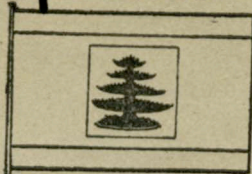


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# CÉZANNE

1913

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# CÉZANNE

BY

*Elie Faure*

*Translated by Walter Pach*



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## PAUL CÉZANNE

By ELIE FAURE

The men of means in Aix, leaving their big cool halls after the midday meal, and hastening to their daily game of dominoes along the narrow strip of shade that the edge of the roofs wrests from the sun on one side of the deserted street, the coachmen of the Cours Mirabeau who half turn in their seats to exchange a phrase or two of patois through the dust and din of the wheels, the beggars who choose the hour for mass to go and sun themselves against the wall of Saint-SauVeur,—all can remember having seen frequently—in the last years of the nineteenth century and the first years of

the present one, a singular old man. Almost all knew his name, very few had heard his voice. In the morning he was scarcely to be met, save at the hour when he returned for lunch, for he started out for his work at dawn. In the afternoon he would again set forth for the suburbs, on foot—almost always, sometimes in a cab. In the evening he went to bed before the table was cleared; he never dined out, he never had callers. The people of Aix had long since settled his case. Cézanne passed for a madman.

Fairly tall, a bit stoop-shouldered, with a beard that at some times he allowed to cover his cheeks, white-moustached, with a high forehead and a bald cranium, he had the look of an old soldier whose garrison life had dealt rather ill with him. A nose veined with purple, red eyelids that drooped and watered, and a prominent lower lip rendered his face less martial. He wore ordinary city dress—a black jacket, trousers a bit corkscrewish, a round felt hat in winter, a straw hat in summer;

often he carried a game-bag slung over his shoulder; occasionally he wore a cape. But his apparel was not to be inspected too close by. When one could get near him one saw that he had not put on his cravat, or that his collar was tied on with string, or that his coat was spotted with paint. He avoided the glances of passers-by. When they met his eyes, they read in them a timid savagery sometimes a flash of anger which would be hidden by the droop of his eyelid—at the same time his pace would quicken almost to one of flight. He seemed like a man hemmed in, seeking, as he did, the quietest streets and often making a brusque turn out of his way to avoid meeting people. The bad boys of the town knew him well and would run after him and throw stones at him. Cézanne would make away as fast as the swelling of his old legs permitted. But his itinerary, practically the same every day—from his town house to his country house, from his country house to his studio, from his studio to his town house—made him their prey. Only on Sundays he left his cus-



tomary route to go to mass and vespers, when he sat on the vestry-bench of the blond cathedral whose nave they fill with laurels, orange-trees and oak at each opening of the panels of the "Burning Bush" that Nicolas Froment of Avignon, King René's painter, hung there, five centuries ago. On that day there would be a perfect hedge of poor wretches at either side of the door, for they knew that Cézanne would come with his pockets full of small coin.

Once in a great while he was to be seen in the company of a young man, in those streets of Aix that retain their whiteness in the dust of summer or when hardened by the north-west wind of Southern France in winter. The young man was unknown, did not look like every-day people and, as it was vaguely known that the well-to-do old man amused himself with painting, people conjectured that the young man was a painter come from Marseilles to see him. On those days his bearing was altered. He spoke much, with tremendous ges-



tures; he would stop in his walk, would break out with furious oaths. For the inhabitants of Aix, doubtless, the meridional intonations of his voice were not specially accentuated, but his companion, who generally came from much farther away than Marseilles, was moved at its innocent music and the sonorities that bring out the vigor of the epithets. Sometimes he was seen to leave the young man all of a sudden and get away hastily, growling angry words the while \* \* \* \* So he would drop into long silences—of a whole year, or suddenly expand into good humor for an hour,—leaps of ill-temper and behavior that no one understood \* \* \* \* Such was the old man,—wild, candid, irascible and good.

Except for one long stay in Paris where he came into touch with his century, he never left Aix-en-Provence without coming back to it almost immediately. In other places his apathy met too many useless obstacles and his timidity too many chances to get him by the throat and indispose

toward him those to whom he never bared a parcel of his intelligence or his capacity for loving. He was born in Aix in 1839. At college there, he had had a good classical education. It was not that he had been a very hard worker, but at that period the professors appealed oftener to the emotions of their students than to their reason. They neglected the sciences a little. They centered their attention on the dead languages, and neither Greek nor Latin was quite dead in this corner of the land of the ancients where the soil is but a thin crust over rock, where the lines of the hills cut sharp against the sky, where the cities are full of the ruins of temples, aqueducts and theatres, where the Mediterranean elements of the race have undergone but slight mingling, where the language of the common people still participates intimately in the genius and structure of the old mother-tongue—like the dwellings of the poor, which, up to the beginning of the last century had invaded the tiers of benches, the corridors and the great door-ways of the arenas of Nimes and Arles

without changing their curve, their mass and their accent. Cézanne retained from his studies a special friendship for the old Latin artists who revealed to him the poetry of a world whose horizons and profiles he knew. He read them in the original. In the course of walks that he took about the country-side of Aix with his rare visitors and with friends far rarer still—those who, in Aix itself, had braved the bourgeois prejudice and the raillery of fools to have the protection and encouragement of his intellect—anything was a pretext for him to invoke Vergil or Lucretius; whether it was an encounter along the road, the sight of beasts yoked to the plough, an old wall, the crossing of a stream, a flight of pigeons or simply the intimate tone of his own heart, anything might have their participation and authority.

In his youth he was guilty of verse in Latin. In French, even, he composed a pagan poem, "Hercules," which Zola, if we are to believe the letters he wrote from Paris at this time, seems to



have found but little to his taste. But Zola, though he had written a book (\*) on Cézanne that is often very fine, understood him but poorly, even in the days when they loved each other like brothers. They had been in the same class at college. But more than that they had together explored the country to its horizons and likewise the world of dreams and aspiration—to the infinity of enthusiasm and desire. Nothing is more touching than this ardent friendship and communion of the two young men who were to have, indubitably, the most vivifying effect on the artists of today. There was something divine in their pagan childhood. We have all felt the passage,—whether we have understood the action both have had on us—we have all felt the passage of that blast of brutal intoxication that swells in the first books of the poet: “La Fortune des Rougons,” “La Conquete de Plassans,” “La Faute de l’Abbé Mouret,” and in the painter’s strange canvases, blue and green, where the shudder of space and of water stirs the world and murmurs about the nude

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\* “L’Oeuvre”



beings assembled under the boughs of trees. Together the two would start out along the roads where the dust creaks as one treads in it. During the heat of the day they splashed about in the river Arc, swimming, diving, rolling on the warm moss to dry themselves, diving in again, naked in the water and the sun until the air grew cool. Often they stayed away from home for two or three days, sleeping under a shed or on the leaves in the motionless nights of summer that cool into morning. They returned with sunburnt skins, smarting feet, and red earth under their nails. In their veins beat an acrid blood. The bark of scrub oak, the bitter juice of chewed leaves, the rocky paths where they ran after the lizards, the thorns of the hedges, the brambles, the flints—all drove through their skins the pervading spirit of the poets, dead or living, whose verses they had brought with them to read to each other,—at the top of their voices. They were two little black fauns, tender and wild of heart,—and with never one doubt.

