JEAN FRANÇOIS MILLET

JULIA CARTWRIGHT

Plate I: Jean François Millet, 1846–47

Phot. Braun Clément et Cie.

JEAN FRANÇOIS MILLET

HIS LIFE AND LETTERS

BY

JULIA CARTWRIGHT

(MRS. HENRY ADY)

Author of "Sackarissa," "Madame," "The Pilgrim's Way," etc., etc.

"Il faut pouvoir faire servir le trivial à l'expression du sublime, c'est la la vraie force."
—J. F. MILLET

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PREFACE

THE world moves on so fast and new phases of art succeed each other with such surprising rapidity in the present day, that to many ears the name of Jean François Millet may have a remote and antiquated sound. Only twenty years have passed since the great peasant-painter died. But he has already taken his place among the classics, and the enormous prices that are paid for his works in England and America, as well as in France, prove how fully his genius is now recognised. He stands supreme among his contemporaries as the first painter of humanity who gave expression to modern ideas in noble and enduring form, and whose work will live when the passing fashions and momentary fancies of the day are forgotten.

The life of Millet was partly written by his friend, Alfred Sensier, and completed and published after the author's death by M. Paul Mantz, in the year 1881. Sensier began his work during the painter's lifetime, and his book contains a large number of letters and recollections from Millet's own pen. These, we need hardly say, are of the utmost value and interest. But the book itself has long been out of print, and is chiefly known to English readers by the abridged translation, made by an American writer, which originally appeared in *Scribner's Magazine*, and was afterwards published by Macmillan. Of late years many other important contributions to the subject have been made by French and American writers who were personally acquainted with Millet, and whose recollections reveal him under new and dif-

ferent aspects. As long ago as September, 1876, Mr. Edward Wheelwright published a most interesting account of his intercourse with the Barbizon painter in the *Atlantic Monthly*, and in 1889, another American artist, Mr. Wyatt Eaton, gave the world some valuable recollections of Millet during the last years of his life in the *Century Magazine.* Still more recently, Mr. T. H. Bartlett has published two papers in *Scribner's Magazine* (1890), giving further particulars of the painter's life at Barbizon, and including twenty-seven letters, or fragments of letters, which did not appear in Sensier's book. Many of these are of especial value, and help to explain passages in Millet's career which had been hitherto involved in obscurity. Other letters have appeared in different French, periodicals, and M. Piedagnel has written a charming account of a visit which he paid to Millet in 1864, in his little volume of *Souvenirs de Barbizon.* Two papers on Millet's early life and his later years at Barbizon by the painter's own brother, Pierre Millet, were also published in the *Century Magazine* for January, 1893, and April, 1894.

A monograph on the art of Millet from the pen of the well-known writer, M. Yriarte, appeared in the *Bibliotheque d' Art Moderne* (Paris, 1885), and an admirable essay on the painter has been written by M. Charles Bigot in his *Peintres Français Contemporains* (Paris, 1888). Among English writers who have treated the same subject we may name Mr. David Croal Thomson, whose excellent articles on Millet in the *Magazine of Art* have been reprinted in his book on the "Barbizon School" (1889), and Mr. William Ernest Henley, who has done more than any living writer to make the great French master's work known in this country. His "Early Life of Millet" in the *Cornhill* for 1882 attracted considerable attention at the time, and his biographical introduction to a volume of Twenty-two Woodcuts and Etchings, reproduced in *facsimile* (1881), is one of the ablest

essays that has ever been written on the subject.

The biographical facts and letters which have been collected from these different sources, have been supplemented by a variety of information received from members of his family and personal friends, which helps to fill up the outline and complete the picture. One by one the men and women who were his contemporaries are dropping out, and it becomes the more important to collect these scattered memories before the generation which knew Millet has quite passed away. The smallest details which throw light on the character and genius of such a man are precious, and every incident in his life deserves to be remembered. For in Millet's case the man and the artist were closely bound together, and his art was in a special manner the outcome of his life. Himself a peasant of peasants, he has illustrated the whole cycle of the life of the fields in a series of immortal pictures. "Man goeth forth to his labour until the evening" is the text of all his works. The impressions which he has recorded are those which he received himself, in the days when he laboured with his own hands in the fields of his father's home—the only side of life, he often said, with which he was really familiar. But his theme was new and strange, and because the young Norman artist dared to take an independent line, and paint the subjects which appealed to him, he had to face, not only the prejudices of an ignorant public, but the scorn and hatred of the official world.

