Ideala

by Sarah Grand

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IDEALA

BY SARAH GRAND

"L'esprit ne nous garantit pas des sottises de notre humeur."—VAUVENARGUES

PREFACE

You will ask me, perhaps, even you who are all charity, why parts of this book are what they are. I can only answer with another question: Why are we what we are? But I warn you that it would not be fair to take any of Ideala's opinions, here given, as final. Much of what she thought was the mere effervescence of a strong mind in a state of fermentation, a mind passing successively through the three stages of the process; the vinous, alcoholic, or excitable stage; the acetous, jaundiced, or embittered stage; and the putrefactive, or unwholesome stage; and also embodying, at different times, the characteristics of all three. But, even during its worst phase, it was an earnest mind, seeking the truth diligently, and not to be blamed for stumbling upon good and bad together by the way. It is, in fact, not a perfect, but a transitional state which I offer for your consideration, a state which has its repulsive features, but which, it may be hoped, would result in a beautiful deposit, when at last the inevitable effervescence had subsided.

But why exhibit the details of the process, you may ask. To encourage others, of course. What help is there in the contemplation of perfection ready made? It only disheartens us. We should lay down our arms, we should struggle no longer, we should be hopeless, despairing, reckless, if we never had a glimpse of growth, of those "stepping- stones of their dead selves" upon which men mount to higher things. The imperfections must be studied, because it is only from the details of the process that anything can be learned. Putting aside the people who criticise, not with a view to mending matters, but because a

… low desire Not to seem lowest makes them level all;

the people who judge, who condemn, who have no mercy on any faults and failings but their own, and who,

… if they find Some stain or blemish in a name of note, Not grieving that their greatest are so small, Inflate themselves with some insane delight,

and would ostracise a neighbour for the first offence by ruling that one mistake must mar a life—anybody's life but their own, of course; who have no peace in themselves, no habit of sweet thought; whose lives are one long agony of excitement, objection, envy, hate, and unrest; the decently clad devils of society who may be known by their eternal carping, and who are already in torment, and doing their utmost to drag others after them. Putting them aside, as any one may who has the courage to face them—for they are terrible cowards—and taking the best of us, and the best intentioned among us, we find that all are apt to make some one trait in the characters, some one trick in the manners, some one incident in the lives of people we meet the text of an objection to the whole person. And a state of objection is a miserable state, and a dangerous one, because it stops our growth by robbing us of half our power to love, in which lies all our strength, and which, with the delight of being loved, is the one thing worth living for. When we know in ourselves that love is heaven, and hate is hell, and all the intervals of like and dislike are antechambers to either, we possess the key to joy and sorrow, by which alone we can attain to the mystery that may not be mentioned here, but beyond which ecstasy awaits us.

This is why such details are necessary.

Doctors-spiritual must face the horrors of the dissecting-room, and learn before they can cure or teach; and even we, poor feeble creatures, who have no strength, however great our desire, to do either, can help at least a little by not hindering, if we attend to our own mental health, which we shall do all the better for knowing something of our moral anatomy, and the diseases to which it is liable. We hate and despise in our ignorance, and grow weak; but love and pity thrive on knowledge, and to love and pity we owe all the beauty of life, and all our highest power.

"It is that life of custom and accident in which many of us pass much of our time in this world; that life in which we do what we have not purposed, and speak what we do not mean, and assent to what we do not understand; that life which is overlaid by the weight of things external to it, and is moulded by them, instead of assimilating them; that which, instead of growing and blossoming under any wholesome dew, is crystallised over with it, as with hoar frost, and becomes to the true life what an arborescence is to a tree, a candied agglomeration of thoughts and habits foreign to it, brittle, obstinate, and icy, which can neither bend nor grow, but must be crushed and broken to bits if it stands in our way. All men are liable to be in some degree frost-bitten in this sort; all are partly encumbered and crusted over with idle matter; only, if they have real life in them, they are always breaking this bark away in noble rents, until it becomes, like the black strips upon the birch tree, only a witness of their own inward strength." —RUSKIN.

IDEALA

CHAPTER I.

She came among us without flourish of trumpets. She just slipped into her place, almost unnoticed, but once she was settled there it seemed as if we had got something we had wanted all our lives, and we should have missed her as you would miss the thrushes in the spring, or any other sweet familiar thing. But what the secret of her charm was I cannot say. She was full of inconsistencies. She disliked ostentation, and never wore those ornamental fidgets ladies delight in, but she would take a piece of priceless lace to cover her head when she went to water her flowers. And she said rings were a mistake; if your hands were ugly they drew attention to them, if pretty they hid their beauty; yet she wore half-a-dozen worthless ones habitually for the love of those who gave them, to her. It was said that she was

striking in appearance, but cold and indifferent in manner. Some, on whom she had never turned her eyes, called her repellent. But it was noticed that men who took her down to dinner, or had any other opportunity of talking to her, were never very positive in, what they said of her afterwards. She made every one, men and women alike, feel, and she did it unconsciously. Without effort, without eccentricity, without anything you could name or define, she impressed you, and she held you —or at least she held me, always—expectant. Nothing about her ever seemed to be of the present. When she talked she made you wonder what her past had been, and when she was silent you began to speculate about her future. But she did not talk much as a rule, and when she did speak it was always some subject of interest, some fact that she wanted to ascertain accurately, or some beautiful idea, that occupied her; she had absolutely no small talk for any but her most intimate friends, whom she was wont at times to amuse with an endless stock of anecdotes and quaint observations; and this made people of limited capacity hard on her. Some of these called her a cold, ambitious, unsympathetic woman; and perhaps, from their point of view, she was so. She certainly aspired to something far above them, and had nothing but scorn for the dead level of dull mediocrity from which they would not try to rise.

"To be distinguished among these people," she once said, "it is only necessary to have one's heart

Dowered with the hate of hate, the scorn of scorn, The love of love.

There is no need to do anything; if you have the right feeling you may be as passive as a cow, and still excel them all, for they never thrill to a noble thought."

"Then, pity them," I said.

"No, despise them," she answered. "Pity is for affliction, for such shortcomings as are hereditary and can hardly be remedied—for the taint in nature which is all but hopeless. But these people are not afflicted. They could do better if they would.

They know the higher walk, and deliberately pursue the lower. Their whole feeling is for themselves, and such things as have power to move them through the flesh only. I would almost rather sin on the impulse of a generous but misguided nature, and have the power to appreciate and the will to be better, than live a perfect, loveless woman, caring only for myself, like these. I should do more good."

They called Ideala unsympathetic, yet I have known her silent from excess of sympathy. She could walk with you, reading your heart and soul, sorrowing and rejoicing with you, and make you feel without a word that she did so. It was this power to sympathise, and the longing she had to find good in everything, that made her forgive the faults that were patent in a nature with which she was finally brought into contact, for the sake of the virtues which she discovered hidden away deep down under a slowly hardening crust of that kind of self- indulgence which mars a man.

But her own life was set to a tune that admitted of endless variations. Sometimes it was difficult even for those who knew her best to detect the original melody among the clashing cords that concealed it; but, let it be hidden as it might, one felt that it would resolve itself eventually, through many a jarring modulation and startling cadence, perhaps, back to the perfect key.

I saw her first at a garden party. She scarcely noticed me when we were introduced. There were great masses of white cloud drifting up over the blue above the garden, and she was wholly occupied with them when she could watch them without rudeness to those about her; and even when she was obliged to look away, I could see that she was still thinking of the sky. "Do you live much in cloudland?" I asked, and felt for a moment I had said a silly thing; but she turned to me quickly, and looked at me for the first time as if she saw me—and when I say she looked at me, I mean something more than an ordinary look, for Ideala's eyes were a wonder, affecting you as a poem does which has power to exalt.

"Ah, you feel it too," she said. "Are they not beautiful? Will you sit beside me here? You can see the river as well—down there, beneath the trees."

I thought she would have talked after that, but she did not. When I spoke to her once or twice she answered absently; and presently she forgot me altogether, and began to sing to herself softly:

Flow down, cold rivulet, to the sea, Thy tribute wave deliver; No more by thee my steps shall be For ever and for ever.

Then suddenly recollecting herself, she stopped, and exclaimed, in much confusion, "O please forgive me! That stupid thing has been running in my head all day—and it is a way I have. I always forget people and begin to sing."

She did not see in the least that her apology might have been considered an adding of insult to injury, and, of course, I was careful not to let her know that I thought it so, although I must confess that for a moment I felt just a trifle aggrieved. I thought my presence had bored her, and was surprised to see, when I got up to go, that she would rather have had me stay.

She cared little for people in general, and had few likings. It was love with her if anything; but those whom she loved once she loved always, never changing in her affection for them, however badly they might treat her. And she had the power of liking people for themselves, regardless of their feeling for her; indeed, her indifference on this score was curious. I once heard a lady say to her: "You are one of the few young married ladies whom I dare chaperon in these degenerate days. No degree of admiration or worship ever seems to touch you. Is it real or pretended, your unconsciousness?"

"Unconsciousness of what?"

"Of the feeling you excite."

"The feeling I excite?" Ideala seemed to think a moment; then she answered gravely: "I do not think I am conscious of anything that relates to myself, personally, in my

intercourse with people. They are ideas to me for the most part—men especially so."

That way she had of forgetting people's presence was one of her peculiarities. If she liked you she was content just to have you there, but she never showed it except by a regretful glance when you went away. She was very absent, too. One day I found her with a big, awkward volume on her knee, heated, excited, and evidently put out.

"Is anything the matter?" I wanted to know.

"O yes," she answered desperately; "I've lost my pen, and I'm writing for the mail."

"Why, where are you looking for it?" I asked.

She glanced at me, and then at the book.

"I—I believe," she faltered, "I was looking for it among the p's in the French dictionary."

On another occasion I watched her revising a manuscript. As she wrote her emendations she gummed them on over the old copy, and she was so absorbed that at last she put the gum-brush into the ink-bottle. Discovering her mistake, she gave a little disconcerted sort of laugh, and took the brush away to wash it. She returned presently, examining it critically to see if it were perfectly cleansed, and having satisfied herself, she carefully put it back in the ink-bottle.

But perhaps the funniest instance of this peculiarity of hers was one that happened in the Grosvenor Gallery on a certain occasion. She had been busy with her catalogue, doing the pictures conscientiously, and not talking at all, when suddenly she burst out laughing.

"Do you know what I have been doing?" she said. "I wanted to know who that man is"—indicating a gentleman of peculiar appearance in the crowd—"and I have been looking all over him for his number, that I might hunt up his name in the catalogue!"

Her way of seeing analogies as plausible as the obvious relation of p to pen, and of acting on wholly wrong conclusions deduced from most unexceptionable premises,

was another characteristic. She always blamed her early education, or rather want of education, for it. "If I had been taught to think," she said, "when my memory was being burdened with historical anecdotes torn from the text, and other useless scraps of knowledge, I should be able to see both sides of a subject, and judge rationally, now. As it is, I never see more than one side at a time, and when I have mastered that, I feel like the old judge in some Greek play, who, when he had heard one party to a suit, begged that the other would not speak as it would only poggle what was then clear to him."

But in this Ideala was not quite fair to herself.

It was not always—although, unfortunately, it was oftenest at critical moments—that she was beset with this inability to see more than one side of a subject at a time. The odd thing about it was that one never knew which side, the pathetic or the humorous, would strike her. Generally, however, it was the one that related least to herself personally. This self-forgetfulness, with a keen sense of the ludicrous, led her sometimes, when she had anything amusing to relate, to overlook considerations which would have kept other people silent.

"I saw a pair of horses running away with a heavy wagon the other day," she told us once. "It was in Cross Street, and there was a child in the way—there always is a child in the way!—and, as there was no one else to do it, I ran into the road to remove that child. I had to pull it aside quickly, and there was no time to say 'Allow me'—in fact, there was no time for anything—and in my hurry I lost my balance and fell in the mud, and the wagon came tearing over me. It was an unpleasant sensation, but I wasn't hurt, you know; neither the wheels nor the horses touched me. I got very dirty, though, and I have no doubt I looked as ridiculous as I felt, and for that I expected to be tenderly dealt with; but when I went to ask after the child, a few days later, a neighbour told me that its mother was out, and it was a good thing too, as she had been heard to declare she would 'go for that lady the next time she saw her, for

flingin' of her bairn about!'"

When she had told the story, Ideala was horrified to find that the fact, which she had overlooked, of her having risked her life to save the child struck us all much more forcibly than the ingratitude that amused her.

Although her sense of humour was keen, it was not always, as I said before, the humorous side of a subject that struck her. I found her one day looking utterly miserable.

"What has happened?" I asked. "You look sad."

"And I feel sad," she answered. "I was just thinking what a pity it is those gay, pleasure-loving, flower-clad people of Hawaii are dying out!"

She was quite in earnest, and could not be made to see that there was anything droll in her mourning poignantly for a people so remote.

Another instance of her absent-mindedness recurs to me. The incident was related at our house one evening, in Ideala's presence, by Mr. Lloyd, a mutual friend. A clever drawing by another friend, of Ideala trying to force a cabman to take ten shillings for a half-crown fare— one of the great fears of her life being the chance of not giving people of that kind as much as they expected—had caused Ideala to protest that she did understand money matters.

"O yes, we all know that your capacity for business is quite extraordinary," Mr. Lloyd said, with a smile that meant something. And then, addressing us all, he asked: "Did I ever tell you about her coming to borrow five shillings from me one day? Shall I tell, Ideala?"

"You may, if you like," Ideala answered, getting very red. "But the story is not interesting."

We all began to be anxious to hear it.

"Judge for yourselves," Mr. Lloyd said. "One day the head clerk came into my

private room at the Bank, looking perplexed and discomfited. 'Please, sir' he said, 'a lady wishes to see you.' 'A lady,' I answered. 'Ladies have no business here. What does she want?' 'She would not say, sir, and she would not send in her name. She said it did not matter.' I began to wonder what I had been doing. 'What is she like?' I asked. He looked all round as if in search of a simile, and then he answered: 'Well, sir, she's more like a picture than anything.' 'Show her in,' I said."

Here the story was interrupted by a shout of laughter. He laughed a little himself.

"I should have been polite in any case," he declared, apologetically. "The clerk ushered in a lady whose extreme embarrassment made me sorry for her. She changed colour half-a-dozen times in as many seconds, and then she hurled her errand at my head in these words, without any previous preparation to break the blow: 'Mr. Lloyd, can you lend me five shillings?' and before I had recovered she continued—'I came in by train this morning, and I've lost my purse, and can't get back if you won't help me—at least I think I've lost my purse. I took it out to give sixpence to a beggar—and—and here is the sixpence!' and she held it out to me. She had given her purse to the beggar and carried the sixpence off in triumph. You may well say 'Oh, Ideala!'"

"And Mr. Lloyd was so very good as to take me to the station, and see me into the train," Ideala murmured; "and he gave me his bank-book to amuse me on the journey, and carried Huxley's Elementary Physiology, which I had come in to buy, off in triumph!"

But with all her self-forgetfulness there were moments in which she showed that she must have thought deeply about herself, weighing her own individuality against others, to see what place she occupied in her own age, and how she stood with regard to the ages that had gone before; yet even this she seemed to have done in a selfless way, having apparently examined herself coolly, critically, fairly, as she might have examined any other specimen of humanity in which she felt an interest,

unbiassed by any special regard.

"People always want to know if I write, or paint, or play, or what I do," she once said to me. "They all expect me to do something. My function is not to do, but to be. I make no poetry. I am a poem—if you read me aright."

And again, in a moment of despondency, she said, "I am one of the weary women of the nineteenth century. No other age could have produced me."

When she said she did nothing she must have meant she was not great in anything, for her time was all occupied, and those things in which she was interested were never so well done without her help. If any crying abuse were brought to light in the old Cathedral city; if any large measure of reform were set on foot; if the local papers suddenly became eloquent in favour of some good movement, and adroit in their powers of persuasion; if burdens had to be lifted from the oppressed, and the weak defended against great odds, you might be sure that Ideala was busy, and her work could be detected in it all. And she was especially active when efforts were being made to find amusement for the people. "That is what they want, poor things," she would say. "Their lives are such a dreary round of dull monotonous toil, and they have so little sun to cheer them. They ought to be taught to laugh, and have the brightness put into themselves, and then it would seem as if they had been relieved of half the atmospheric pressure beneath which they groan. Think what your own life would be if day day after day brought you nothing but toil; if you had nothing to look back upon, nothing to look forward to, but the labour that makes a machine of you, deadening the power to care, and holding mind and body in the galling bondage and weariness of everlasting routine."

She thought laughter an unfailing specific for most of the ills of life. "We can none of us be thankful enough for the sensation," she said. "Nothing relieves the mental oppression, which does such moral and physical harm, like mirth; of course, I mean legitimate laughter, not levity, nor the ill-natured rejoicing of small minds in such

subjects for sorrow as their neighbours' faults, follies, and mistakes. What I am thinking of is the pleasure without excitement which there is in sympathetic intercourse with those large, loving natures that elevate, and the laughter without bitterness which is always a part of it."

Like most people whose goodness is neither affected nor acquired, but natural to them, Ideala saw no merit in her own works, and would not take the credit she deserved for them; nor would she have had her good deeds known at all if she could have helped it. But knowledge of these things leaks out somehow, although probably not a third of what she did will ever be even suspected.

CHAPTER II.

Speaking to me of women one day, she said: "Certainly they are vainqueurs des vainqueurs de la terre in any sense they choose; but the pity of it is that they do not choose to exercise their power for good to any great extent. I agree with Madame Bernier—if it were Madame Bernier—who said: 'L'ignorance où les femmes sont de leurs devoirs, l'abus qu'elles font de leur puissance, leur font perdre le plus beau et le plus précieux de leurs avantages, celui d'être utiles.' But hundreds of other quotations will occur to you, written by thoughtful men and women in all ages, and all to the same effect; it is impossible to over-estimate their restraining and refining influence as the companions and mothers of men—and almost equally impossible to make them realise their responsibility or care to use their strength. I would have every woman feel herself a power for good in the land—and if only half of them did, what a world of difference it would make to everybody's health and happiness! But women should, as a rule, be silent powers. There are, of course, occasions when they must speak—and all honour to those who do so when the need arises—but our influence is most felt when it is quietly persistent and unobtrusive. There is no social reform that we might not accomplish if we agreed among ourselves to do it, and then

worked, each of us using her influence to that end in her own family, and among her own friends, only. I once induced some ladies to try a little experiment to prove this. At that time the gentlemen of our respective families were all wearing a certain kind of necktie. We agreed to banish the necktie, and in a month it had disappeared, and not one of those gentlemen was ever able to tell us why he had given it up. We don't deserve much credit for our ingenuity, though," she added, lightly. "Men are so easily managed. All you have to do is to feed them and flatter them."

"I think that hardly fair," I commented.

"What? The feeding and flattering?"

"No, the conspiracy."

"Well, that occurred to me too—afterwards, when it was too late to do anything but repent. At the time, I own, I thought of nothing but the success of the experiment as an example and proof of our will-power."

"You considered one side of the subject only, as per usual, when you are eager and interested," I softly insinuated.

She frowned at me thoughtfully; then, after a pause, she resumed: "Ah, yes! You may be sure there is a great deal of good motive power in women, but most of it is lost for want of knowledge and means to apply it. It works like the sails of a windmill not attached to the machinery, which whirl round and round with incredible velocity and every evidence of strength, but serve no better purpose than to show which way the wind blows."