Cézanne struggled three years with his father, a banker, who wanted to put him into his office, made an honest attempt at studying law in Aix and finally managed to get leave to join Zola in Paris whither the latter called him. No sooner was he there than he talked of returning to Provence. The brutality of the city, its fever, the indifference of its crowds to what he regarded as the essential in life, all was a shock to him, stupefied him. The contrast between his live youthfulness and his first contact with men was too strong. His terrible sensibility drew back as before a blow. He ceased showing what went on within him, and giving his full soul to the friend with whom he had begun the discovery of the world. As a child he had thought of every living being as close to himself. He had opened, had expanded to all, at least he believed so. He did not yet perceive that the friend he had chosen in the rush of instinct was himself an exception. They did not know, either of them, that almost all those who dwell in cities perceive nothing of what

was intoxicating for *them*. They did not know that they were almost the only ones to find in the murmur of leaves, the sonority of water and the vibration of insects, the vibrations, the sonorities and the murmurs that run, like a breeze swollen with whispering voices and with odors, from one end to the other of the verses they spoke as they walked along. They were unaware of the sincere hearts they possessed, and of the fact that the hearts of other men are not the same. The one quickest to find it out was he who was least fitted for external strife, who belonged least to the current of the century, he who came to Paris the later, who first hurtled against the miscomprehension of men because he expressed himself in that language they understand least—and to all this he could not resign himself \* \* \* \* Zola, the less susceptible, the more combative, did not understand. For him his friend—that being distraught with love, stifling with compressed life, torn with the magnificent chants that every look arrested on his lips—for him the friend was fantastic, full of



contradictions and shadow: "He is all of one piece, stiff and hard to the hand; nothing can bend him, nothing can wrest from him a compromise...."†

Yes,—and very surely yes. The time of lyric expansion was past, the time was passed for calling aloud the witnessing of nature, for according to all the confidence one has in oneself, for believing that all of us have the disinterestedness of spirit and the desire to commune in enthusiasm that the artist has within him. The time had come to brace himself against the despairing flight of childish illusions, to cuirass his breast against the wounds inflicted by the inexhaustible misunderstanding of men, and to bare it more and still more to the balm of inner searching and the amends that hope makes. Whither was he to turn, how many years was he to wait before coming wholly to understand that the more we give our respect to man, the less does he respect us,—and that we never find outside of ourselves the consolation and the support we need to keep us from weakening

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† Emile Zola, "Lettres de Jeanesse"



before the end? The young provincial, with his accent of candor, his confiding look and his unlimited capacity for giving himself to friends, frequents the Atelier Suisse, and fails at the competition for the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. He is surrounded by a tribe of silly daubers, young bourgeois just out of college, who have had a first-prize in drawing and now talk of art like an administrative career, of women like merchandise one buys dirt cheap in the ill-smelling lanes of a seaport. And everywhere—hostility, the indifference which is worse, the aggressive ugliness, the immutable beatitude of those who do not understand.

However, here and there—rumors are heard. People are mentioning the name of a painter whom Baudelaire loves and whose work is refused at the Salon. Now that the crowd can stand Delacroix—seeing that he is an academician and decorated, now that the official exhibitions refuse only the most beautiful of Courbet's works, it is around Manet that we find the young men who are not

wanted in the schools. Other desires are born, and new visions, and happily uncompromising certitudes. Literary men are met at the lectures of Claude Bernard. Painters are to be seen at the windows of the Ecole. The spiritualism of the Romantics gives places suddenly to experimental materialism. Against the traffickers in the genius of Hugo and Delacroix the fight must be fought again which they themselves sustained against the usurpers of classicism. The combat for the tradition is continued—against the Ecole. And the Revolution begins again, in order that the vital movement of the world may be saved from death—compromised, as it is, by those who claim to belong to the revolution of yesterday. Another Barbizon exodus,—less complete, but more decisive. It is no longer the fashion to live like a peasant, to be totally ignorant of the world, to get back to Nature as a sentimentalist disabused of the vanity of cities and disdainful of everything that is not the untouched tree and the man of the fields. On the contrary, the whole of the world is now to be accepted, the

Street as well as the country, the factory as well as the cathedral. Men were resolved to explore everything impartially, on condition that no bookish or scholastic prejudice interpose itself between the eyes of the artist and his subject. The artist is no longer under any literary constraint. It is the scientific constraint which is about to begin.

It was necessary. It cramped his power of imagination for a moment, it increased his power to see. An hour would come, doubtless, when—rid of the sentimental mist that clouded his vision—he would, with a clearer eye, and with the magnificent will-power of a renewed temperament, recommence the pursuit of illusion, of the dream. Cézanne returned to Paris in '63 after a short stay at Aix, whither he had departed disconsolate, bewildered, asking himself if he were born to be a painter. He had tried for some months to work there in his father's bank.\* In Paris, and back at Suisse's Atelier, chance brought about his meeting with Pissarro. A few words sufficed. Pissarro re-

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\* It was during this stay that he must have painted in the drawing-room of the Jas de Bouffan—the country-house of his family—those four frescoes, "Spring," "Summer," "Autumn" and "Winter" which he derisively signed 'Ingres,' and which make one think of some unknown contemporary of Botticelli and Ghirlandaio,—so much have they of a strange and unskilled fervor, of a nervous primitivism.



vealed Courbet to him. Zola, a little later, took him to see Manet. At the bottom of the young heart, compressed by doubt, by too-sudden disillusionment and the infernal noise of the cruel streets, desire rekindled.

To be exact, if he took part in the revolts and shared the dreams of emancipation of the young men Pissarro introduced him to, he did not feel that his standpoint was quite the same as theirs. They liked to say that painting was only about to be born, that science would soon permit the creation of an infallible artistic method, that there is nothing outside of the truth of facts, that the old-time efforts of men were tainted with the error of mysticism, and that the time of consciousness was to come. Cézanne felt the thorough sincerity of his friends, he was well aware that the artists needed to come into touch with the external world again, for a long time and profoundly. All the same, when the verses of Vergil or Sophocles mounted to his lips, when he would suddenly



break away from the enthusiastic group where his silence had stopped the conversation for a moment and would hasten to the great gallery of the Louvre where he would wander till night,—he told himself that there was another kind of art, that other men, before those he had just left, had given to their soul sensible form, which seemed imperishable. He told himself that in their verses or in their pictures, where the external world was powerfully manifested, a certain order appeared, a certain rhythm, something cadenced, harmonious and musical, where the human mind affirmed the desire and the sense of mystery. When his new friends threw open the window to let in the smell of earth and the light, and translated the world according to chance sensations, he perceived that his ancient friends had long and quietly leaned on that window-sill to search out—in the confused tangle of lines and the complex play of reflections, in the movements of shadows and of men—certain accents, certain dominant orientations whose repetition and return impose themselves as laws.

