

## EUGENE FROMENTIN—A PAINTER IN PROSE.

BY LEWIS PIAGET SHANKS.

FOR an Algerian picture, its coloring seems at first glance too restrained. The great museum has so many of the gaudier modern Orientalists, so many attempts to put on canvas the vibrancy of tropic sunlight; eyes dazzled by their rainbow hues must here wait a moment for an adequate impression. With the *plein-airistes* no less than *en plein air*, one does not pass directly from prismatic color into this living light, soft, diffused, enwrapping the whole subject in poetic atmosphere.

It is called "Arabs Fording a Stream." Dark brown sleeps the river of the foreground, under banks relieved by the olive-green of clustering trees. An Arab on a white horse is charging up the shoals, whilst others ahead climb the sands of the farther shore, their faces turned toward the desert that obviously lies beyond the hills. It is a sultry afternoon, for horizon and light-blue sky are obscured by trailing clouds; veiled, too, the African sun whose naked rays would have turned this triumph of tone to a bald photographic anecdote. The color is warm yet delicate, the dominant brown-gray bringing out the dripping white or black or bay of the sleek Arabians, bestridden by figures draped in dull blues and reds and white; the tonal quiet gives splendid relief to those glossy straining haunches, bearing their riders away to the Land of the Sun. . . . The artist? He is the painter who first made the pilgrimage here symbolized, the artist who discovered Algeria, who revealed with brush and pen the charm of the coast country and the burning glories of the Sahara.

"Eugène Fromentin, 1820-1876"—reads the inscription. To the centenary there indicated, one's handbook adds the fact that Fromentin was a pioneer of realism. Although dated 1873, this painting seems far closer to the romantic school, with its dreamy exotic charm, drawing one back to the Orient of *The Arabian Nights* or the older Bible story—these swarthy horsemen pursuing Old World adventures through an Eastern wilderness, in a light

which breathes the peace of Allah's paradise. And musing in the spell of its color-harmonies, of its composition—so satisfying, so balanced despite the daring lines of river-gorge and hill—one cannot fail to see that the painter is a lover of the great style and the great tradition, a close student of the Old Masters and in his freer modern way almost as classical as they.

So to-day he finds his place among them, in the galleries of Paris, and no traveler who has once seen the silvery morning sky of the Louvre Falcon Hunt will ever forget that miracle of cool shimmering radiance, even beside the Corots whose influence is so plain in the pearly softness of its color. The discriminating observer will wish to see all the others, in which Fromentin expresses for Algeria and the desert the very genius of place, with a synthetic breadth that leaves him still unrivaled. A romanticist saturated with classicism—one of the successors of Delacroix whom the exotic Orient enabled to become a realist—such is the artist Fromentin; a poet saved from realism by his love of light in all its magical moods, the light of dawn, of evening, of quivering sultry afternoon. . . . But Paris is too far and photographs too unsatisfactory for us to consider his painting; one would gladly give the illustrations of Gonse's biography for an afternoon in the Louvre and the Luxembourg galleries. It were better to review his masterpieces—now ranked even higher—in that other art of which all the world may possess authentic copies, the art of painting in words.

In neither field was he especially precocious. Unlike Gautier, a poet and prentice painter at twenty, or Flaubert who scribbled volumes of juvenilia in his teens, their future fellow-realist grew up a sober and obedient boy, a model scholar, graduating at seventeen with ten prizes and completing his year of philosophy with the highest honors of his class. Inheriting the mental powers of his father, an able physician of La Rochelle, and the sensibility of his Breton mother, he naturally dreamed of a literary career like so many others of his generation; and naturally, too, the tragic love-affair of his youth found expression in verse. But obedient to his father, who despite his own hobby for painting refused to consider seriously his son's sketches or verses, he went to the capital at nineteen to study law, and with truly French docility submitted to this plan of his parents until he was over twenty-five. Once in Paris, however, he found time to hear the lectures of Sainte-Beuve and prove his discipleship in sporadic verse and criticism, to study the Louvre, the Salons, and even to enter a famous studio as pupil—a temporary concession by which his father hoped to distract him

from his grief at the death of his lost love. With his friend Du Mesnil, whose niece he was later to marry, he made a three weeks' trip to Africa in the company of a young native artist, and returning, the ardent admirer of the rising Oriental school prepared at twenty-five his first offerings to the Salon. He had found his way at last; he had discovered Algeria.

