

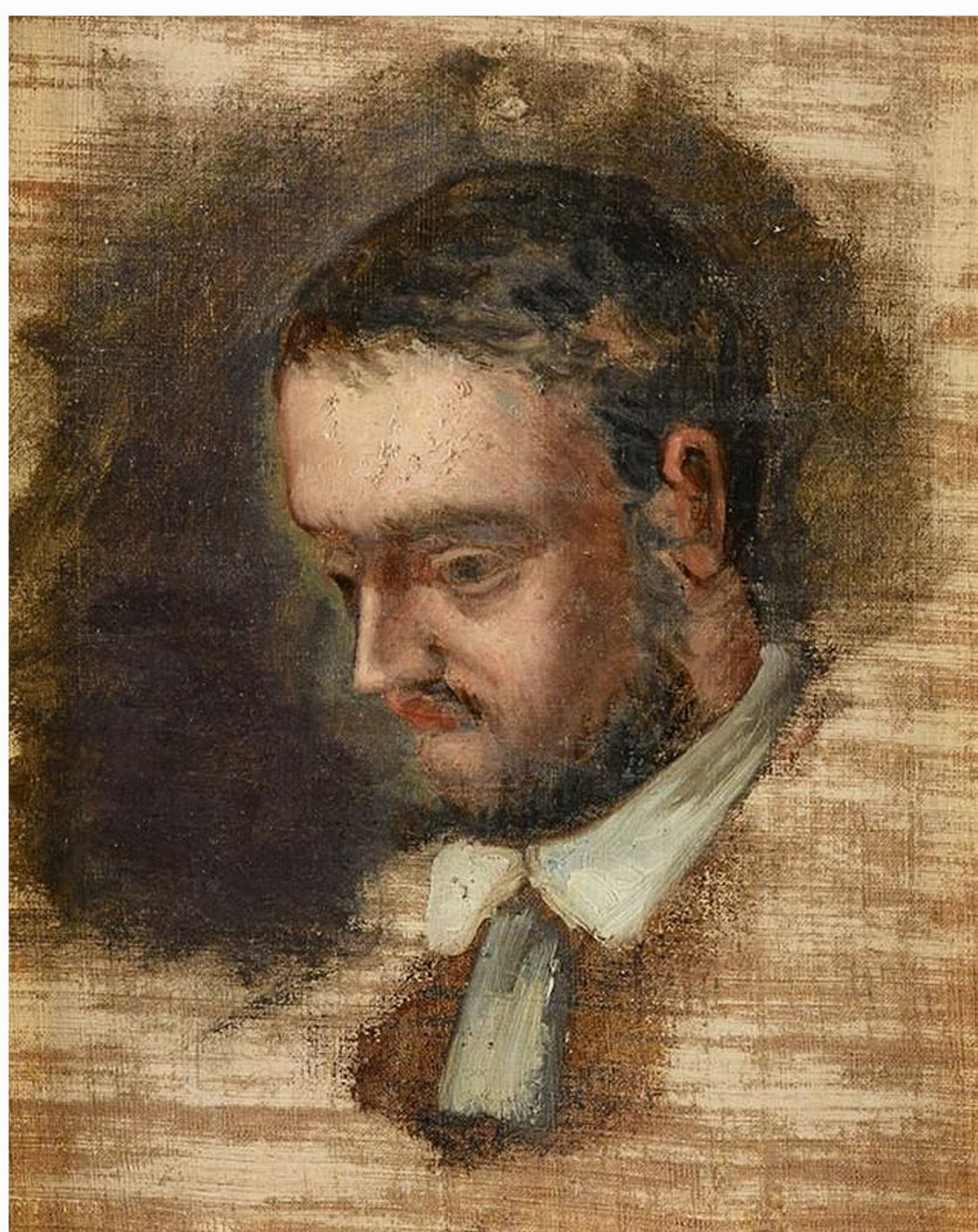
VANITY FAIR

December, 1915

PAUL CÉZANNE —AT LAST

New York's First Opportunity to
Judge the Most Powerful
of the Moderns

By Frederick James Gregg



PORTRAIT OF ZOLA, BY CÉZANNE

*Zola was perhaps the best of Cézanne's friends
Painted in 1860*

AS there is to be a large exhibition—the first ever held here—of the paintings of Paul Cézanne, at the Montross Gallery this season, it is timely to consider his relation to our own period. For whatever is disturbing, violent, or heterodox in the art of the day is to be attributed mainly to the influence of the Old Man of Aix. He was the first of what are now called the Moderns. Though he did not know it, every one of the canvases in which he strove to express himself—his own expression—was a manifesto of revolution, a defiance flung in the face of all the established schools.