To follow them to their logical conclusion, he needed a good deal of urging. It was not with impunity that he and Zola had carried the poems of Hugo and de Musset with them on their wild tramps. Like his companion, he remained impregnated with their romanticism. In his efforts of that time, centaurs carry off nymphs to the depths of dark forests. Monstrous muscles emboss the shoulders, arms hang swollen with blood; drama is written brutally into the shadowy hollows and the sharp projections; he follows Delacroix and Daumier to the brink of the abyss where the soul of Michael Angelo has been rolling these four hundred years. He searches, he suffers. The positivistic absolute of his friends strikes rudely against the desires that burn in him to attain an absolute placed above and outside of their provisional needs. If he stays in their midst, it is because he knows they are painters—loving their art for itself. It is because Pissarro, the theorist of the band, before launching out on the conquest of light alone, has wandered from one sort of

inquietude to another, has followed Corot, has followed Millet. Courbet arrests his attention for a long time. This is the master who is to liberate him from his romantic literature, he will not forget it, any more than he will forget Delacroix or Daumier, all those powerful builders of matter and form whose work, in the future, more and more dominates the pretext that gave it birth. Later, we find Cézanne hanging up in his room a study by Delacroix, a print of Daumier's. He will take off his hat whenever he pronounces the name of Gustave Courbet. Thirty years after breaking away from the solidest and earthiest modeller of life that there ever was in the art of painting, he will feel the same enthusiasm each time he finds himself in the presence of the "Burial at Ornans," with its judges, its weeping women, its dreary sky, its formidable oppositions of the blacks and the whites,—and its whole massive poem of brutal reality. Without a thought of the swollen legs that drag like a chain, he will impetuously climb the ladder of the copyists, will forget his blessed



modesty and cause a disturbance amongst visitors and guardians by the exclamations he utters.\*

To return to the serenest realizations of his art, Cézanne lived over again, one after the other, all the decisive works of his time. One by one he tried the links in the chain of that eternal tradition toward which, since Delacroix, the artists were marching, step by step. With Delacroix and Daumier he must deliver form from its prison of scholastic formula. With Courbet he must rid himself of the lie of the "noble subject." He must, with the men of his generation, consent to study the phenomena of light, unprejudicedly, and according to the hour of the day and the weather and the season. It is only when far past the age when others had finished their task,—Masaccio, Raphael, Watteau, Mozart, that he really begins his own, leaving behind him to their necessary, liberating,—but limited—function, those who showed him the true path.

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\* I take the anecdote from J. Gasquet. I ought to cite him on every page. He is the artist of my generation who best knew Cézanne, the Cézanne of the last years,—that is, the most personal, the most real, why not say the most young?

He consented then, a little passively and because he loved the purity of their vision and felt the necessity of the transition, to join the Impressionist group, after having found Pissarro again at Auvers-sur-Oise. It was the year of '73. Between time,—the war, marriage, a son. In '70 when the police were hunting for him at Aix, he was at l'Estaque where his mother hid him. He had not the slightest taste for the business of war. He had something else to do, and felt it—and knew it. His laziness, his timidity, and his uncertainty suddenly changed into a passion for work, into resolution and self-assurance, as always happens when a work beneath its desires is proposed to an aristocratic mind which does not yet know itself well. He was afraid? Doubtless. Afraid to break the cup in which fermented the wine of illusion.

He shared the life of disgrace that was the lot of the painters of his time bold enough to return to the sources of the beauty of the world without

looking back and without consenting to veil their discoveries under such concessions to appearances as would have assured their success. Refused at the Salon every year, in company with Pissarro, Claude Monet and Sisley, he was the one amongst them—with Renoir who like himself brought to the association of malefactors a certain preoccupation with tradition and composition which went beyond impressionism and even ended by combating the fundamental principle that gave it its name—he it was who provoked the greatest amount of laughter, insults and idiotic jokes. The most personal vision is fought against the most bitterly and the longest time. Like his friends it was vain for him—with less of spontaneity doubtless, but more of the sober strength of self-expression—to rediscover the mobile face of the world, to surprise the reflections of the sky in every trembling of the water's edge, to find the variable colors of things in the transparent shadows they cast on the ground, to restore to the universe the infinite mobility of appearances that the



height of the sun, the interposition of clouds and the decomposition of light on uneven surfaces make a part of our sensations. It was in vain that he explored for us the hustling valleys, caught the spot of red roofs seen through moving branches, seized the iridescence that the wind lends to the mirror of the water and mingled with the vapors of space the incessant trembling of leaves. Everything caused laughter, and most of all himself.

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In '79 he fled from Paris. His sight cleansed by impressionism of all traces of the tones and forms of the Ecole, his brain cleared of the sentimental rubbish that is the food of low-grade romanticism, he sees, sketched on the unstable face of the earth, a vague skeleton that no one else has perceived. But he is wounded, without courage, doubtful of himself, of others, and tortured by the pitiless analysis to which he submits his impressions. He is overwhelmed with regret as he feels that in proportion to his will to understand and his success in understanding a little more, men understand

him less; he no longer finds even amongst his friends the intimate approbation of the uncertainties that torment his mind. For a year, already, he has given up sending to exhibitions the paintings of which he has done fewer and fewer. The terrible "What's the use?" comes up at every moment, now that he knows better how hard the road is, now that he has plunged farther along into the immensity of Veronese and Rubens, that he has half-seen the summits of his dream and calculated the length of the effort that separates him from it has he perhaps at that time an hour of cowardice, even? He does certain pieces of painting of a heavy and savory impasto,—the eyes black against the excessive glow of the flesh, and with shining stuffs; laid in with great freedom, showing that he was imitating Velasquez—by way of Manet perhaps—and seeming to announce in himself a temptation to develop the qualities of the virtuoso at the expense of his sincerity. Perhaps his exile at Aix was renunciation, perhaps it came from a desire to tear himself away from the

tyrannical influences which would have brought him to deterioration, to self-disgust, to the nothingness of the worship of society and such easy successes. He will not leave Provence again save for brief visits to Paris. He never went to Italy, though he could thus have found at his door the evidence he needed but whose power of fascination he doubtless feared. He made short trips to Belgium and Holland. Even that was too much. There were within him such profound, such confused desires, that the noise about him prevented his hearing them. Only solitude could inform him, by permitting him to look to the bottom of the mystery that he bore about with him in the midst of the universal mystery. In solitude he could decide fully whether he was to find silence, or the mounting of unknown forces that no exterior action could henceforward prevent from affirming themselves.

From now on he has no history. It is not that he was happy. He had pursued too hard, in the



noise of the combat which desire was forever waging in his being—he had given too hard a chase to the fleeing object of that desire, ever to know for a moment that rest which the artist incessantly aspires to and never seizes—happily, for the glory of the world and its dark march onward. But as he had concentrated into a fixed idea all the powers of life of which chance had made him the depositary, external events could touch him no longer. As he fled from the anecdote in art, so anecdote fled from his life. It entered a shadow from which nothing, in spite of all the tales and the guesses of those who approached him, could draw it forth again. He wanted to make of it a work, so pitilessly objective that nothing should appear in it of the momentary sentiments that his relations with men provoked in his heart. It is a manner of defining oneself which quite equals the other in value, if we know how to go beyond the superficial relations of man and society—to seize, in **h**is work, the directions of his spirit.