With the sale of one of these paintings, favorably noted by the critic Gautier, parental opposition was partially overcome, and within a year a second visit to his adopted country ripened his memories and added to his portfolios. He is delighted with the land, with its character, with the nature he finds there. "Of all the types I know, this is the best adapted to give breadth to one's drawing. However numerous and discordant the details, they form an ensemble always simple, always legible to the eye and easy to portray pictorially." And besides his sketches he is writing letters to Du Mesnil—a diary of his journey—whose clear and vivid notes will later enter into the texture of *A Year in the Sahel*. He is preparing himself in two arts because of his eagerness to express all of Algeria, supplementing his yet unskilful brush by the pen as the poignancy of his impressions imperatively demands.

Had these letters been rewritten and published then, as projected during the hesitations of the following summer, in the last of those long depressing returns to his home and the scene of his first grief, he might easily have leapt into fame as a writer, with an initial success equal to Gautier's just published *Voyage in Spain*. But Fromentin was twenty-eight before he at last asserted his freedom and returned definitely to Paris and the studio. Henceforth the story of his life is the history of his paintings and his books. Saluted as master of the Oriental school in the Salons of 1849 and 1850, he was enabled to marry and take the long wedding tour to his beloved Africa which gave us *A Summer in the Sahara* and the completed *Year in the Sahel*.

The latter should be read first, although published two years later, so that one may penetrate the Sahara with Fromentin from the shores of Provence. He had passed the previous summer in that sunny land, which prepares for the Orient, calling one ever southward by its golden light and its deep blue skies. Now, with his career decided and his happiness secured, he will go to Africa, "word that makes the lovers of discoveries dream," go there to drink his fill of light and color. There is something of romantic weariness and pessimism, or the fatalistic spirit of the East, in his decision to live this year through in the Sahel (Arabic for coast),

that strip of land which extends along the midland sea on either side of Algiers. "Why should not the essence of Algeria," he exclaims, "be contained in the little space framed by my window?" He will let adventure come to him, certain that he is the center of his own universe, esthetically no less than philosophically. So he takes a house with a garden of rose and orange trees, a house from which he can see all one side of the Sahel and the slope behind—a country of groves and marshes, farms and villages, backed by the blue chain of the Kabyle mountains and faced by the deeper blue of the Mediterranean. Westward he looks out on Algiers the White, with its ramparts and minarets and ship-filled port—Algiers the city of his dreams, which, at sunrise, "when it takes on light and color from the vermeil ray that every morning comes to it from Mecca, one might think had sprung the day before from an immense block of white marble, veined with pink."

Everywhere the description is precise, vivid and complete. It is perfect because it is not mere eye-work; the artist has used all the palette of the senses and painted the picture in the warmth of his personal feeling:

"My bedroom faces the south. From it I have a view over the hills, whose first undulations begin fifty meters beyond my garden. The whole slope is carpeted with trees and colored in a harsher green as the year completes its course. Scarcely visible there are a few light trees, old aspens gilded by the autumn and one would say covered with sequins. Only the almond-trees have already lost their leaves.

"The little houses built in this paradise by voluptuaries now dead, are of the purest Arab style and white as lilies. Few windows, queer-looking party-walls, bedrooms one can surmise, circular divans indicated by tiny domes, and trellised openings that make one dream. The morning sky bathes these mysteries in its cool and vivid light. The pigeons of my back court are cooing, setting the musical note of this delightful picture, and from time to time a white pair pass noisily across the window, sending their shadows clear to my bed.

"...I do not need to tell you that everything in this country delights me. The season is magnificent; the astounding beauty of the sky would redeem even a land devoid of grace. The summer continues, although it is November. The year will end without a season of gloom; winter will come without our seeing or fearing it. Why should not human life end like an African autumn, under a clear sky and a warm wind, without decrepitude and without forebodings?"

