into her Italian heritage and had learned the lessons that Holland and Flanders had to teach her as well; when, in fine, the art of the modern world began, it was an art of grammar, of rhetoric. Certainly up to the time of Géricault painting in general held itself rather pedantically aloof from poetry. Claude, Chardin, what may be called the illustrated *vers de société* of the Louis Quinze painters—of Watteau and Fragonard—even Prudhon, did little to change the prevailing color and tone. Claude's art is, in manner, thoroughly classic. His *personal* influence was perhaps first felt by Corot. He stands by himself, at any rate, quite apart. He was the first thoroughly original French painter, if indeed one may not say he was the first thoroughly original modern painter. He has been assigned to both the French and Italian schools—to the latter by Gallophobist critics, however, through a partisanship which in æsthetic matters is ridiculous; there was in his day no Italian school for him to belong to. The truth is that he passed a large part of his life in Italy and that his landscape is Italianate. But more conspicu-

ously still, it is ideal—ideal in the sense intended by Goethe in saying, "There are no landscapes in nature like those of Claude." There are not, indeed. Nature has been transmuted by Claude's alchemy with lovelier results than any other painter—save always Corot, shall I say?—has ever achieved. Witness the pastorals at Madrid, in the Doria Gallery at Rome, the "Dido and Æneas" at Dresden, the sweet and serene superiority of the National Gallery canvases over the struggling competition manifest in the Turners juxtaposed to them through the unlucky ambition of the great English painter. Mr. Ruskin says that Claude could paint a small wave very well, and acknowledges that he effected a revolution in art, which revolution "consisted mainly in setting the sun in heavens." "Mainly" is delightful, but Claude's excellence consists in his ability to paint visions of loveliness, pictures of pure beauty, not in his skill in observing the drawing of wavelets or his happy thought of painting sunlight. Mr. George Moore observes ironically of Mr. Ruskin that his grotesque depreciation of Mr. Whistler—"the lot of critics" being "to be remembered by what they have failed to understand"—"will survive his finest prose passage." I am not sure about Mr. Whistler. Contemporaries are too near for a perfect critical perspective. But assuredly Mr. Ruskin's failure to perceive Claude's point of view—to perceive that Claude's aim and Stanfield's, say, were quite different; that Claude, in fact, was at the opposite pole from the botanist and the geologist whom Mr. Ruskin's "reverence for nature" would make of every landscape painter—is a failure in appreciation than to have shown which it would be better for him as a critic never to have been born. It seems hardly fanciful to say that the depreciation of Claude by Mr. Ruskin, who is a landscape painter himself, using the medium of words instead of pigments, is, so to speak, professionally unjust.

"Go out, in the springtime, among the meadows that slope from the shores of the Swiss lakes to the roots of their lower mountains. There, mingled with the taller gentians and the white narcissus, the grass grows deep and free; and as you follow the winding mountain paths, beneath arching boughs all veiled and dim with blossom—paths that forever droop and rise over the green banks and mounds sweeping down in scented undulation, steep to the blue water, studded here and there with new-mown heaps, filling the air with

fainter sweetness—look up toward the higher hills, where the waves of everlasting green roll silently into their long inlets among the shadows of the pines."

Claude's landscape is not Swiss, but if it were it would awaken in the beholder a very similar sensation to that aroused in the reader of this famous passage. Claude indeed painted landscape in precisely this way. He was perhaps the first—though priority in such matters is trivial beside pre-eminence—who painted *effects* instead of *things*. Light and air were his material, not ponds and rocks and clouds and trees and stretches of plain and mountain outlines. He first generalized the phenomena of inanimate nature, and in this he remains still unsurpassed. But, superficially, his scheme wore the classic aspect, and neither his contemporaries nor his successors, for over two hundred years, discovered the immense value of his point of view, and the puissant charm of his way of rendering nature.

Poussin, however, was the incarnation of the classic spirit, and perhaps the reason why a disinterested foreigner finds it difficult to appreciate the French estimate of him is that no foreigner, however disinterested, can quite appreciate the French appreciation of the classic spirit in and for itself. But when one listens to expressions of admiration for the one French "old master," as one may call Poussin without invidiousness, it is impossible not to scent chauvinism, as one scents it in the German panegyrics of Goethe, for example. He was a very great painter, beyond doubt. And as there were great men before Agamemnon there have been great painters since Raphael and Titian, even since Rembrandt and Velasquez. He had a strenuous personality, moreover. You know a Poussin at once when you see it. But to find the suggestion of the infinite, the Shakespearian touch in his work seems to demand the imaginativeness of M. Victor Cherbuliez. When Mr. Matthew Arnold ventured to remark to Sainte-Beuve that he could not consider Lamartine as a very important poet, Sainte-Beuve replied: "He was important to us." Many critics, among them one severer than Sainte-Beuve, the late Edmond Scherer, have given excellent reasons for Lamartine's absolute as well as relative importance, and perhaps it is a failure in appreciation on our part that is really responsible for our feeling that Poussin is not quite the great master the French deem him. Assuredly he might justifiably apply to himself the "Et-Ego-in-Arcadia" inscrip-

tion in one of his most famous paintings. And the specific service he performed for French painting and the relative rank he occupies in it ought not to obscure his purely personal qualities, which, if not transcendent, are incontestably elevated and fine.