When he re-entered the town of the big severe mansions and the fountains, the royal city of the South, where through the university, the archbishopric and the parliament, the scepter of Louis XIV extended amongst the vicious cities of traders and convicts, the sensation of tormented stupor that had been his lot on his arrival in Paris fifteen or eighteen years earlier, seized him again, and more strongly. He expected, doubtless to come back to the landscape of antiquity, to the end of temptations, to solitude, the pure teaching of the sky and the hills, and the paternal library where like imprisoned birds, slept the verses of the Latin poets that the literateurs of Paris no longer comprehended. But, unknown to himself, his brain had gone an enormous distance, and here no one had budged. Impressionism was unknown, even as a name, no one had ever heard of Courbet, and the struggle between Ingres and Delacroix had never found, in these quiet regions, an echo of the living passions that it had stirred in its time. The people about him were just content to be

peacefully installed in habit, in hatred of effort and intellectual laziness. They would speak of art in the same tone and with the same words as they would about local or general politics, and the small happenings that feed the curiosity of small towns; their appreciation of art was given with that certitude unshakably rooted in miscomprehension and armored with ignorance that characterizes the judgment of those who have not reflected. The unfortunate man had to sit through those provincial conversations so definitively omniscient, idiotic and sneering that they can be brought to Paris full-armed and live on there immutably at the brink of the torrent of the century for four generations. He had to stand the shamelessness of incompetence, go through the acute suffering that seizes the heart of every artist who has strayed amongst those for whom art is nothing, when some one takes it upon himself to deliver, in general conversation, an opinion on literature—which few know how to feel, on music which—outside an elite—practically no one understands, on painting



above all, whose true sense is suspected by a few painters at the most. He was acquainted with the torture of the current divagations on "the subject," "color," the "poetry" the "expression." He was acquainted with the painful necessity of forcing his tingling ears to stop listening, to impose calm on his bounding heart, to shut his teeth on the furious words that came to his lips and digest the ferocious pride of being the only one, he—one of the great painters of his time—not to give his opinion, no one having asked it. He had the despairing feeling of his radical importance to mount those blind currents, to make over the general and special education of all those who surrounded him. If, in his rage, he proclaimed his faith, he surprised half-smiles, whisperings in corners, the beginning of a shrug of the shoulders,—which were his answer—the spontaneous and immediate agreement of everyone against him in the quiet vanity of folly unconscious that it is folly. One sole refuge: the intimate sentiment of

his superiority of intelligence and of soul, and the strength to react that he drew from it wholeheartedly.

How could it be otherwise for those who came from Paris to see him after twenty or thirty years of that savage isolation than to find themselves in the presence of a strange old man, distrustful and hunted in manner, who only peeped through his half-opened door to shut it again quickly if the face of the visitor did not please him at first sight? How was it again that the people of the town did not seize the rare chance of possessing within their walls and announcing to all visitors that they had this genuine unquestionable curiosity, a painter who was ignorant of the very names of the renowned painters of his time, who spoke nothing but ill of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, and whose pictures—when he risked sending them to the local exhibitions now and again—were always skied? They had not the right to enter his magnificent heart to understand his sudden

effusion when he saw a spark of sensibility in the eye of the visitor—to seize in his anxious and fugitive manners, the gestures of kindness he had with the poor, to respect his obstinate silences, the long walks in which he beat down with weariness the anguish that dwelt in him, his fear of fools, his impotence to defend himself against lies and robbery. They all laughed at him. Did he want a studio built and give directions as to how it should be done?—the architect overrode them; and he did not dare to protest.\* Did his cabman take one road rather than another?—he said nothing. Only his friends were acquainted with his anger and rancor against his timidity. Cheated, —made ridiculous, he let things pass. Defenceless, he saw about him only “maléins.”\*\* He had, for the skill with which others organized their profits, an ingenuous real and divine admiration, that denoted the goodness of his heart. And his candor was the index of a spirit whose whole bent was toward self revelation. Aside from his art and his inner being, he would have let anything

\* Emile Bernard, “*Mercure de France*,” Nos. 247 and 248. The larger part of the anecdotes and traits of character reported in this study have been drawn from the recollections of M. Emile Bernard, so astonishingly living and evocative.

\*\* Provencal pronunciation of *malins*-rogues.

(Translator's note).



he possessed be taken from him. He kept his soul for his work, and for it alone. One phrase constantly recurred in his speech: he would not have them "get their grappling-irons on him." He would show an unfinished canvas only to those who had gained his confidence, he was afraid "they would steal his tricks." He was religious but afraid of the Jesuits. A torturing susceptibility kept him always in a state of defense, even in his relations with those who had the right to believe themselves his friends. His physical sensitiveness was such that he could not bear to have anyone help him in walking, in rising or in dressing himself. No one, no one should ever "get the grappling-iron on him."\* He had drawn in to the center of his being all the sensitive nerves that for fifty-years had touched the world in its various aspects—to store up in him his fund of religiosity and emotion. Devoured by anxiety, he had yet the consciousness of being a great force unemployed. How could he have been understood? How could anyone have believed that this man, afraid of

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\* Emile Bernard, *loc. cit.*

mankind, hiding himself from women, had enough virility to make the future fertile? No one around him was worthy to divine the inner drama with which his spirit was torn,—he had that insatiable desire of the artist to find encouragement in every mouth, admiration in every look, silent companionship in every life; he was condemned by the very loftiness of his aim never to make a concession in order to obtain those things. No one understood why he still occasionally had the weakness to send to “the Salon of M. Bouguereau” and to suffer each time he was refused, and to get white with pain and run away when people would smile, and tell him he was wrong to persist. No one understood, one evening, when he got up from table during a conversation about painting that he had taken no part in, and said in a cry of anger: “You know well that there is only one painter in the world, myself.” No one perceived that he suffered in being the only one to know—he who doubted all, amidst people sure of all—that he was a great artist. For it is not enough to be right,



to be certain of triumphing one day, to believe in the glory that will come when one is no longer there to taste the consolation of glory. Can they not feel, all those people, that artists love, and that they need to be loved?

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What matter? "Work, that brings progress in the craft, is reward sufficient to make up for the lack of comprehension on the part of the idiots."\* Cézanne, fleeing from the sight of men, started out every morning and afternoon either for his studio outside the city, or for his Jas de Bouffan, the beautiful country house with its pure lines and its noble aspect, or again for the "motif"—that is to say the open fields, either amongst the rocks, opposite Sainte-Victoire that one perceives from his avenue of chestnut-trees, or at the foot of the Gypières hills whose profile—clear-cut against the sky—he could see from his window. Arrived there he would plant his easel and, in the intoxication of solitude—a thousand centuries from his

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\* Letter to Em. Bernard, *loc. cit.*



tormentors—free to think only of the way of expressing the rumble of life he felt within him, he demanded of the world that it reveal the meaning of that life.

“I have wanted to make of impressionism,” he said at the end of his career, “something solid and durable like the art of the museums.”\* It is with that phrase that we must define this work, for it is not to be described. One cannot follow reflections on surfaces in it, nor scatter words in pursuit of the multicolored elements of the decomposed prism, nor follow the route of the winds through the branches and over the water, nor show what happens to the same corner of the landscape according to the hour of the day, or according to the month that brings frost, rain, snow, the drying of the grass under the breath of the mistral, the blossoming of flowers or the ripening of fruits. It is a primitive essay on the general and permanent architecture of the earth, a piece of it transported with its deep-laid foundations, into the rectangle of a picture.