Could one imagine a more sympathetic guide for an arm-chair journey than Fromentin? He haunts the Arab quarters of Algiers, so tranquil and meditative, where once inside the gates, "queer streets mount up like so many mysterious stairs leading one to silence." It is here that he studies the Arab, hidden among these white walls as under the hood of his burnoose; he learns his language and slowly wins his friendship, divining that indomitable spirit which is the secret of the Arab's native dignity, and finding in his distrust of strangers a kinship to his own reserve. Let us follow him into the heart of Old Algiers:

"It was almost ten when I reached the goal of my usual walks. The sun was climbing upward, the shadow retiring imperceptibly to the depths of the alleys; and the shadows massed beneath the arches, the dark recesses of the shops, and the black paving-stones that slept until noon in the coolness of the night, gave more splendor to the light in every spot touched by the sun. Above the alleys and clinging so to speak to the dazzling corners of the roofs, the sky was spread like a deep violet curtain, spotless and almost without depth. The moment was delicious. The workmen were working as Moors work, quietly seated at their benches. The Mzabites in striped gandouras were sleeping under their veils; those who had nothing to do—always a large number—were smoking at the doors of the cafés. Delightful sounds could be heard: the voices of children droning in the schools, prisoned nightingales that sang as in a May morning, fountains trickling into echoing jars. Through this labyrinth I would walk slowly, going from one *impasse* to the next, and stopping by preference at certain places where the silence is more disquieting than elsewhere. . . .

"...One side of the square is without walls—the one facing the south: so that to brighten the shadow we have close by us a fairly large opening filled with sunlight, and for horizon a view of the sea. The charm of Arab life is always made up of these two contrasting things: a dark retreat with light all about, a shut-in place from which one can enjoy a view, a tight little nest with the pleasure of breathing the wide free air and of looking out afar."

So he finishes the year on the coast, finding in its long Saint Martin's summer the rest his tired artist's nerves require. "I am not producing much," he tells us, "I am watching and listening. I give myself over body and soul to the mercies of that objective nature which I love, which has always had its way with me, and which rewards me now by greatly calming the agitations, known to me alone, which it has made me undergo." Worn out by the



struggles of a decade, by his grief at the marriage and death of his boyish love, by the opposition of his father and the long enforced vacations at La Rochelle, tormented by the consciousness of his late start and his technical weakness, torn by all the hesitations of a self-questioning generation, he is curing his soul in a bath of nature, under a sky which dispenses all the joys of the Oriental kief. Daily, he expands in this sense of well-being, "suspended but not interrupted by sleep," and he "forgets that his sensations repeat themselves in seeing them reborn each day always the same and just as keen." Imperceptibly he absorbs the soul of the land, immersing himself in that life which his books and canvases are to depict with such feeling and such classical breadth.

In *The Year in the Sahel* are found the subjects of his paintings. Some pages have the liveliness of sketches: "Before me, I have two Turkish houses grouped at the right distance to make a pretty picture, quite lacking in style, but pleasantly Oriental. . . . Each is flanked by cypresses. The houses are a dazzling white and divided by delicate shadows, streaked as with the graving-tool; the cypresses are neither green nor russet: one would not be far wrong in seeing them absolutely black. Extraordinarily vigorous, this spot of color lies as though stamped upon the vivid sky, outlining with a sharpness harsh to the eye the fine structure of their branches, their compact foliage and their odd candelabra-like limbs. Wooded slopes go rolling down the valley, and the last of the hills encloses in waving, close-drawn lines this choice bit of homely landscape. All this is practically new; at least I recall nothing in modern painting which reproduces its clear attractive look, or which, especially, employs candidly the simplicity of its three dominant colors, white, green and blue. The whole landscape of the Sahel is almost reducible to these three notes. Add to them the strong brown of soil filled with iron oxide, send up through the green clumps, like a tree of faery, a tall white poplar spangled as if it were goldsmith's work, restore the balance of this slightly jumbled picture by the flat blue line of the sea, and you have once for all the formula of the landscape in the suburbs of Algiers."

Plainly, it is a painter's selective vision which gives this relief and color. Always he is seeking the formula of things, "that which ought to be seen rather than that which is"; he is using the artist's faculties of synthesis and choice of detail, for "man is more intelligent than the sun." Like the suave design of his paintings is *The Year in the Sahel*, perfectly easy and natural to the reader, but cunningly made up of contrasting and repeated colors and

effects, filled with the reveries inspired by that lotus-land—a dream-life in which the repetition of certain moods becomes an additional charm.

As Fromentin leaves the coast for the south, he brings into his description charming bits of narrative, lest the reader weary, and sets off his word-paintings by incidents which he later confesses were in part fictitious. But what if he did not find the philosophic Vandell, or the *alméc* Haoûa in Blidah? Like Hercules he did not return unrewarded from that garden of the Hesperides.