We have only to turn back to the journals and periodicals of those days, and study old volumes of *La Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, to see how fierce was the opposition which he had to encounter. His finest masterpieces were rejected by the jury of the Salon, and the pictures which now fetch their thousands were sold for a few pounds to buy bread for his children. But, pitiful as the story is, it is none the less noble and inspiring. His sufferings saddened his days and

shortened the number of his years, but they did not crush his spirit or weaken the message that he had to give. On the whole, we may count him more fortunate than many whose lives have been spent in happier conditions; for he worked in obedience to a deep and unchanging conviction, and clung in his darkest hours with despairing tenacity to the principles for which he had ventured all. "A peasant I was born, and a peasant I will die!" he cried; "I will say what I feel, and paint things as I see them." Apart from his artistic genius, Millet's personality is one of rare charm. He had all the courage and independence of his Norman ancestors, together with their simple faith and goodness. But although a peasant by birth and education, he was a man of remarkable culture. He had read widely, and thought deeply, and was gifted not only with a poetic imagination of the highest order, but with fine literary instincts. His letters are full of grave and pregnant sentences, his conversation surprised men of letters by its terseness and originality. And if the natural melancholy of his nature was deepened by the hardships which he endured, and the persecution to which he was exposed, a deep undercurrent of hope runs alike through his life and through his art. The sense of tears may be felt in all that he ever painted, but it is lightened throughout by the radiance of the divine hope that cheers the poet's dream. He belongs to "the great company of grief," who have stamped their thoughts on the heart of this generation, who learnt in suffering what they taught in song, and who, out of the seeming failures of a short and sorrowful life, have reared the fabric of an art that will live for all time.

J. C.

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PART I

GRÉVILLE

1814 – 1837

"Oh! encore un coup, comme je suis de mon endroit."
—J. F. Millet

I

THE life of Millet falls naturally into three divisions. The first part contains the story of his early youth and education in his native village of Gréville. The second includes the twelve years of his stay in Paris, and training as an artist. The third corresponds with his residence at Barbizon, where he spent the last twenty-six years of his life, and where all his great works were painted. Each period has its peculiar interest and importance. First we see him as the child growing up in his peasant-home, and receiving those impressions which were to last during his whole lifetime. Then we follow him through the struggles of his *Lehr-* and *Wanderjahre*, and watch the painful steps by which he served his apprenticeship to art and life. Finally, we see him go forth as the complete and finished master to give his message to the world. There can be no doubt which is the most attractive part of the story. The days of youth, before we enter on the storm and stress of the battle of life, are naturally pleasant to look back upon. And in Millet's case this part of the story is more than commonly interesting and instructive. For the circumstances of his birth and childhood had a remarkable share in shaping the bent of his genius. To the early influences of his peasant-home, he owed the strength of his character and convictions; and in the country scenes amidst which he was born and bred, he found the inspiration which governed his whole career.

Although after the first eighteen years of his life he was never again at his native place excepting for a short visit, nothing could ever weaken the memory of these first impressions, and to the end of his life he remained the peasant of

Gréville. "Oh! once more, how I belong to my native soil!" he exclaimed, when in 1871, three years before his death, he paid his last visit to Normandy; and no truer word was ever spoken.

Jean François Millet was born on the 4th of October, 1814, at Gruchy, a small hamlet of Gréville, a village ten miles west of Cherbourg, in the department of La Manche, and at the north-west extremity of that narrow strip of coast which runs out into the English Channel to end in the steep headland of La Hague. A wild and rugged coast it is, bristling with granite rocks and needles, and stern and desolate to the sailor's eye as he sails along its perilous shores, but pleasant and fruitful enough inland: a country of rolling down and breezy moorland, where quaint old church-towers of grey stone stand on the hill-tops, and low roofs cluster among the apple-orchards and grass meadows in the sheltered valleys. The whole district has a special interest for Englishmen, as the cradle of some of our older families, and many of these villages, like Gréville itself, still bear the names of the barons who sailed of old with the Conqueror to found a new kingdom on the shores of Britain.