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\* Quoted by Maurice Denis, “L'Occident”—September, 1907.

In the rocky landscapes whose life he expressed, the houses we have built seem as ancient as the stones, even the thin plants that spring from the crevices of the soil seem rock-like in character—summer and winter having so mingled with them, and burnt them and covered them with dust. Those houses—how solidly they stand, like blocks of marble on their granite pedestal. And the rhythm of the new lines they introduce into the profiles of the earth harmonize with them in a massive equilibrium.

Those houses, golden and gray, that one sees fleetingly amongst the trees all bending toward the sea, as one comes from the north and at morning enters the dusty plains of the Rhone, we are forever finding them returning to his canvases, as if he had sought to group around their straight outlines and their rough plaster surfaces the dark spots and the precise contours that for him defined this country where the structure of the ground is so clearly in evidence. They fixed his thought as in a geomet-



rical mould,—which he could scarcely do without save when he found himself before a hill-slope barring the horizon like a cliff, like a Greek pediment, or a pyramid,—dominating the forms about it by the weight of its mass or the severity of its planes. Often he would halt on the route from Aix to Marseilles and follow the line of the houses mounting some declivity, thick-set around a crutch and heavy as a mass of stones,—under the dull red of their roofs that seem heaped one on the other. If he went down to the sea-shore, it was they again that bounded the opaque plane of the sea at the sky-line. And as he went along the roads, he always stopped at the point where two lines of high walls overhung with thick trees are like two great verses of a poem as they frame a stretch of country rolling straight to the distance.

That Greek soil, those hard hills, those stony valleys where the vertebrae of the planet break through its husk everywhere could not fail to counsel a mind brought up on the measure of the



classics to search out the essential lines and volumes on which the Mediterranean peoples have been erecting the architecture of the human mind for the last ten thousand years. Although he had seized, with admirable force, the contrast presented by the iridity, the clearness, the nobleness, somber and nude, of the South with the confusion, the orgy, the interpenetration of the air, the trees and the waters of northern landscapes, every time he left his native valley to try to express the pantheism they diffuse, he imposed on them the order demanded by his Latin soul. In the same way, but from the opposite point of departure, Rubens introduced the troubled and tumultuous life of Flanders into the rhythms of the South. There are landscapes of the Isle of France where the richness of the fields and of the foliage and the swelling earth beneath, and the livid sky, and two or three spots of dead red in the torrent-like chorus of the greens, full-fed, viscous, moist and filled with juice and rain-water organize themselves like

a painted cathedral where life accumulates and murmurs loud, but is comprised at every point within the limits of the mind.

It is in Cézanne that the necessary renaissance of the meridional sense of beauty is declared,—that aestheticism desired before him by Ingres whose narrowness of formula he could never pardon, and indicated in the masculine accent of Daumier, whom he loved. The day must come when unity will be established, it must be that the iron roads that transport men in a few hours from the land of beeches to the land of olives, that the words that fly in a second from the shores of fire to the shores of ice, and all the thoughts and all the desires come from all the corners of heaven, crossing, striking together, wearing one another out, making one another fruitful—create for a minute at least and for our joy, the soul, one and multiform, where Aeschylus and Shakespeare will each recognize the other. It must be that the supreme man will reveal himself, consoling those among us who



think it meet to deliver our hearts from the childish slaveries to which our admirations and impulses chain themselves according to the place of our birth.

The inferiority of meridional art and the meridional mind is a rumor that the men of the North have been fomenting for fifty or sixty years. It has just the same importance as the rumor fomented since the Renaissance by the meridionalists concerning the thought and art of the North. The South was calumniated by Gambettist politicians, the tenors and painters of Toulouse, M. Daudet's literature, the Bolognese school and Italian operas, just as the North suffered the tyranny of Swiss yodling, of the picturesque by schedule of prices, of the alimentary sentimentalism of Germany, of Teniers, monkeys, and of Anglo-Saxon puritanism at war with Brahma. The northern clumsiness with the means was a shock to the Latin intelligence, the southern facility with the means exasperated Germanic sensibilities. One and the



other forgot that the heroic works are born of the reaction of certain minds against facility on the one hand and clumsiness on the other. Which is the more profound soul—that of Rembrandt, forgetting the noisy materiality of his beginnings to follow in enchanted anguish the growing of the light that was born within him, or that of Michael Angelo, reacting painfully against his early virtuosity, to descend to the most mysterious regions of the spirit with a weight and force accruing each day? The more human art of the North and the more intellectual art of the South have an equal share in the formation of our hearts, and if our breaks of equilibrium attach us at one time to the southern heroes and at another to those of the North, we have no right to make each in turn responsible for the difficulties we experience in loving both at one time.

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So then, whether Cézanne has rich soil on the soles of his shoes or is wearing them down on pebbles, whether he is piling bare rocks to the peak of

heaven or pursuing in still water the exact structure of the mirrored woods and clouds, as if to find in the reflection of things the equilibrium—summary but unshakable—that they imposed on his mind, or whether he see the red earth cut up by black clumps of cork-oak and box-wood entering the chalky hills over which mounts a sky darkened by the tremendous sunlight,—all the elements of his universe organize into their normal order on the breast of a sober and severe harmony whose center and motif is always formed by greens and blues. And all is unrolled with a singular density, one clod of ploughed land packed against another clod, one bed of flint on another, the bare trunks holding to their roots that plunge down between the rocks, masses of verdure heaped on masses of verdure, and the road that twists amongst the houses developing its slow curve as if an iron roller were hardening its dust pressed down grain by grain. Again let his subject be a far perspective of fields, of ditches, of paths, of rolling country, of hedges, with Sainte-Victoire at the end of it all, or let him



paint a green nook of the forest with interlacing tree-trunks, reddish earth, an alley, slanting foliage, or an old broken-down house by a stony path, or a narrow pool at the foot of a wall,—there was not in the tissue of the things, a single strand that he neglected, not a hole through which any dissociation of the earth could slip. It was all of the same block. We are shown a soil of granite and roots kneaded into one, rigid tree stems, the heavy thickness of foliage, a compact sky where slightly pale shadings announce the slow diffusion of watery vapors, and sometimes—spread about everywhere, red and golden, as if taking part in the general substance—the light that comes over countries by the sea at the hour preceding the night; and it all seems to us like a world more logical in architecture, of colors more coherent than the world we know. Once commenced, a poem by Cézanne passed at a given moment to a maximum of equilibrium and saturation. Whether finished in appearance or in the half-formed state of a sketch, whatever the aspect of the picture he



had recommenced a hundred times—toiling, despairing—it was only when he had brought it to this point that he abandoned it.