This question of the position of women in our own day occupied her a good deal.

"The women of my time," she said to me once, "are in an unsettled state, it may be a state of transition. Much that made life worth having has lost its charm for them. The old interests pall upon them. Occupations that used to be the great business of their lives are now thought trivial, and are left to children and to servants. Principles accepted since the beginning of time have been called in question. Weariness and

distrust have taken the place of peace and content, and doubt and dissatisfaction are the order of the day. Women want something; they are determined to have it, too; and doubtless they would get it if only they knew what it is that they want. They are struggling to arrive at something, but opinions differ widely as to what that something ought to be; and the result is that they have divided themselves into three classes, not exactly distinct: they dovetail into each other so nicely that it is hard to say where the influence of the one set ends and the other begins. There are, first of all, the women who in their struggles for political power have done so much to unsex us. They have tried to force themselves into unnatural positions, and the consequence has been about as pleasing and edifying as an attempt to make a goose sing. They clamour for change, mistaking change for progress. But don't let the puzzling dovetail confuse you. The people I speak of are not those who have so nobly devoted themselves to the removal of the wrongs of women, though they work together. But the object of all this class is good. They wish to raise us, and what they want, for the most part, is a little more common sense—as is shown in their system of education, for instance, which cultivates the intellectual at the expense of the physical powers, girls being crammed as boys (to their great let and hindrance also) are crammed, just when nature wants all their strength to assist their growth; the result of which becomes periodically apparent when a number of amiable young ladies are let loose on society without hair or teeth. But the thing they clamour for most is equality. There is a great deal to be said in favour of placing the sexes on an equal footing, and if social conventions are stronger and more admirable than natural instincts—and doubtless they are—the thing should be done; but the innate perversity of women make it difficult—for, I know this, that whatever the position of a true woman, and however much she may clamour for equality with men in general, the man she herself loves in particular will always be her master.

"But such ridicule as this party has brought upon itself would not have mattered so much had nothing worse come of it. Unfortunately, there seems to be no neutral

ground for us women: we either do good or harm; and I hold that first class responsible for the existence of those people who clamour for change of any kind, regardless of the consequences. Their ideas, shorn of all good intention, have resulted in the production of a new creature; and have made it possible for women who have the faults of both sexes and the virtues of neither to mix in society. The bad work done by the influence of this second class is only too apparent. It is to them we owe the fact that there is less refinement, less courtesy, less of the really good breeding which shows itself in kindness and consideration for others, and, Heaven help us! even less modesty among us now than there was some years ago."

"These are the women, too, who spend their time and talents on the production of cleverly written books of the most corrupt tendency. Their works are a special feature of the age, and are doubly dangerous because they have the art of making the worst ideas attractive, by presenting them in forms too refined and beautiful to shock even the most delicate."

"Besides these two classes there is the third, which is more difficult to define. It is the one on which our hope rests. The women who belong to it are dissatisfied like the others, but they are less decided, and therefore their dissatisfaction takes no positive shape. They also want something, and go this way and that as if in search of it, but they are not really trying for anything in particular. They do good and evil indiscriminately, and for the same motive: they find distraction in doing something—anything. But the desire to do good is latent in all of them; show them the way, and it will make itself apparent."

"But what is the reason of all this dissatisfaction?" I asked. "Why don't you go to your husbands and brothers to be set right, as of old?"

"Ah! when you ask me that, you get to the first cause of the trouble," she answered. "The truth is that we have lost faith in our men. They claim some superiority for themselves, but we find none. The age requires people to practise what they preach,

and yet expects us to be guided by the counsels of those whose own lives, we know, have rendered them contemptible. They are not fit to guide us, and we are not fit to go alone. I suppose we shall come to an understanding eventually— either they must be raised or we must be lowered. It is for the death of manliness we women mourn. We marry, and find we have taken upon ourselves misery, and lifelong widowhood of the mind and moral nature. Do you wonder that some of us ask: Why should we keep ourselves pure if impurity is to be our bedfellow? You make us breathe corruption, and wonder that we lose our health."

"But why do you talk of the death of manliness? Men have as much courage now as they ever had."

"Oh, of course—mere animal courage; there is plenty of that, but that is nothing. A cat will fight for her kittens. It is moral courage that makes a man, and where do you find it now? Are men self-denying? Are they scrupulous to a shadow of the truth? Are they disinterested? How many gentlemen have you met in the course of your life? I know about half a dozen."

"What do you call a gentleman, then?" I asked in surprise. "What makes a man one?"

"Why, truth and affection, of course," she answered; "the one is the most ennobling, and the other the most refining quality. As a child I used to think ladies and gentlemen never told stories; it was only the common people who were dis-honourable, and that was what made them common. Hélas! one lives and learns!"

"I don't think the world is worse than it ever was," I said, drily.

"Not worse, when we know so much better!" she answered with scorn. "Not worse when we have learnt to see so clearly, and most of us acknowledge that

It is our will Which thus enchains us to permitted ill!

It is nearly two thousand years since Christianity began its work, and it is still

unaccomplished. Do you know, I sometimes think that all this talk of virtue, and teaching of religion, is a kind of practical joke, gravely kept up to find a church parade of respectability for States, a profession for hundreds, and a means of influencing men by making a tender point in their nervous system to be touched, as with a rod, when necessary—a rod that is held over them always in terrorem! We all talk about morality; but try some measure of reform, and you will find that every man sees the necessity of it for his neighbour only. Goodness is happiness, and sin is disease. The truism is as old as the hills, and as evident; but if men were in earnest, do you suppose they would go on for ever choosing sin and its ghastly companion as they do? Do you know, there are moments when I think that even their reverence for the purity of women is a sham. For why do they keep us pure? Is it not to make each morsel more delicious for themselves, that sense and sentiment may be satisfied together, and their own pleasure made more complete? Individuals may be in earnest, but the great bulk of mankind is a hypocrite. When the history of this age is written, moral cowardice and self-indulgence will be found to have been the most striking characteristics of the people. There is no truth to be found in the inward parts."

But Ideala did not often adopt this tone, and she would herself check other people who were preparing to assume it. She had a favourite quotation, adroitly mangled, to suit such occasions. "When we begin to inculcate morality as a science, we must discard moralising as a method," she declared; and she would also beg us to stop the hysteria. "It is the mortal malady of all well-beloved measures," she said; "and it spreads to an epidemic if the infected ones are not suppressed at once to prevent contagion."

But, although she spoke so positively when taken out of herself by the interest and importance of a subject, she had no very high opinion of her own judgment and power to decide. A little more self-esteem would have been good for her; she was too diffident, "I have not come across people on whose knowledge I could rely," she

told me. "I have been obliged to study alone, and to form my opinions for myself out of such scraps of information as I have had the capacity to acquire from reading and observation. I am, therefore, always prepared to find myself mistaken, even when I am surest about a thing—for

What am I? An infant crying in the night: An infant crying for the light: And with no language but a cry!

In practice, too, she frequently, albeit unconsciously, diverged from her theories to some considerable extent; as on one occasion, when, after talking long and earnestly of the sin of selfishness, she absently picked up a paper I had just cut with intent to enjoy myself, took it away with her to the drawing-room, and sat on it for the rest of the morning—as I afterwards heard.

CHAPTER III.

Ideala held that dignity and calm are essential in a woman, but, like the rest of the world, she found it hard to attain to her own standard of excellence. Her bursts of enthusiasm were followed by fits of depression, and these again by periods of indifference, when it was hard to rouse her to interest in anything. She always said, and was probably right, that want of proper discipline in childhood was the reason of this variableness, which she deplored, but could neither combat nor conceal. Temperament must also have had something to do with it. Her nervous system was too highly strung, she was too sensitive, too emotional, too intense. She reflected phases of feeling with which she was brought into contact as a lake reflects the sky above it, and the bird that skims across it, and the boats that rest upon its breast; yet, like the lake's, her own nature remained unchanged; it might be darkened by shadows, and lashed by tempests till it raged, but the pure element showed divinely even in its wrath, and the passion of it was expended always to some good end.

But even her love of the beautiful was carried to excess. It was a passion with her

which would, in a sturdier age, have been considered a vice. She delighted in the scent of flowers, the song of the thrushes in the spring; colour, and beautiful forms. Doubtless the emotion they caused her was pure enough, and it was natural that, highly bred, cultivated, and refined as she was, she should feel these delicate, sensuous pleasures in a greater degree than lower natures do. There was danger, however, in the over-education of the senses, which made their ready response inevitable, but neither limited the subjects, nor regulated the degree, to which they should respond. But it would be hard in any case to say where cultivation of love for the beautiful should end, and to determine the exact point at which the result ceases to be intellectual and begins to be sensual.

I have sat and watched Ideala lolling at an open window in the summer. The house stood on a hill, a river wound through the valley below, and beyond the river—the land sloped up again, green and dotted with trees, to a range of low hills, crested with a fringe of wood.

"Do you know what there is beyond those hills?" Ideala asked me once, abruptly. "I don't know; but I love to believe that the sea is there, and that the sun is sinking into it now. Sometimes I fancy I can hear it murmur."

And then followed a long silence. And the scent of mignonette and roses blew in upon her, and the twilight deepened, and I saw her grow pale with pleasure when the nightingale began to sing—and then I stole away and never was missed. She would lie in a long chair for hours like that, scarcely moving, and never speaking. At first I used to wonder what she thought about; but afterwards I knew that at such times she did not think, she only felt.

I have some pictures of her as she was then, dressed in a gown of some quaint blue and white Japanese material, with her white throat bare—I was just going to catalogue her charms, but it seems indelicate to describe a woman, point by point, like a horse that is for sale. I have some other pictures of her, too, as she appeared to

me one hot summer when I was painting a picture by the river, and she used to come down the towing-path to watch me work, and sit beside me on the grass for hours together, talking, reading aloud, reciting, or silent, according to her mood, but always interesting. It was then I learnt to know her best. And I am always glad to think of her as I used to see her then, coming towards me in one particular grey frock she wore, tight-fitting and perfect, yet with no detail evident. It was like an expression of herself, that dress, so quiet to all seeming, and yet so rich in material, and so complex in design. The wonder and the beauty of it grew upon you, and never failed of its effect.

CHAPTER IV.

When I first knew Ideala her religious opinions were all unsettled. "I neither believe nor disbelieve," she told me; "I am in a state of don't know; or perhaps it would be more exact to say that I both doubt and believe at one and the same time. I go indifferently to either church, Protestant or Catholic, and am thankful when any note of music, or thrill of feeling in the voice, or noble sentiment, elevates me so that I can pray. But I am told that both Catholics and Protestants consider me a weak waverer, and call me incorrigible. Sometimes I cannot pray for months together, and when I do it is generally to ask for something I want, not to praise or give thanks. But what a blank it is when one cannot pray; when one has lost the power to conceive that there is a something greater than man, to whom man is nevertheless all in all, and to whom we may look for comfort in all times of our tribulation, and for sympathy in all times of our wealth! To be able to give thanks to God when one is happy is the most rapturous, and to be able to call upon Him in the day of trouble is the most blessed, state of mind I know. Yet I believe we should only pray for the possible. The leafless tree may pray for the time of buds and blossoms; will the time come the sooner? Perhaps not, but it will come."

"I must confess," she said on another occasion, "that I do have moments of pure scepticism; but when I cannot believe in the existence of a God, and a Beyond, I feel as if the sky were nearer, and weighed upon me, so that I could not lift my head."

She thought religion consisted much more in doing right than in believing right, and set morality above faith; but I think she had a leaning towards the Roman Catholic religion nevertheless.

"It is a grand old faith," she said, "only it has certain ramifications with which I should always quarrel, notably that of the Sacred Heart with which Catholics deface their lovely Lady in the churches. I always feel that such bad art cannot be good religion. When the Roman Catholic religion commanded respect it expressed itself better—as in the days when it carved itself in harmonies of solid stone, and wrote itself in tint and tone on glowing canvases, and learnt to speak in thundering mass and mighty hymns of praise! There are people who think these new shoots good as a sign of life in the tree, and this consideration might perhaps make their appearance welcome; but a great deal of strength is expended on their production, and it would be just as well to lop them off again. The old tree wants pruning and cutting back occasionally, and it is a false sentiment that is letting it fall to decay for the sake of these struggling branches.

"There is another thing, too, for which we should all quarrel with the Catholic religion. I think the fact his already been noticed by some writer; at all events, it is evident enough to have occurred to any one. I mean the fact that the Church, by its narrow views about education, and its most unspiritual ambition for itself, has retarded the world's progress for centuries by interfering with the law of natural selection. As a matter of course for ages all the best men went into the Church; it was the only career open to them; and so they left no descendants."

At our house, on another occasion, when the Roman Catholic religion happened to be under discussion, she launched forth some observations in her usual emphatic

way. There were only two strangers present, a lady and her husband. Ideala asked the lady, who was sitting next to her, if she were a Catholic, to which the lady answered "No;" and Ideala, satisfied, proceeded to remark: "It may be the true religion, but it certainly is not the religion of truth. The doctrine of expediency, or the latitude they allow themselves on the score of expediency—I don't quite know how they put it—but it has much to answer for. I never find that my Roman Catholic friends are true, as my Protestant friends are. There is always a something kept back, a reservation; a want of straightforwardness, even when there is no positive deception—I can't describe the thing I mean, but it is quite perceptible, and causes an uneasy feeling of distrust, which is all the more tormenting from its vagueness and want of definition. The low-class Roman Catholics, I find, never hesitate if a lie will serve their purpose; and Roman Catholic servants are notoriously untrustworthy. That, of course, proves nothing, for one knows that low-class people of any religion are not to be depended on—still, there is no doubt that one finds deception more rife among Catholics than among Protestants, and one wonders why, if the religion is not to blame."

My sister, Claudia, had tried to catch Ideala's eye, and stop her, but in vain; and the lady next her broke out the moment she paused: "Indeed, you are quite wrong. You cannot have known many Catholics. They are not untrue."

"O yes, I have known numbers," Ideala answered; "I speak from experience. Yet it always seems to me that the Roman Catholic religion is good for individuals. There is pleasure in it, and help and comfort for them. But then it is death to the progress of nations, and the question is: Would an individual be justified in adding a unit more for his own benefit to a system which would ruin his country? I think not."

Here, however, she stopped, seeing at last that something was wrong.

"What dreadful mistake did I make this evening?" she asked me afterwards. "Mrs. Jervois declared she wasn't a Catholic."

"But her husband is," I answered; "and he heard every word."

Ideala groaned.

Not long afterwards Mrs. Jervois wrote and told us she had entered the Catholic Church. "I had, in fact, been received before I went to you," she confessed.

"There!" Ideala exclaimed. "It is just what I said. A want of common honesty is a part of the religion; and you see she had begun to practise it while she was here."

"What an eternal lie it is they preach when they tell us life is not worth having," she said to me once, speaking of preachers generally. "I have heard an oleosaccharine priest preach for an hour on this subject, detailing the worthlessness of all earthly pleasures, with which he seemed to be intimately acquainted—his appearance making one suspect that he had not even yet exhausted them all himself—and giving a florid account of the glories of the life to come, about which he appeared to know as much but to care less; just as if heaven might not begin on earth if only men would let it."

One day I had to warn her about acting so often on impulse. She heard what I had to say very good-naturedly, and, after thinking about it for a while, she said: "What a pity it is one never sees an impulse coming. It is impossible to know whether they arise from below, or descend from above. I always find if I act on one that it has arisen; and as surely if I leave it alone it proves to have been a good opportunity lost. And how curiously our thoughts go on, often so irrespective of ourselves. I was in a Roman Catholic church the other day, and the priest—a friend of mine, who looks like the last of the Mohicans minus the feathers in his hair; but a good man, with nice, soft, velvety brown eyes—preached most impressively. He told us that the Lord was there—there on that very altar, ready to answer our prayers; and, oh dear! when I came to think of it, there were so many of my prayers waiting to be answered! I 'felt like' presenting them all over again, it seemed such a good opportunity. And then they sang the O salutaris Hostia divinely— so divinely that I

thought if the Lord really had been there He would certainly have made them sing it again—and I could not pray any more after that. You call this rank irreverence, do you not? I do. And I wish I had not thought it. Yet it was one of those involuntary tricks of the mind for which I cannot believe that we are to be held responsible. Theologians would say it was a temptation of the devil, but they are wrong. The first cause of these mental lapses is to be found in some habit of levity, acquired young, and not easily got rid of, but still not hopeless. But prevention is better than cure, and children should be taught right-mindedness early. I wish I had been. Happy is the child who is started in life with a set of fixed principles, and the power to respect."

I used to wish that there might be a universal religion, but Ideala did not share my feeling on this subject. "I suppose it is a fine idea," she said; "but while minds run in so many different grooves, it seems to me far finer for one system of morality to have found expressions enough to satisfy nearly everybody."

She had very decided views about what heaven ought to be.

"The mere material notion of abundance of gold and precious stones, which appealed to the early churchmen, has no charm for us," she declared. "We must have new powers of perception, and new pleasures provided for us, such, for instance, as Mr. Andrew Lang suggests in an exquisite little poem about the Homeric Phæacia—the land whose inhabitants were friends of the gods, a sort of heaven upon earth." And then she quoted:

The languid sunset, mother of roses, Lingers, a light on the magic seas; The wide fire flames as a flower uncloses; Heavy with odour and loose to the breeze.

* * * * *

The strange flowers' perfume turns to singing, Heard afar over moonlit seas; The siren's song, grown faint with winging, Falls in scent on the cedar trees.

"Those lines were the first to make me grasp the possibility of having new faculties

added to our old ones in another state of existence," she said, "faculties which should give us a deeper insight into the nature of things, and enable us to discover new pleasures in the unity which may be expected to underlie beauty and excellence in all their manifestations, as Mr. Norman Pearson puts it. Did you ever read that paper of his, 'After Death,' in the Nineteenth Century? It embodies what I had long felt, but could never grasp before I found his admirable expression of it. 'I can see no reason,' he says, in one passage in particular which I remember word for word, I think, it gives me such pleasure to recall it—'I can see no reason for supposing that some such insight would be impossible to the quickened faculties of a higher development. With a nature material so far as the existence of those faculties might require, but spiritual to the highest degree in their exercise and enjoyment: under physical conditions which might render us practically independent of space, and actually free from the host of physical evils to which we are now exposed, we might well attain a consummation of happiness, generally akin to that for which we now strive, but idealised into something like perfection. The faculties which would enable us to obtain a deeper and truer view of all the manifestations of cosmic energy would at the same time reveal to us new forms of beauty, new possibilities of pleasure on every side: and—to take a single instance—the emotions to which the sight of Niagara now appeals might then be gratified by a contemplation of the fierce grandeur of some sun's chromosphere or the calmer glories of its corona.' That satisfies, does it not?" she added, with a sigh. "It suggests such infinite possibilities."

* * * * *

One day, when she was making herself miserable for want of a religion, I tried to comfort her by talking of the different people whose lives had been good and pure and noble, although they had had no faith.

