

THE HAND THAT FALTERED.

BY MAUDE PETITT, B.A.



HE afternoon sun fell in mellowing floods through the roof-lights of the art-gallery. A new picture had just been hung that day, which a group of visitors paused to admire. An autumn scene from the Rockies—a number of deer were clustered together in the foreground of a deep ravine. A fine stag tossed its antlered head, and with one foot half upraised, stood as if scenting something on the autumn air, all unconscious that from the brink of the ravine above a hunter was taking deadly aim at his velvet forehead. An old tree, lifeless and torn by lightning, projected straight out from the topmost ledge of rock. On this the hunter had stepped forth to get the better aim. You almost saw him take that step, so natural was the work. Then you held your breath at his peril. A movement, a step, a moment of dizziness, and the hunter would be dashed to death a hundred feet below! In the background the mountain forests rose with their dashes of russet and crimson, while far out over the ravine a solitary cloud rested, like a ship at anchor in the blue sea of heaven.

The onlookers made various comments, as, "New picture," "New artist," "Quite young," "A mere girl, they say," "A future before her," etc.

Meanwhile, a man of distinctly clerical bearing crossed the gallery toward the picture, at his side a fine, well-poised, well-dressed young lady.

"See, there is the artist, that girl," said one of the spectators in an undertone to another, "the girl coming toward us with the clergyman."

"Humph! Looks very much like any other girl. Nice-looking girl, though. But how very young she seems to have attained such success. Wonder if she will fulfil all she promises."

Apart from her picture, she was really less interesting than her companion. The Rev. Edgar Welland was certainly a striking man—strong, erect, dark, polished, a suggestion of brilliance, the brow of a profound intellect. Strength and refinement were impressed on every feature, but there

might have been with them just a little too much dogged determination. He looked like a man who, having made a resolution, would walk over coals of fire to carry it out. Just now his eyes were all aglow as he took in every detail of Miss Ray Bruce's masterpiece.

He looked from the picture to the artist. Yes, her mind was filled with beautiful visions. He found it all here, the inspiration he had been seeking so long. It was all there in her face, in her words as she talked. He had known her but a little while, but hers was the soul his heart had cried out for. She lifted him out of life's pettiness. He could preach and work with threefold vigour after a talk with her. She was so brilliant, so far beyond any other woman he had known. The man studied the painting, and the woman studied the man, whether because she wanted a new subject or because the study pleased her, it was hard to say just then.

"Good afternoon, Miss Bruce." It was a lady with silvery hair and satin robes who joined them.

Edgar Welland watched his companion as she talked to her elderly friend.

"What an air she had! How graceful and elegant her every poise and movement!"

He looked at her picture again, and a shadow crossed his face, a shadow that deepened and deepened till he was all in a cloudland. He was painting a picture, too, just then. Her picture had taken months. His took moments. But his was the stronger of the two. What he saw was the low, old-fashioned white house, where he lived alone with his housekeeper, an old Frenchwoman, away back in the village of Poonagee—a village consisting partly of Indians, a few French, and a number of hard-handed toilers in a manufacturing establishment that was the sole life of the village. This was his place in life. He had come up to the city for one winter to take a post-graduate course. Then he would return to Poonagee. His work was there. "A future before her," he heard some one say on his right.

And he painted his picture again.