So he continued his inexorable way. He carried within him the superb sketch of a world to which each picture was only a step that he reached,—exhausted but ready to start out again, sure each time that at the next stage of his journey he could rest. Even from disappointments he drew renewed energy to go onward. Never has anyone had a more magnificent disdain for the work accomplished. It was the dead leaf. Even in the midst of the long winters of sensibility that fall upon artists at times, he knew well that the strength of green leaves mounted within him toward the promised spring. He considered nothing but the work to be born, the end of the silent current that bore him irresistibly onward. It was the mission of a martyr and a saint, without hope of reaching a halt, without rest or refuge. What he has done yesterday irritates him today, he is condemned to

be forever breaking the bonds that unite him to the social block, of acquired truths, at every hour, to shatter the circle of admiration and support that forms about him, to discourage those who are near to understanding him, to recommence at each step that dramatic pursuit of a reality that he knows he is never to seize. But the pride of it!

When an old work was shown him he condemned it without bitterness, thinking of the one to come. At his house and studio the canvases knocked about pretty nearly everywhere. One, folded twice, propped up a cupboard, another served for polishing the floor, another for cleaning the stove. He spoke quite boastingly of his child's skill in cutting windows and doors out of his pictures. He thought that was "*maléin*" (smart). He did not open the catalogues of the exhibitions of his pictures that were organized in Paris and in foreign countries. Often a thing happened with him that partook of the sublime—he would forget a study in the fields and the sun



and the whirlwinds of dust brought by the mistral and the rain and the dew made short work of taking it back to themselves. His inner realm was always more beautiful than what he told of it.

He could never paint otherwise than "at the motif." He had that in common with the Impressionists, his friends. Like them, besides, he was born of a generation too uninventive to get rid of the imperative need of demanding from the world of the senses all the pretexts for self-expression. "To paint from nature is not to copy what is objective, it is to realize one's sensations."\* To such an extent was he devoid of the faculty of imagining that he could not choose, in the world of forms, the ones most adapted to the realization of the type of superior harmony whose existence he desired. His choice was never directed to a large number of objects, to disengage from them the average type which should express their essence.\*\* He seized on any object, without the least concern as to its ugliness or beauty, and it

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\* Letter to Em. Bernard, *loc. cit.*

\*\* It is this that separates him, essentially, from Renoir—with him the greatest painter of his generation.



was then that his choice began. The object took a character of unity and expressive force so strong that it governs like a law. From the world he interrogated there issued a synthesis in which the bare summits of the idea strike the mind like the rhyme at the end of a verse. Never the shade of an anecdote; never a concession; not a single effort to interest or please. He was purely and simply a painter, one for whom facts had no interest and who seized only certain generalities in a world which they organized for him according to inexorable laws of harmony. Never had anyone accepted the whole of visible life with such complete indifference—to transport it to the life of the spirit with such a sober splendor. The commonest stuff, a dirty dressing-gown, a poor, old-fashioned dress, a coat spotted with plaster and mud, an old hat, a clay pipe, a piece of oil-cloth, a poor paper with blue flowers on the wall, or a torn red arm-chair immediately took on a dull magnificence through his art. He found again in the inns of the country about Aix, in poor streets, at home,—

everywhere, the eternally glorious color—relations that the Venetians, his masters, demanded of flowing velvets and brocaded silks in marble palaces, and of the amber and silver that tremble on the bodies of nude women.

He was a painter. Nothing in the world attracted him save the combinations of form and color that light and shadow impose on objects to reveal to the eye laws so rigorous that a great mind can apply them to life and through them demand its directions—metaphysical and moral. He was one of those beings who perceive not one of those accidents around them to which we are nearly all bound through the break and exception they create in the monotony of our thoughts,—one of those who provide their minds with a scheme of forms and sentiments so logical, so integral that the banal world of things takes on henceforward an inexhaustible interest. He was one of those madmen who pass by a cavalcade or a fight without seeing it, who do not look out of their window when a



tumult is heard in the street, and who get into a sort of despair when anyone stops them to relate the actions of a lady, the adventures of an explorer or the thefts of a politician. He was one of those madmen whom the light wandering on the outline of flesh will arrest, or the gentle illumination at the top of a row of houses and roofs and chimneys, or the spot of a scrap of a poster on a wall, of a red door, or a window painted blue, or the curve that carries our eye from a neck to a shoulder, or the planes of a horse's head as he strains with the effort of a climb,—or a few flowers, or a basket of fruit on a table,—and everything that confirms, by its bringing together of forms and colors, the systematic conception of the universe that he has built up for himself.

Totally incapable of finding subjects of pictures outside of what came before his eyes, he had some very curious occupations—disquieting his warmest friends as to firmness of his reason, but which must



on the contrary, be considered as a necessary effect of his purely plastic vision and his poverty of invention. To give a living form to the sensation that stifled him and yet could not issue forth in an order acceptable to other eyes than his own, he hunted about in old family books, in the "*Magasin Pittoresque*," in fashion papers even, for their bad illustrations which he copied faithfully, but into which he forced the flood of those great symphonies that the world created within him. His intuitive strength had no need of precise images and exact documents. He knew Rubens, Veronese, Poussin and Velasquez so well from having seen them in the Louvre and in Flanders, that he did not perceive the things that offend artists in the bad reproductions of Charles Blanc's book and other publications that he had to hand. The approximate rhythm of the composition sufficed for him to transfer, by intuition, the splendor, the profundity, the mystery and the movement of life to that formless carcass.

He took the direction of the great classics, the Latin poets—Nicolas Poussin, Jean Racine, from his need to base his work on order and measure; and if he loved Baudelaire with them, it is because he sought, in those streams of blood driven from the poet's heart by its feverish pulsations, the support of a genius who knew his own desire to impose the classic rhythms on the dark storms of his mystical sensuality. A hundred times he tried to group nude beings, men or women under the trees, near the water; he was haunted by the sculptural harmonies that Poussin perceived in nature when he associated the movements of beautiful torsos and beautiful arms with the majestic volumes of the trees, with the regularity of the harvest, with the lines of the castles that crown the hills, with the rearing of the herds and with the strong clouds in the heavens—building up their grandiose architectures. There is, in those strange compositions of nude beings struggling on the grass and frolicking in the streams under green foliage, amongst the straight trunks



that launch upward like a lyric chant to the glory of the blue skies invaded by aerial silver, a slow rustling, a clumsy orgy of foliage and breeze, a painful aspiration toward purification by the nature of a human race of renewed youth, that after their first surprise, bring little by little, a broad pagan sentiment into our sensibilities.

The form is awkward, sometimes ugly, at times raised for a second by a flash of immense grace. Never realized, it always exists as a powerful presentiment. Some have seen voluntary deformations in these works. It is not the case. He could obtain male models only with the greatest difficulty. In the summer he went to see the soldiers bathing in the Arc. He no longer wanted women models, "posers," from that day when one of them, after having undressed, asked him why he looked so disturbed. In reality, this great sensual being feared women, more than he did anyone or anything else. He was surly in manner with them. Like all those who desire them too



much, he affected a contempt of women that was simply a homage to their power. Not understanding a thing about them, he believed they were all to be had and fled them, so as not to be forced to a useless resistance. One day when his gardener brought his two big daughters to meet the painter in the garden of Jas du Bouffan, he ordered the man to take an ax, and break open the door of the house, which happened to be locked—so that he could get away from them, and not see them any more.\* There must be something analogous in the life of the Catholic Greco, surrounded on all sides by Catholic Spain; Cézanne makes one think of him again and again by the quality of his painting also, and the disproportions of his nudes, and yet once more by his incapacity for imagination although of that, to tell the truth, the painter of Toledo never gave such radical examples.