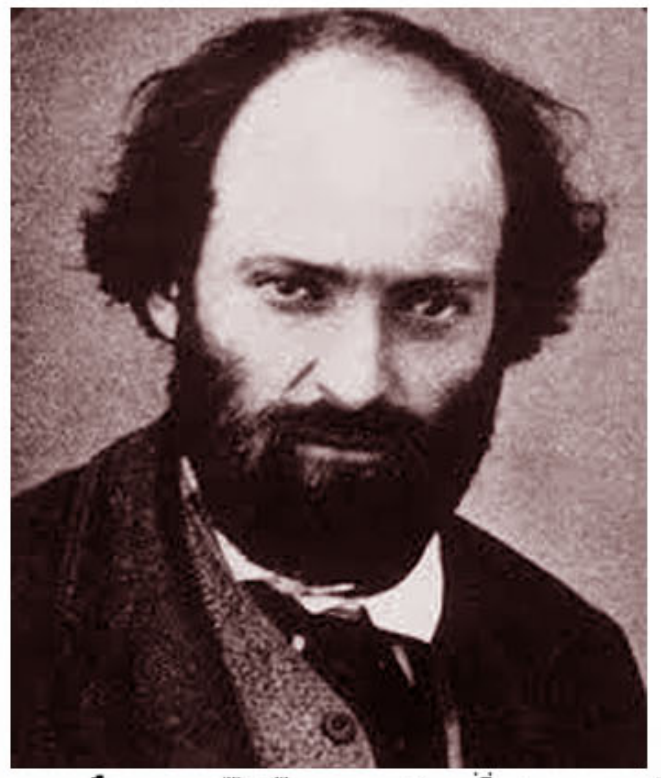
Some of the reactionaries object to the word Moderns. But it has a precise meaning, and that is enough. The Impressionists, in their day, came by their unsatisfactory label by adopting defiantly, on the advice of Renoir, a nickname taken and applied to them, from the title of a painting by one of the group. Modernism means in 1915—as it did in 1878, in the case of Manet, Pissarro, Renoir, Monet, Degas and the rest—an artistic revolt against authority. But it is to be noted that the opposition to the followers of Cézanne has been much more bitter than that shown to the Impressionists.

CÉZANNE was *in* the Impressionist group, but was not *of* it. As far back as 1866 he frequented the Café Guerbois, of which Manet was the acknowledged



Cezanne at Last

dictator. After the War of 1870-71, the still more celebrated Nouvelle Athènes became the meeting place of the geniuses. But Cézanne complained that his friends were as correct about their clothes as if they had been a set of