His apples of the sun were the golden pages of the *Summer in the Sahara*.

Was it in search of keener sensations that Fromentin made his pilgrimage to the oasis of Laghouat? Or was it rather that longing for flat horizons which drives the nervously overwrought to the plains or the sea—sovereign balm for the ills that a landscape of broken lines only increases? This impression is indicated in his journal, with a joyous comment on the disappearance of the vegetation as he progresses southward. But it is really his romantic curiosity, his thirst for a sunlight unknown before, scattering golden largesse of new material—this is what urges him forward, where he may see the desert in the naked sterile beauty which is its real character. He longs for that “severity of landscape which makes the beholder serious,” for the land of silence and immobility and implacable cloudless skies; and there, on the stark barren shadowless plains of the Sahara, he was to learn anew the lesson of simplicity which the Old Masters had taught him, in walks through the Louvre unremembered till now.

All the details of his nomad's life are set down in these letters. “We have enjoyed a matchless day. I have passed it in camp, drawing or writing, stretched out beneath my canvas tent. My door is open to the south. . . . rarely do I lose from sight, even at the halts, that mysterious quarter which the sun covers with brighter reflections. . . . From the place where I am lying, I can take in half the horizon, from the house of Si-Chériff to the opposite side, where a group of brown camels is outlined upon a strip of pale sand. Before me I have our whole camp spread out in the sun, horses, baggage and tents; in the shade of the tents a few men are resting, together but silent. . . . Silence is one of the subtlest charms of this solitary empty land. . . .

“All day long a few slender shreds of mist have lain above the horizon, like long distaffs of white silk. Toward evening they dissolved at last and formed a little golden cloud, alone in the un-

wrinkled blue and drifting slowly toward the setting sun. As it approaches, it dwindles, and like the swelling sail of a ship, drawn in and furled on entering port, it will soon disappear in the planet's radiance. The heat grows less, the light softer, it withdraws imperceptibly before the approaching night, which no shadow precedes. Up to the last moment of the day the Sahara remains in full sunlight. Here, the night falls like a swoon."

Sentences like the last are by no means rare. The whole narrative is constellated with touches that reveal the poet, enriched by little personal notes, philosophic or epigrammatic, showing the thinker behind the artist, who gives to his thought the fire of a subdued lyricism. One feels the writer's soul in the page, as with Loti, not Théophile Gautier's smoothly running machine for recording vision, so impersonal that *Tra los Montes* has been called "Spain without the Spaniards." Fromentin's is a humanized landscape; like the authors of the great classics, he is always seeking some eternal aspect of human truth. "What have I come to find here?" he exclaims. "*Est-ce l'Arabe? Est-ce l'homme?*"

Let us go on with him to the oasis of his pilgrimage. "The procession began to mount among the hillocks of yellow sand. . . . I felt that Laghouat was there, that a few steps more would reveal it. . . . The sky was a pure cobalt blue: the glow of the sterile flaming landscape made it still more extraordinary. Finally the terrain declined, and before me but still very far away, on a sun-beaten plain, I saw appear, first an isolated little mount of white rocks with a multitude of dark spots, representing in violet black the upper outlines of a city armed with towers; below a thicket of cold green, compact and slightly bristling like the bearded surface of a wheat-field. A violet bar, which seemed very dark, showed itself at the left, almost at the city's level, reappeared at the right, still just as straight, and shut off the horizon. This bar contrasted crudely with a sky background of dull silver, and save in tone resembled a limitless sea. . . . Right in the foreground a man of our company, on horseback and bent over in his saddle, awaited, resting, the procession left far behind; the horse stood with lowered head and did not stir."

To-day that is a painting which has its variant in every large museum; then it was new and thrilling in romance. Undiscovered, too, were the streets of Laghouat, painted by Fromentin and by so many others since. Entering the city, he shows us the cemetery outside, the heavy primitive gates which lead to the sun-baked silent streets, the café where he passes his evenings with the lieutenant—commanding the newly installed French garrison—who relates to



him the capture of the town. He describes his room in the *Maison des Hôtes*, a mud-built hovel like the rest of the desert dwellings, and tells of the barbaric camel trains coming out of the broad Sahara into these tortuous alleys. He paints the group of native women gathered from mid-afternoon till nightfall at the muddy little spring—ragged but statuesque in the long folds of their flowing *haïks*, and bearing their jars and water-skins with the massive dignity of Greek matrons. Women at the fountain, streets filled with sleeping men: this is for him the formula of the Orient. Then comes the picture:

"Toward one o'clock, the shadow begins to draw a narrow line along the pavement; sitting, it does not yet cover your feet; standing, the sun still catches your head; you must keep close to the wall and draw your body in. The reflection of the sun and the walls is terrific; the dogs give little yelps when they happen to cross this metallic pavement; all the shops exposed to the sun are closed. The end of the street, toward the west, is waving in white flames; thrilling in the air are heard little noises that might be taken for the breathing of the panting earth. Gradually, however, you see coming from the gaping doorways tall figures, pale and dreary, clad in white, visibly exhausted rather than pensive; they come with blinking eyes and bowed heads, using the shadow of their veils to shield their bodies beneath that perpendicular sun. One by one they take their places along the wall, sitting or lying where they can find room. These are the husbands and brothers and young men who have come to finish their day's work. They began it on the left side of the pavement; that is the only difference in their habits between morning and evening.

"This shadow of the countries of light," he adds, "is inexpressible. It is something obscure and transparent, limpid and many-hued; it may be likened to deep water. It seems black, and when the eye plunges into it, we are surprised at seeing very plainly. Suppress the sun, and this shadow itself becomes light. Figures float in a kind of pale golden atmosphere in which their outlines vanish. Look at them now as they sit; their white garments almost melt into the walls; their naked feet are scarcely indicated upon the ground; and but for their faces which make spots of brown upon the vague picture, they would seem to be petrified statues of mud, baked like the houses, in the sun."

Consider that it was nearly seventy years ago that Fromentin observed and composed this luminous picture, and it is clear why the *Street in Laghouat*, with its four sister-paintings sent to the Salon in 1859, brought him a first medal and the cross of the Legion of Honor. "The synthesis of a sensation of the whole thing could

go no farther," says his biographer Gonse, and certainly, space not forgotten, the same might be said of this page of prose.

Some may prefer to its conciseness the longer panoramic description of his days on the city walls. Drawn by his love of large horizons, his thirst for sunlight and solitude and silence, wherein nerves keyed to their highest pitch find "an equilibrium elsewhere unknown," Fromentin brings his sketching umbrella to the ramparts, and takes his place there at sunrise, before the desert and the sky. He notes the pink tints of the changing sand-dunes, with their peach-bloom shadows, the morning flights of birds, glittering in the sun; the fading of the landscape from rose to tawny gray and the darkening of the vast plain as the sun's rays strike it more directly, in the windless silent heat of noon. Crouched under his umbrella on the scorching stones, his color-box twisting in the furious heat, he sees the town blazing white and violet beneath him, set like a jewel among the gardens and green trees of the oasis, their branches moveless as the infinite surrounding sands. With the sun at its zenith, the desert is now an ocean of mysterious brown, swooning in the flaming heat, without detail, formless and colorless as the void. The dreaming artist sees in imagination the unknown lands of the south, the country of the Tuaregs, Timbuktu and Ghadames, strange wares and monstrous animals, distances, uncertainties—an enigma of which he only knows the beginning, and which needs the presence of the Egyptian Sphinx to personify its awful mystery. . . . Camel trains pass and are gone as in a vision. They have seen the realms that lie beyond the unknown south. . . . Sunset comes with its sky of amber and red, bringing purple shadows to the mountains and to the city the consolation of a momentary truce. Again the birds sing, figures are visible on the house-tops, horses and camels are heard at the drinking-places; the desert is like a shield of gold as the sun descends upon the violet hills. Then the artist returns, drunk with the glory of the Saharan day, drowned in a sort of inner sunlight which refracts its fire across his sleep, the sequel of his day-long debauch. He dreams of light, of flames, burning circles and reflections; the comfort of darkness is no longer his. One afternoon he is stricken with blindness, by good fortune only temporary; he is living in a fever, in an apotheosis of light, "*le cœur trempé cent fois dans le néant divin.*"