However, when it was not a question of painting a nude figure, Cézanne found at hand all the elements of control that his incapacity for working

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\* Em. Bernard, *loc. cit.*

from imagination demanded. His wife, the maids, any child who came along, a workman, a peasant or a friend, and always in common-place surroundings—often the same—the worn red arm-chair and the old wall-paper with the blue design. Now it is rare when strange awkwardnesses and partial errors of balance (which never hurt the general equilibrium) do not strike the most untrained eye,—but most of all his own. For those who do not know the meaning of drawing, it is drawn by a child.

Not for such people is painting in the world. So much the worse for them if they cannot see the interior structure of the forms, built like houses, those summary visages seen in their planes, that he spent a hundred days in painting, those arms falling on either side, those hands—clasped or posed on the knees, those rough faces, of such an austerity of vision, so uncompromising in aspect, so simple, so divested of all desire to attract or charm that we must go back to the Spanish mas-



ters, Greco or Zurbaran, to find their equivalents. This indifference to pleasing, this confessed impotence to arrange things, this terrible obstinacy in presenting them as they are, in searching out in the object nearest at hand the elements of one of the most impressive plastic syntheses to be found in the art of painting—has something of a fatal force, of the revelation of a natural element insensible to tastes, to habits, and to the progressive education that the workmen of painting, from Masaccio to Delacroix, have tried to give us. There is a child, bareheaded and with a white neck-cloth; four gamblers at a table with wine, cards, pipes,—they wear old clothes, they lean firmly with their fists on their thighs or on the table; there is a woman in a wrapper with her hands crossed; another is sewing; another is before him doing nothing at all. It is always the same thing: matter painted, visages noted with the utmost succinctness—two black holes make the eyes in a massive oval, clothing of some rough material;—but from it all radiates a somber and rich splen-



dor, the sentiment of full solidity, a calm that makes one think of the calm of the figures that silently emerge from the shadow at the summit of the Parthenon, an essential equilibrium of the masses in the simplicity of the attitudes and profiles that only the Egyptians perhaps, the primitive French sculptors and Giotto have realized up to our day.

Men do not draw well or ill, any more than they write well or ill. In drawing, or in writing, you say something or you say nothing; you repeat, without emotion, the words that others have pronounced—trembling with ardor,—or you go forth and seek, in the mingling form and spirit of things, certain new characters that shall stir within us sensations whose strength shall depend utterly on their correspondence with the unknown well-springs that the incessant evolution of the world opens up each day in adventurous brains. Drawing should be as free as the movements of thought, which it has the right to follow in its newest directions. It may permit itself anything,

everything, on condition that it neglect the immobile spirit of the crowds, to attach the form to the moving spirit of life—establishing in the nature to whose constant testimony it appeals, the solidarity of the planes. Cézanne's speech in uttering the truths he had acquired was not a correct one, at times it was with stammering that he affirmed the immanent verities.

He knew it well. His secret pride warned him of the power of his nature and the greatness of his mission. But he suffered at not being able to speak his presentiments as freely as his certitudes. Before the drawings of Luca Signorelli, he wept with distress. "I am too old, I have not realized, and now I shall not realize. I remain the primitive of the way that I have discovered."\* After the negative and anarchical work of Impressionism, the necessary analysis of the elements of the universe pushed to the point of complete dissociation,\*\* the positive work that Cézanne had undertaken, the work of synthetic reconstitution of

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\* Em. Bernard, *loc. cit.*

\*\* Complete dissociation represented by *pointillisme* or neo-impressionism which goes to the extreme of the division of tones and thus, theoretically, brings the work of art to a scientific process.

which he felt the general need could not be demanded of the single life-time of one man. Reconstituting a world, and not having wanted to ask for a single arm from the arsenal of those around him—save the defensive cuirasses furnished by Pissarro and Claude Monet, he had not the time to lavish care on the details of the edifice and to place on the structure he had planted deep in the soil those incomparable ornaments through which the men who have attained full freedom of speech—Veronese, Rubens, Velasquez, Rembrandt, Watteau—participate without effort in the freedom of nature. It was particularly toward these latter men that he turned. He loved the primitives but little, finding in them too much of his own torment of creation. He has raised a pedestal of archaic structure and form. It remains to us to erect upon it the final monument.

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This frightened, maniacal, susceptible man, this capitalist who, in appearance, accepted all the



social conventions but whose work caused indignation or laughter amongst all persons of the social stamp, this irreducible provincial whom the bourgeois considered criminal and many artists a powerful but blind nature, this species of creative monster who no longer considered the work he had suffered for months in creating—was withal quite conscious of the quality of his effort. When he consented to deliver his mind in one of those explosions of confidence that were his relief after weeks of stoical and furious silence, everything was vented at once,—his enthusiasms, his rancors, his desires—in a flood of words at first confused, then more and more clear, ordered, persuasive. He talked of painting most of all, but if the discussion turned aside to another question—outside of politics, which he execrated, his mind immediately gave him, as a frame-work, the general ideas he had slowly arrived at in the contemplation of forms. One day when Joachim Gasquet was expounding Kantism, at his request, Cézanne brought that system, in a few words, to bear on his

own theories of plastics. He was a theorist of his art, like almost all the artists of yesterday and today; they arrive at the extreme of analysis and demand of their reason, amidst the disorder of their senses, to reconcentrate in them the scattered elements of the plastic creation whose unity has been taught them by the masters.

Cézanne classified all the aspects of nature according to the sphere, the cone and the cylinder.\* But though always synthesizing the images in which these figures made their imprint on his mind, he never went in his pictures to the point of linear abstraction. When he spoke of reducing the world to those simplified figures, he was only borrowing from the language of mathematics the purest symbol he could find to express his tendencies. But he remained a painter, he wanted to be nothing but a painter. If in the world of the senses he perceived spiritual correspondences, it was through the world of the senses that they revealed themselves to him and to that world they

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\* Em. Bernard, *loc. cit.*

always brought him back. He was a painter. His inner harmonies, on opening his eyes, always found in nature their control and support. Had he not become conscious, through his contact with the classic poets and the heroes of painting,—of an imaginary world plunging everywhere into the real one, and had he not made his terrible efforts to lift himself to this world of imagination when he grouped his nude beings under the cathedral of the trees, he would have found a sufficient joy in spending his whole day in painting stuffs, a tapestry on the wall or fruits and a napkin on the edge of a table. Never since Vermeer of Delft has an artist better felt than this one, the identity of his blood and the material of things. The still-lives of Cézanne,—a bottle, some apples, a bowl painted with red or blue flowers, a knife—have the weight of life torn up by its roots. One would say that these round forms, of a hard, condensed flesh, that these apples that have just rolled heavily from the basket are colored from within, that the sun's heat drew the juice to their surface to spread the dark



color of full ripeness there. Round about, the world is in silence, everything seems loose and pale and disjointed. It is like the single hoarse cry of some virgin beast giving out all the desire concentrated within it by spring and summer and autumn. Possibly there never were, hewn in space, bits of eternal life so dense as these.