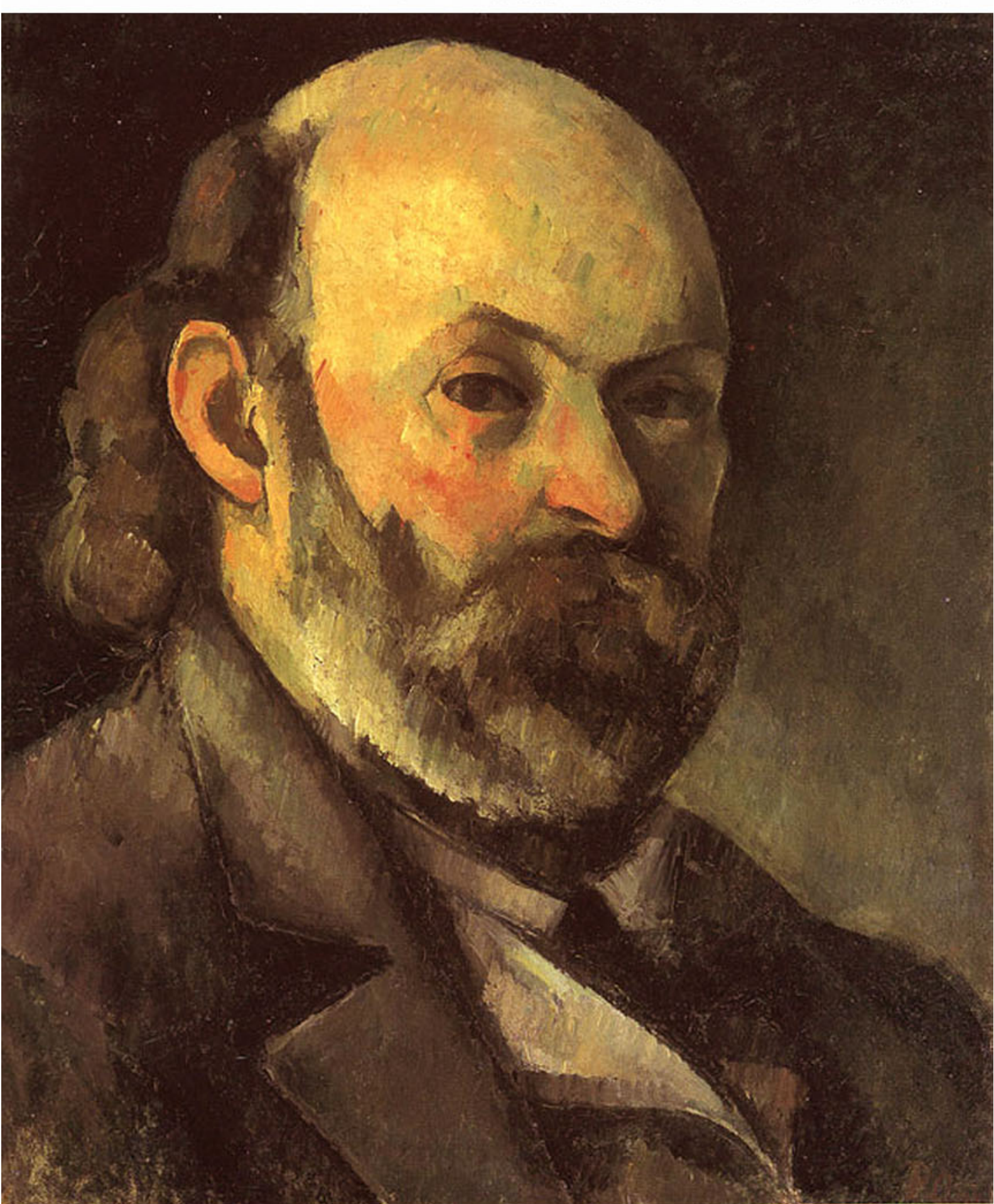


notaries, and he got angry when Manet showed his jealousy of Carolus Duran's capacity for making an income of 100,000 francs a year. Besides, as early as 1863, Cézanne distinguished his own painting sharply from that of Manet and Monet. "Monet is nothing but an eye," said he, "but, good Lord, *what* an eye!"

THE history of Cézanne's connection with the Manet-Monet group, until he definitely quit it in 1877, shows that he felt all the time that the Impressionists had gone up a side street which led to a blank wall. He turned back to the main road. The recognition of the Impressionists increased with the buyers, but the Impressionistic influence began to decrease with the younger painters. Then Cézanne came into his own. Of course the stout champions of Impressionism objected. As the critics who helped Wagner to recognition were unfriendly to that composer's successors, so George Moore, to take one notable instance, not only refuses to accept the Moderns, who derive from Cézanne, but declares positively that the art of painting came to an end with Manet. Then if we accept this view Gauguin and Van Gogh must be of no account, while Picasso and Matisse and all their works are simply an insult to human intelligence, for all these are art descendants of Cézanne.

It is charged against Cézanne that he longed for recognition. He did. The explanation is simplicity itself. He tried to break into the Salon of Bouguereau in 1866, when the first gun of official hostility was fired against him, and answered by Zola. But as Ambroise Vollard points out—and nobody else knew the painter better, or perhaps as well—Cézanne believed that if his pictures once found their way into the official salons, the scales would fall from the eyes of those who could not or would not see, and they would turn their backs on academic art, in order to follow him. Cézanne never wavered in his belief in his own work. That is all the silly charge amounts to.

