

A POEM OF LOVE AND FAITH.*

Under the unpromising title, "The Story of a Hunchback," a little volume has just been published which merits more than a passing mention. It embraces but a single poem, short, and, as a narrative, simple and scant of incident; but this poem is the story of a pure and sensitive soul—of its burden of sorrow, its faith and aspirations, its silent devotion late but eternally requited; and whosoever can be touched by the beauty of a flower or the song of a bird will find a pleasure in this unfolding of a gentle spirit. It presents no new or strange conception of the spiritual life with which it deals, but it is rich in true poetic feeling, and is evidently the work of one skilled in harmony, grace, and precision of expression. From the unfamiliar initials which indicate the author, and from the fact that first volumes of this class are commonly youthful ventures, we may perhaps infer that these pages come from an unpracticed pen; but we fail to find the crude thought, the imitative style, and the awkward and nerveless forms of expression, which

* THE STORY OF A HUNCHBACK. By J. L. Chicago: Jansen, McClurg & Co.

generally betray the amateur in sustained efforts of this kind.

The story itself, though it introduces but few characters, and only the events which mark the eras in the course of a chastened love, is not without interest, and in its construction bears evidence of the nicest discrimination. It is a delicate task to invest with true poetic charm the mutual passion of a beautiful girl and a man dwarfed and twisted by physical deformity. The general sentiment of mankind demands for feminine grace and loveliness a strong and manly wooer. But in this case the lover has the artist's sensibilities, and there is no sense of departure from the "eternal fitness of things." The principal charm of the poem, however, is in the purity and elevation of the religious sentiment which pervades it. We have in this little volume a charming picture of Faith, by one to whom her face is dear and who has wrought deftly and with loving zeal to make her image beautiful to all the world.

The unrhymed metre adopted for the work, though apparently easy, is likely to prove a snare to one who attempts it without the true ear for rhythm; but in this poem the versification is uniformly good. There are few jarring lines, and many passages which are extremely musical. Indeed, the execution of the work, in this respect, is worthy of all praise; and among the similes, sure tests of the poetic fancy, are some of striking force and beauty—like this, of one who listens, kindly incredulous, to the rapt utterances of faith:

"He gently smiled, as one who hears
A dreamer murmuring broken words
Of woods and fields and waves of blue,
And will not break his happy sleep."

And this:

"A soul as stainless, clear, and glad
As sunlit spray on breaking waves."

Among the short lyrics incidental to the narrative, the Song of the Lily is one which we note for its simple grace and delicate fancy. It may fitly be quoted here:

"Upon a river's brink
A lily fair
Her brows uplifted light
Through summer air.

"The soft breeze whispered low
His tale of bliss,
And touched her velvet cheek
With tender kiss.

"But ah, the sickle breeze
Passed swiftly on,
And stole away the joy
His lips had won.

"The sunlight on her heart
In sweet rest lay,
And dreamed, in golden calm,
The hours away.

"But when night beckoned soft,
The false sun fled,
And left his love to mourn
Uncomforted.

"But ever at her feet
The river flowed;
And in his constant heart
Her image glowed.

"Through daylight and through dark
His tide, unknown,
Sent freshness through her life,
Yet flowed alone.

"And when she drooped and died,
Upon his breast
He bore her tenderly
Away to rest."

JAMES S. NORTON.