Gruchy itself is a straggling street of houses perched on the top of the cliffs, a few hundred yards from the sea. On one side rise grey boulders clad with bracken, brightened here and there with patches of golden gorse or purple heather, through which we can look down on the waves breaking in foam on the rocky shore below, and catch a glimpse of the mountain sheep cropping the short grass. On the other are orchards and pastures, with oak and elm trees bent into fantastic shapes by the wind, and deep winding lanes with high hedges, such as we see in Kent or Sussex. The house where the painter was born is still standing. It is the last of a row of four houses, built of huge blocks of rough grey stone, and thatched with straw. An old vine with gnarled stem grows up the wall, and on a block of

granite let in over the door we read the words:—

"Ici est né le Peintre Jean François Millet,
le 4 Octobre, 1814."

The house has been divided of late years, but a portion is still occupied by the widow of Millet's younger brother. Little is changed since the painter's days. The quaint old well, with the hive-shaped roof and flight of steps, which figures in more than one of Millet's drawings, is still standing, and the ivy which he begged might be spared when he gave up his share in the old home still grows thickly over the worn, grey stones. The large kitchen within, the wooden dresser and settle and the great open fireplace, are all the same as they were in François' childhood. Upstairs we are shown the room where he was born, and some etchings and early drawings from his hand. Close by is a low wall which he helped to build, and a barn-door on which he roughly scrawled the figure of a grinning devil with a pitchfork. Beyond is the *douet*, or washing-place, where the women of Gruchy still beat their linen with the big, round stones in the pathway. And as we stand at this lonely spot, where briars and ivy grow tangled together over crumbling walls, we can look down across the fields, where the painter sowed and reaped, to the wide stretch of sea and the far horizon which filled his young soul with dreams.

The wild and desolate aspect of the coast has left its stamp upon the people of the district. These bleak moors and rugged cliffs, the abiding presence of the sea, and the frequent shipwrecks on that perilous shore have made them familiar from childhood with thoughts of death, and with the nearness of the unseen world. Even now they are a primitive and God-fearing race; frugal and thrifty in their ways, strong to bear the hardships of their daily lot, and faithful to their ideas of right and wrong. Much more was this the case eighty years ago, when in those troubled days, at the close of Napoleon's wars, Jean François Millet first

saw the light in the old, grey house facing the rising sun at the end of Gruchy street.

Here, after the patriarchal fashion of the place, three generations lived under the same roof. Jean Louis, the painter's father, came of a good old yeoman stock, and united in his person the qualities of two remarkably vigorous peasant races, the Millets of Gréville and the Jumelins of Saint Germain-le-Gaillard, a village in the Vallée Hochet, fifteen or sixteen miles distant. Nicolas Millet, the painter's grandfather, had been dead some fifteen years, but his widow, Louise Jumelin, shared her son's home and brought up his children. Jean Louis himself was a tall, slight man, with soft black eyes, long dark curling hair, and beautiful hands. A singularly refined and gentle soul, his tastes and sympathies were of a distinctly artistic nature, although his life was spent in tilling the fields. He loved music, had a fine voice himself, and taught the village choir so well that people came from all parts of the countryside to hear the singing in Gréville church. For their use he made a collection of simple chants, several of which his son preserved, written, it is said, in a hand worthy of a mediæval scribe. He modelled in clay, carved flowers and animals in wood, and was never tired of studying the forms of trees and plants.

"See how fine these are," he would say to his little son, as they went out to work, taking up a blade or two of grass in his hand. And again, "Look what a tall and well-shaped tree that one is—as beautiful as a flower!" And when they were looking out of the window together, he would say, "Look how well that house lies half buried in the field! It seems to me that it ought to be drawn in this way."

His gentle, thoughtful nature endeared him to all. At his approach rude jests were silenced, and unseemly laughter died away. "Hush!" some one would say, if a coarse joke were made in his presence; "here comes Millet."

One day, as little François stood at his father's side, watching the setting sun sink into the waves, the glory of the scene stirred him to enthusiastic admiration, and he poured out his heart in an ecstasy of childish rapture. Jean Louis took his cap off reverently and said, "My son, it is God." The boy never forgot that word.