“When the color is at its perfect richness,” he used to say, “the form is at its plenitude.”\* One feels like saying that the pure curve of the fruits he has grouped, presses on the color at every point to intensify it and give it that somber magnificence. One might say that the color creeps in under their skins to determine by its gradations their almost absolute sphericity. It was the brush and with that alone that he was re-creating the world of forms on his canvas, even as on the flat surface of a tapestry, the sweep of the plains, the volume of trees and the perfect roundness of the sky are woven. Form, under his control, stood out, turned and thrust itself back because he juxtaposed

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\* Em. Bernard, *loc. cit.*

related spots of color where it continued, and contrasted spots where it stopped.\* "One should not speak of modelling, one should speak of modulating."\*\* He went slowly, with insistent patience, placing spot after spot, recommencing twenty times. And behold, a compact universe, made of solid pieces jointed together, was re-created of itself—unrolling the logical succession of its planes, whose indestructible testimony he was constantly invoking and the ensemble, pure and one, stood balanced in the transparent air.

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Cézanne, at the end of his life could have tasted glory, and knew he could. But that, again would have been a "grappling-iron" on him. When it came, \*\*\* he only burrowed the deeper into his treat, frightened that people should be talking of him. However it was glory indeed, and the true one that silently takes its course in the inner light of grateful minds. All the young men who love painting, in this generation, have more or less

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\* Maurice Denis, "L'Occident," Sept. 1907.

\*\* Em. Bernard, *loc. cit.*

\*\*\* Between 1890 and 1900, Vollard collected a great number of his pictures in that interval and had several exhibitions of them. At about the same time several painters recognized his influence,—among them Bonnard, Maurice Denis, K. X. Roussel, Vuillard and Emile Bernard—Sérusier and Odilon Redon had already felt it. In 1901, Maurice Denis exhibited at the Salon of the Société Nationale a picture called "Homage to Paul Cézanne in which he grouped the disciples of the master and the propagators of his ideas. Gauguin tried to popularize them with the public and succeeded in part thanks to the odor of the exotic in which he prudently steeped them, and in spite of the fact that Cézanne had declared that Gauguin had misunderstood his intentions and travestied his thought.

consciously solicited the counsel of this rough and subtle art. Most of them have thought they must submit themselves to the letter of his teaching,—by voluntarily inflicting twists and fractures on the form, by peopling imaginary landscapes with nudes that look like bursted sausages or by installing on the edge of a table a glass of wine and three onions. Some, penetrated by his spirit, have resolutely approached nature with the sole preoccupation of demanding from her—aside from all literary or moral intentions and tendencies—the secret of pure coloration and the essential structure which will permit the men of to-morrow to bring back her great decorative rhythms. Never since Rubens perhaps has a painter awakened such fervor in the world of artists. And yet it is possible that the future will not recognize in the work of Cézanne a greater absolute value than in that of Delacroix, or of Corot, or Puvis or Renoir. It must be then that the general fascination exercised by this work derives from profound causes that the majority do not understand or do not know at all,



and whose importance was not even suspected by Cézanne himself,—he being too passionately engrossed in the realization he pursued to take note of those who followed him. The artist is conscious of what he is doing, doubtless, but rarely of the relations of what he does with what surrounds him and what succeeds him,—of the place he holds in the evolution of societies and of the mind. For that reason, the future has the right to discover in his work social correspondences and metaphysical ideas that most often manifested their potential presence there without his knowing it.

I do not know a work, since the thirteenth century, less individualistic, and of a character more clearly impersonal and general than this one. Again, none has come at a more decisive hour—to seek, outside the hollow formulas of political ideology, the realistic bases of a social synthesis whose approach and necessity is everywhere foretold. The ideas of philosophers, savants and artists only announce beforehand the general

needs that are born in the multitudes, and almost always without one or the other's being aware of their unity. On the morrow of the materialistic and impressionistic analysis, at the moment of the most complete social dissociation that history has recorded since the end of the antique world perhaps, the work of Cézanne expresses, under a form still primitive but incomparably strong and dominating, the architectural formula of a plastic archaism whose justification is the movement of concentration in the organizations of the people, the movement of free minds and of philosophic systems.

But let us make no mistake: Cézanne is no more made to be understood by the multitudes than the flower and the fruit are made to fulfill the functions of the branches that bear them and the trunk that nourishes them. He declared that "the artist addresses himself to an exceedingly limited number of individuals only."\* And if he is a social symptom, he neither desired it nor knew it. He had

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\* Letters to Em. Bernard, *loc. cit.*

nothing of the "primary school" in him. He did not believe that reason is both the end and means of the world. If ever there was a being in whom instinct commanded reason and in whom that reason was forced to organize the revelations of instinct, it surely was that formidable painter who marched through life like one hallucinated, clearing his difficult passage through the tangle of forms and colors that pressed about him. He knew well, the great artist, that the always new accession of the innumerable elements of life— ceaselessly mounting and imposing themselves— demands that the successive generations furnish at every moment intuitive geniuses who outstrip traditional reason to introduce into the world sensations and ideas whose value the reason of the future must one day pronounce on. Although he had spoken that decisive word—"study modifies our vision to such a degree that the humble and colossal Pissarro is now justified in his anarchistic theories"\* he was not at all a revolutionist. He lived on his good income, and his dead friendship

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\* I have this speech from Joachim Gasquet.



for Zola which made him keep up a dignified reserve at the moment of torment that closed the last century, did not prevent his manifesting his conservative sentiments to his intimates. He went regularly to church. "It is the mass and my cold bath that keep me going"\* he said. As it was in vain that he demanded from the society of men the edifice of which his systematic had need, he took refuge in the unreal but still imposing edifice of catholicism. If he fought the future, he had the living spirit of the future within him, it was because he was attached to the dead letter of a past wherein he sought the support of a social architecture that his work, amidst the disorder of his time was reconstituting for the future.

The very function that he came to fulfill for those amongst us who are eager to find in nature a new order that we may transport to the work we dream of—forbade him all imagination and even any social opinion of a personal, original and innovating kind. Had he left his workshop for a moment to

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\*Em. Bernard, *loc. cit.*

raise a flag over the house he was building stone by stone—and from which task no incident, no tumult, no solicitation and no grief could drag him, he would not have had that fateful and so to speak, impersonal action whose irresistible power we have felt. The will of a savant was needed for that nature distraught with faith, with loving ardor and creative power to escape the temptations of the senses and of dreaming. Let us bless his pride and his solitude. To make over a classicism he consented to be a primitive. Slowly, painfully, he re-created his innocence. Like the Egyptians, the Hindoos and the French of the Middle Ages, he preferred to be anonymous. He did not sign his works, he forgot them completely once they had fallen from him. Those who will build the temple will respect the base—unshakable and rough, that he has reared.

\* \* \* \* \* “I am old, sick; and I have sworn to myself to die painting rather than fall into the contemptible decline that threatens old

men who let themselves be dominated by the brutalizing passions of the senses."\* One day as he was working from nature, he was badly drenched by the rain. He got home, took to his bed and died two days later.\*\*

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\* Em. Bernard, *loc. cit.*

\*\* The 23rd of October, 1906.