"The festival of the sun"—he calls his three months in the oasis. "I have seen summer," says the returning traveler, laden with the memories of his fiery baptism. Doubtless he found in it a divine creative energy—the flame of Apollo—reflex of that physical stim-

ulus which the real presence of the sun-god gives his favored ones. But child of the sun as he was, dark-skinned and trained to the life of the open air, it seems marvelous that he made the journey, this slight delicate child of luxury, an instrument tuned to a world of sensations which must have yielded torment along with joy. For he is not merely a visualist, as we have seen. Landing in Algiers he notes at once its indefinable musky smell: "I recognized that charming city by its odor." This characteristic sensitiveness, which never fails to leave its impression, is always the sign of a highly nervous type. His ear, too, is quick to catch each sound or degree of silence: his pictures rarely lack their musical note, be it the voices of men or children or animals, the song of birds or the respiration of the sea. For him sounds are pegs for memories; kept awake all night by the dogs baying along the slope of the Sahel, he relives with pleasure a host of half-forgotten episodes of his youth, pictures which change and return with the changing recurrent tones from distant farms and douars. The page is uncanny, but not less so than the range of his sensitivity, that unison of response which makes his travel books a pure stream of sensation and artistic feeling, carrying the reader with it by the apparently artless transparency of its luminous placid flood.

Once in *The Sahel* we divine the price he must have paid. It is when he tells of the gloom and tumult of the rainy season, confessing his hatred of the falling torrents and the restless sea and the never-quiet clouds. The torment of all this changing horror makes the winter of his discontent: his inability "to find equilibrium anywhere" in the somber landscape sends him south with the first breath of spring; and *en passant* he laments his servitude to mere weather as a thing unworthy of his ideal of dignity and freedom.

"Of all the attributes of beauty the finest is immobility," he remarks in this letter, whilst trying to restore his mental calm with the fixed lines and bright colors of his sketches. Herein he voices the first requirement of the Parnassian poets, and one is interested to see if his realism is merely plastic or the reaction of an outworn lyricism, controlled but still romantic at its core.

The answer to this problem is found in *Dominique*. In 1862, six years after *The Sahara* and four after *The Sahel*, Fromentin responded to the admiration and encouragement of George Sand by publishing his modest essay in the field of fiction. There is a saying that every man has within him the material of one novel, if he have the art to write it. *Dominique* was Fromentin's, a "portrait of the artist," intimate but not morbid, and corroborated in all its

essential lines by his letters and by facts. Here we have the memories of his childhood, the town residence in La Rochelle, dreary and dark, and the country villa or farm which he always loved as the scene of his first Wordsworthian revelation of nature in all its responsive moods. We see him learning the lore of the fields, living the life of a rustic, gathering a harvest which gave him these delicately-toned pages of description, so atmospheric despite the fine discretion which subordinates their color to the spiritual drama. Yet a child, the hero is already storing up impressions with a zeal which declares the poet. In later years he will remember these, not the excursion, but "the vision of the place, very clear, the exact notation of the hour and the season, and even the sounds" which accompany the picture. Like a magic harp, his soul is ever in tune to reproduce these chords in which it finds full harmony. It is not concerned with the hunt or the quarry, but the impression: the weather, the wind, the calmness of the gray sky and dark-green September woods, the low flights of the birds are engraved there forever, stored up to cheer the gloomy prison-life of winter months, a "subtle winged world of sights and odors, sounds and images" which he condenses, "concentrates into pictures" lighted by the glamor of a dream. One is not surprised to find this boy writing sentimental verses—whose formal beauty shows on what anvil his prose was forged—nor at his later love of the African sun.

The tragedy of his hopeless love develops this tendency to introspection and lyricism. Postdated here for artistic reasons, the realization of his true feeling for the friend of his childhood, married two years before, actually came in 1836, at the age of sixteen. But the spell of Lamartine's poems and the similar story of Elvire, mentioned in Fromentin's verses, may explain this precocity, natural enough in an imaginative youth during the romantic eighteenth-thirties, when truant schoolboys read *The Lake* and George Sand's early novels without requiring any pedagogical stimulus thereto.