"I suppose my principles are right," she said; "but if they are, they have come right by accident. The children of the people are sent to Sunday-schools, and taught the

difference between right and wrong; we seem to be expected to know it instinctively. I think if I had learnt I might have profited, because I cling so fondly to the one principle I ever heard clearly enunciated. It was on the sin of shooting foxes; and I cannot tell you the horror I have of the crime, even down to the present day. But, now I think of it, I did receive two other scraps of religious training. My governess taught me the Ten Commandments by making me say them after her when I was eating bread and sugar for breakfast before going to church on Sunday. The thought of them always brings back the flavour of bread and sugar. And the other scrap I got from a clergyman to whom I was sent on a single occasion when I was thought old enough to be confirmed. He asked me which was the commandment with promise, and I didn't know, so he told me; and then I made him laugh about a horse of mine that used to have great fun trying to break my neck, and after that he said I should do. I did not agree with him, however, and I positively refused to be confirmed until I knew more about it. My mother said I was the most disagreeable child she had ever known, which was probably true, but as an argument it failed to convince. It was her last remark on the subject, happily, and after that the thing was allowed to drop."

Ideala was fourteen when she refused to be confirmed for conscientious scruples, and although she made light of it in this way, she had suffered a good deal and been severely punished at the time for her refusal, but vainly, for she never gave in.

In after-life she held, of course, that Christianity was the highest moral revelation the world had ever known; but when she saw that legal right was not always moral right, I think she began to look for a higher.

By baptism she belonged to the Church of England, but she seems to have thought of the Sacrament always with the idea of transubstantiation in her mind. She spoke of it reverently, but had never been able to take it, and for a curious reason: she said the idea of it nauseated her. She felt that the elements were unnatural food, and

therefore she could not touch them—and this feeling never left her but once, when she was dangerously ill, and yearned, as she told me, for the Sacrament more than for life and health. Day and night the longing never left her; but, not having been confirmed, she did not like to ask for it, and as she recovered the old feeling gradually returned.

Religious difficulties always tormented her more or less. As she grew older she felt with Shelley that belief is involuntary, and a man is neither to be praised nor blamed for it; and she was always ready to acknowledge with Sir Philip Sidney that "Reason cannot show itself more reasonable than to leave reasoning on things above reason," but nevertheless her mind did not rest.

I have also heard her quote, "Credulity is the man's weakness, but the child's strength," and add that in matters of faith and religion we are all children, and I have thought at times that she had been able to leave it so; but something always fell from her sooner or later which showed that the old trouble was rankling still—as when she told me once: "I have never heard the Divine voice which has called you and all my friends. I listen for it, but it does not speak. I call, but there is no reply. I wait, but it does not come. The heaven of heavens is dark to me, and the yearning of my soul meets no response. Will it be so for ever?"

No, not for ever—but she was led by tortuous ways, and left to work out her own salvation in very fear and trembling, till the dear human love was given to her in pity to help her to know something of that which is Divine. And then, I hope, above the trouble of her senses, and the turmoil of the world, the Divine voice did call her, and she was able at last to hear.

CHAPTER V.

Ideala often recurred to the subject of work for women.

"There are so many thousands of us," she said, "who have no object in life, and

nothing to make us take it seriously. My own is a case in point. I am not necessary, even to my husband. There is nothing I am bound to do for him, or that he requires of me, nothing but to be agreeable when he is with me, which would not interfere with a serious occupation if I had one, and is scarcely interest enough in life for an energetic woman. My household duties take, on an average, half an hour a day; and everything in our house is done regularly, and well done. My social duties may be got through at odd moments, and the more of a pastime I make them the better I fulfil them; and, with the exception of these, there is nothing in my life that I cannot have done for me by some one better able to do it than I am. And even if I had children I should not be much more occupied, for the things they ought to learn from their mothers are best taught by example. For all practical purposes, parents, as a rule, are bad masters for any but very young children. They err on the side of over severity or the reverse. So you see I have no obligations of consequence, and there is, therefore, nothing in my life to inspire a sense of responsibility. And all this seems to me a grievous waste of Me. I remember Lord Wensum telling me, when we discussed this subject, that he was travelling once with a well-known editor, and, noticing the number of villas that had sprung up of late years along the whole line of rail they were on, he said: 'I wonder what the ladies in those villas do with their time? I suppose their social duties are limited, and they are too well off to be obliged to trouble themselves about anything.' 'It is the existence of those villas,' the editor answered, 'that makes the present profession of the novelist possible.' But I think," said Ideala, "that those women might find something better to do than to make a profession for novelists."

"But you do a good deal yourself, Ideala," I ventured.

"Yes, in a purposeless way. All my acts are isolated; it would make little difference if they had never been done."

"Then you are not content, after all, to be merely a poem?" I said, maliciously. "You

would like to do as well as to be?"

She laughed. Then, after a little, she said earnestly: "Do you know, I always feel as if I could do something—teach something—or help others in a small way with some work of importance. I never believe I was born just to live and die. But I have a queer feeling about it. I am sure I shall be made to go down into some great depth of sin and misery myself, in order to learn what it is I have to teach."

She loved music, and painting, and poetry, and science, and none of her loves were barren. She embraced them each in turn with an ardour that resulted in the production of an offspring—a song, a picture, a poem, or book on some most serious subject, and all worthy of note. But she was inconstant, and these children of her thought or fancy were generally isolated efforts that marked the culminating point of her devotion, and lessened her interest if they did not exhaust her strength.

Perhaps, though, I wrong her when I call her inconstant. It seems to me now that each new interest was a step by which she mounted upwards, learning to sympathise practically and perfectly with all men in their work as she passed them on her way to find her own.

CHAPTER VI.

She knew the poor of the place well, and took a lively interest in all that concerned them; and occasionally she would confide some of her own odd observations and reflections to me.

"On Sunday morning all the women wash their doorsteps," she told me; "I think it is part of their religion."

And on another occasion she said: "They have such lovely children here, and such swarms of them. I am always hard on the women with lovely children. People say it is envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness, that makes me so; but it really is because I think women who have nice children should be better than other women.

It would be worse for one of them to do a wrong thing than for poor childless me."

This conclusion may be quarrelled with as illogical, but the feeling that led to it was beautiful beyond question; and, indeed, all her ideas on that subject were beautiful.

She went once, soon after she came among us, to comfort a lady in the neighbourhood who had lost a baby at its birth.

"It is sad that you should lose your child," Ideala said to her; "but you are better off than I am, for I never knew what it was to be a mother."

She would have thought it a privilege to have experienced even the sorrows of maternity.

Talking about the people, she told me: "They draw such nice distinctions. They speak of 'a lady' and 'a real lady.' A 'real lady' is a person who gives no trouble. If Mrs. Vanbrugh wants anything from the butcher, and he has already sent to her house once that day, she does not expect him to send again; she sends to him—and she is 'a real lady.' Mrs. Stanton is also thoughtful, but she is something more; she is sociable and kind, and talks to them all in a friendly way, just as if they were human beings; and she is something more than 'a real lady'—she's 'a real nice lady.'

"Do you know Mrs. Polter at the fish-shop? What a fine-looking woman she is! Middle-aged, intelligent, and a very good specimen of her class, I should think. She has eight children already, and would consider the ninth a further blessing. Her husband is a good-looking man, too, and most devoted. In fact, they are quite an ideal pair with their eight children and their fish-shop. He had to go to Yarmouth the other day to buy bloaters, and while he was away she went by the five o'clock train every morning to choose the day's supply of fish for the shop, and he was quite unhappy about it. He was afraid she would 'overdo' herself, and rather than that should happen he desired her to let the business go to the—ahem! He made her write every day to say how she was, and was wretched till he returned to relieve her of her arduous duties. She made friends with me during the scarlet fever epidemic. Number

eight was a baby then, and she was afraid he might catch the disease and be taken to the hospital and die for want of her; and I sympathised strongly with her denunciations of the cruelty of the act. Fancy taking little babies from their mothers! Barbarous, don't you think it? One day a lady came into the shop while I was there. She was dressed in a bright pink costume, with a large hat all smothered in pink feathers. I thought of the Queen of Sheba, and felt alarmed. Mrs. Polter told me afterwards she was 'just a lady,' rolling in recently acquired wealth, and 'as hard to please as if she had never washed her own doorstep.' It was then I learnt the difference between 'a lady' and 'a real lady.'"

One of Ideala's exploits got into the paper somehow, and she was annoyed about it, and anxious to make us believe the account of the risk she ran had been greatly exaggerated. I was present when she gave her own version of the story, which was characteristic in every way.

"I heard frantic cries from the river," she said. "Some one was shrieking, 'The child will be drowned!' and I ran to see what was the matter. A man was tearing up and down on the bank, a child was struggling in the water, and as there was nobody else to be seen he looked to me for assistance! I advised him to go in and bring the child out, but the idea did not appear to commend itself to him, so he took to running up and down again, bawling, 'The child will be drowned!' And indeed it seemed very likely; so I was obliged to go in and bring it out myself. The man was overjoyed when I restored it to him. He clasped it in his arms with every demonstration of affection; and then he looked at me and became embarrassed. He evidently felt that he ought to say something, but the difficulty was what to say. At last a bright idea seemed to strike him. His countenance cleared, and he spoke with much feeling. 'I am afraid you are rather wet,' he observed; and then he left me, and a sympathetic landlady, who keeps a little public-house by the river, and had witnessed the occurrence, took me in and dried me. She gave me whisky and hot water, and entertained me for the rest of the afternoon. She is a remarkable woman, and I

should visit her often were it not for her love of, and faith in, whisky and hot water. I tell her there are five things which make the nose red— viz., cold, tight-lacing, disease of the right side of the heart, dyspepsia, and alcohol, and the greatest of these is alcohol; but she says a little colour anywhere would be an improvement to me, and I feel that I can have nothing in common with a woman who has such bad taste in the distribution of colour."

CHAPTER VII.

Ideala's notions of propriety were altogether unconventional. She never could be made to understand that it was not the proper thing to talk familiarly to any one she met, and discuss any subject they were equal to with them.

"It is good for people to talk, and natural, and therefore proper," she said. "If I can give pleasure to a stranger by doing so, or he can give pleasure to me, it would not be right to keep silent."

She carried this idea of her duty to her neighbour rather far sometimes.

I remember her telling me once about two old gentlemen she had travelled with the day before.

"The sun came in and bothered me, and one of them offered to draw the blind," she said, "and he remarked it was rather a treat to see the sun, we have so little of it now; and I said that was true, and told him how I pitied the farmers. I had to stay in my room the other day with a bad cold, and I amused myself watching one of them at work in some fields opposite. The state of his mind was expressed by his boots. On Monday the sun was shining, the air was mild, and it seemed as if we were going to have a continuance of fine weather, and the farmer appeared of a cheerful countenance, and his boots were polished and laced. On Tuesday there was an east wind, veering south, with showers, and his boots were laced, but not polished. On Wednesday there was frost, fog, and gloom, and they were neither laced nor

polished. On Thursday there was a snowstorm, and he had no boots at all on; and after that I did not see him, and I wondered if he had committed suicide—in which case I thought the jury might almost have brought in a verdict of 'justifiable felo-de-se.' And when I told that story the other old gentleman shut his book, and began to talk too. And I said I thought the weather was much colder than it used to be, for I could remember wearing muslin dresses in May, and I could not wear them at all now; but I did not know if the change were in the climate or in myself—perhaps a little of both—though, indeed, I knew that, to a certain extent, it was in the climate, which had been very much altered in different districts by drainage, and cutting, or planting—altered for the better, however, as a rule. And one old gentleman had heard that before, but did not understand it exactly, so I explained it to him; and then I talked about changes of climate in general, and the formation of beds of coal, and the ice period, and sun-spots, and the theory of comets, and about my husband getting up to see the last one, and going out in a felt hat and dressing-gown with a bed-candle to look for it—and about that dream of mine, did I tell you? I dreamt the comet came into our drawing-room, and the leg of a Chinese table turned into a snake and snorted at it, and the comet looked so taken aback that I woke myself with a shout of laughter. And then we talked of popular superstitions about comets, and dreams, and ghosts— particularly ghosts, and I told a number of creepy stories, and one old gentleman pretended he didn't believe in them, but he did, and so did the other without any pretence; and we talked about Darwinism, and the nature of the soul, and Nihilism, and the state of society—and—and a few other things. And they were such dear delightful old gentlemen, and they knew such a lot, and were so clever; and one of them was a Railway Director, and the other couldn't let his farms, and was bothered about his pheasants, and wanted to have the trains altered to suit him. I should so like to meet them both again."

"And how long did all this take, Ideala?"

"Oh, some hours. I fancy their dreams would be rather confused last night," she added, naively.

"Poor old gentlemen!" said I.

This sociability and inclination to talk the matter out, and, I may say, a certain amount of innocence and lack of worldly wisdom into the bargain, betrayed her occasionally into small improprieties of conduct that were not to be excused, and would possibly not have been forgiven in any one but Ideala. But such things were allowed in her as certain things are allowed in certain people—not because the things are right in themselves, but because the people who do them see no harm in them. There are people, too, who seem to enjoy the privilege of making wrong right by doing it. Society, however, only accords this privilege to a limited and distinguished few.

When Ideala saw for herself that she had done an unjustifiable thing she was very ready to confess it. I always fancied she had some latent idea of making atonement in that way. It never mattered how much a story told against herself, nor how much malicious people might make of it to her discredit; she told all, inimitably, and with scrupulous fidelity to fact.

One day she was standing waiting for a train at the station at York, and in her absent way she fixed her eyes on a gentleman who was walking about the platform.

Presently he went up to her, and, without any apology or show of respect, remarked: "I am sure I have seen you before."

"Probably," Ideala rejoined, as if the occurrence were the most natural thing in the world, "but I do not remember you. Perhaps if I heard your name——?"

"Oh, I don't suppose you ever heard my name," he said.

"In that case I can never have known you," she answered, calmly. "I never know any one except by name. I suppose you are an Englishman?"

"Yes," he said, eagerly; "I am in the 5th——"

"Ah, I thought so," she interrupted, placidly. "Englishmen in the 5th, and some other regiments, are apt to have but the one idea——"

"And that is?"

"And that is a bad one."

He looked at her for a moment, and then, hat in hand, he made her a low bow, and left her without another word.

"I think he felt ill, and went to have some refreshment," she added, when she told me.

From what happened afterwards I am sure that at the time she had no idea of the real significance of the position in which she found herself placed on this occasion. But, as a rule, if she did or said the wrong thing, she became painfully conscious of the fact immediately afterwards—indeed, it was generally afterwards that she grasped the full meaning of most things. She was ready with repartee without being in the least quick of understanding; she had to think things over, and even then she was not sure to do the right thing next time.

"Mr. Graves is ten years younger than his wife," she told me once, "and only fancy what I said one day. It was in his studio, and she was there. I declared a woman could have no sense of propriety at all who married a man younger than herself—that no good could possibly come of such marriages—and a lot more. Then I suddenly remembered, and you can imagine my feelings! But what do you think I did? I went there the next year, and said the same thing again exactly!"

CHAPTER VIII.

When we were a small party of intimate friends, and Ideala was quite at her ease with us, it was pleasant to see her lolling, a little languidly as was her wont (for

physically her energy was fitful), in the corner of a couch, looking happy and interested, her face, which was sad in repose, lit up for the time with amusement, as she quietly listened to our talk, and observed all that was going on around her. Even when she did not speak a word she somehow managed to make her presence felt, and, as a rule, she spoke little on these occasions. But sometimes we managed to draw her out, and sometimes she would burst forth suddenly of her own accord, with a torrent of eloquence that silenced us all; and even when she was utterly wrong she charmed us. Her chance observations were generally noteworthy either for their sense or their humour. It was only her sense of humour, I think, that saved her from being sentimental; but she gave expression to it in season and out of season, and would let it carry her too far sometimes, for she made enemies for herself more than once by the way she exposed the absurdity of certain things to the very people who believed in them. Every lapse of this kind caused her infinite regret, but the fault seemed incurable: she was always either repenting of it or committing it, although, having so many quirks of her own, she felt that she, of all people in the world, should have dealt most tenderly with the weaknesses of others.

She knew how narrowly she escaped being sentimental, and would often joke about her danger in that respect. "This lovely summer weather makes me sickly sentimental," she told me once. "I feel like the heroine of a three-volume novel written by a young lady of eighteen, and I think continually of him. I don't know in the least who he is, but that makes no difference. The thought of him delights me, and I want to write long letters to him, and make verses about him the whole day long. And he wants me to be good."

She had two or three pet abominations of her own, any allusion to which was sure to make her outrageous—false sentiment and affectation of any kind were amongst them. She had little habits, too, that we were all pleased to fall in with. Sitting in the corner of a couch, and of one couch in particular in every house, was one of these; and people got into the way of giving up that seat to her whenever she appeared. I

think it would have puzzled us all to say why or wherefore, for she never said or looked anything that could make us think she wished to appropriate it; she simply took it as a matter of course when it was offered to her, and probably did not know that she invariably sat there. Ideala was a splendid horsewoman, and swam like a fish; but she was not good at tennis or games of any kind, and she did not dance, for a curious reason: she objected to be touched by people for whom she had no special affection. She even disliked to shake hands, and often wished some one would put the custom out of fashion. With regard to dancing I have heard her say, too, that she sympathised entirely with the Oriental feeling on the subject. She thought it delightful to be danced to, to lie still with a pleasant companion near her who would not talk too much, and listen to the music, and enjoy the poetry of motion coolly and at ease. "I love to see the 'dancers dancing in tune,'" she said; "but to have to dance myself would be as great a bother as to have to cook my dinner as well as eat it. I suppose it is a healthy amusement—indeed, I know it is when you take it as I do; for when all you people come down the morning after a dance with haggard eyes and no power to do anything, I am as fresh as a lark, and have decidedly the best of it."

She was not good at games because she was not ambitious. She did not care to have her skill commended, and was content to lose or win with equal indifference—so long as only the honour of the thing was involved; but when the stakes were more material she showed a vice of which she was quite conscious.

"I daren't play for money," she said to me. "I never have, and I have always said that I never will. All the women of my family are born gamblers. My mother has often told me that regularly, when she was a girl, the day after she received her allowance she had either doubled it or lost it all; and before she was twenty she hadn't a jewel worth anything in her possession—and my aunts were as bad. One of them staked herself one night to a gentleman she was playing with, and he won, and married her. Gambling was more the custom then than it is now, but for me it is as much in the air as if it were still the fashion. When there is any talk of play I feel fascinated, and

when I see a pack of cards the temptation is so irresistible that I have often to go away to save my resolution."

Which made me think of a favourite quotation of Lessing's from Minna:—"Tout les gens d'esprit aiment le jeu à la folie."

CHAPTER IX.

Ideala's low esteem for "mere animal courage" was probably due to the fact that she possessed it herself in a high degree. Yet soon after I met her I began to suspect, and was afterwards convinced, that something in her manner which had puzzled me at first arose from fear. There was that in her life which made her afraid of the world, which would, had it guessed the truth, have pryed with curious eyes into her sorrow, and found an interest in seeing her suffer. The trouble was her husband. She rarely spoke of him herself, and I think I ought to follow her example, and say as little about him as possible. He was jealous of her, jealous of her popularity, and jealous of every one who approached her. He carried it so far that she scarcely dared to show a preference, and was even obliged to be cold and reserved with some of her best friends. I was a privileged person, allowed to be intimate with her from the first, partly because I insisted on it when I saw how matters stood, and partly because my position and reputation gave me a right to insist. I never had occasion to brave insults for her sake, but, like many others, I would have done so had it been necessary. Her friends were constantly being driven from her on one pretext or another. People would have taken her part readily enough had she complained, but complaint was contrary to her nature and her principles. Some, who suspected the truth, blamed her reticence; but I always thought it right, and on one occasion when we approached the subject indirectly I told her "Silence is best." I ought to have qualified the advice, for she carried it too far, and was silent afterwards when she should have spoken—that is to say, when it had become evident that endurance was

useless and degrading.

