THE SINCERITY OF MILLET

The question of what constitutes beauty in art is one upon which the layman and the artist cannot precisely meet—at least upon the same ground. As has been said at the beginning, certain outdoor painters like Millet and Corot in France, and Horatio Walker and William Lathrop in our own country, satisfy both the layman and the painter for different reasons. There are other men, like Whistler and Twachtman, who appeal more to the painter than to the average sincere layman who does his own thinking. It is perhaps not probable that in a huge busy commercial country like America the people will ever come to have the appreciation of beauty that once was in Greece, and in Italy in the days of the Renaissance. But certainly the cultured general public is getting closer to the idea of beauty as the painter sees it than he was in past generations. Undoubtedly the taste of our mothers’ day would have revolted from a picture of Horatio Walker’s pigs considered as a thing of beauty, yet now there are many people who, although unable to appreciate the technical skill with which Walker wields his brush, can yet enjoy such a picture and wish to possess it. And to have brought home the simple homely realities of life as things possessing beauty is to have done something for humanity as well as art.

THE SINCERITY OF MILLET

“A SINCERITY so absolute and convincing as to become at times almost depressing is the secret of Millet’s art. He painted that which he knew and understood and felt. In eighteen hundred and fifty-one he wrote, ‘The most joyful thing I know is the peace, the silence, that one enjoys in the woods or on the tilled lands. One sees a poor, heavily laden creature with a bundle of fagots advancing from a narrow path in the fields. The manner in which this figure comes suddenly before one is a momentary reminder of the fundamental conditions of human life—toil. On the tilled land around, one watches figures hoeing and digging. One sees how this or that one rises and wipes away the sweat with the back of his hand. In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat thy bread. Is that merry, enlivening work, as some people would like to persuade us? And yet it is here that I find the true humanity, the great poetry.’”

ARTHUR JEROME EDDY.