In any case Madeleine, as he calls her, finished his *éducation sentimentale*. Her coquetry or her love of platonic dalliance lighted a consuming fire in the heart of Dominique, developing his sensibility no less than Musset's was aroused by the gentle Sand. The experience dominated his adolescence, accounting for much of his hesitation in choosing a career, as is proved by his more decided attitude after his beloved's death in 1844. But the Lamartinian interlude absorbed too much energy, left too deep a stamp. "Your lot is always to regret, never to desire," his bosom friend reminds the hero, expressing Fromentin's mature judgment of the time when

his mind was bent back upon itself, sunk in contemplation of past happiness and lyrical regret. In the story Madeleine lives on, for the novel must continue; and her lover, filled with a desire to create as "the only excuse for our miserable existence," shows his romanticism by "writing only to rid his brain of something," and ends by burning the results as unworthy of his artistic ideal. For like Flaubert, Fromentin has the romantic horror of the commonplace, transferred to the realm of ideas.

Werther-like, he travels to forget her, only to cry her name on the shores of storied seas. Moved to pity, she tries to help him to forget, to give at least some happiness by distracting him, to realize at last the happiness she is giving is her own. The consciousness of love's requital now restores his energy and ambition, and he gains strength to sweep his soul's house clear of cobwebs. He renounces his old search for impressions, for moonlights on the Seine and sun-dappled reveries in the woods; he gives up his life of sensation and emotion and begins to study. Anonymously, he publishes his verses, and after their failure, two serious books which attain success.

The final separation is resolved by Madeleine, and the hero finds in a sensible marriage and a country squire's life some measure of content. But it is Dominique's spiritual purgation which most concerns us, as a personal revelation of Fromentin himself. It shows us a lyrical type bent on curing himself of lyricism, giving up his former emotional reading, choosing from the great classics a number of vitalizing books, and making them his for their tonic virile force. It shows us a romantic type realizing the price he has paid, and subjecting himself to an intellectual rein to curb his romanticism.

Fortunately for art, he did not entirely succeed. But he chastened his prose immensely by the process. *Dominique* has a beauty so restrained that one can hardly define its penetrating, distinguished, melancholy charm—a charm still potent, since the novel has had twenty editions in the last twenty-five years. That fact alone would prove this plotless soul-picture a classic. And, if traces of "the elegiac dew of tears" which he regrets are discoverable in his confession, there are certainly no hints of morbidity in the fine severity of his travel pages, concentrated as so many copper-plate etchings.

Involuntarily one thinks again of Flaubert. But unlike that satirist of romanticism, Fromentin never belittles the past, even objectively and by implication. His is too sure a consciousness of the dignity of human suffering to let him fall into that pit. *Sunt*



*lachrymae rerum et mentem mortalia tangunt.* Yet though he found in travel and art the impersonal sensation which alone leaves no sting behind, he came to realize in the practice of his thoughtful craft that one can only cure the soul by the mind, by labor that involves the intellect. His last book, published the year before his death, resumes the intellectual activity which prepared and accompanied the painter's brilliant and uninterrupted successes in the Salons.

For many years Fromentin had cherished the plan of writing a volume on the art treasures of the Louvre. To study the masters in that unrivaled galaxy, to compare their methods and define their individual types of genius, was an ambition which his inquiring mind may well have got from the days when he listened to the lectures of Sainte-Beuve. He had gone to Venice in 1870, only to have his journey cut short by the Prussian invasion of France; now, after a summer's vacation trip to the Low Countries, he returned and in six weeks completed the first and unhappily the only volume of his *Old Masters: Belgium and Holland*.

No other book of art-criticism can approach this. Written from fresh notes and in the full heat of discovery and inspiration, it has like all his masterpieces, a power tempered and enriched by the study and meditation of many years. It may be censured for lack of formal arrangement, for its tone direct as a personal letter, for its long though illuminating digressions. But the critic who would prune it of this informal quality, so warm and inspiring, or of the impressions of Lowland towns and landscapes which convey the relation of Dutch and Belgian art to their motherlands, would be more than a pedant. This is no dilettante's work, in spite of the modest assumption of the Preface.

"I have just been viewing," he says, "Rubens and Rembrandt in their own home, and the Dutch School in its unchanging frame of a life partly agricultural, partly seafaring—a life of downs, pastures, huge clouds and low horizons. There are two very distinct types of art here, . . . which would need to be studied by one who is at the same time an historian, a philosopher and a painter." He dreams of a new art-history, "wherein philosophy, esthetics, nomenclature and anecdote should fill less room, and matters of the craft much more, which should be like a sort of conversation upon painting, wherein painters might recognize their ways of working, wherein men of the world might learn better to understand painters and painting." Too modest to claim aught but the technical fitness required, his wish best defines the quality of his result.