She fought hard to preserve her dignity, and was determined that "as the husband is, the wife is," should not be true in her case. But he did lower her insensibly, nevertheless. As her life became more and more unendurable she became a little reckless in speech; it was a sort of safety-valve by means of which she regained her composure, and I soon began to recognise the sign, and to judge of the amount she had suffered by the length to which she afterwards went in search of relief, and the extent to which suffering made her untrue to herself.

As a rule, when with him, she was yielding, but she had fits of determination, too, when she knew she was right. One night, as they were driving home from a ball together, her husband suddenly declared that he would not allow her to be one of the patronesses of a fancy fair which was to be held for a charitable purpose, although she had already consented and he had made no objection at the time.

"But why may I not?" Ideala asked.

"Because I object. Do you hear? I will not have it, and you must withdraw."

"I must decline to obey any such arbitrary injunction," she answered, quietly.

He detained her on the doorstep until the carriage had driven round to the stables.

"Now, are you going to obey me?" he asked.

"Yes, if you give me a reason for what you require," she answered, wearily.

"Oh, you are obstinate, are you?" he rejoined, in a jeering tone. "Well, stay in the garden and think it over. Perhaps reflection will make you more dutiful. I shall tell your maid you will not want her to-night. When you have made up your mind you can ring." And so saying he walked into the house and shut the door upon her.

It was a summer night, but Ideala felt chilly with only a thin shawl over her ball dress. She walked about as long as she could, but fatigue overcame her at last, and she was obliged to lie down on one of the garden seats. She wrapped the train of her

dress round her shoulders, and lay looking up at the stars. The air was heavy with the scent of flowers. The night was very still. Once or twice the rush of a passing train in the distance became audible; and the ceaseless, solemn, inarticulate murmur of the night was broken by a nightingale that sang out at intervals, divinely.

Ideala never thought of submitting; she simply lay there, waiting without expecting. The night air overcame her more and more with a sense of fatigue, but she could not sleep. She saw the darkness fade and the dawn appear, and when at last the servants began to move in the house she watched her opportunity and slipped in unobserved. She went to one of the spare rooms, undressed, rang, and got into bed. When the bell was answered she ordered a hot bath and hot coffee immediately. The maid supposed she had slept there, and seemed surprised; but as her mistress offered no explanation she could make no remark; and so the matter ended.

But I do not think Ideala suffered much on that occasion. Her strong young womanhood saved her somewhat—and there was a charm for her in the beauty of the night and the novelty of her position, which a less healthy organism would not have appreciated, had it been able to discover it—at such a time.

CHAPTER X.

Ideala had been married eight years, and two months after that night the long-delayed hope of her life, which she had begun to believe was beyond hope, was at last realised. Her child was a boy, and her joy in him is something that one is glad to have seen. But it was short-lived. I do not know if her husband were jealous of her happiness, or if he thought the child was more to her than he was, or if he were merely making a proposition, by way of experiment, which he never meant to carry into effect—probably the latter. At all events, he went to her one day when the child was about six weeks old, and told her he thought she must give up nursing him.

The mother's nature was up in arms in a moment. I suppose she had not quite

regained her strength, for she had been very ill, and, being weak, she was excitable.

"I will not give my baby up! How can you think it?" she exclaimed.

"Oh, well," he answered, coolly, "just as you like, you know. But I should think you'd better—for the child's sake, at least."

"It isn't true. I don't believe it," she said, piteously.

"Ask the doctor, then;" and he sauntered out, smiling, and perhaps not dreaming that she would.

But "for the child's sake" had alarmed Ideala, and she sent for the doctor. It was hours before he could come to her, and, in the meantime, not knowing that her state of mind would affect the child, she had fidgeted and fretted herself into a fever, and when the doctor saw her, he could only confirm her husband's verdict.

"I am afraid you must give up nursing," he said. "You are in such a nervous state it will do the child harm. But he's such a fine fellow! He'll thrive all right—you needn't be frightened."

Ideala said nothing, but she sat in her own room night after night for a week, and heard the child crying for her, and could not go to him— and even when he did not cry she fancied she heard him still. I think as the milk slowly and painfully left her, her last spark of affection for her husband dried up too.

The child died of diphtheria some time afterwards, and in a little while, Ideala, who was then in her twenty-sixth year, returned to her old pursuits, and no one ever knew what she felt about it:

For, it is with feelings as with waters— The shallow murmur, but the deep are dumb!

CHAPTER XI.

My widowed sister, Claudia, was one of Ideala's most intimate friends. She was a

good deal older than Ideala, whom she loved as a mother loves a naughty child, for ever finding fault with her, but ready to be up in arms in a moment if any one else ventured to do likewise. She was inclined to quarrel with me because, although I never doubted Ideala's truth and earnestness (no one could), knowing her weak point, I feared for her. I thought if all the passion in her were ever focussed on one object she would do something extravagant—a prediction which Claudia, with good intent, rashly repeated to her once.

Claudia was mistress of my house, and she and I had agreed from the first that, whatever happened, we would watch over Ideala and befriend her.

My sister was one of the people who thought it would have been better for Ideala to have talked of her troubles. When I praised Ideala's loyalty, and her uncomplaining devotion to an uncongenial duty, Claudia said: "Loyalty is all very well; but I don't see much merit in a life- long devotion to a bad cause. If there were any good to be done by it, it would be different, of course; but, as it is, Ideala is simply sacrificing herself for nothing—and worse, she is setting a bad example by showing men they need not mend their manners since wives will endure anything. It is immoral for a woman to live with such a husband. I don't understand Ideala's meekness; it amounts to weakness sometimes, I think. I believe if he struck her she would say, 'Thank you,' and fetch him his slippers. I feel sure she thinks some unknown defect in herself is at the bottom of all his misdeeds."

"I don't think she knows half as much about his misdeeds as we do," I observed.

"Then I think it would be a charity to enlighten her," Claudia answered, decidedly. "One can't touch pitch without being defiled, and when it is too late we shall find she has suffered 'some taint in nature,' in spite of herself. Will you kindly take us to the Palace this evening? The Bishop wants us to go in after dinner, and Ideala has promised to come too."

Ideala was fastidious about her dress, and being in one of her moods that evening

she teased Claudia unmercifully, on the way to the Palace, about a blue woollen shawl she was wearing. "A delicate and refined nature expresses itself by nothing more certainly than elegant wraps," she said, parodying another famous dictum; "and I should not like to be able to understand the state of mind a lady was in when she bought herself a blue woollen shawl; but I could believe she was suffering at the time from a temporary aberration of intellect—only, if she wore it afterwards the thing would be quite inexplicable." Claudia drew the wrap round her with dignity, and made no reply; then Ideala laughed and turned to me. "Certainly your friend," she said, alluding to a young sculptor who was staying with me, "can 'invest his portraits with artistic merit.' Claudia's likeness in the Exhibition is capital, and the fame of it is being noised abroad with a vengeance. But I think something should be done to stop the little newspaper-boy nuisance: the reports they spread are quite alarming."

"Ideala, what nonsense are you talking about sculptors and newspaper- boys?" Claudia exclaimed.

"I'll tell you," said Ideala. "There was a small boy with a big voice standing at the corner of the market-place this afternoon. He had a sheaf of evening papers under his arm, and was yelling with much enthusiasm to an edified crowd:—'Noose of the War! Hawful mutilation of the dead! Fearful collision in the Channel! Eighty-eight lives lost! Narrative of survivors! Thrilling details! Shindy in Parl'ment! Hirish members to the front again! 'Orrible haccident in our own town! The Lady Claudia's bust!'"

"Ideala, how dare you?"—but just then the carriage stopped, and we had to get out.

The good Bishop met us in the hall. Ideala positively declined to go upstairs when he asked her.

"It is too much trouble," she said, not seeing in her absence what was meant. "I would rather leave my things here."

"But I am afraid I must trouble you," the Bishop answered, in despair. "The fact is, my wife is not so well this evening, and she was afraid of the cold, and is staying in her own sitting-room."

The "sitting-room" was a snug apartment, warm, cosy, luxurious, and we found a genial little party of intimate acquaintances there when we arrived. Ideala's husband was not one of them. He did not take her out much at that time. Probably he was engaged in some private pursuit of his own, and insisted on her going everywhere alone to keep her out of the way. A little while before he would scarcely allow her to pay a call without him. But, as a rule, whatever his mood was, she did as he wished—and provoked him sometimes, I think, by her patient compliance; a little resistance would have made the exercise of his authority more exciting.

When we entered the sitting-room "an ominous silence feel on the group," which was broken at last by one of the ladies remarking that a kind heart was an admirable thing. Another agreed, and made some observations on the merits of self-sacrifice generally.

"But some people are not satisfied with merely doing a good deed," a gentleman declared, with profound gravity. "They think there is no merit in it if they do not suffer for it in some way themselves."

There was a good deal more of this kind of thing, and we were beginning to feel rather out of it, when presently the preternatural gravity of the party was broken by a laugh, and then it was explained.

Ideala had gone to a neighbouring town one day by train, and before she started a poor woman got into the carriage. The woman had a third-class ticket, but she was evidently ill, and when the guard came and wanted to turn her out, Ideala took pity on her, insisted on changing tickets, and travelled third class herself. The woman had been to the Palace, and described the incident to the Bishop's wife that morning, and she had just told her guests, wondering who the lady could have been, and they

in turn had put their heads together and decided that there was no one in the community but Ideala who would have done the thing in that way.

"But what else could I have done?" she asked, when she saw we were laughing at her.

"Well, my dear," said the Bishop, who always treated her with the kind indulgence that is accorded to a favourite child, "you might have paid the difference for the woman, and travelled comfortably yourself, don't you know?"

Ideala never thought of that!

Presently the dear old Bishop nestled back in his chair, and with a benign glance round, which, his scapegrace son said, meant: "Bless you, my children! Be happy and good in your own way, but don't make a noise!" he sank into a gentle doze, and the rest of the party relapsed into trivial gossip, some of which I give for what it is worth by way of illustration. It shows Ideala at about her worst, but marks a period in her career, a turning-point for the better. She was seldom bitter, and still more rarely frivolous, after that night.

"Clare Turner will take none of the blame of that affair on his own shoulders," some one remarked.

"Mr. Clare Turner is the little boy who always said 'It wasn't me!' grown up," Ideala decided, from the corner of her couch. "He is a sort of two-reason man."

"How do you mean 'a two-reason man,' Ideala?"

"Well, he has only two reasons for everything; one is his reason for doing anything he likes himself, which is always a good one; and the other is his reason why the rest of the world should not do likewise, which is equally clear—to himself. He thinks there should be one law for him and another for everybody else. I don't believe in him."

"Nor I," said one of the gentlemen. "Underhand bowling was all he was celebrated

for at school; he bowled most frightful sneaks all the time he was there."

"Talking about Clare Turner," Charlie Lloyd put in, "I've brought a new book of poems—author unknown. I picked it up at the station to-day. There's one thing in it, called 'The Passion of Delysle,' that seems to be intense; but I've only just glanced at it, and don't really know what it's like. Shall I read it?"

"Oh, do!" was the general exclamation, and we all settled ourselves to enjoy the following treat.

Charlie began softly:

O day and night! Oh day and night! and is this madness? O day and night! O day and night! and is this joy? Whence comes this bursting sense of life, and love, and gladness, This pain of pleasure, perfected, without alloy? Lo, flowing past me are the restless rivers, Or swelling round me is the boundless sea; Or else the widening waste of sand that quivers In shining stretches, shuts the world from me— Or seems to shut it, while I would that what it seems might be.

O day and night! O day and night! this mountain island, This saintly shrine, this fort—I scarce know what 'tis yet— This sand, or sea-girt, rocky, town-clad, church-crown'd highland, This dull and rugged gem in golden deserts set, Has some delicious, unknown charm to hold me, To draw me to itself and keep me here; The old grey walls, it seems, with joy enfold me— Or is it I that make the dead stones dear, And send the throbbing summer in my blood thro' all things near?

O day and night! O day and night! where else do flowers Open their velvet lids like these to greet the light? Or raise such sun-kissed lips aglow to meet cool showers? Or cast more subtle scents abroad upon the night? These trees and trailing weeds that climb the cliff-side steep, The dusky pine trees, draped with wreaths of vine, Make bowers where love might lie and list the sea-voice deep, And drink the perfumed air, the light, like wine, Which threads intoxication through these hot, glad veins of mine.

O day and night! O day and night! I sought this haven, From place and power, and wealth I flew in search of rest; They forced and bound me to a hard, detested craven, Who mocked my loathing with his head upon my breast. With deathless love I moaned for my young lover; To make me great they drove him from my side, And foully wrought with shame his name to cover— My boy, my lord, my prince! In vain they lied! But should I always suffer for their false, inhuman pride?

O day and night! O day and night! I left them flying, I fled by day and night as flies the nomad breeze, Across the silent land when light to dark was dying, And onward like a spirit lost across the seas; And on from sea and shore thro' apple-orchards blooming, Till all things melted in a moving haze; And on with rush and ring by tower and townlet glooming, By wood, and field, and hill, by verdant ways, While dawn to mid-day drew, and noon was lost in sunset blaze.

O day and night! O day and night! light once more waxing, Still on with courage high, tho' strength was well-nigh spent; Grim spectres of pursuit the wearied brain perplexing, Fear-fraught, but ever met with spirit dedolent. The landscape reeled, there came a sense of slumber, And myriad shadows rose and wanned and waned, And flitting figures, visions without number, Took shape above the land till sight was pained, And floated round me till at last the longed-for goal I gained.

O day and night! O day and night! with rest abounding, The soothing sinking down on hard-earned holy rest, With grateful ease that grew from all the calm surrounding, A languid, dreamful ease, my soul became possessed. The hoarse sea-wind comes soughing, sighing, singing, Its constant message from the patient waves. While high above cathedral bells were ringing, Or falling voices chanted hymns of praise, And all the land seemed filled with peace and promised length of days.

* * * * *

O day and night! O day and night! once, all unheeding, By sun and summer wind

with tender touch caressed, I wandered where the strains, the sacred strains, were pleading, And, kneeling in the fane, my thoughts to prayer addressed. And softly rose the murmur'd organ mystery, And swell'd around the colonnaded aisle, Where smiled the pictured saints of holy history On prostrate penitents who prayed the while: I could not pray there, but I felt that God Himself might smile.

O day and night! O day and night! while I was kneeling There came the strangest sense of some loved presence near; A re-awakening rush of well-remembered feeling Thrill'd thro' me, held me still, with vague expectant fear. Half turn'd from me, there stood beside the altar, Where incense-clouds nigh veiled him from my sight, A fair-haired priest—my quicken'd heart-beats falter! Or is he priest, or is he acolyte, Or layman devotee who prays in novice robes bedight?

O day and night! O day and night! whence comes this feeling? For all unreal seem day and night and life and death, And all unreal the hope that sets my senses reeling, And stills my pulse an instant, checks my lab'ring breath. Yet louder rolls the mighty organ thund'ring. And downward slopes a beam of light divine, The perfumed clouds are cleft: he looks up wond'ring— Looks up—what does he there before the shrine? He could not give himself to God, for he is mine, is mine!

O day and night! O day and night! I go forth trembling, He did not meet my eyes, he never saw my face. My bosom swells with joy and jealousy resembling A war of good and evil waged in a holy place. No longer soft the day, the sun in splendour Pours all his might upon this green incline; I lie and watch the cirrus clouds surrender, Their glowing forms to one hot kiss resign— How could he give himself to God when he is mine, is mine?

O day and night! O day and night! beneath your glory The crimson flood of life itself has turned to fire! The rugged brows of those old rocks, storm-rent and hoary, Are quivering in their grim surprise at my desire. The mother earth, throbbing with pain and pleasure, Would sink her voices for the languid noon, But light airs wake a

reckless madd'ning measure, And wavelets dance and sparkle to the tune. And mock the mocking malice of yon day-dimm'd gibbous moon.

* * * * *

O day and night! O day and night! a fisher maiden Is wand'ring up the path to where unseen I lie; She comes with some light spoil from off the shore beladen. And softly singing of the sea goes slowly by. And slowly rise great sun-tipped white cloud masses, Sublimely still their shadows flit and flee: How silently the work of nature passes— The roll of worlds, the growth of flower and tree! Angels of God in heaven! give him to me! give him to me!

O day and night! O day and night! the hours rolling Bring ev'ry one its change, its song, or chant, or chime: Now solemnly their sounds a distant death-knell tolling. And now the bells above beat forth the flight of time. I lie, unconsciously each trifle noting, The far-off sailors toiling on the quay, Or o'er the sand a broad-wing'd sea-bird floating, Or passing hum of honey-laden'd bee— Angels of God in heaven! give him to me! give him to me!

O day and night! O day and night! the scene surrounding Grows dim and all unreal beneath the sunset glow; And all the heat and rage pass into peace abounding, I moan, I fear no more, but wait, while still tears flow. The warm sweet airs scarce move the flowerets slender, A pause and hush have settled on the sea, A bird trills forth its love-song low and tender: O bird rejoice! thy love and thou art free- Angels of God in heaven! give him to me! give him to me!

* * * * *

O day and night! O day and night! ye knew it ever! Ye saw it written in the world's first golden prime! And smiled your giant smile at all my rash endeavour To snatch the cup unfill'd from out the hand of Time. He comes, O day and night! Spirits attending, Swift formless messengers my ev'ry sense apprise! He comes! the bright fair head o'er some old book low bending Dear Lord, at last! his eyes have met my

eyes— Gleam of light goes quivering across the happy skies!

* * * * *

O day and night! O day and night! Love sits between us. Far out the rising tide comas sweeping o'er the sand. The murmurous pine trees lend their purple shade to screen us, And breathe their fragrant sighs above the quiet land. And, like a sigh, the sunset blaze is over, The folding grey has veiled its colours bright; While swift from view fade out the gulls that hover, As round us sinks at last, on pinions light, The dark and radiant clarity of the beautiful still night.

O day and night! O day and night! no words are spoken. Such pleasant joy profound no words could well express: His wand'ring fingers smooth my hair in silent token, And all my being answers to the tender mute caress. My head is resting on his breast for pillow, And as by music moved my soul is thrill'd; Flow on and clasp the land, O bursting billow! O breezes, tell the mountains many-rill'd! Our hearts now know each other, and our hope is all-fulfill'd.

O day and night! O day and night! no shadow crosses This long'd-for solemn hour of all-forgetful bliss; No chilling thought, or stalking dread arising, tosses A poison'd drop of bitterness to spoil the ling'ring kiss: No mem'ries past or future fears assailing— As soon might doubt bedim the stars that shine! Or souls released reach Paradise bewailing The end of pain, and clemency divine: The glorious present holds us: I am his and he is mine!"

* * * * *

O day and night! O day and night! and was it madness? Lo! all is changing, even sky, and sea, and shore; The heaving water ebbs itself away in sadness, The waves receding sigh, "Delight returns no more!" Far down the East the dawn is dimly burning, Its first chill breath has shivered thro' my frame, And with the light comes cruel Thought returning, The air seems full of voices speaking blame; Another day commences, but the world is not the same!

