

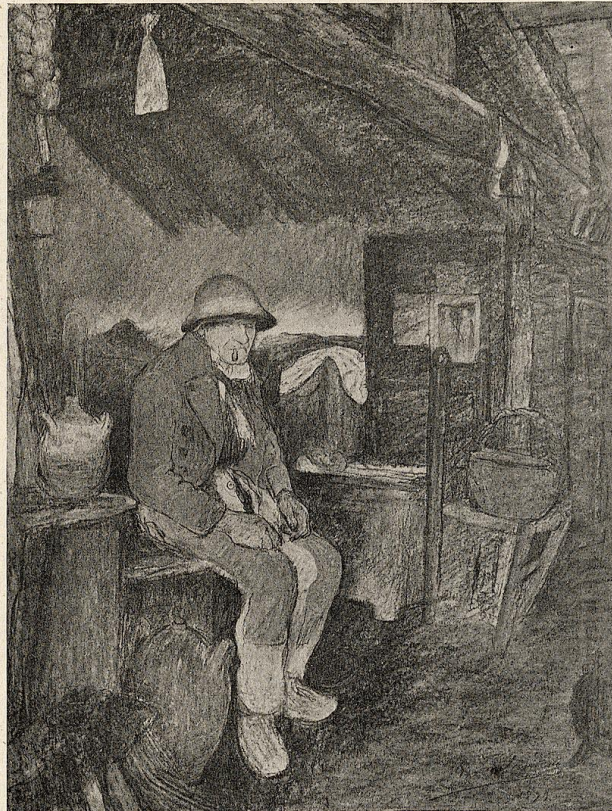
Charles Milcendeau's Pastels

THE MODERN FRENCH PASTELISTS : CHARLES MILCENDEAU. BY GUSTAVE GEFFROY.

It is now five years since Charles Milcendeau displayed in a private exhibition some fifty drawings of La Vendée and Brittany. The impression they produced was singular and profound, and it has not been lessened so far as those are concerned who at once appreciated this precise and delicate art, which charmed likewise by its dreaminess and, so to speak, its want of finish. The fact is that Milcendeau, skilful draughtsman as he is, will not make models for his drawings. He essays to fix the life around him ; and that life ever presents itself to him with a movement, a respiration, which he strives to make visible. This he often expresses with rare felicity. To see his figures one would think they had suddenly moved ; that their hands had shifted from their place ; that the expression of their features had just changed ; that they had started walking, or had all of a sudden taken an attitude of repose. Milcendeau does not always obtain this result by the simple play of light and shade which lends itself to all phantasmagoric effects. Very often he presents his creations in full light, and it is only by means of a certain manner of his in tracing their features and outlines, in sketching their attitudes, and in hesitating over their form that he succeeds in producing the illusion as of life caught by surprise, and transferred right away on to a sheet of paper.

One can at once understand the charm of works conceived in this fashion, yet, none the less, solid, massive, and strong. In these visions of folk such

as we meet in the streets, or see on their doorsteps or inside their houses, there is an ingenuous knowledge which becomes even more marked in contact with reality. Milcendeau tells us what he knows ; and well he knows it, and well he tells it. I admire this young man—a pupil of Gustave Moreau, who gave him the familiar Italian and academic training—for having had the sturdy inspiration to return to Nature. Gustave Moreau was a man of intelligence, and did his best to respect the liberty of his pupils. But in this he did not succeed so well as has been thought. The conversations I have had, not only with Milcendeau, but also with Bussy and Martel, have left me no room for doubt in this respect. Gustave Moreau could not hide his ill-humour—his anger, indeed—when he observed these young men desirous of painting peasants and peasant-women—mere clowns and wenches,



"VIEILLARD"

FROM THE PASTEL BY CHARLES MILCENDEAU