

THE PORTRAIT OF A HAND.

It was only a repetition of an old, old story — a village girl's search in the city for broader work and a higher life; the gradual creeping of poverty and despair, till starvation leered at her, not over her shoulder, but not more than a block away.

It was the old, old story of temptation, such as comes to such a girl — poor, pretty and beauty-loving — on the one hand utter misery, on the other luxury and shame.

And Audrey had wandered into an art gallery to think it over, and to try to decide. No one would care, she mused. She thought that the last tie which bound her to the old life was broken when her mother died a year ago. To be sure, there had been another fine, slender thread — but that was so long ago. It seemed too weak for any service now; in fact, she did not think of it at all. And yet, with a strange persistence, her mind kept revealing vague bits of scenery and character, which floated before her in a confused way, so that she could not tell whether they were painted on her memory or on the canvases. There was a grove of yellow maples, where the leaves were always brighter than anywhere else. "Like the gold I need so much," she thought. Then there was a sketch of a quaint, old house, so like one she knew that she could almost point out her own diamond-paned window; but when the illusion seemed most perfect, it faded again, and the house was not the one she thought.

The afternoon was almost over, and a day of dull, painful, illogical thinking had left her spirit bruised and weary, but with no conclusion reached for good or evil. She was about leaving the gallery, when a picture caught her eye which sent her into a chair, faint and breathless, but more thoroughly aroused than she had been for days.

It was simply a hand, half-raised and half-extended, palm outward, with the index finger brought slightly into prominence. The wrist was encircled by a vague feminine drapery.

There was nothing in the pose of the hand which could strike any soul with strong emotion. Indeed, it might seem strange that such a hand should be painted at all. It was not white; it was

not smooth. The fingers were knotted with toil and scarred with needle-pricks. But with all its disfigurements, the hand had a peculiar expression of gentleness, as though its owner were never so happy as when helping some one.

Audrey felt her own hand clasped within the worn one, in the early days when she went to hunt buttercups, and insisted that mamma should go, too. She felt the dear fingers on her hair, as when, full of girlish dreams and visions, she told her hopes and plans at her mother's knee. The same strong, unselfish hand had reached back from the spirit world, to snatch her from a living death.

Who could have painted such a thing? Who but the little playmate she had affectionately called "brother"? She remembered how he used to draw patterns for her embroidery. Yes, it must be he; no one else knew her mother's hand so well.

The slender, silken thread, whose existence she had forgotten, thrilled suddenly. She looked up. The artist was leaning on the mantel-piece, watching her.

IRIS OF LIFE.

Like tiny drops of crystal rain,
In every life the moments fall,
To wear away with silent beat,
The shell of selfishness o'er all.

And every act, not one too small,
That leaps from out the heart's pure glow,
Like ray of gold sends forth a light,
While moments into seasons flow.

Athwart the dome, Eternity,
To Iris grown resplendent, fly
Bright gleams from every noble deed
Till colors with each other vie.

'Tis glimpses of this grand rainbow,
Where moments with good deeds unite,
That gladden many weary hearts,
Inspiring them to seek more Light.

G. E. SIMMONS.

The fund of sensible discourse is limited; that of jest and badinage is infinite.—*Shenstone*.