Jean Louis had married young by the express wish of his parents, who feared to see their only son torn from his home and forced to serve in the wars of Napoleon. But since newly married men were exempt from military service at that time, and Jean Louis was attached to a well-born maiden in the neighbouring village of Ste. Croix, both families agreed in hurrying on the union of the young people, who were married in 1811. The object of the young man's choice was a fair young girl named Aimée Henriette Adelaïde Fleury du Perron, a member of an old yeoman family, who had known better days. Millet remembered hearing his mother speak of the fine house in which her parents lived, with its massive granite buildings and large courtyard shaded by tall trees. She herself was a simple and devout soul like her husband, whose time and thoughts were divided between her children and the field-work in which she took her share. At the same time, her letters to her son show that she was by no means devoid of intelligence or education, and it is a mistake to suppose, as some writers have done, that she was a mere household drudge. To the end of her life she kept her youthful air and graceful and refined appearance. She was always well dressed, her son Pierre tells us, and had a marked preference for bright colours and gaily-flowered china. Like a good mother she was especially anxious for her children's material welfare, and did her best to keep up the position of the family in the eyes of the world. Millet was tenderly attached to his mother, and has left us a good likeness of this patient and loving woman in his *Cueilleuse d' Haricots*, where Aimée Millet is

seen gathering beans in front of her home at Gruchy.

But it was the grandmother, Louise Jumelin, who played the chief part in Millet's earliest recollections. A woman of strong character and deep feeling, stern in her ideas of duty, but gifted with a boundless capacity for loving, Louise Jumelin was an interesting and striking personality. The members of her family had all of them made their mark in the world. One brother was a monk, another a chemist of some repute in Paris, a third had spent some years as a planter in Guadeloupe, but in Millet's childish recollection, his chief distinction lay in the fact that he had once walked to Paris on foot in two days and nights. Another brother, a miller in the neighbourhood of Gréville, was a great reader, and studied Montaigne and Pascal, the philosophers of the last century, and the writers of Port Royal, during his leisure moments. Her old sister, Bonne, was devoted to the Millet children, and Bonnette, as they called her, remained one of the painter's fondest recollections to his dying day. Louise Jumelin herself had inherited the strong head and warm heart of her family. She had all their religious fervour and no small share of culture. She took the saints as her model and carried out her ideal in every detail of daily life. Nothing would ever induce her to swerve a step from what she held to be right; and if she was in any doubt she went at once, in her simple faith, to consult the village curé. But this mystic vein of piety was blended with an ardent love of natural beauty, and the fire of her zeal for God was tempered with the tenderest human love and pity. "Hers was a beautiful religion," says Millet, "for it gave her strength to love so well and so unselfishly. The saintly woman was always ready to help others, to excuse their faults, to pity and relieve them." And his brother Pierre, who was many years younger, tells us, in his recollections of his grandmother, that her aged face wore an expression of Christian goodness which agreed perfectly with

her character.

Such was the remarkable woman to whom the care of the painter's childhood was entrusted, after the Norman custom, in order that the mother might be left free to work in the fields, and tend the sheep and cattle on her husband's farm. He was the second child, but eldest boy of Jean Louis' family, and his birth was accordingly welcomed with joy by his grandmother, who was proud of her first grandson, and looked on him from the first as her especial property. She it was who held him at the baptismal font and gave him the name of François, after the Saint of Assisi, on whose fête-day he was born—Francis, who called the birds his brothers and sisters, and praised God for the sun and stars and all living creatures. No more fitting patron could have been chosen for the great peasant painter, and no better or holier influence could have watched over his early years than that of this good grandmother. He remembered how she used to rock him in her arms, and sing him to sleep with songs of old Normandy. On bright spring mornings she would rouse him from his slumbers, saying, as she bent over him in her high, white linen cap, "Wake up, my little Francis! The birds have long been singing the glory of our good God." As the boy grew older, she taught him to see the hand of a great and loving Father in all the wonders of sea and shore, and to dread a wrong action more than death itself. And in so doing she laid the foundation of that moral uprightness and simple faith which marked the character of the man. To the end of her life she followed him with her prayers and counsels, and long after she was dead Millet recalled her words and cherished her memory with the tenderest affection.

Another aged relative to whom Millet always said he owed much was his great-uncle, the Abbé Charles Millet, a priest of the diocese of Avranches, who had been forced to hide himself in his brother's house during the Revolution.