His qualities, however, are very thoroughly French qualities—poise, rationality, science, the artistic dominating the poetic faculty, and style quite outshining significance and suggestion. He learned all he knew of art, he said, from the Bacchus Torso at Naples. But he was eclectic rather than imitative, and certainly used the material he found in the works of his artistic ancestors as freely and personally as Raphael the frescos of the Baths of Titus, or Donatello the fragments of antique sculpture. From his time on, indeed, French painting dropped its Italian leading-strings. He might often suggest Raphael—and any painter who suggests Raphael inevitably suffers for it—but always with an individual, a native, a French difference, and he is as far removed in spirit and essence from the Fontainebleau school as the French genius itself is from the Italian which presided there. In Poussin, indeed, the French genius first asserts itself in painting. And it asserts itself splendidly in him.

We who ask to be moved as well as impressed, who demand satisfaction of the susceptibility as well as—shall we say rather than?—interest of the intelligence, may feel that for the qualities in which Poussin is lacking those in which he is rich afford no compensation whatever. But I confess that in the presence of even that portion of Poussin's magnificent accomplishment which is spread before one in the Louvre, to wish one's self in the Stanze of the Vatican or in the Sistine Chapel, seems to me an unintelligent sacrifice of one's opportunities.

III

It is a sure mark of narrowness and defective powers of perception to fail to discover the point of view even of what one disesteems. We talk of Poussin, of Louis Quatorze art—as of its revival under David and its continuance in Ingres—of, in general, modern classic art as if it were an art of convention merely; whereas, conventional as it is, its conventionality is—or was, certainly, in the seventeenth century—very far from being pure formulary. It was

genuinely expressive of a certain order of ideas intelligently held, a certain set of principles sincerely believed in, a view of art as positive and genuine as the revolt against the tyrannous system into which it developed. We are simply out of sympathy with its aim, its ideal; perhaps, too, for that most frivolous of all reasons because we have grown tired of it.

But the business of intelligent criticism is to be in touch with everything. "Tout comprendre, c'est tout pardonner," as the French ethical maxim has it, may be modified into the true motto of æsthetic criticism, "Tout comprendre, c'est tout justifier." Of course, by "criticism" one does not mean pedagogy, as so many people constantly imagine, nor does justifying everything include bad drawing. But as Lebrun, for example, is not nowadays held up as a model to young painters, and is not to be accused of bad drawing, why do we so entirely dispense ourselves from comprehending him at all? Lebrun is, perhaps, not a painter of enough personal importance to repay attentive consideration, and historic importance does not greatly concern criticism. But we pass him by on the ground of his conventionality, without remembering that what appears conventional to us was in his case not only sincerity but aggressive enthusiasm. If there ever was a painter who exercised what creative and imaginative faculty he had with an absolute gusto, Lebrun did so. He interested his contemporaries immensely; no painter ever ruled more unrivalled. He fails to interest us because we have another point of view. We believe in our point of view and disbelieve in his as a matter of course; and it would be self-contradictory to say, in the interests of critical catholicity, that in our opinion his may be as sound as our own. But to say that he has no point of view whatever—to say, in general, that modern classic art is perfunctory and mere formulary—is to be guilty of what has always been the inherent vice of protestantism in all fields of mental activity.

Nowhere has protestantism exhibited this defect more palpably than in the course of evolution of schools of painting. Pre-Raphaelitism is perhaps the only exception, and pre-Raphaelitism was a violent and emotional counter-revolution rather than a movement characterized by catholicity of critical appreciation. Literary criticism is certainly full of similar intolerance; though when

Gautier talks about Racine, or Zola about "Mes Haines," or Mr. Howells about Scott, the polemic temper, the temper most opposed to the critical, is very generally recognized. And in spite of their admirable accomplishment in various branches of literature, these writers will never quite recover from the misfortune of having pre-occupied themselves as critics with the defects instead of the qualities of what is classic. Yet the protestantism of the successive schools of painting against the errors of their predecessors has something even more crass about it. Contemporary painters and critics thoroughly alive, and fully in the contemporary æsthetic current, so far from appreciating modern classic art sympathetically, are apt to admire the old masters themselves mainly on technical grounds, and not at all to enter into their general æsthetic attitude. The feeling of contemporary painters and critics (except, of course, historical critics) for Raphael's genius is the opposite of cordial. We are out of touch with the "Disputa," with angels and prophets seated on clouds, with halos and wings, with such inconsistencies as the "Doge praying" in a picture of the marriage of St. Catherine, with the mystic marriage itself. Raphael's grace of line and suave space-filling shapes are mainly what we think of; the rest we call convention. We are become literal and exacting, addicted to the pedantry of the prescriptive, if not of the prosaic.

Take such a picture as M. Edouard Detaille's "Le Rêve," which won him so much applause a few years ago. M. Detaille is an irreproachable realist, and may do what he likes in the way of the materially impossible with impunity. Sleeping soldiers, without a gaiter-button lacking, bivouacking on the ground amid stacked arms whose bayonets would prick; above them in the heavens the clash of contending ghostly armies—wraiths born of the sleepers' dreams. That we are in touch with. No one would object to it except under penalty of being scouted as pitifully literal. Yet the scheme is as thoroughly conventional—that is to say, it is as closely based on hypothesis universally assumed for the moment—as Lebrun's "Triumph of Alexander." The latter is as much a true expression of an ideal as Detaille's picture. It is an ideal now become more conventional, undoubtedly, but it is as clearly an ideal and as clearly genuine. The only point I wish to make is, that Lebrun's painting—Louis Quatorze painting—is not the perfunctory thing we are apt to as-