

## “The Mother”

(Note on the frontispiece)

JAMES A. McNEILL WHISTLER

(American Artist)

Born at Lowell, Mass., 1834—Died at Chelsea, England, 1903.

The following somewhat lengthy quotation from OLD MASTERS AND NEW by Kenyon Cox contains much of a suggestive character for those teachers who will study this picture with their classes this month, 'and will help to explain its immense popularity:—"The purely artistic elements of such a picture as the 'Mother' are few and simple. A gray, a black, a little low-toned white, and the dim pink of the flesh, this is all of colour. The right lines of the curtain and the baseboard, cutting the parallelogram of the canvas, are echoed by the smaller rectangle of the frame upon the walls, and diagonally across this background is drawn the austere silhouette of the figure, its boundaries simplified into long curves, delicately modulated, but with scarce a break or accident in all their length. Everything is sober and severe except for the one outbreak of capricious fancy in the dainty embroidery of the curtain, which lights up the picture like a smile on a grave face. It is the masterly management of those elements—the perfect balance of the spaces so frankly outlined, the quality of the few tones of black or gray, the fine graduation of the curves—which gives the picture its rare distinction. These purely artistic matters were, perhaps, all that Whistler was consciously occupied with—this beautiful arrangement of tones and lines and spaces was all he would admit he had produced—but the picture owes its popularity to quite other qualities. The public has insisted on "caring about the identity of the portrait," or at least about its character and humanity, and in feeling that such a "foreign" emotion as love has, somehow, got itself expressed on the canvas. The gentle refinement of the aged face, the placid pose, with hands folded in the lap, the sweetness and strength of character, the aroma of gentility, the peace of declining years—all these things have been rendered or suggested by the artist with reverent care and sympathy. One feels that he has so painted *his* mother that she becomes a type of *the* mother as she is for all of us, or as we should wish her to be, and we accuse him, in spite of his denial, of having made something finer and nobler and far more important than any "arrangement in gray and black", however exquisite.