He had steadily refused to take the oath to the Constitution, and had in consequence narrowly escaped with his life. When the Reign of Terror was over, he lived on at Gruchy with his brother and nephew, inhabiting a room over the old stone well, opposite the house. He taught Jean Louis to read, and acted by turns as parish priest and field-labourer.

"He might often be seen," writes Sensier, "reading his breviary on the upper pastures overlooking the sea, or else guiding the plough, or carrying blocks of granite to rear walls round the family acres. If he had a furrow to plough, or a garden to hoe, he put his breviary into his pocket, tucked his cassock into his girdle, and went to work with goodwill." But whether at home or abroad little François was the good Abbé's constant companion. He taught the boy to read, and watched over his early years with the most anxious affection. But he died when his great-nephew was only seven years old, and the event made a profound impression on the thoughtful child.

There was yet one other member of the little household at Gruchy who played an important part in François' life. This was his sister Emilie, the eldest of Jean Louis' eight children. She was a girl of sweet and gentle disposition, much beloved by all her family, and especially by her brother François, to whom she bore a marked resemblance. She was the favourite companion of the painter's boyhood, and treasured up stories of his sayings and doings, which she loved to repeat in after years. In her eyes François was always a remarkable child, unlike other children in his ways and thoughts. François, who was eighteen months younger, looked up to Emilie as a cherished elder sister, and made a charming drawing of her sitting at her spinning-wheel, in the white linen cap, homespun skirt, and sabots of the Norman peasant-girl. The affection between the brother and sister lasted to the end of their lives, and survived many years of trial and separation. When in

1866 Emilie, who had become the wife of a neighbouring farmer, named Léfèvre, fell dangerously ill, Millet hastened to Gréville without delay, and has left a touching account of her death in his letters.

Pages 22-116 are not included in this preview.

of human life and the unsatisfied yearnings of the human heart. The sight of the struggling masses of toiling humanity filled him with sympathy; the hardship and monotony of the labourer's daily lot, the patient endurance that comes of long habit, touched his inmost soul. In his eyes this was true humanity and great poetry.

And more than this, he looked on the peasant with the eye not only of the poet but of the artist. He realized from the first the close relation that exists between the familiar sights of every-day life and the noblest works of art; saw that there might be action as heroic, and beauty as true, in the attitude and gesture of a peasant sowing or a woman gleaning as in the immortal forms of Greek sculpture. That natural instinct for beauty of line, that keen appreciation of form which revealed itself in the boy's charcoal-drawing of the old man bent double with age, led him to note every gesture and movement in the people about him, just as it made him find such keen delight in the drawings of Michelangelo. When, in his struggling Paris days, he proposed to make drawings of reapers at work, "in fine attitudes," his friend shrugged his shoulders and shook his head at this strange suggestion. But in the end this was exactly what Millet did, and the world to-day no longer laughs at his *Sower*, or *Gleaners*. He knew, as few masters have ever known, how to put a whole world of thought into an individual action, how to express the lives and character of bygone generations in a single gesture; and with true poetic insight he makes us realize the deeper meaning that lies hidden below the eternal destiny of the human race, the age-long struggle of man with Nature, which will endure while seed-time and harvest, summer and winter, follow each other upon the face of the earth.

The first page in Millet's great epic of labour, the first celebrated picture which he painted at Barbizon, was the *Sower*. Long ago, in the days of his youth at Gréville, he

had sketched the figure of a peasant scattering grain in the furrows as he walks along. That little pen-and-ink drawing, in its few strokes, contains the germ of the future work. The pose and movement of the figure, the measured step, and outstretched arm are there already; the rusty felt hat sunk over the young labourer's brows, the very shape and cut of his clothes, the sack of grain at his side, even the oxen ploughing in the background, are all indicated.

