"MY MOTHER": A LOVELY EXPOSITION OF THE MADONNA SPIRIT: BY PIERRE LOTI

THE CRAFTSMAN has always been interested in the source of the Madonna experience, the feeling which has inspired more art, more religious development, more social adjustment than any one other emotion in the world. In every December issue for some years past we have published what seemed to us beautiful conceptions from the brush of various artists in regard to child life. We have been especially interested in pictures of mothers and children, the old Madonna pictures from the north and south of Europe, and the modern Madonna pictures from the fishing villages in Gloucester and from the East Side in New York.

As a rule we have not written ourselves about these pictures, rather we have selected some quotation from the writings of a man whose love of child life is preëminent. Last year we published a not well known essay of Ruskin’s about child life; this year we are happy to present a lovely story of Pierre Loti’s, called "My Mother," a chapter from his charming tale of "The Story of a Child."

"M Y mother!—I have already mentioned her two or three times in the course of this recital, but without stopping to speak of her at length. It seems that at first she was no more to me than a natural and instinctive refuge where I ran for shelter from
all terrifying and unfamiliar things, from all the dark forebodings that had no real cause.

“But I believe she took on reality and life for the first time in the burst of ineffable tenderness which I felt when one May morning she entered my room with a bouquet of pink hyacinths in her hand;—she brought in with her as she came a ray of sunlight.

“I was convalescing from one of the maladies peculiar to children,—measles or whooping cough, I know not which,—and I had been ordered to remain in bed and to keep warm. By the rays of light that filtered in through the closed shutters I divined the springtime warmth and brightness of the sun and air, and I felt sad that I had to remain behind the curtains of my tiny white bed; I wished to rise and go out; but most of all I had a desire to see my mother.

“The door opened and she entered, smiling. Ah, I remember it so well! I recall so distinctly how she looked as she stood upon the threshold of the door. And I remember that she brought in with her some of the sunlight and balminess of the spring day.

“I see again the expression of her face as she looked at me; and I hear the sound of her voice, and recall the details of her beloved dress, that would look funny and old-fashioned to me now. She had returned from her morning shopping, and she wore a straw hat trimmed with yellow roses, and a shawl of lilac barege (it was the period of the shawl) sprinkled with tiny bouquets of violets. Her dark curls (the poor beloved curls today, alas! so thin and white) were at this time without a gray hair. There was about her the fragrance of the May day, and her face as it looked that morning with its broad brimmed hat is still distinctly present with me. Besides the bouquet of pink hyacinths, she had brought me a tiny watering-pot, an exact imitation in miniature of the crockery ones so much used by the country people.

“As she leaned over my bed to embrace me, I felt as if every wish was gratified. I no longer had a desire to weep, nor to rise from my bed, nor to go out. She was with me and that sufficed—I was consoled, tranquillized, and re-created by her gracious presence.

“I was, I think, a little more than three years old at this time, and my mother must have been about forty-two years of age; but I had not the least notion of age in regard to her, and it had never occurred to me to wonder whether she was young or old; nor did I realize until a later time that she was beautiful. No, at this period that she was her own dear self was enough; to me she was in face and form a person so apart and so unique, that I would not have dreamed of comparing her with any one else. From her whole being there emanated such a joyousness, security and tenderness, and so much goodness that from thence was born my understanding of faith and prayer.
"THE OFFERING": Charles W. Hawthorne, painter.
"THE PROCESSION":
Ettore Tito, painter.

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"GRANDMOTHER'S IDOL": Luppi, painter.
Reproduced From "Some Impressions of the Art at the Panama-Pacific Exhibition," by Christian Brinton

"MOTHER AND CHILD": John W. Twachtman, painter.
“MY MOTHER”: BY PIERRE LOTI

“I would that I could speak hallowed words to the first blessed form that I find in the book of memory. I would it were possible that I could greet my mother with words filled with the meaning I wish to convey. They are words which cause bountiful tears to flow, but tears fraught with I know not how much of the sweetness of consolation and joy, words that are ever, and in spite of everything, filled with the hope of an immortal reunion.

“And since I have touched upon this mystery that has had such an influence upon my soul, I will here set down that my mother alone is the only person in the world of whom I have the feeling that death cannot separate me. With other human beings, those whom I have loved with all my heart and soul, I have tried to imagine a hereafter, a tomorrow in which there shall be no tomorrow; but no, I cannot! Rather I have always had a horrible consciousness of our nothingness—dust to dust, ashes to ashes. Because of my mother alone have I been able to keep intact the faith of my early days. It still seems to me that when I have finished playing my poor part in life, when I no longer run in the overgrown paths that lead to the unattainable, when I am through amusing humanity with my conceits and my sorrows, I will go there where my mother, who has gone before me, is, and she will receive me; and the smile of serenity that she now wears in my memory will have become one of triumphant realization.

“True, I see that distant region only dimly, and it has no more substance than a pale gray vision; my words, however intangible and elusive, give too definite a form to my dreamy conceptions. But still (I speak as a little child, with the child’s faith), but still I always think of my mother as having, in that far off place, preserved her earthly aspect. I think of her with her dear white curls and the straight lines of her beautiful profile that the years may have impaired a little, but which I still find perfect. The thought that the face of my mother shall one day disappear from my eyes forever, that it is no more than combined elements subject to disintegration, and that she will be lost in the universal abyss of nothingness, not only makes my heart bleed, but it causes me to revolt as at something unthinkable and monstrous; it cannot be! I have the feeling that there is about her something which death cannot touch.

“My love for my mother (the only changeless love of my life) is so free from all material feeling that that alone gives me an inexplicable hope, almost gives me a confidence in the immortality of the soul.

“And why among the treasured playthings of my childhood has the tiny watering-pot taken on the value and sacred dignity of a relic? So much so indeed that when I am far distant on the ocean, in hours of danger, I think of it with tenderness, and see it in the place where it
CHRISTMAS EVE IN THE NORTH

has lain for years, in the little bureau, never opened, mixed in with broken toys; and should it disappear I would feel as if I had lost an amulet that could not be replaced.

"And the simple shawl of lilac barege, found recently among some old clothing laid aside to be given to the poor, why have I put it away as carefully as if it were a priceless object? Because in its color (now faded), in its quaint Indian pattern and tiny bouquets of violets, I still find an emanation from my mother; I believe that I borrow therefrom a holy calm and sweet confidence that is almost a faith. And mingled in with the other feelings there is perhaps a melancholy regret for those May mornings of long ago that seemed so much brighter than are those of today."

This quotation from Pierre Loti is used by permission of C. C. Birchard & Co.

CHRISTMAS EVE IN THE NORTH

A DIM, white world, with everywhere
    The silent trees, each
      one a tall
Black column 'neath the stars!
No sound disturbs the icy air!
A weighted pine, with giant branches over-dressed
Among the naked poplars, showers down
A load of powdery flakes. Some wagon tracks
Marking the lonely solitudes with man's near presence,
Lie like a long, dark shadow 'neath the trees.
Across the white expanse, lit by the cold, bright twinkle
From the sky, a rabbit slowly hops, making a neat,
Clean line of purple hollows in the light,
Dry snow, then leaves the winter world
To trees and stars!       PHYL LIS WARD.