Free from studio jargon as it is, this is still a painter's book on painting. A trained vision is analyzing methods and determining sources and relations, and a trained mind is directing the whole inquiry. For the cultivated layman Fromentin holds out a torch of insight, at once esthetic, philosophic and technical, and marvelously interpretative. He lays bare the secrets of color and brushwork, of chiaroscuro and values; he makes the masterpiece reveal, as Sainte-Beuve did the book, the temperament of its creator. The scalpel of the critic is handled as surely as brush or pen; it would be hard to find pages finer than those in which the Dutch painters are drawn and differentiated—an unforgettable group—or the summary of Rubens's fecund lyrical genius, or the portrait of the mystic Rembrandt.

*The Old Masters* is a pure intellectual joy. It has the power of clear concentrated thought. There is no shadow of vagueness, because the author limits himself to the certainties learned in his craftsmanship; when he dissects Rembrandt as a colorist he cleaves with the sharp edge of technical fact. All mysticism or personal feeling is eliminated from these chapters; all the pseudo-subtlety of half-thoughts dear to literary journalism; the sheer cold force of his logic grips like a vise. Its judgments are final, irrefutable. Yet the book is no abstract lucubration; word-pictures pure as the spring green of the Sahel, portraits worthy of the author of *Dominique* relieve the web of thought, brilliant as the Sahara skies and broad as the horizon of art-history.

Impartiality? Seek not in this book that trait of the impressionistic critic or the art-dealer. Here as always, Fromentin takes exception to the French realists, finding them flat and photographic, opposing to their crudity and dryness the rich atmospheric values of classical realism. As in *The Sahara* he does not cease to inveigh against the substitution of raw undigested nature for choice and synthesis; he stands for the great tradition and the discipline which, for the Dutch School, never stifled the individuality of genius, and gave to all the priceless craft-heritage of the past.

His own classicism in painting, applied to the reproduction of that romantic landscape and life to which his imagination called him, is explained in *The Sahel*, in a chapter which offers a foretaste of this supreme critical flower of his genius. His paintings were composed in his studio from notes and drawings and memories. In his studio, too, the travel books received their final form, gaining breadth and losing no whit of their vibrancy and color. Selective memory, memory eliminating the trivial and grown atmospheric

with lapse of time, is the secret of his prose, chastened moreover by a classical restraint. His school-days lasted long enough to show him what standards were.

A true sensitive-plant, as his friend Gönse calls him, impressionable to the last degree, wearing reserve like a mask, a born romanticist but elegiac rather than rebellious—in other words, with a body unequal to his spiritual energies and a mind which gave him pause—a child of feeling who until after twenty was subjected to a classical discipline, and who found in that discipline strength to live, breadth to distinguish his art, taste to control his writing to a purity which with all its color makes it authentic to the reader and classic for all time: that is Eugène Fromentin. He attracts because of the distinction of his personality, divined in all his works in either art; he continues to attract because of his reserve.

It is the loss of France that he died at fifty-six, just as his books were about to open to him the doors of the French Academy. It is the loss of world-literature that a public upon which he was dependent for bread would not permit him to leave the field of Algerian painting, holding his books as the work of a talented amateur. But such was the taste of the age. Two years before his death he reissued, with a preface, the third edition of that immortal *Summer in the Sahara*, which with *Dominique* and *The Old Masters* is now progressing toward its thirtieth. So Fromentin has come to his own. Leaving but four volumes, he could have cried at the end: *Eregi monumentum*. But he was far too modest.

To-day, the writer is considered superior to the artist. Amid the vagaries of that individualism which he first noted and deplored, now passing into isms which he was mercifully spared, Fromentin is thrust aside by the young as *vieux jeu*; with Corot and Millet he is one of the last of the Old Masters. And even in Paris, in the Louvre, before the pearl and silver sky of the Falcon Hunt, one feels through all the wealth of the impression an indefinable melancholy, considering Time's undeserved requital to his art, to his message, to this voice crying in the wilderness. It was well for him that he could express himself in another way, even at the cost of much-deplored manual dexterity and technical skill. It was well that he knew his humanities, as it always is. Given this training, when the hour of a great experience strikes and the Muses call, a man is at least prepared. Whether early or late, be he parched in the heat of a Sahara or lulled in the calm of a Sahel, the artist finds one instrument ready to his hand. He has his chance of leaving that which never dies.