From this slight sketch the artist, after his wont, slowly and painfully evolved his noble work. He has left us several drawings which enable us, step by step, to follow the development of his idea through its successive stages. We see how the figure gradually gained in breadth and vigour, and by degrees acquired that solemn majesty and rhythm, until the homely theme became a grand and sublime poem. All through the winter and spring-time at Barbizon, surrounded as he was by country sights and sounds recalling the old life, he brooded silently over that first impression of his early days. He thought of the serious meaning of the sower's task, of the great issues that hang upon the seed-time, and of the new life that germinates in the grain that he casts abroad to supply the bread of the coming years. He remembered the old custom, still practised in his boyhood, of uttering a few words of prayer, and sowing the first seed in the ground in the form of a cross. And as he meditated over these old memories, the great picture grew into being, and he painted that wonderful form of the Sower, striding with majestic tread across the newly-ploughed field, flinging the precious seed broadcast. Night is falling, the shadows are lengthening over the wind-swept fields, and scarce a gleam in the western sky lights up the winter landscape; but still he goes on his way, careless alike of the coming darkness or of the flocks of hungry crows that follow in his track. In that solitary figure, with his measured tread and superb action, the whole spirit of the peasant's calling

Plate II: Le Semeur, The Sower

Phot. Braun Clément et Cie.

is summed up with a power and concentration of thought worthy of Michelangelo.

The first version of *The Sower*, Sensier tells us, was executed at fiery speed, in the white heat of the painter's glowing imagination. But when he had almost finished the picture, he found to his dismay that the canvas was too short, and would not allow sufficient room for the ground on which the sower's front leg rests. Accordingly he traced the lines of his figure on a larger canvas, and produced an exact replica of the original, which was finished in time to appear at the Salon held in the Palais Royal at the close of 1850. The impression which it made was twofold: on the one hand, the older and more conventional critics declared *The Sower* to be a revolutionary work, plainly conceived on Socialist lines by a painter who wished to protest against the cruel tyranny of the upper classes and the misery of the poor. Some ingenious persons went so far as to see in this "severe arid threatening figure" a Communist, who is flinging handfuls of shot at the sky in open defiance of God and man! On the other hand, it attracted the admiration of all the younger school of artists, and was greatly praised by at least one critic, Théophile Gautier, who recognised its rare merit, and described it in eloquent language as the finest picture of the year.

This *Sower*, exhibited in the Salon of 1850, soon found its way to America, and has for many years been the chief ornament of the Vanderbilt collection. The first and smaller picture is also in the New World and is now the property of Mr. Quincy Shaw, of Boston. In later years Millet made several drawings and pastels of the same subject, which had already acquired a wide popularity. But this time his model was a Barbizon peasant. Instead of the white oxen, two horses were harnessed to the plough, the plain of La Bière took the place of the Norman moorland, and the ruined tower near Chailly was introduced, with a clump of

trees in the background.

Together with *The Sower* Millet sent another picture, *The Hay-binders*, to the Salon at the Palais Royal. This was a group of labourers binding newly-cut hay in trusses at the foot of a haystack, while a young girl at their side collects the last rakings of the meadow. Here again the vigorous action of the men, and the blazing heat of the June day, were given with remarkable truth; but the colour was heavy in tone, and the picture passed comparatively unnoticed by the side of *The Sower*.

Gautier's criticism of these two works pleased Millet, and he frankly owns the justice of a remark which that writer had made on the meanness of his colouring in *Les Botteleurs*—the hay-binders.

> "Gautier's article," he writes on the 23rd of March, 1851, "is very good. I begin to feel a little more contented. His remarks about my thick colours are also very just. The critics who see and judge my pictures are not forced to know that in painting them I am not guided by a definite intention, although I do my utmost to try and attain the aim which I have in sight, independently of methods. People are not even obliged to know why it is that I work in this way, with all its faults."

Millet was probably alluding to the journalists who tried to discover political theories and Socialist tendencies in his peasant-pictures—a form of criticism which he naturally resented as unjust and absurd. The same letter to Sensier contains a touching expression of Millet's grief at the sudden death of a mutual friend, Longuet:

> "I am still stupefied and astounded at the news of the death of poor Longuet. I am very much pained, not only because of the suddenness of his death—only very lately he came to see me at Laveille's, and appeared in as good health as he had ever been—but because I have always held him to be a very worthy man. What a frail machine this body of ours is! I believe he was married, but I did not know his wife. Did he leave any children? I heard

from Jacque a few days ago. The commission, he says, has fallen through; but they will get up a subscription of 2,000 francs, which is something, and even a very agreeable gift, if only half the sum which he expected to have."

The next day Millet opened his letter again, in great distress at the sudden illness of his little daughter, Marie, a child of five. He had a profound distrust of the country doctor and of his drugs, and anxiously begs Sensier to send him a bottle of medicine from Paris.

