

SCANDINAVIAN ART

ILLUSTRATED

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With the name of Tidemand the name of Hans Gude is always closely associated; so closely, in fact, that the two are more often mentioned together than separately. Born in Christiania in 1825, Gude was, it is true, eleven years younger than Tidemand; but he came to Düsseldorf at a very early age, and the two painters were soon intimately joined in friendship and co-operation. Accordingly the landscape painter Gude stands beside the figure painter Tidemand as the second of the two chief personages in our art in the middle years of the century.

Before 1854, the year in which Gude was appointed a professor at the Academy in Düsseldorf, he lived alternately in Norway and in the Rhine city. During the summer he invariably travelled in Norway, and on these journeys he learned to know the various scenically beautiful regions of his native land. In the summer of 1843 he met Tidemand on a jaunt through Sogn and Hardanger; in the autumn, he writes, they returned to Düsseldorf, their portfolios crammed with sketches. The following winter he painted the first of the pictures that have borne the title Mountain Heights; it was his debut, created a sensation, and was purchased by Kunstforeningen in Christiania. At that time he was only nineteen years of age. His next picture, which made a stir at the exposition in Berlin and was sold there, was A Norwegian Fjord in Sunshine. These subjects are noteworthy. Gude's art was, during his entire life, principally occupied with the portrayal of Norwegian mountains and fjords.

Between the years 1844 and 1858 there follows a long series of paintings of mountain heights. Among them are Mountain Heights at Sunrise, from 1855, and Mountain Heights, from 1857, both of which are now in the National Gallery. The last-named, particularly, belongs with the best things Gude has produced, and indeed ranks among the capital pieces in the landscape art of Norway. The painting takes us up on the moors of a cold evening in autumn. The long ridge of the plateau extends in toward a distant chain of peaks upon which the fog lies heavily; and, like an eye deserted by hope, the little mountain tarn gazes out from that dark-blue embodied solitude lying rigid beneath angry skies and chilled through by the icy gusts of approaching night.

That Dahl's art made the strongest impression upon him in youth Gude has himself confessed in the warmest terms in his Recollections. Without doubt it would have been extremely fortunate, as well for Norwegian art on the whole as for Gude himself, if from the very first he had escaped Düsseldorf and had immediately become a pupil of Dahl, who was then at the height of his powers and was engaged in teaching at Dresden. The fact is that in Gude's native endowment there was a dangerous tendency toward theatrical spuriousness; The Bridal Procession in Hardanger is nothing else than reminiscences from an emotional evening of tableaux and music at the theatre. Nor have his decorative landscapes upon themes from Fridthjof's Saga, painted in 1849 in the dining-room at Oscarsholm, any very profound pictorial value.

At bottom, however, Gude was naturally a realist; little by little he worked his way out of the mists of romanticism. The decisive moment came in Gude's life as an artist when it dawned upon him that the cleverness of Düsseldorf and all its concessions to bad taste might be leading in the wrong direction. At once he resolutely took flight, resigning his professorship at the Academy and adventuring into the world with uncertain prospects. In Wales, where he made his first sojourn, he painted open air subjects the year round. His charming Ivy Bridge was done in Wales in 1862. In 1864 he accepted an appointment as professor at the Academy in Karlsruhe. Here he exercised an active influence as a teacher until 1875, when he was called to a professorship at the Academy in Berlin; there he remained till his death in 1903. Among well known Norwegian artists who were pupils of Gude in Karlsruhe may be mentioned Otto Sinding, Eilif Peterssen, Fritz Thaulow, Kitty Kielland, Fredrik Collett, and Thorolf Holmboe.

Gude's art has a very broad reach. In his earlier pictures the subjects are preferably drawn from mountain heights and from the widely contrasted scenery of the Westland; in later years, on the contrary, it was more often the less pretentious natural features of eastern Norway, the Eastland, that attracted him. From lofty mountain expanses to the farms of Smaalenene and the groves of Jarlsberg, from the stormy shores of the ocean to the smooth bays and inlets of the Christiania fjord, from the highlands of Wales or the misty mountain regions of Scotland to the low, sandy coast of Rügen and its long, even ground swells—these are the paths that Gude's art has traversed.

With the year 1860 begins that long series of pictures from the seashore which thenceforth are a constant feature of Gude's production till the very last. He is, to be sure, still able to paint mountain and foliage and river; but the sea fascinates him most. He loves to observe the life of the waves, to watch the moods of the ocean through all the transitions between storm and calm. What are no doubt the best of his marines had their origin out on the Christiania fjord on a beautiful day in summer. One of the most popular among them is called The Entrance to Christiania Harbor, with Akershus and the Bærum Hills in the background. It is a day of light, fair-weather clouds that half obscure the sun, and a soft southern breeze is driving the white-caps at a merry pace in toward the anchorage, while the veiled sunshine flows like molten silver over the undulating surface.

Paintings by Gude are to be found, besides the great numbers in the public and private collections throughout Norway, also in galleries in Stockholm, Copenhagen, and Gothenburg, in Amsterdam and Rotterdam, in Dresden, Berlin, and many other German cities.

Gude was admittedly a hard worker, but his work seems never to have given him difficulty, never to have caused him pain. The charming was to him a natural form of expression. Selection, moderation, fear of extremes mark everything that he has done. All that might disturb his own poise and harmony he avoided. Therefore he avoided also the impressionism which in the eighties penetrated from French art into Norwegian; he remained a stranger to it and hostile to it.