O day and night! O day and night! its rashes pass'd us, We stand upon the brink and watch, the strong deep tide, And shrink already from the howls that soon must blast us, The world that sins unchidden, and the laws that would divide. "O Love, they rest in peace whom ocean covers!" One plunge, one clasp supernal, one long kiss! Then downward, like those old Italian lovers. Descend for ever through the long abyss, And float together, happy, all eternity like this!

The charm of the reader's voice had held us spellbound, and the poem was well received; but after the usual compliments there was a pause, and then Ideala burst out impetuously: "I am sick of those old Italian lovers," she said; "they float into everything. Their story is the essence with which two-thirds of our love literature is flavoured. We should never have received them in society; why do we tolerate them in books? I like my company to be respectable even there; and when an author asks me to admire and sympathise with such people he insults me."

"They must be brought in, though, for the sake of contrast," somebody observed.

"They should be kept in their proper place, then," she answered. "You may choose what you please to point a moral, but for pity's sake be careful about what you use to adorn a tale."

"Moral or no moral," said the young sculptor, "I think a new poem of any kind a thing to be thankful for."

"And do you call that kind of thing new?" said Ideala. "I should say it was a fine compound of all the poems of the kind, and several other kinds, that have ever been written, with a dash of the peculiarly refined immorality of our own times, from which nothing is sacred; thrown in to make weight. Such writing,

Like a new disease, unknown to men, Creeps, no precaution used, among the crowd, ... and saps The fealty of our friends, and stirs the pulse With devil's leaps, and poisons half the young.

It is the feeling of the day accurately defined. Nobody sighs for love and peace now.

The cry is for the indulgence of some fiery passion for an hour, and then, perdition!—if you like—since that is the recognised price of it."

"Our loves are more intense than they used to be," said the sculptor, sighing.

"Love!" Ideala answered. "Oh, do not desecrate 'the eternal God-word, love!' There is little enough of that in the business that goes by its name now-a-days. I am a lady—I cannot use the right word. But it is none the less the thing I mean because it calls blasphemously on God Almighty to help it to fulfil itself."

"Well," said Charlie Lloyd, deprecatingly, "I didn't offer this, you know, as an admirable specimen of what our day can produce. I told you I hadn't read it, and now that I have I don't suppose any one has offered it to the public as a serious expression of sentiment."

"You do not think people write books about what they really feel?" said Ideala. "I believe they do when the feeling is shameful. If you want to keep a secret, publish the exact truth in a book, and nobody will believe a word of it. I think people who publish such productions should be burned on a pile of their own works."

"The writer is young, doubtless," I said, apologetically. It gives one a shock to hear a woman say harsh things.

"He was evidently not too young to have bad thoughts," said Claudia, supporting her friend; "and he was certainly old enough to know better."

"He!" ejaculated Ideala. "It is far more likely to be she. Do you read the reviews? You will find that all the most objectionable books are written by women—and condemned by men who lift up their voices now, as they have done from time immemorial, and insist that we should do as they say, and not as they do."

"I am afraid you are right," said Charlie Lloyd. "So many of our best women—I mean the women who are likely to make most impression on the age—are going that way now."

"But what horrid things you say, Ideala," one of the ladies chimed in, "and you make everybody else say horrid things. That 'Passion of Delysle' is not a bit worse than Tennyson's 'Fatima'—and there's a lot more in it—that part about 'the roll of worlds,' you know, is quite grand."

"I always liked that idea," Ideala observed.

"And—and—" the lady continued, "where she looks at everything, you know. She was very properly seeking distraction, and found it for a moment in the contemplation of nature, and that softened her mood, so that when the inevitable rush of recollection comes and forces the thought of him back upon her, her feeling finds expression in a prayer —instead of—instead of—"

"A blasphemous remonstrance," Ideala put in. "Oh, I don't deny that there is just enough to be said in favour of all these things to make them sell—and this one has two unusual points of interest. It opens with a riddle, and the lady's lover is a priest, which gives an additional zest to the charm of wrong-doing, a sauce piquante for jaded appetites."

"Why do you call the opening verses a riddle?" said Charlie Lloyd.

"Because I fancy no one will ever guess what kind of a place it was—

This mountain island, This saintly shrine, this fort—

I forget how it goes on."

"Oh, the description of the place is not bad," Charlie answered, after reading it over again to himself. "It would do for the Mont St. Michael in Normandy."

"Well, let that pass, then," said Ideala; "also the dear familiar 'subtle scents abroad upon the night.' But what does she mean by 'On with rush and ring'?"

"She means the train, obviously."

"What an outlandish periphrasis! And how about

The rugged brows of those old rocks, storm-rent and hoary, Are quivering in their

grim surprise?"

"That is a 'pathetic fallacy.' She is not speaking of the things as they were, but as they appeared to her excited fancy. She chronicles her own death, though——"

"So did Moses," said Ideala. "If you really want to justify 'The Passion of Delysle' I can help you. You see she was dreadfully badly treated by her friends, poor thing! and her marriage after all was no marriage, because she loved another man all the time; and your husband isn't properly your husband if you don't love him, love being the only possible sanctification—in fact, the only true marriage. And then her lover, thinking he had lost her, became a priest, and vows made under a misapprehension like that cannot be binding—it would be too much to expect us to suffer always for such mistakes. And then the world—but we all know how cruel the world is! And appearances were sadly against them, poor things! No one would ever have believed that they had stayed out all night to discuss their religious experiences. Suicide is shocking, of course; but still, when people are driven to it like that, we can only be sorry for them, and hope they will never do it again!" She nestled back more comfortably on her couch, and then continued in an altered tone: "But it is appalling to think of the quantity of machine-made verses like those that are imposed on the public year by year, verses the mere result of much reading and writing, without a scrap of inspiration in them, and as far removed from even schoolboy efforts of genius, as an oleograph is from an oil painting. Poets are as rare now as prophets, and inspiration has left us for our sins. I think any fairly educated one of us, with a tolerable memory and the habit of composition, could write that 'Passion of Delysle' again in half-an-hour."

"Oh, could they, though!" said Ralph, the son of the house. "I dare bet anything you couldn't do it yourself in twice the time."

"Dare you?" she answered, with a little smile. "Well, to adopt your elegant phraseology, Master Ralph, I bet I will produce the same story, with the same

conclusion, but a different moral, in an hour—since you allow me twice the time I named—if I may be permitted to write it in blank verse, that is, and of course, with the understanding that what I write is not intended to be anything but mere versified prose."

"Done with you!" cried Ralph.

"Hush—h—h!" his mother exclaimed, deprecatingly. "Betting, and before the Bishop, too!"

"What the Bishop don't know will do him no harm, Ma," said the youth in a stage whisper. "Sit down, Ideala, and begin. It's ten minutes to ten now."

The Bishop slept serenely; conversation flagged; and Ideala wrote steadily for about three-quarters of an hour; then she gathered up the manuscript, rose from the table, and returned to her old seat.

"'The Passion of Delysle' has become 'The Choice,'" she said. "Will you read it for me, Mr. Lloyd? I think it should have that advantage, at least."

Charlie took the manuscript, and read:

Once on a time, not very long gone by, A noble lady had a noble choice. The daughter of an ancient house was she, Beauty, and wealth, and highest rank were hers, But love was not, for of a proud, cold race Her people were, caring for nought but lands, Riches, and power; holding all tender thoughts As weakly folly, only fit for babes. The lady learnt their creed; her heart seem'd hard— She thought it so; and when the moment came To choose 'twixt love, young love, and pride of place, She still'd an unwonted feeling that would rise, And saying calmly: "I have got no heart, And love is vain!" she chose to be the wife Of sinful age, corruption, and untruth, Scorning the steadfast love of one who yearn'd To win her from the crooked paths she trod, And break the sordid chains that bound her soul, And sweep the defiling dust of common thoughts From out her mind, until it shone at last With large imaginings of God and good.

She chose: no more they met: her life was pass'd In constant round of pomp and proud display. But when he went, and never more there came The love-sad eyes to question and entreat, The voice of music praising noble deeds, The graceful presence and the golden hair, She miss'd the boy; but scoff'd at first and said: "One misses all things, common pets one spurn'd, Good slaves and bad alike when both are gone,— A small thing makes the habit of a life!" But days wore on, and adulation palled. She knew not what she lack'd, nor that she loath'd The hollow semblance, the dull mockery, Which she had gain'd for joy by choosing rank, And money's worth, instead of peace and love.

Yet ever as the long days grew to months More heavy hung the time, moved slower by. And all things troubled her and gave her pain, And morning, noon, and night the thought would rise, And grew insistent when she would not hear: "One loved me! out of all this crowd but one! And he is gone, and I have driven him forth!"

Then in the silent solitude of night An old weird story that she once had heard Tormented her; a story speaking much Of a rock-island on the Norman coast, A mountain peak rising from barren sand, Or standing sea-girt when the tide returns, And beaten by the winds on ev'ry side, With wall'd-in town, and castle on the height, And high above the castle, strangely placed, A grey cathedral with its summit tipp'd By a gold figure of St. Michael crown'd, With burnished wings and flashing sword that shone A beacon in the sunset, seen for miles, As tho' the Archangel floated in the air. The castle and the church a sanctuary And refuge were, to which men often fled For rest or safety, finding what they sought. And as the lady thought about the place, A notion came that she would like to kneel And pray for peace at that far lonely shrine. The longing grew: she rested not nor slept. And should she fly and leave her wretched wealth? And if she fled she never could return; Yet if she stay'd she felt that she should die. So go or stay meant misery for her— But misery is lessened when we move. Yes, she would go! and then she laugh'd to think Of the wild fury of her harsh old Lord When he should wake one day and find her gone—

Laugh'd! the first time for long and weary months.

By Mont St. Michael, on the Norman coast, A restless river, changing oft its course, Flows sullenly; and racehorse-like the tide, Which, going, leaves a wilderness of sand. Comes rushing back, a foam-topp'd, wat'ry wall; And those who, wand'ring, 'scape the quicksand's grip, Are often caught and drown'd ere help can come. But fair the prospect from the Mount when bright The sunshine falls on Avranches far away, A white town straggling o'er a verdant hill; And on the tree-clad country toward the west, On apple orchards, and the fairy bloom Of feath'ry tam'risk bushes on the shore; Whilst high above in silent majesty Of hue and form the floating clouds support The far-extending vault of azure sky

Such was the shrine the lady sought, and there In mute appeal for what she lack'd she knelt, Not knowing what she lack'd; but finding peace Steal o'er her soul there as she faintly heard The slow and solemn chanting of the priests, The mild monotony of murmured prayers, And hush of pauses when she seemed to feel The heart she deem'd so hard was melting fast, And listen'd to a voice within her say— "Love is not vain! Love all things and rejoice!" And found warm tears were stealing down her cheeks.

The mystery of love, of love, of love, Of hope, of joy, of life itself, she felt; The crown of life, which she had sacrificed In scornful pride for lust of power and place. The lady bow'd her head, and o'er her swept A wave of anguish, and she knew despair. "Could I but see him once again!" she moan'd, "See him, and beg forgiveness, and then die!" Did the Archangel Michael, standing there Upon her left, in shining silver, hear? Who knows? Her prayer was answer'd like a flash; For at that moment, clear and sweet o'er all The mingled music of the chanting choir, There rose a voice that thrill'd her inmost soul: It breathed a blessing; utter'd soft a prayer. No need to look: and yet she look'd, and saw A hooded monk before the altar kneel, A graceful presence, tho' in sordid dress. And as she gazed the cowl slipp'd back and

show'd (But dimly thro' the incense-perfumed cloud) A pure pale face, a golden tonsured head, And blue eyes raised to heaven. Then the truth Was there reveal'd to her that he had left The world to watch and pray for such as she.

Out of the castled-gate she hurried forth: What matter'd where she went, to east or west? What matter'd peasant's warning that the sand Was shifting ever, and the rushing tide Gave them no quarter whom it overtook? 'Twas death she courted, and with heedless step Onward to meet it swift the lady fled. Death is so beautiful at such a time, When all the land in summer sunshine lies, And lapse of distant waves breaks pleasantly The silence with a soothing dreamy sound, And danger seems no nearer than the sky, He tempts us from afar with hope of rest. She hurried on in search of death, nor heard That eager footsteps followed where she went. The voice that call'd her was not real, she thought, But a sweet portion of a strange sweet dream— For now the terrible anguish quickly pass'd, And sense of peace at hand was all she felt. "O stop!"

Ah! that was real. She turn'd and saw, Nor saw a moment till she felt his grasp Strong and determined on her rounded arm. "Thou shalt not die!" he cried. "What madness this?" "Madness!" she echoed: "nay, my love, 'tis bliss— The first my life has known—to stand here still With thee beside me, and to wait for death. I know my heart at last, but all too late! I may not love thee, I another's wife; Thou mayst not love me, thou hast wedded heaven. We cannot be together in this world; I cannot live alone and know thee here. And thou art troubled! I for beneath that garb Thy heart beats ever hot with love for me; For love will not be quell'd by monkish vows. But all things change in death! so let us die Thus, hand in hand, and so together pass, And be together thro' eternity!"

There was a struggle in the young monk's breast; He would not meet her pleading eyes and yield, But gazing up to heaven prayed for strength, Strength to resist, and guidance how to act, For death like that with her was luring—sweet— A strong

temptation, but he must resist, And strive to save and show her how to live. "We cannot make hereafter for ourselves," He answered softly; "all that we can do Is so to live that we shall win reward Of praise, and peace, and happy life to come. Thy duty lies before thee; so does mine. Let each return, and toil and watch and pray, Knowing each other's heart is fix'd on heaven. And do the good we can; not seeking death Nor shunning it, but living pure and true, With conscience clear to meet our God at last, And win each other for our great reward."

The moving music of his words sank deep Her alter'd heart thrill'd high to holy thoughts. "Be thou my guide," she said. "My duty now Shall bring me peace; so shall I toil like thee To win the love I yearn for in the end."

It might not be. The treach'rous, working sand Already clutched their feet, and check'd their speed; And dancing, sparkling, like a joyful thing, A glitt'ring, glassy wall of foam-fleck'd wave Towards them glided with that fatal speed You cannot mark because it is so swift. No use to struggle now: no time to fly! He clasp'd her to him: "God hath will'd it thus. Courage, my sister!" "Is this death?" she cried. "Yes, this is death." "It is not death, but joy!" And as she spoke the spot where they were seen Became a wat'ry waste of battling waves: While high above the summer sun shone on— A passing seabird hoarsely shriek'd along! All things were changed, with that vast change which makes It seem as tho' nought else had ever been.

"Well done, Ideala!" said Ralph, patronisingly; "you certainly have a memory, and are quite as good at patchwork as the author of 'Delysle.' I could criticise on another count, but taking into consideration time, place, circumstances, and the female intellect, I refrain. That is the generous sort of creature I am. So, without expressing my own opinion further—except to remark that, though I don't think much of either of them, personally I prefer 'Delysle.' The other is wholesomer, doubtless, for those who like a mild diet. Milk and water doesn't agree with me. But I put it to the vote. Ladies and gentlemen, do you or do you not consider that this lady has won her

bet?"

"Oh, won it, most decidedly!" we all agreed.

"By-the-by, what was the bet?" I asked.

"My Pa's gaiters against Ideala's blue stockings. I regret to say that circumstances over which I have no control"—and he glanced at the unconscious Bishop—"prevent the immediate payment of my debt—unless, indeed, he has a second pair;" and he left the room hurriedly as if to see.

He did not come back to us that evening, but I believe he was to be heard of later at the sign of the "Billiard and Cue."

"Well," said the young sculptor, returning to the old point of departure, "for my own part, I find much that is elevating in modern works."

"So do I," said Ideala; "I find much that raises me on stilts."

"But even that eminence would enable you to look over other people's heads and beyond."

"It would," she answered, "if human nature didn't desire a sense of security; but, as it is, when I am artificially set up, I find that all I can do is to look at my own feet, and tremble lest I fall. Modern literature stimulates; it doesn't nourish. It makes you feel like a giant for a moment, but leaves you crushed like a worm, and without faith, without love, without hope. It excites you pleasurably, and when you see life through its medium you never suspect that the vision is distorted. It makes you think the Iconoclast the greatest hero, and causes you to feel that you share his glory when you help him with your approval to overthrow all the images you ever cherished; but when the work of destruction is over, and you look about you once more with sober eyes, you find you have sacrificed your all for nothing. Your false guide fails you when you want him most. He robs you, and leaves you hungry, thirsty, and alone in the wilderness to which he has beguiled you. There is no need for new theories of Life and Religion; all we require is strength and courage to perfect the old ones.

[Footnote: She quite changed her mind upon this subject eventually, and held that there was not only need of new theories, but good hope that we should have them.] What the mind wants is food it can grow upon, not stimulants which inflate it for a time with a fancied sense of power that has no real existence. But I have small hope for our nation when I think of the sparkling trash that the mind of the multitude daily imbibes and craves for. I mean our novels. What a fine affectation of goodness there is in most of them! And what a perfect moral is tacked on to them!—like the balayeuse at the bottom of a lady's dress; but, like the balayeuse, it is only meant to be a protection and a finish, and, however precious it may be, it suffers from contact with the dirt, and sooner or later has to be cut out and cast aside, soiled and useless. Some doggerel a friend of mine scribbled on one book in particular describes dozens of popular novels exactly:

O what a beautiful history! Think what temptations they passed! Each one more cruelly trying, More tempting, indeed, than the last. And what a lesson it teaches; No passion from evil's exempted— Whilst admiring the moral it preaches, It makes you quite long to be tempted.

I agree with those who tell us that society is breaking up, or will break up unless something is done at once to stop the dissolution. We have no high ideals of anything. Marriage itself is a mere commercial treaty, and only professional preachers speak of it in other terms—and those young people, with a passion for each other, who are about to be united—a passion that dies the death inevitably for want of knowledge, and wholesome principle, and self-control to support it. Some of us like our bargains better than others, but you can judge of the estimation in which marriage is held when you see how much happiness people generally find in it. If men and women were kept apart, and made to live purely from their cradles, they would still scarcely be fit for marriage; yet any man thinks he may marry, and never cares to be the nobler or the better for it. And when you see that this, the only perfect state, the most sacred bond of union between man and woman, is everywhere lightly

considered, don't you think there is reason in the fear that we are falling on bad times? Oh, don't quote the Romans to me, and the Inevitable. We know better than the Romans, and could do better if we chose. But we have to mourn for the death of our manhood! Where is our manhood? Where are our men? Is there any wonder that we are losing what is best in life when only women are left to defend it? Believe me, the degradation of marriage is the tune to which the whole fabric of society is going to pieces——"

"Eh, what!" exclaimed the Bishop, waking up with a start—"whole fabric of society going to pieces? Nonsense! When so many people come to church. And then look at all the societies at work for the—for the— ah—prevention of everything. Why, I belong to a dozen at least myself; the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and the Rational Dress Reform, for doing away with petticoats—no, by-the-by, it is my wife who belongs to that. But, at any rate, everything is being done that should be done, and you talk nonsense, my dear"—looking at Ideala severely— "because you don't know anything about it."

"The faults we are hardest on in others are those we are most conscious of in ourselves—perhaps because we know how easy it would be to conquer them," Ideala observed vaguely.