"Monday Morning.

"Yesterday evening, Sunday, when 1 was writing to you, and had got as far as you see above, I was forced to interrupt my letter to attend to my eldest girl, who had been suddenly attacked by a violent fever. She played during the day as usual, but asked to be put to bed while she was eating her dinner, and complained of being cold. I passed the night with her, applying, according to Raspail's method, bandages soaked in sedatives; but it did no good, and the fever developed to a formidable degree. I am suffering the greatest anxiety. Generally speaking, I have very little confidence in physicians, and much less in the one at Chailly than in any other. How and what is to be done? I have just bathed her again. . . . Poor little girl! so gay all day and in a moment stricken by this sudden fever. Whether I send or not for the horrid doctor at Chailly, oblige me by buying and sending by the coach a bottle of camphorated ammonia as soon as you get this note. Perhaps you will not read my letter before to-morrow evening; but if by any chance you happen to be at home during the day, buy the bottle, and send it by the coach that leaves at four o'clock. In any case do this on Wednesday, and I will go to Chailly to see if it arrives. I hope I may have no need of it when it reaches me, but it may be required at any moment. Good-bye. The fever does not diminish.

"J. F. MILLET."

This letter reveals all the man's tenderness of heart, and gives a faithful picture of his life at Barbizon, divided as it was between the practice of his art and family cares.

Fortunately, the child recovered and the anxious father was able to return to his work.

It was his habit at this period of his life to take up his pictures to Paris, and finish them either in the *atelier* of his friend Diaz or at the shop of Laveille, the dealer who bought most of his early drawings and whose name is constantly mentioned in his letters. Here he met other artists and became acquainted with collectors who gave him new commissions.

Of the three smaller works painted in 1850, which Millet sent to the sale mentioned in his former letter, the most important was *Allant Travailler*—a peasant and his wife going out to work. This well-known picture was one of the painter's first Barbizon impressions, and proved so popular that he afterwards reproduced the same theme in a variety of drawings and pastels. In this young couple starting for the fields together, there is a spirit of frank and cheerful enjoyment, seldom found in Millet's works. The young labourer, in his straw hat and blouse, steps blithely along, with his hand in his pocket and his fork upon his shoulder, his wife walks at his side, in her short petticoats and sabots, carrying a stone pitcher in her hand and wearing her basket on her head, to protect her from the heat of the sun. Their bright faces and brisk steps are in tune with the pleasant freshness of the early morning and the happy spring-time of life, when toil is easy and action full of delight. Every detail in the landscape—the tufts of grass at their feet, and the plain behind them—is reproduced with loving care, and in the distance are the roofs and houses of Barbizon.

This charming little work was promptly bought by a Paris tradesman, named Collet, who was so pleased with his purchase that he ordered a figure of the Virgin as a signboard for his draper's shop in the Rue Notre Dame de Lorette. Accordingly Millet painted a blue-robed Virgin, clasping the Child Christ in her arms, and resting her feet

on the crescent of the moon. He executed the work in the courtyard of a neighbour in open daylight, and fixed his canvas on the top of a ladder on a level with the roof, that he might better judge of the effect which it produced at this height. He writes to Sensier on the 18th of December, 1851: "If you see Collet, tell him that he shall soon have his signboard, only I must have a few days of dull weather before I can finish it." During many years this blue-robed Virgin hung outside M. Collet's shop at the corner of the Rue Notre Dame de Lorette and Saint Lazare, a familiar object to passers-by. Constant exposure to weather made repeated restorations necessary, and when, after often changing hands, it came into the possession of its present owner, M. Morel, several coatings of paint were removed, and the surface was carefully cleaned In spite of its damaged condition, this picture was exhibited in London some years ago, and attracted considerable attention. The Virgin is of distinctly peasant type, but has a nobleness of character and simple dignity not unworthy of Millet. Her eyes are turned heavenwards with a calm and trustful gaze, and the tiny babe on her arm, in its weakness and helplessness, recalls the child of Holbein's Darmstadt Madonna.