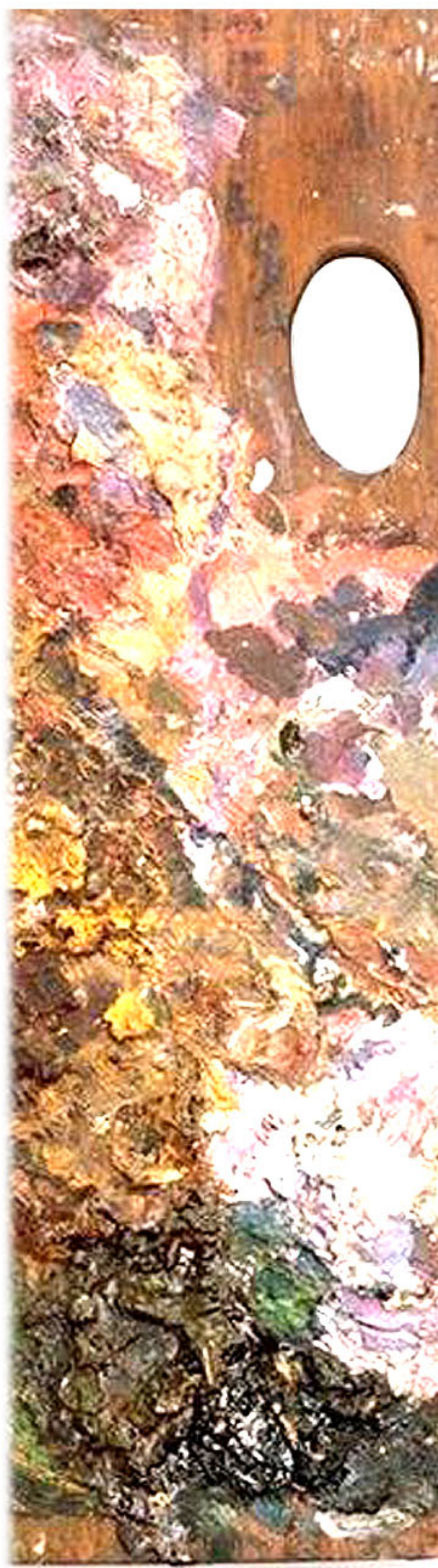
No man of genius ever found greater obstacles in his way. To begin with, his father, a banker (money lender) of Aix, had all the prejudices of a Provincial against a precarious profession like painting. The boy was forced to become a law student. He was so bored



THE FAMOUS SELF PORTRAIT OF PAUL CÉZANNE

Cezanne at Last

by the Code that he spent his time turning its clauses into French verse. Through the intercessions of his mother he was permitted to go to Paris in 1861. Here the friendship with Zola, begun at school, was continued. Cézanne



Cezanne's Palette

returned to his birth place next year, and the parental pressure was renewed. He was forced into the office, where he was so unbusinesslike as to adorn the margins of the ledgers with pen and ink studies. When he was caught painting, his father addressed to him the triumphant questions "How can you hope, as an artist, to improve on what Nature has done so well?" There was another family discussion with the mother and Sister Marie. He got leave to try for entrance to the Beaux Arts, and, though he failed, the father capitulated finally and never more endeavored to make the crooked straight, as he understood it. It was about this time that Cézanne painted his famous "Bathers," the picture described by Zola in "L'Oeuvre," the novel in which the painter is hero

under which Cézanne appears as Claude Lantier.

Then came Paris again, with Zola determined to get along, like the good bourgeois that he was, while his companion Cézanne caused annoyance to all his friends by his perpetual contempt for appearances. The future popular novelist always thought of what people would think. The future great master, when he felt so disposed, would stretch himself on a park bench to take a nap, like a tramp, and would put his boots under his head for a pillow to keep any marauder from running off with them while he slept. In the matter of money, too, Cézanne was as much the careless, generous Bohemian as Zola was the careful man of affairs.

This sojourn at Paris was followed by two years spent at Anvers, in the company of Pissarro, at the house of Dr. Gachet, an early admirer of Cézanne. It is strange to find Pissarro warning his colleague not to be influenced by the old masters. This shows at any rate how little those who frequented the Guerbos, and, later on the Nouvelle Athènes, were aware of the direction of Cézanne's development. To this period are attributed some of Cézanne's sharp criticisms. He objected to Manet because the latter had "copied the Spaniards." But it had to be admitted that Manet was a true forerunner because he had produced a simple formula at a time when official art had run to convention. Cézanne accepted Bacon's theory that the artist was *homo additus naturae*—man added to nature. But he went on to point out that the philosopher had not foreseen the *plein air* school, or "that other calamity, the *plein air* of indoors."

In 1874 Cézanne took part in the Exhibition of the Anonymous Society of Painters, Sculptors and Engravers, with Pissarro, Renoir, Degas, Berthe Morizot and the rest, and in 1877 his work was included in the Exhibition of the Impressionists, officially so called at the suggestion of Renoir.

