

THE PICTURE ON THE BARE WALL

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A CHARITABLE lady who had been interested in a poor family, and aided the various members in their search for employment, was highly indignant when the oldest daughter used part of her first month's earnings in purchasing a crude picture in a glaring gilt frame. On the next visit of the benefactor, the family took pains to impress upon her the fine points of the masterpiece, and she went away disheartened. She had ventured the suggestion that a rocking-chair would have been of more service, but the purchaser of the picture had not been convinced.

"Yes, a rocking-chair's right handy," she acknowledged, "but nia says it rests her just to look at that picture. Besides, all of us can see it at once, and only one could use the rocking-chair at a time."

Of course the practical good Samaritan had right on her side. When people need shoes and winter flannels, and are buying their fuel by the basket, and rent-day is an oft-recurring crisis never absent from the thought, it makes us impatient that they should spend the money they need in so many ways on something so far from essential to their comfort. And yet there is something to be said on the other side. "Man shall not live by bread alone." As human nature advances, it hungers for more than food; and it is not altogether ignoble, surely, to be ready to sacrifice material wants to satisfy the cravings of the higher nature. We honor the artist who sticks to his garret and his ideal. Is there not something of the same quality in the poor who rejoice in the element of beauty which has come into their bare lives, even though the evening meal is scanty, and the fire is low for lack of fuel? The crudeness of that which they mistakenly admire does not alter the principle involved.

The picture on the bare wall has a mission. It meets a need as real as hunger, as insistent as thirst. It satisfies a craving which has a right to recognition. It sets up an ideal independent of physical necessities. It reaches a side of the nature too often buried beneath an avalanche of material needs. And though the practical may cry, "Why this waste?" it is,

on the whole, a good omen. The girl who spends part of her weekly wages on a pink ribbon may be actuated by a love of beauty or by mere vanity. But when she sacrifices both the ribbon and her luncheon for several days to purchase the cheap picture, her higher self has triumphed over vanity and material need alike — no mean victory.

The picture on the bare wall need not discourage those who are interested in human advancement. Even though the picture itself is crudely ugly and the room shows signs of squalor and poverty, it is an evidence of the aspiration which is back of all progress. While man is content with food and drink and shelter, he never rises far; but when his spirit asserts its claim, and the hunger for beauty begins, his powers stir themselves to gratify the new longings. And that higher nature grows stronger as the lower is sacrificed to minister to its increasing needs.

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