"Oh, come, now, my dear," said the Bishop, beaming round on all of us, "you must not believe what you hear about society being in such a bad state. I know idle people say so, and it is very wrong of them. Why, I never see anything wrong."

"Of course not," said Ideala. "We are all on our best behaviour before you."

The Bishop patted his apron good-humouredly. "Well, now, take yourself for example," he said. "I am sure you never do wrong—tell stories, you know, and that kind of thing."

"Haven't I, though!" she answered, mischievously. "Not that it was much use, for I always repented and confessed; and now I have abandoned the practice to the best of

my ability. It is horrid to feel you don't deserve the confidence that is placed in you, Bishop, isn't it?"

"Ideala!" Claudia protested.

The Bishop looked puzzled.

"I can assure you I have suffered agonies of remorse because, in an idle moment, I deceived my cat—a big, comfortable creature, who used to come to me every day to be fed, and preferred to eat out of my hand. He was greedy, though, and snapped, and one day I offered him a piece of preserved ginger, and he dashed at it as usual, and swallowed it before he knew what it was. Then he just looked at me and walked away. He trusted me, and I had deceived him. It was an unpardonable breach of confidence, and I have always felt that I never could look that cat in the face again."

The Bishop smiled and sighed at the little reminiscence. "I think you are right, though, in one way, Ideala," he presently observed. "The powers of Light and Darkness are certainly having a hard fight for it in our day; but we have every reason to hope.

Oh, yet we trust that somehow good Will be the final goal of ill."

"And, granted that the popular literature of the day is corrupt," the young sculptor put in, "and that the standard of society is being yearly lowered by it, still there is Art——"

"But there is so little of it," said Ideala; "I mean so little that elevates. Most of the subjects chosen are not worth painting; and what profit is there in contemplating a thing that is neither grand nor beautiful in itself, nor suggestive, by association, of anything that is grand or beautiful? The pictures one generally sees are not calculated to suggest anything to the minds that need suggestion most. The technical part may be good and gratifying to those who understand it, but that is the mere trade of the thing. We prefer to see it well done, of course, but if the canvas has nothing but the paint to recommend it, the artist might have saved himself the

trouble of putting it on, for all the good it does or the pleasure it gives."

"Oh, Ideala, do you know nothing of the charm of colour?" asked a lady who painted.

"I do," said Ideala, "but I may be supposed to have enjoyed exceptional advantages. And it is hardly charm we want to elevate us. There will always be enough in all conscience to appeal to the senses. But there is an absence even of charm."

"Many a noble thought has been expressed in a coat of colour," said the lady.

"I know it has," Ideala answered; "and all best thoughts give pleasure. I have been so thrilled by a noble idea, well expressed, that I could do nothing but sit with closed eyes and revel in the joy of it. But if such an idea were placed before you, and you did not know the language in which it was written, what good would it do you? An uneducated person seeing a picture of a donkey in a field sees only a donkey in a field, however well it may be painted; and I fancy very exceptional ability would be required to make any of us think a grey donkey sublime, or believe an ordinary green field to be one of the Elysian."

"Talking about charm," the sculptor broke in, enthusiastically, "I suppose you haven't seen the new picture, 'Venus getting into the Bath?' That is a feast of colour, and realism, if you like! She is standing beside the bath with a dreamy look on her face. Her lovely eyes are fixed on the water. One arched and blue-veined foot is slightly raised as if the touch of the marble chilled her. Her limbs are in an easy attitude, and beautifully modelled. She is represented as a slight young girl, and the figure stands out in exquisite nudity from a background of Pompeian red, and the dark green of myrtles. With one hand she is holding aloft the masses of her rich brown hair—the attitude suggests the stretching of the muscles after repose; with the other"—but here his memory failed him. "What is she doing with her other hand?"

"Scratching herself!" slipped from Ideala, involuntarily, to her own horror and the delight of some. But she recovered herself quickly, and turning to the good Bishop,

who was looking mildly astonished and much amused, she said: "There, my Lord, is an instance of the corrupt state of society in our own day. You see, even your restraining presence doesn't always keep us in order. I hope," she whispered to me, "I'm not going to be made the horrid example to prove the truth of all my theories."

Soon after this the party broke up. Claudia returned in her wraps to say good-night to the Bishop's wife.

"Claudia!" Ideala exclaimed, "you have forgotten that detestable old blue shawl."

Claudia tried to stop her with a significant gesture, but in vain. Ideala was obtuse.

"Claudia came out this evening in the most extraordinary covering I ever saw a lady wear," she said to the Bishop's wife. "I really think she must have borrowed it from one of the maids."

"I am afraid you must mean the blue shawl I lent to Lady Claudia the other evening," the Bishop's wife replied, with a hurt smile.

"Oh!" said Ideala, disconcerted for a moment. "But, really, Bishopess, you deserve to be upbraided. You should set a better example, and not provoke us to scorn on the subject of your shawls."

Later, when I was alone with my sister, I said: "Ideala did nothing but put her foot in it this evening. What was the matter with her? I never heard her speak so strongly before, except when she was alone with us. And I don't think she ought to discuss such subjects with such people; it is hardly delicate."

Claudia sighed wearily. "Who knows what pain is at the bottom of it all?" she said. "But one thing always puzzles me. Ideala rails at evils that never hurt her, and yet she speaks of marriage, which has been her bane, as if it were a holy and perfect state, upon which it is a privilege to enter."

"Plenty of people have condemned marriage simply because their own experience of it has been unfortunate," I answered; "but Ideala is above that. She will let no petty

personal mishap prejudice her judgment on the subject. She sees and feels the possibility of infinite happiness in marriage when there is such love and such devotion on both sides as she herself could have brought to it; and she understands that her own unhappy experience need only be exceptional."

"I wish it were!" sighed Claudia.

Some years later, Ideala confessed to me that she had written "The Passion of Delysle" herself, but had had no idea of its significance until she heard it read aloud that night, and then, as she elegantly expressed it, she could have cut her throat with shame and mortification, which I consider a warning to young ladies not to trust to their poetical inspirations, for—if the shade of Shelley will pardon the conclusion—alas! apparently, they know not what they do when they write verses!

"I can't think how you could have criticised it like that, Ideala," I said, "now that I know you wrote it."

"Neither can I," she answered.

"You ought to have confessed you had written it, or have said nothing about it," I told her, frankly.

"Yes," she assented. "Not doing so was a kind of falsehood. But neither course occurred to me." And then she explained: "I never see the meaning of what I write till the light of public opinion is turned upon it, or some cold critic comes and damps my enthusiasm. When a subject possesses me, and shapes itself into verse, it boils in my brain, and my pen is the only way of escape for it, the one safety-valve I have to ease the pressure. And I can't judge of its merits myself for long enough after it is written, because the boiling begins again, you see, whenever I read it, and then there is such a steam of feeling I cannot see to think. For the verses, however poor they appear to you, contain for me the whole poem as I have it in my inner consciousness. It is beautiful as it exists there, but the power of expression is lacking. If only I could make you feel it as I do, I should be the greatest poet alive."

It was a trick of Ideala's to miss the true import of a thing—often an act of her own—until the occasion had passed, or to see it strangely distorted, as she frequently did at this time—though that gradually ceased altogether as she grew older; but it was this peculiarity, so strongly marked in her, which first helped me to comprehend a curious trait there is in the moral nature of men and women while it is still in process of development. Many men, Frenchmen especially, have thought the trait peculiar to women. La Bruyére declares that "Women have no principles as men understand the word. They are guided by their feelings, and have full faith in their guide. Their notions of propriety and impropriety, right and wrong, they get from the little world embraced by their affections." And Alphonse Karr says: "Never attempt to prove anything to a woman: she believes only according to her feelings. Endeavour to please and persuade: she may yield to the person who reasons with her, not to his arguments"—opinions, however, which apply to men as often as not, and only to the young, impressible, passionate, and imperfectly educated of either sex. But there is scarcely a generalisation for one sex which does not apply equally to the other, so perfectly alike in nature are men and women. The difference is only in circumstance. Reverse the position of the sexes, require men to be modest and obedient, and they will develop every woman's weakness in a generation. If a man would comprehend a woman, let him consider himself; the woman has the same joys, sorrows, hopes, fears, pleasures, and passions—expressed in another way, that is all. But, certainly, for a long time Ideala's guide was her feeling about a thing. I have often said to her, when at last she decided to take some step which had obviously been the only course open to her from the first: "But, Ideala, why have you hesitated so long? You knew it was right to begin with."

"Yes," she would answer, "I knew it was right; but I have only just now felt that it was."

She had never thought of acting on the mere cold knowledge. For feeling to knowledge, in young minds, is like the match to a fire laid in a grate; knowledge

without feeling being as cheerless and impotent as the fire unlit.

CHAPTER XII.

A little while after that evening at the Palace we learnt to our dismay that Ideala's husband had taken a house in one of the rough manufacturing districts, to which he meant to remove immediately. Business was the pretext, as he had money in some great ironworks there; but I think the nearness of a large city, where a man of his stamp would be able to indulge all his tastes without let or hindrance, had something to do with the change.

Ideala had kept up very well while she was among us, but soon after she went away we gathered from the tone of her letters that there was a change in her which alarmed us. Her health, which had hitherto been splendid, seemed to be giving way, and it was evident that her new position did not please her, and that, even after she had been there for months, she continued to feel herself "a stranger in a strange land." The people were uncongenial, and I think it likely they regarded Ideala's oddities with some suspicion, and did not take to her as we had done. She had not that extreme youth which had been her excuse when she came to us, and which, somehow, we had not missed when she lost it; and her habitual reserve on all matters that immediately concerned herself must also have tended to make her unpopular with people whose predominant quality was "an eminent curiosity."

"They are far above books," Ideala wrote to Claudia; "what they study is each other, and in the pursuit of this branch of knowledge they are indefatigable. When they can get nothing out of me about myself, they question me about my husband and friends, and it is in vain that I answer them with those words of wisdom (I feel sure I misquote them)— 'All that is mine own is yours till the end of my life; but the secret of my friend is not mine own'—they persevere.

"Our house is near the town, Eighteen big chimneys darken our daylight and deluge

us with smuts when the wind brings the smoke, our way; and besides the smoke we are subject to unsavoury vapours from chemical works in the other direction, so that when the wind shifts we only exchange evils. They say these chemical fumes are not unwholesome, and quote the death-rate, which is lower than any other place of the size in England. In fact, scarcely anybody dies here. They go away as soon as they begin to feel ill—perhaps that accounts for it. But those horrid chemical fumes have a great deal to answer for. They have killed the trees for miles around. It is the oaks that suffer principally. The tops are nipped first, and then they gradually die downwards till the whole tree is decayed all through. The absence of trees makes the country bleak and desolate, and I cannot help thinking the unlovely surroundings affect us all. The people themselves are unlovely in thought, and word, and deed; but I have found a good deal of rough kindliness amongst them nevertheless. They did mob me on one occasion, and made most unkind remarks about my nether garments, when I was obliged to walk through the town in my riding habit; but, as a rule, the mill girls merely observe 'That's a lady,' and let me go by unmolested—unless I happen to be carrying flowers. They do so love flowers, poor things and I cannot resist their pathetic entreaties when they beg for 'One, missus, on'y one!' Some of my lady friends are not let off so easily as I am. The girls chaff them unmercifully about their dress and personal peculiarities, and if they show signs of annoyance they call them names that are not to be repeated. The mill girls wear bright-coloured gowns, white aprons, and nothing on their heads. If a policeman catches them at any mischief they either clatter off in their clogs with shrieks of laughter, or knock him down and kick him most unmercifully. They are as strong as men, and as beautiful, some of them, as saints; but they are very unsaintlike creatures really—irresponsible, and with little or no idea of right and wrong. One scarcely believes that they have souls—and I am always surprised to find that anything not cruel and coarse can survive in the hearts of people, begrimed, body and mind, like these, by their hard surroundings; but it is there,

nevertheless—the human nature, and the poetry, and the something ready to thrill to better things. A gentleman has a lovely place not far from us, where the trees have been spared by a miracle. Nightingales seldom wander so far north, but a few years ago a stray one was heard there, and the wonder and the beauty of its voice brought hundreds from the mills and crowded streets to hear it sing. Special trains were run from the neighbouring city to accommodate the crowds that came nightly to wait in the moonlight and listen; and an enterprising trader set up a stall, and sold gingerbeer. The story ends there, but I like it, don't you? especially the gingerbeer part of it. It was told me by one who remembers the circumstance.

"My greatest pleasure in life is in my flowers, they are dearer to me than any I ever had before, because they are all so delicate, and require such infinite care and tenderness to keep them alive in this uncongenial climate. I have my thrushes also—two, which I stole from a nest in a wood one moonlight night, and brought up by hand on bread and milk and scraped beef. I had to get up at daylight, and feed them every hour until dark; but the clergy will not allow that this obligation was a proper excuse for staying away from church, and just now I am unhappy in the feeling that their religion must be inhuman. But my thrushes have well repaid the trouble. They call me when I go into the room, and come to me when I open the door of their cage, and perch on my shoulder. One of them, Israfil, sings divinely. People who come to hear him see only a little brown bird with speckled breast, and call him a thrush; but I know he is Israfil, 'the angel of song, and most melodious of God's creatures;' and he thinks that I have wings. He told me so!

"I wish you would send me a basket of snails packed up in lettuce leaves. I don't know why, but I can find none here, and I cannot hear of one ever having been seen in the county. But please do not send them unless you are quite sure you can spare them."

"Ideala is trying to hide herself behind these pretty trivialities," Claudia said. "I

always suspect that there is something more wrong than usual when she adopts this playful tone and childlike simplicity of taste."

"It must be trying to have a friend who believes so little in one as you do in Ideala," I answered.

"Oh, how exasperating you are!" Claudia exclaimed. "You know what I mean quite well enough."

Later, Ideala wrote: "You are anxious about my health. The fact is, I have developed a most extraordinary talent for taking cold. I went by train to see the museum in the city the other day. I took off my cloak while I was there, and stayed an hour, and when I came away, the antiquary, who knew I was a precious specimen, wrapped me up carefully himself. Nevertheless I caught cold. Then I went to stay with some people near here who clamoured much for the pleasure of my company. They live in a palace and are entertaining. The lady's papa took me in to dinner he first evening. He asked me about Major Gorst, and wanted to know, in an impressive tone of voice, if I had heard that he was the next heir but one to the Hearldom of Cathcourt.

"The next day my hostess said to her husband: 'Dearest, do let me ride Oscar,' and he replied: 'No, my darling, I can't till I know he's safe. I must get some one to try him first'—and he looked at me—'Perhaps you wouldn't mind?'

"They had never seen me on horseback, and I was longing to distinguish myself. I did distinguish myself. Oscar was a merry horse, but one never knew how he would take things. The first bridge we came to—I was 'sitting easy to a canter' with my foot out of the stirrup and my leg over the third crutch—a bad habit I learnt from a foreign friend—and an express train rushed by. Oscar went on abruptly, but I remained. The next difficulty was at a brook. We ought to have crossed it together; but Oscar changed his mind at the last moment, so he remained and I went on. And after that we came to cross-roads, and had a difference of opinion about which was the right one. That ended in our coming over together, which made me feel

solemn—disheartened, in fact—and then I thought we should never understand each other and be friends, so I gave him up. I did not talk much about riding to those people after that.

"But I wore my summer habit that day, and of course I caught cold. And when that was nearly well I went downstairs to be civil to some people who had driven a long way to see me. The drawing-room was damp from disuse, and the fire had only just been lighted—and of course I caught cold. When that was better I went for a drive. The wind was east, and the carriage was open—and of course I caught cold. I don't know how it may strike you, but argument seems to me useless when a person has such a constitution."

"Can you read between the lines of that letter?" Claudia asked me.

"She seems to be dreadfully don't care," I said.

"Exactly. She is more reckless, and therefore more miserable, than she used to be. I wouldn't live with him."

"Ideala won't shirk her duty because it is hard and unpalatable," I answered.

"I believe she likes it!" Claudia exclaimed; and then, smiling at her own inconsistency, she explained, "I mean if she really is miserable she ought to speak and let us do something."

"It is contrary to her principles. She would think it wrong to disturb your mind for a moment because her own life is a burden to her. That is why she always tries to seem happy, and is cheerful on the surface. If she made lament, we should suffer in sympathy, and all the more because there is so very little we could do to help her. Silence is best. If she ever gives way, she will not be able to bear it again."

"But why should she bear it?" Claudia demanded.

"It is her duty."

"I know she thinks so, and is sacrificing her life to that principle. But will you kindly

tell me where a woman's duty to her husband ends and her duty to herself begins? I suppose you will allow that she has a duty to herself? And the line should be drawn somewhere."

Claudia's mind was a sort of boomerang just then, returning inevitably to this point of departure; but I could make no suggestion that satisfied her. And I was uneasy myself. Ideala refused to come to us, and had made some excuse to prevent it when Claudia offered to go to her. This puzzled me; but we induced her at last to promise to meet us in London in May. It was April then, and we thought if she could be persuaded to stay two months of the season in town with us, and go with us afterwards to a place of mine in the North which she loved, she would probably recover her health and spirits.

CHAPTER XIII.

In the meantime, however, something decisive happened, as we afterwards learnt.

It seems that after they left our neighbourhood Ideala had, by accident, made a number of small discoveries about her husband which had the effect of destroying any remnant of respect she may still have felt for him. She found that he was in the habit of examining her private papers in her absence, and that he had opened her letters and resealed them. His manner to her was unctuous as a rule; but she knew he lied to her without hesitation if it suited his purpose—and that alone would have been enough to destroy her liking for him, for it is not in the nature of such a woman to love a man who has looked her in the face and lied to her.

These things, and the loneliness he brought upon her by driving from her the few people with whom she had any intellectual fellowship, she would have borne in the old uncomplaining way, but he did not stop there.

One day she drove into town with a friend who got out to do some shopping. Ideala waited in the carriage, which had stopped opposite a public-house, and from where

she sat she could see the little sitting- room behind the bar, and its occupants. They were her husband and the barmaid, who was sitting on his knee.

Ideala arranged her parasol so that they might not see her if they chanced to look that way, and calmly resumed the conversation when her friend returned.

She dined alone with her husband that evening, and talked as usual, telling him all she had done and what news there was in the paper, as she always did, to save him the trouble of reading it. In return he told her he had been at the ironworks all day, only leaving them in time to dress for dinner, a piece of news she received with a still countenance, and her soft eyes fixed on the fire.

She was standing on the hearth at the time, and as he spoke he laid his hand upon her shoulder caressingly, but she could not bear it. Her powers of endurance were at an end, and for the first time she shrank from him openly.

"How you do loathe me, Ideala," he exclaimed.

"Yes, I loathe you," she answered.

And then, in a sudden burst of rage, he raised his hand and struck her.

Ideala's determination to be faithful to what she conceived to be her duty had kept her quiet hitherto, but now a sense of personal degradation made her desperate, and she forgot all that. Her first impulse was to consult somebody, to speak and find means to put an end to her misery; but I was not there, and to whom should she go for advice. Her impatience brooked no delay. She must see some one instantly. She thought of the Rector of the parish, but felt he would not do. He was a fine-looking, well-mannered old gentleman, much engaged in scientific pursuits, who always spoke of the Deity as if he were on intimate terms with Him, and had probably never been asked to administer any but the most formal kind of spiritual consolation in his life.