The first man to understand Cézanne properly was the composer Cabaner. Cabaner gave an indication of his quality when they asked him if he could render silence in terms of music. "Yes," he replied, "but I should need the aid of three military bands to do it." Somehow or other you feel that this was just the right sort of man to appreciate the power and originality of Paul Cézanne.

It was Renoir who brought Cézanne to the attention of the astute M. Choquet, who when he decided to buy one of the paintings was afraid of what his wife would think about it. So it was introduced into the house by a ruse, and remained there, as if by accident, until the good lady grew accustomed to its violence. At this period the genial Père Tanguay, the paint seller, had some of Cézanne's things and the key of his studio, so that he could introduce a chance buyer. For long a small Cézanne could be had for 40 francs and a big one for 100 francs. Think of it, museum presidents!

EVERY year Cézanne sent two canvases to the Salon and every year they were rejected until 1882, when he got in. But it was not a real acceptance, seeing that Guillemet put forward the false pretence that the

Cezanne at Last

other was his pupil. In fact, Cézanne entered, without examination, through the back door of charity. There was a similar experience in the case of the Exposition Universelle of 1889. The authorities wanted to borrow a rare piece of furniture from Choquet. The latter agreed, on condition that they accept a painting by Cézanne. It was hung up against the ceiling where it could do no harm, for nobody could see it. In the following year Cézanne exhibited with the "Thirty" at Brussels. One of the paintings, a landscape, was the first of his works to go to Berlin. It was not until the year 1913, after the International Exhibition of Modern Art in the Armory that, through the acquisition of the "Poor House Hill," Cézanne found a place in the Metropolitan Museum in New York.

In 1895 the great Caillebotte legacy, including some Cézannes, was accepted by the French Government. Cézanne was pleased at the thought of getting into the antechamber of the Louvre. But the authorities took fright, when they heard that the painter had made a rough remark as to what he was going to do to the work of Bouguereau. It was settled that the "Bathers" could not be put in the Luxembourg. For consistency's sake, 8 Monets, 3 Sisleys, 11 Pissarros, 1 Manet and 3 Cézannes, were rejected, which cut the gift in half. Official incompetence was once more triumphant. One recalls the observation of Cézanne made years before: "The great thing is to quit the schools and all the schools . . . Still Pissarro went a little too far when he said that the Mausoleums of art should be burned."

The most important event in the life of Cézanne, as far as the growth of his influence was concerned, was his introduction to Ambroise Vollard, for it resulted in the first real exhibition of the painter's work in December, 1895; no less than 150 of his canvases being shown in the Rue Lafitte. M. Vollard has given a lively account of the criticisms of the visitors in his recent recollections of Cézanne. Those who say that Paris is always more intelligent than New York or London, will be surprised to find that such expressions as the following were the rule on the part of visitors: "Monstrosities!" "Nightmares!" "atrocious painting" and "very easy to do!" The last will appeal to all those who keep their ears open at Post Impressionist shows.

Some laughed, others shrugged their shoulders and others got angry. A gloomy person put the situation to M. Vollard this way. "You will see that people will buy pictures which are ugly, until they come to seek them for their very ugliness, all the time with the thought in the back of their heads, that this very ugliness is a guarantee of huge prices in the future." A celebrated flower painter was indignant and declared that Cézanne had used blossoms made of paper for his models. Gérôme dropped in with Gabriel Ferrier. "Design counts no longer," said the first. "Patience," said the second, "Time has no respect for what is done without its aid."

The first purchaser was August Pellerin who has now one of the finest collection of Cézannes anywhere. When M. Vollard went down to Aix soon after to see if he could pick up some Cézannes, he found the natives incredulous. Later on, when the prices began to soar, the good folks of the artist's birthplace adopted the theory that the Parisians actually bought paintings by Cézanne in order to make fun of the provincials. It was no wonder that when he returned home to pass his last years in exile from Paris the artist found the people utterly incapable of sympathizing with him or his work.

In the meantime the Old Man of Aix has had his revenge. This is his epoch, as it is no one else's epoch in any of the arts. Even the new-rich collectors, who buy on advice, must each have at least one Cézanne. Cézanne and Renoir lead the modern market, which is strange seeing that their work has so little in common. Renoir is a fashion, a fine fashion, but Cézanne is a great force or energy, affecting what is coming on. It only remains for France to find out how truly great a man she gave to the Nineteenth Century.

V A N I T Y
F A I R