Another picture which belonged to these first years at Barbizon, was the small canvas of *Les Couseuses*, or young women sewing at home. "They are not professional needlewomen," Millet was always careful to insist, "but women engaged in mending the household linen in their own homes." The artist had an example of domestic industry constantly before his eyes in his own wife, who sat to him about this time as a model of his drawing of *Young Women Sewing*, which was bought by his friend Campredon. The picture of *Les Couseuses* had one good result—it brought the painter an order from the State.

M. Romieu was at that time Director of the Fine Arts, but although a cultivated man, he took little interest in art,

and owned frankly that he knew nothing about painting. When Sensier addressed a request to him through his secretary on Millet's behalf, he was told that inquiries must first be made as to the artist's political views and moral character. There were influential persons, it appears, who had an idea that the painter of *The Sower* must be a demagogue and agitator. Accordingly, inquiries on the subject were addressed to the Prefect of the department of Seine-et-Marne, who replied that Millet was a very quiet and well-conducted citizen, who was rarely seen and seldom heard of at Barbizon, and that he spent his whole life in painting at home or in taking walks by himself in the neighbourhood, watching the sky and the trees. These accounts of his character were so far reassuring. Unfortunately, the artists whom M. Romieu consulted as to Millet's capabilities, described him as a pretentious and eccentric personage, who went his own way and rejected the great traditions of the past. This was sufficient to excite suspicion in the Director's mind, and, to Sensier's disappointment, his appeal met with no response. As a last resource, he took Millet's picture of *Les Couseuses*, and, carefully concealing the painter's signature, he asked his friend the secretary to hang it in M. Romieu's rooms, and see what impression it produced upon the Minister and his friends. This simple and graceful little canvas certainly bore no trace of the dangerous opinions that Millet was supposed to hold. Before long its quiet charm attracted the notice of more than one visitor. One day it caught the eye of Paul Delaroche, who stood still before it during several minutes, and asked the Director to tell him the name of the painter. "It must be the work of some new man," he remarked; "I have seen nothing like it before."

In reply, he was told that the little picture had been painted by an artist named François Millet, who was said to be a mere peasant. Delaroche recognised the name at once. "Millet!" he exclaimed, "why, he was my own pupil.

I am not at all surprised; he was full of imagination, and had a vigorous method of his own."

After that, Sensier had no difficulty in attaining his object. The order from the State was signed at once. Millet received 600 francs in advance, and was desired to paint any subject which he liked to choose, and to deliver the work at his own convenience. The commission reached him in 1852, at a time when he was in great want of money and hard pressed by his creditors. He was still hampered by his old debts, and found, to his surprise, that at Barbizon he could not live upon credit, as he had done in Paris. The small Chailly tradesmen naturally asked for ready money, and were little disposed to trust a struggling artist with a large and yearly-increasing family. Before long, Millet found himself surrounded by a whole tribe of angry shopkeepers who clamoured for payment of their weekly bills, and threatened to stop supplies. The baker refused to let him have any more bread, the grocer sent him a lawyer's letter, and one day a tailor put an execution into his house, and sent bailiffs to sell his furniture, refusing to allow him a single day's grace. In these straits, Millet wrote urgent letters to Sensier, entreating him to sell his pictures

> "Try, my dear Sensier," he wrote, "to make money with my pictures; sell them for whatever price you can get, and send me 100 francs, or even 50 or 30, for the time is rapidly coming when I must have the money or starve."

These appeals were especially frequent at the end of the month, or quarter, when impatient creditors refused to be put off with promises any longer. And Millet, it must be owned, was a thoroughly bad man of business, incapable of managing his own affairs, and an easy prey to the neighbours or false friends who tried to impose upon his credulity.

His health was another cause of trouble. He suffered

from constant headaches, partly caused by the unhealthy atmosphere of the damp, close barn in which he worked, and was often unable to paint for weeks together. At such times his courage sank, and his anxieties assumed alarming proportions which prompted the despairing utterances that we read in his letters to Sensier. But a single ray of hope—the sale of a picture or a fresh order—quickly produced a revulsion of feeling. His headaches were cured, the sun shone once more in the heavens overhead, and he went back to work with new ardour and hope. His love for his art and his faith in himself never failed. If he could but struggle on for a few years, he firmly believed that a better day would come, his pictures would begin to sell, and the world would acknowledge the truth of the principles which he maintained. For the present he must wait and work on in patience. "In Art," he often said, "you have to give your skin."

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