The training and experience of a Roman Catholic priest, accustoming them as it does to deal with every phase of human suffering and passion, would have been more

useful to her in such an emergency, but she knew none of the priests in that district, and did not think of going to them. But while she was considering the matter, as if by inspiration, she remembered something an acquaintance had lately written to her. This lady was a person for whom she felt much respect, and that doubtless influenced her decision considerably. The lady wrote: "It must be convenient to be only twenty minutes by train from such a big place. I suppose you go over for shopping, &c.? When you are there again I wish you would go and see my cousin Lorrimer. He is Adviser in General at the Great Hospital—a responsible position; and I am sure, if you go, he will be glad to do the honours of the place, which is most interesting."

Ideala had felt from the first that she would rather consult a stranger who would be disinterested and unprejudiced. This gentleman's name promised well for him, for he belonged to people whose integrity was well known; and his position vouched for his ability—and also for his age to Ideala, whose imagination had pictured a learned old gentleman, bald, spectacled, benevolent, full of knowledge of the world, "wise saws and modern instances." No one, she thought, could be better suited for her purpose; and accordingly, next day, after attending to her household duties, she went by an early train to consult him.

CHAPTER XIV.

The Great Hospital had been founded by an eccentric old gentleman of enormous wealth for an entirely original purpose. He observed that great buildings were erected everywhere to receive patients suffering from all imaginable bodily ills, chronic mania, of course, when the brain was diseased, being one of them; but no one had thought of making provision for such troubles, mental, moral, and religious, as affect the mind; and he held that such suffering was as real, and, without proper treatment, as incurable and disastrous, as any form of physical ailment. He therefore

determined to found an hospital for these unhappy ones, which should contain every requisite that Divine Revelation had suggested, or human ingenuity could devise, for the promotion of peace of mind. The idea had grown out of some great mental trouble with which he himself had been afflicted in early life, and for which the world, as it was, could offer him no relief.

The first thing he did towards the carrying out of his plan was to buy a site for his hospital near a growing town on the banks of a big river. The building was to be surrounded by green fields, for the colour is refreshing; and within sight of a great volume of calmly flowing water, the silent power of which is solemn and tranquillising to the spirit; and human society was to be within easy reach, for many people find it beneficial. As soon as he had found the site, which was entirely satisfactory, he set about maturing his plan for the building. Such a scheme could not be carried out in a moment, and he spent thirty years in travelling to study human nature, and architecture, and all else that should help to bring his work to perfection. At the end of thirty years he had finished a plan for the building to his own entire satisfaction; but Mr. Ruskin had been growing up in the meantime, and had begun to write, and the founder, happening to come across his works by accident one day, discovered his own ideas to be wrong from beginning to end. However, as it was the Truth he was aiming at, and not a justification of himself, he calmly burnt his plans, put his fingers in his ears (figuratively speaking) that he might not hear the rest of the world bray, and for ten years more devoted himself to the study of Mr. Ruskin. At the end of that time he knew something about proportion, about masses and intervals of light and shade; about the grandeur and sublimity of size, and the grace and beauty of ornament; about depth and harmony of colour, and all the other wonders that make one sick with longing to behold them; and when he had mastered all this he determined to begin at the very beginning, that is to say, with the walls that were to enclose his vast experiment. Everything was to be real, everything was to be solid, everything had to be endowed with a power of

expression that could not fail of its effect. And as soon as he felt he might safely begin, he hastened away to inspect the long neglected site for his wonderful building. But here an unexpected check awaited him. While he himself had been so hard at work, his future neighbours had not been idle. The town had grown to a city; the river's banks were crowded with wharves and human habitations; the river itself cradled a fleet on its bosom, its waters, once so sublimely clear and still, were turbid and yellow, befouled by the city sewers, and useful only; and all that remained to remind him of what had once been were a few acres of weeds enclosed by an iron railing—an eyesore to the inhabitants of that region, as the Corporation told him, with a polite hope that he would either build on it soon or leave it alone, which was their diplomatic way of requesting him to hand the lot over to themselves. And this he might have done had they said "Please;" but when he found the young city so ignorant, he thought it his duty to teach it manners, so he took a year or two more to consider the matter. Then he perceived that if he built his house on the site as it was now he should do even more good than he had intended, for the constant contemplation of such a stately pile would help to elevate the citizens outside the building, while those within might find comfort in seeing themselves surrounded by even greater misery than their own.

And so the building rose and grew to perfection, and they found after all that no better site could have been chosen for it; for from every side as you approached it, it was seen to advantage, and the majesty and power of it were made manifest. Outside, the design was so evident in its grandeur that the mind was not wearied and perplexed by an effort to understand; it was simply elevated to a state of enjoyment bordering on exaltation—exaltation without excitement, and near akin to peace. And the interior of the building as you entered it maintained this first impression. Such ornament as there was touched you, as the clouds do, with a sense of suitability that left nothing to be desired. Art was so perfectly hidden that there seemed to have been no striving for effect in decoration or construction, it looked like a work of

Nature, accomplished without effort, and beautiful without design; and the mind brought under its influence, and left free of conjecture, was gently compelled to revel in the peace which harmonious surroundings insensibly produce. Disturbing thoughts vanished as being too common and mean, too human, for such a place, and the spirit was soothed with a sense of repose—of sensuous restfulness, really, for the pleasure, as intended, affected the senses more than the intellect, which could here make holiday. Work-wearied brains were thus eased from pressure, and minds a prey to doubts and other disturbing thoughts which impaired their strength, if they did not render them useless, were at once relieved. And this was the beginning of the treatment which was afterwards continued in other parts of the building, and by other means, until the cure was complete—arrangements being made for the removal of cases that proved to be hopeless to those older establishments which have long existed at the expense of the country, or as the outcomes of private enterprise.

Of course the staff of such a place had to be formed of men of a high order. Some of these had been patients themselves, and had been chosen on that account, it being thought that those who had suffered from certain ills would be apt to detect the symptoms in others, and able to devise remedies for them, which proved to be the case. The establishment was munificently endowed and liberally supported, and the Master, as he was reverently called, lived just long enough to see that it was a success.

He had not thought of extending the charity to women, being under the impression that no such provision was necessary for them. He acknowledged that they had a large share of physical suffering to endure, but asserted that Nature, to preserve her balance, must have arranged their minds so as to render them incapable of suffering in any other way. Sentimentality, hysteria, and silliness, he said, were at the bottom of all their mental troubles, which did not, therefore, merit serious attention.

CHAPTER XV.

But of all this Ideala knew little or nothing when she went there, except that the Great Hospital existed for some learned purpose. She felt the power of the place, however, preoccupied as she was, and stopped involuntarily when she saw the building, ceasing for a moment to be conscious of anything but the awe and admiration it inspired. Then she passed up the broad steps, beneath the massive pillars of the portico, and entered the hall. A man-servant took her card to Mr. Lorrimer, and, returning presently, requested her to follow him. They left the great hall by a flight of low steps at the end of it, and, turning to the right, passed through glass doors into quite another part of the building. A long, dimly-lighted gallery led away into the distance. A few doors opened on to it, and at one of these the servant stopped and knocked. A tall gentleman opened the door himself, and, begging Ideala to enter, bade her be seated at a writing-table which stood in the middle of the room, and himself took the chair in front of it, and looked at Ideala's card which lay before him. Another gentleman, whom Lorrimer introduced as "My brother Julian," lounged on a high-backed chair at the other side of the table. The room was a good size, but so crowded with things that there was scarcely space to turn round. The light fell full upon Lorrimer as he sat facing the window, and Ideala saw a fair man of about thirty, not at all the sort of man she had imagined, and quite impossible for her purpose.

An awkward pause followed her entrance. She was unable to tell him the real reason of her visit, and at a loss to invent a fictitious one.

"I don't suppose you know in the least who I am," she said, seeing that he glanced at her card again, and then she explained, telling him what his cousin had written to her.

"And you would like to see the Hospital?" he asked.

"Please."

He rose, took down a bunch of keys, and requested her to follow him. She felt no interest in the place, and knew it was a bore to him to show it to her; but the thing had to be done. He led her through halls and lecture-rooms, places of recreation and places for work; he showed her picture galleries, statuary, the library, and a museum, and told her the plan of it all clearly, like one reciting a lesson, and indifferently, like one performing a task that must be got through somehow, but making it all most interesting, nevertheless.

Ideala began to be taken out of herself.

"What a delightful place!" she said, when they came to the library. "And there is a whole row of books I want to consult. How I should like to come and read them."

"Oh, pray do," he answered, "whenever you like. Ladies frequently do so. You have only to write and tell me when you wish to come, and I will see that you are properly attended to."

"Thank you," Ideala rejoined. "It is just the very thing for me, for I am writing a little book, and cannot get on till I have consulted some authorities on the subject." In the museum they stopped to look at a mummy.

"Oh, happy mummy!" burst from Ideala, involuntarily.

"Why?" asked Lorrimer, aroused from his apathy.

"It has done with it all, you know," she answered.

Then he turned and looked at her, and she saw that he was something more than cold, pale-faced, and indifferent, which had been her first idea of him. His eyes were large, dark grey, and penetrating. She would have called his face fine, rather than handsome; but the upper part was certainly beautiful, in spite of some hard lines on it. There was something in the expression, more than in the formation, of the mouth and chin, however, that did not satisfy. His head and throat were splendid; the former narrowed a little at the back, but the forehead made up for the defect, which was not striking. He made Ideala think of Tito Melema and of Bayard.

That remark of hers having broken the ice, they began to talk like human beings with something in common. But Ideala's mood was not calculated to produce a good impression. The failure of her enterprise brought on a fit of recklessness such as we understood, and she said some things which must have made a stranger think her peculiar. Lorrimer had begun to be amused before they returned to the great entrance hall. Once or twice he looked at her curiously. "What sort of a person are you, I wonder?" he was thinking,

"I was dying of dulness," she said, telling him about the place she came from, "and so I came to see you."

He left her for a moment, but presently returned with his brother.

"You had better come and have some luncheon before you go back," he said.

And she went.

As they left the building Lorrimer asked her: "Where on earth did my cousin meet you?"—with the slightest possible emphasis. Ideala understood him, and laughed.

"Upon my word I don't know who introduced her," she answered, standing on her dignity nevertheless. "I can't remember."

They went to the refreshment-room at the station. It was crowded, but they managed to get a table to themselves. There was a vacant seat at it, and an old gentleman begged to be allowed to occupy it as there was no other in the room. The three chatted while they waited, each hiding him, or her, self beneath the light froth of easy conversation; and people, not accustomed to look on the surface for signs of what is working beneath, would have thought them merry enough. As she began to know her companions better, Ideala was more and more drawn to Lorrimer. His brother, who was a dark man, and very different in character, did not attract her.

The old gentleman, meanwhile, was absorbed in his newspaper, and he marked his enjoyment of it by inhaling his breath and exhaling it again in that particular way which is called "blowing like a porpoise."

Lorrimer, by an intelligent glance, expressed what he thought of the peculiarity to Ideala, who remarked: "It is the next gale developing dangerous energy on its way to the North British and Norwegian coasts."

The laugh that followed caused the old gentleman to fold up his paper, and look benignly at the young people over his pince-nez.

It was early in the season, and peas were a rare and forced vegetable. A small dish of them was brought, and handed to the dangerous gale, who absently took them all.

"You have taken all the peas, sir; allow me to give you all the pepper," said Lorrimer, dexterously suiting the action to the word.

The dangerous gale, though disconcerted at first, was finally moved to mirth.

"Ah, young people! young people!" he said, and sighed—and being a merry and wise old gentleman, he found pleasure in their pleasure, and entered into their mood, little suspecting that Black Care was one of the party, or that a black bruise which would have aroused all the pity and indignation of his honest old heart, had he seen it, was almost under his eyes.

And they all loved him.

Presently he rose to go; but before he departed, he observed, looking kindly at Ideala and Lorrimer; "You're a handsome pair, my dears! Let me congratulate you; and may your children have the mother's sweetness and the father's strength, and may the love you have for each other last for ever—there's nothing like it. Thank God for it, and remember Him always—and keep yourselves unspotted from the world." And so saying, he went his way in peace.

"Dear embarrassing old man!" said Lorrimer, regretfully. "I wish I hadn't spilt the pepper on his plate.

"Is there a chance for Lorrimer?" his brother asked.

But Ideala only stared at him. There was something in his tone that made her feel ill

at ease, and brought back the recollection of her misery in a moment. Then all at once she became depressed, and both the young men noticed it.

"I'm afraid you're rather down about something," Julian said. "You'd better tell us what it is. Perhaps we could cheer you up. And I'm a lawyer, you know. I might be able to help you."

Lorrimer was looking at her, and seemed to wait for her to speak; but she only showed by a change of expression that the fact of his brother being a lawyer possessed a special interest for her.

"If you will trust us," he said at last, "perhaps we can help you."

"I wish I could," she answered, wistfully; "I came to tell you."

"This sounds serious," Julian said, lightly. "You will have to begin at the beginning, you know. Come, Lorrimer, we'll go down the river. And," to Ideala, "you might tell us all about it on the way, you know."

"Yes, come," said Lorrimer. Ideala rose to accompany them without a thought. It all came about so easily that no question of propriety suggested itself—and if any had occurred to her she would probably have considered it an insult to these gentlemen to suppose they would allow her to put herself in a questionable position; and when Julian lit a cigarette without asking her permission, she was surprised.

On the way to the river Ideala's spirits rose again, and they all talked lightly, making a jest of everything; but while they were waiting for a boat, Julian took up a bunch of charms that were attached to Ideala's watch-chain and began to examine them coolly, and the unwonted familiarity startled her. With a sudden revulsion of feeling she turned to Lorrimer. She was annoyed by the slight indignity, and also a little frightened. Whatever Lorrimer may have thought of her before, he understood her look now, and his whole manner changed.

Julian left them for a moment. "I am so ashamed of myself," Ideala said. "I have made some dreadful mistake. I have done something wrong."

"I am very sorry for you," he answered, gravely—and then, to his brother, who had returned—"You can go on if you like. I am going back."

"Oh, we can't go on without you," Ideala inter-posed; "and I would rather go back too."

They began to retrace their steps, and Lorrimer, as they walked, managed, with a few adroit questions, to learn from Ideala that the trouble had something to do with her husband.

"Regy Beaumont is coming to me this afternoon," he said to his brother. "Would you mind being there to receive him?"

They exchanged glances, and Julian took his leave.

"Now, tell me," Lorrimer said to Ideala.

But an unconquerable fit of shyness came over her the moment they were left alone together. "I cannot tell you," she answered. "It is too dreadful to speak of."

"Your husband has done you some great wrong?" he said.

"Yes."

"Something for which you can get legal redress?"

"Yes."

"And that made you desperate?"

"Yes."

"And what did you do?" He put the question abruptly, startling Ideala, as he had intended.

"I? Oh, I—did nothing," she stammered. There was a pause.

"My ideal of marriage is a high one," he said at last, "and I should be very hard on any short-comings of that kind."

Ideala longed to confide in him, but her shyness continued, and she walked by his

side like one in a dream.

He took her to the station, and when they parted he said, "You will write and tell me?"

Ideala looked up. There were no hard lines in his face now; he was slightly flushed.

"Yes, I will write," she answered, almost in a whisper.

And then the train, "with rush and ring," bore her away through the spring-country; but she neither saw the young green of the hedgerows, nor "the young lambs bleating in the meadows," nor the broad river as she passed it, nor the fleecy clouds that flecked the blue. She was not really conscious of anything for the moment, but that sudden great unspeakable uplifting of the spirit, which is joy.

CHAPTER XVI.

The following week Ideala came to London, but not to us—she had promised to stay with some other people first. She wrote three times to Lorrimer while she was with them—first to thank him for his kindness, to which he replied briefly, begging her to confide in him, and let him help her.

In her second letter Ideala told him what had occurred. His reply was business-like. He urged her to let him consult his legal friends about her case; pointed out that she could not be expected to remain with her husband now; and showed her that she would not have to suffer much from all the publicity which was necessary to free her from him. She replied that her first impulse had been to obtain legal redress, but that now she could not make up her mind to face the publicity. She would see him, however, when she returned, and consult him about it; and she would also like to consult those books in the library. Her buoyant spirit was already recovering under the influence of a new interest in life.

Lorrimer's answer was formal, as his other notes had been. He begged her to make

any use of the library she pleased, only to let him know when to expect her, that she might have no trouble with the officials; and offered her any other help in his power.

In the meantime my sister Claudia had seen Ideala, and had been pleased to find her, not looking well, certainly, but just as cheerful as usual. "It is evident the place does not agree with her," Claudia said; "but a few weeks with us will set her all right again."

They drove in the park together one afternoon, and talked, as usual, of many things, the state of society being one of them. This was a subject upon which my sister descanted frequently, and it was from her that Ideala learnt all she knew of it.

"Can you wonder," Claudia said on this occasion, "that men are immoral when ladies in society rather pride themselves than otherwise on imitating the demi-monde?"

"Have you ever noticed," Ideala answered, indirectly, "how frequently a word or phrase which you know quite well by sight, but have never thought of and do not understand, is suddenly brought home to you as it were? You come across it everywhere, and at last take the trouble to find out what it means in self-defence. That expression—demi- monde—has begun to haunt me since I came to town, and I feel I shall be obliged to look it up at once to stop the nuisance. We went to a theatre the other night, and when we were settled there I saw my husband in the stalls with a lady in flame-coloured robes. I didn't know he was in town. The rest of our party saw him, too, and the gentlemen had a mysterious little consultation at the back of the box. Then one of them left us, but returned almost immediately, and told us the carriage had not gone, and hadn't we better try some other theatre —the piece at that one was not so good as they had supposed. But I knew they had taken a lot of trouble, entirely on my account, to get a box there, as I had expressed a wish to see that particular piece, and I said I had come to enjoy it, and meant to. I did enjoy it, too. It was so absorbing that I forgot all about my husband, and don't know when he

left the theatre. I only know that he disappeared without coming near us. When we got back, Lilian came to my room and told me they were all saying downstairs that I had behaved splendidly, and I said I was delighted to hear it, particularly as I did not know how, or when, or where, I had come to deserve such praise. And then she asked me if I knew who it was my husband was with. I said, no; some alderman's wife, I supposed. 'Nothing half so good,' she answered. 'That woman is notorious: she is one of the demimonde!' 'Well,' I said, 'I don't suppose she is in society.' And then Lilian said, 'Good gracious, Ideala! how can you be so tranquil? You must care. I think you are the most extraordinary person I ever met.' And I told her that the only extraordinary thing about me just then was a great 'exposition of sleep' that had come upon me. And then she left me; but she told me afterwards that she thought I was acting, and came back later to see if I really could sleep."

"And you did sleep, Ideala?"

"Like a top—why not? But now you are following suit with your ill- conducted people, and your demi-monde. I want to know what you mean by that phrase?"

Then Claudia explained it to her.

"But I thought all that had ended with the Roman Empire," Ideala protested.

Claudia laughed, and then went on without pity, describing the class as they sink lower and lower, and cruelly omitting no detail that might complete the picture.

"But the men are as bad," said Ideala.

"Oh, as bad, yes!" was the answer.

Ideala was pale with disgust. "And we have to touch them!" she said.

Her ignorance of this phase of life had been so complete, and her faith in those about her so perfect, that the shock of this dreadful revelation was almost too much for her. At first, as the carriage drove on through the crowded streets, she saw in every woman's face a hopeless degradation, and in every man's eyes a loathsome sin; and

she exclaimed, as another woman had exclaimed on a similar occasion: "Oh, Claudia! why did you tell me? It is too dreadful. I cannot bear to know it."

"How a woman can be at once so clever and such a fool as you are, Ideala, puzzles me," Claudia remonstrated, not unkindly.

She had warmed as she went on, and forgot in her indignation to take advantage of this long-looked-for opportunity to speak to Ideala about her own troubles; and afterwards, when she showed an inclination to open the subject, Ideala put her off with a jest.

"'Le mariage est beau pour les amants et utile pour les saints,'" she quoted, lightly. "Class me with the saints, and talk of something interesting."

A few days later Claudia came to me in dismay.

"What do you think?" she said. "Ideala is not coming to us at all! She says she must go back at once."

"Go back!" I exclaimed, "and why?"

"She is going to write something, for which she requires to read a great deal, and she says she must go back to work."

"But that is nonsense," I protested. "She can work as much as she likes here—I can even help her."

"I know that," Claudia answered; "but she spoke so positively I could not insist. I suppose the truth is her husband has ordered her back, and she is going to be a good, obedient child, as usual."

"Does she seem at all unhappy?"

"No, and that is the strange part of it. She has coolly broken I don't know how many other engagements to return at once, and instead of seeming disappointed, she simply 'glows and is glad.' She says nothing, but I can see it. I don't know what on earth she is up to now." And Claudia left the room, frowning and perplexed.

When I heard she was not unhappy, this sudden whim of Ideala's did not disturb me much; indeed, I was rather glad to think she had found something to be enthusiastic about. Her fits of enthusiasm were rarer now, and I thought this symptom of one a good sign. It was odd, though, that I had not seen her while she was in town. I was half inclined to believe she had avoided me.

CHAPTER XVII.

To give the story continuity it will be necessary to piece the events together as they followed. Many of them only came to my knowledge some time after they occurred, and even then I was left to surmise a good deal; but I am able now, with the help of papers that have lately come into my possession, to verify most of my conjectures and arrange the details.

The summer weather had begun now. Laburnums and lilacs were in full flower, the air was sweet with scent and song, and to one who had borne the heavy winter with a heavy heart, but was able at last to lay down a load of care, the transition must have been like a sudden change from painful sickness to perfect health. Ideala went to the Great Hospital at once. She had written to fix a day, and Lorrimer was waiting for her. She was not taken to his room, however, as on the previous occasion, but to another part of the building, a long gallery hung with pictures, where she found him superintending the arrangement of some precious things in cabinets. Ideala looked better and younger that day in her summer dress than she had done in her heavy winter wraps on the occasion of their first meeting; but when she found herself face to face with Lorrimer she began to tremble, and was overcome with nervousness in a way that was new to her. He saw the change in her appearance and manner at a glance, and, smiling slightly, begged her to follow him, and led the way through long passages and many doors, passing numbers of people, to his own room. He spoke to her once or twice on the way, but she was only able to answer confusedly,

in a voice that was rendered strident by the great effort she had to make to control it. He busied himself with some papers for a few minutes when they reached his room, to give her time to recover herself, and then he said, standing with his back to the fireplace, looking down at her, and speaking in a tone that was even more musical and caressing than she remembered it: "Well, and how are you? And how has it been with you since your return?"

"I am utterly shaken and unnerved, as you see," she answered; then added passionately: "I cannot bear my life; it is too hateful."

"There is no need to bear it," he said. "Nothing is easier than to get a separation after what has occurred. Was there any witness?"

"No; and I don't think any one in the house suspects that there is anything wrong. And none of my friends know. I have never told them. I wonder why I told you?"

"You wanted me to help you," he suggested.

"I don't think I did," she said. "How could I want you to help me when I don't mean to do anything? I fancy I told you because I was afraid you would think me a little mad that day, and I would rather you knew the truth than think me mad. I don't mean to try for a separation. I can't leave him entirely to his own devices. If I did, he would certainly go from bad to worse."

"And if you don't what will become of you? I think much more of such a life would make you reckless."

She was silent for a little, then she exclaimed: "Help me not to grow reckless. I am so alone."

He took her hands and looked down into her eyes. A sudden deep flush spread over his face, smoothing out all the lines, as she had seen it do once before, and transforming him.

"It is like walking on the edge of a precipice in the dark," he said in a low voice, and

his grasp tightened as he spoke.

There was something mesmeric in his touch that overpowered Ideala. She felt a change in herself at the moment, and she was never the same woman again.

"I will help you, if I can," he said, after another pause, and then he let her go.

After that they talked for some time. He tried to persuade her to reconsider her decision and leave her husband. He honestly believed it was the best thing she could do, and told her why he thought so. She acknowledged the wisdom of his advice, but declined to follow it, and he was somewhat puzzled, for the reasons she gave were hardly enough to account for her determination. They wandered away from that subject at last, however, and talked of many other things. He told Ideala of his first coming to the Great Hospital as a patient, and gave her some of the details of his own case, and told her enough of his private history to arouse her sympathy and interest; but of the nature of these confidences I know nothing. Ideala felt in honour bound not to repeat them, as they were made to her in the course of a private conversation, and she was always scrupulously faithful to all such trusts. I know, however, that he was a man who had suffered acutely, both from unhappy circumstances and from those troubles of the mind which beset clever men at the outset of their career, and sometimes never leave them entirely at peace. But this man was something more than a clever man; he was a man in a thousand. He had in a strong degree all that is worst and best in a man. The highest and most spiritual aspirations warred in him with the most carnal impulses, and he spent his days in fighting to attain to the one and subdue the other.

Ideala had never known a man like this man. His talents, his rapid changes of mood, as sense or conscience got the upper hand, and his versatility charmed her imagination and excited her interest; and he had, besides, that magnetic power over her by which it is given to some men to compel people of certain temperaments to their will. While she was with him he could have made her believe that black was

white, and not only believe it, but be glad to think that it was so; and he always compelled her to say exactly what she had in her mind at the moment, even when it was something that she would very much rather not have said.

"But I am forgetting my other object in coming," Ideala broke off at last. "May I look at the books?"

Lorrimer took out his watch. "You ought to have some lunch first," he said. "If you will come now and have some, we can return and look at the books afterwards."

Ideala acquiesced, fearing it was his own lunch time, and knowing it would detain him if she did not accompany him.

Ladies not being allowed to lunch at the Great Hospital, they went, as before, to the station close by, and sat down side by side, perfectly happy together, chatting, laughing, talking about their childhood, and making those trifling confidences which go so far to promote intimacy, and are often the first evidence of affection. Now and then they touched on graver matters. He upheld all that was old, and believed we can have no better institutions in the future than those which have already existed in the past. Ideala had begun to think differently.

"I am sure it is a mistake to be for ever looking back to the past for precedents," she said. "The past has its charm, of course, but it is the charm of the charnel house—it is the dead past, and what was good for one age is bad for another."

"As one man's meat is another man's poison?" he said.

"Proverbs prove nothing," she answered lightly. "Have you noticed that they go in pairs? There is always one for each side of an argument. 'One man's meat is another man's poison' is met by 'What is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander'—and so on. But don't you think it absurd to cling to old customs that are dying a natural death? Learn of the past, if you like, but live in the present, and make your laws to meet its needs. It is this eternal waiting on the past to copy it rather than to be warned by its failures, to do as it did, under the impression, apparently, that we must

succeed better than it did, following in its footsteps though we know they led to ruin once, and, because the way was pleasant, being surprised to find that it must end again in disaster—it is this abandonment of all hope of finding new and efficacious remedies for the old diseases of society that has checked our progress for hundreds of years, and will keep the world in some respects just as it was at the time of the Crucifixion. For my own part, I cannot see that history does repeat itself, except in trifling details, and in the lives of unimportant individuals.

"I think," he rejoined, "if you have studied the decline of the Roman Empire, you must have seen a striking analogy between that and our own history at the present time. With the exception of changes of manners, which only affect the surface of society, we are in much the same state now as the Romans were then."

"I know many people say so, and believe it," Ideala answered; "and there is evidence enough to prove it to people who are trying to arrive at a foregone conclusion; but it is not the resemblances we should look to, but the differences. It is in them that our hope lies, and they seem to me to be essential. Take the one grand difference that has been made by the teaching for hundreds of years of the perfect morality of the Christian religion! Do you think it possible for men, while they cling to it, to 'reel back into the beast and be no more'?"

"But are men clinging to it?"

"Yes, in a way, for it has insensibly become a part of all of us, and has made it possible for us to show whole communities of moral philosophers now in a generation; the ancients had only an occasional one in a century."

"But such a one!"

"The old moral philosophers were grand, certainly, but not grander than our own men are, of whom we only hear less because there are so many more of them."

"But do you mean to say society is less sinful than it was?"

"There is one section of society at the present day, they tell me, which is most

desperately wicked. It is worse than any class was when the world was young, because it knows so much better. But I believe the bulk of the people like right so well that they only want a strong impulse to make them follow it. I feel sure sometimes that we are all living on the brink of a great change for the better, and that there is only one thing wanting now—a great calamity, or a great teacher—to startle us out of our apathy and set us to work. We are not bold enough. We should try more experiments; they can but fail, and if they do, we should still have learnt something from them. But I do not think we shall fail for ever. What we want is somewhere, and must be found eventually."

"They tried some experiments with the marriage laws in France once," Lorrimer observed, tentatively.

"Yes, and failed contemptibly because their motive was contemptible. They did not want to improve society, but to make self-indulgence possible without shame. I think our own marriage laws might be improved."

"People are trying to improve them," he said, with a slight laugh. "A friend of mine has just married a girl who objected to take the oath of obedience. How absurd it is for a girl of nineteen to imagine she knows better than all the ages." "I think," said Ideala, "that it is more absurd for 'all the ages' to subscribe to an oath which something stronger than themselves makes it impossible for half of them to keep. Strength of character must decide the question of place in a household as it does elsewhere; and it is surely folly to require, and useless to insist on, the submission of the strong to the weak. The marriage oath is farcical. A woman is made to swear to love a man who will probably prove unlovable, to honour a man who is as likely as not to be undeserving of honour, and to obey a man who may be incapable of judging what is best either for himself or her. I have no respect for the ages that uphold such nonsense. There was never any need to bind us with an oath. If men were all they ought to be, wouldn't we obey them gladly? To be able to do so is all

we ask."

"Well, it is a difficult question," he answered, "and I don't think we need trouble ourselves about it any way. Do you like flowers?"

"Yes," she burst out in another tone; "and easy chairs, and pictures, and china, and everything that is beautiful, and all sensual pleasures."

She said it, but she knew in a moment that she had used the wrong word, and was covered with confusion.

Lorrimer looked at her and laughed.

"And so do I," he said.

"Oh! if only I could unsay that!" thought Ideala; but the word had gone forth, and was already garnered against her.

Then came an awful moment for her—the moment of going and paying. It was hateful to let him pay for her lunch, but she could not help it. She was seized with one of those fits of shyness which made it just a degree less painful to allow it than to make the effort to prevent it.

They returned to Lorrimer's room and pored together over a catalogue, looking up the books she wanted. When they had found their names and numbers Lorrimer sent for them from the library, but it was too late to do anything that day, and so she rose to go.

Lorrimer walked with her to the station, and saw her into the train. On the way they talked of little children. He loved them as she did.

"A friend of mine," he said, "has the most beautiful child I ever saw. Just to look at it makes me feel a better man."

CHAPTER XVIII.

In the days that followed a singular change came over Ideala. No external

circumstance affected her. She moved like one in a dream; thought had ceased for her; all life was one delicious sensation, and at times she could not bear the delight of it in silence. She would tell it in low songs in the twilight; she would make her piano speak it in a hundred chords: and it would burst from her in some sudden glow of enthusiasm that made people wonder—the apparent cause being too slight to account for it. While this lasted nothing hurt her. She saw the sufferings of others unmoved. She met her husband's brutalities with a smiling countenance, and bore the physical discomfort of a bad sprain without much consciousness of pain. And she knew nothing of time, and never asked herself to what she owed this joy.

The utter forgetfulness of everything that came upon her when she was alone was almost incredible. One evening she spent two hours in walking a distance she might easily have done in forty minutes. She had been to see a sick person, and when she found herself in the fresh air, after having spent some time in a small, close room, the dream-like feeling came over her, and her spirit was uplifted with inexpressible gladness. The summer air was sweet and warm, a light rain was falling, and she took off her hat and wandered on, looking up, but noting nothing, and singing Schubert's "Hark! hark! the lark," to herself softly as she came. A man standing at a cottage door begged her to go in and shelter. She looked at him, and her face was radiant—the rain-drops sparkled on her hair. He was only a working man, "clay—and common clay," but the light in her eyes passed through him, and the memory of her stayed with him, a thing apart from his daily life, held sacred, and not to be described. A man might live a hundred years and never see a woman look like that.

"I did not know it was raining," she said. "It is only light rain, and the air is so sweet, and the glow down there in the west is like heaven. How beautiful life is!"

"Ay, lady!" he answered, and stood there spellbound, watching her as she passed on slowly, and listening to her singing as she went.

A few days later she saw Lorrimer again. She found him in his room this time. He knew she was coming, and flushed with pleasure when he met her at the door. Ideala was not nervous; it all seemed a matter of course to her now. The books he had got for her from the library were where she had left them. He placed a chair for her beside his writing-table, and then went on with his own work. She had understood that she was to read in the library, but she did not think of that now; she simply acquiesced in this arrangement as she would have done in any other he might have made for her. A secretary was busy in another part of the room when she entered, but after awhile he left them. Then Lorrimer looked up and smiled.

"You are looking better to-day," he said. "Tell me what you have been doing since I saw you."

"Lotus-eating," she answered. "How lovely the summer is! Since I saw you I have wanted to do nothing but rest and dream."

"You have been happy, then?"

"Yes."

"Is he kind to you?"

"Oh—he! He is just the same. There is no change in my life. The change is in me."

"Then you mean to be happy in spite of him? I call that the beginning of wisdom. I know two other ladies who hate their husbands, and they manage to enjoy life pretty well. And I don't see why you should be miserable always because you happen to have married the wrong man. How was it you married him? Were you very much in love with him?"

"No, not in the least."

"Spooney, then?"

"Not even 'spooney,' as you call it. I was very young at the time. Very young girls know nothing of love and marriage."

"Very young," he repeated thoughtfully. He was drawing figures with his pen on the blotting-paper before him. "But why did you marry him, then?"

"I can give you no reason—except that I was not happy at home."

"You all say that," slipped from him, with a gesture of impatience.

"I wish I had been more original," said Ideala.

She took up her book again, and he resumed his writing, and for some time there was silence. But Ideala's attention wandered. She began to examine the room, which was, as usual, in a state of disorder. One side of it was lined with cabinets of various sizes and periods. Labels indicated the contents of some of them. Only one picture hung on that side of the room—it was the portrait of a gentleman—but several others stood on the ground against the cabinets. The walls were painted some dark colour. A Japanese screen was drawn across the door, and beside it was a hard narrow settee covered with dark green velvet. Books were piled upon it, and heavily embroidered foreign stuffs, and near it a number of Japanese drawings stood on a stand. The mantelpiece was crowded with an odd mixture of china and other curios, all looking as if they had just been unpacked. Above it another picture was hung, a steel engraving. The writing-table by which they sat was nearly in the middle of the room. In the window was another table, covered also with a miscellaneous collection of curios; and on every other available article of furniture books were piled. The high backs of the chairs were elaborately carved, the seats being of the same green velvet as the settee. A high wire-guard surrounded the fire place, and this unusual precaution made one think, that the contents of the room must be precious. The occupant of this apartment might have been an artist, a man of letters, or a virtuoso—probably the latter; but whatever he was, it was evident that his study was a workshop, and not a showroom.

From the room Ideala looked to her companion. He was writing rapidly, and seemed absorbed in his subject. He was frowning slightly, his face was pale and set, and he

looked older by ten years than when he had spoken last, and seemed cold and unimpassioned as a judge; but Ideala thought again that the face was a fine one.

Presently he became conscious of her earnest gaze. He did not look up, but every feature softened, and a warm glow spread from forehead to chin; it was as if a deep shadow had been lifted, and a younger, but less noble, man revealed.

"How you change!" Ideala exclaimed—"not from day to day, but from moment to moment. You are like two men. I wish I could get behind that horrid veil of flesh that hides you from me. I want to see your soul."

He smiled. "You are getting tired," he said. "Do let me persuade you to come and have some lunch. When you begin to speculate, I know you have done enough."

But Ideala could not go through the ordeal of who should pay for lunch again. She preferred to starve. The camaraderie between them was mental enough to be manlike already, but only as long as there was no question of material outlay.

"Mayn't I stay here and read?" she said. "I can have something by-and- by, when I want it. Do go and leave me."

And he was obliged to go at last, wondering somewhat at her want of appetite.

When he returned she was still working diligently, and they spent the rest of the afternoon together, reading, writing, and chatting, until it was time for Ideala to go. Lorrimer saw her into her train, and fixed another day for her to return and go on with her work.

And so the thing became a settled arrangement. Whenever she could spare the time she went and worked beside him, and he was always the same, kindly, considerate, helping her now and then, but not, as a rule, interfering with her. She just came and went as she pleased, and as she would have done had he been her brother. Sometimes they were alone together for hours, sometimes his secretary worked in the room with them, and always there were people coming and going. There was nothing to suggest a thought of impropriety, and they were soon on quarrelling

terms, falling out about a great many things—which is always the sign of a good understanding; but after the first they touched on no dangerous subject for a long time. At last, however, there came a change. Ideala noticed one day that Lorrimer was restless and irritable.

"Am I interfering with your work to-day?" she said. "Do tell me. Any other day will suit me just as well."

"Oh, no," he answered. "I am lazy, that is all. How are you getting on? Let me see." And he took the paper she was engaged upon, and looked at it.

She watched him, and saw that he was not reading, although he held it before his eyes for some time. He was paler than usual, and there was a look of indecision in his face, very unlike its habitual expression, which was serene and self-contained.

Looking up all at once, he met her eyes fixed on him frankly and affectionately, but he did not respond to her smile.

"How do you suppose all this is going to end?" he said, abruptly.

"Won't it do?" she answered, thinking of her paper. "Had I better give it up, or re-write it?"

He threw the paper down with a gesture of impatience, and got up; and then, as if ashamed of his irritability, he took it again, and gave it back to her. In doing so his hand accidentally touched hers.

"How cold you are," he said. "Let me warm your hands for you."

"They are benumbed," she answered, letting him take them and rub them.

After a moment he said, without looking at her, "Do you know, it is very good of you to come here like this."

"Why?" she asked. "It suits my own convenience."

"I know. But it is refreshing to find some one who will suit their own convenience so." "That sounds as if it were not the right thing to do!" she exclaimed.

"Nonsense!" he answered. "You misunderstand me."

Ideala withdrew her hands hastily, and half rose.

"What is the matter?" he said. "Come, don't be idle! You should have mastered that book by this time."

But Ideala was disturbed. "I can't read," she said. "Tell me what you thought of me when I came to you that first day? I fancied you were old. And I have been afraid since, in spite of your cousin's suggestion, that you may have considered it odd of me to introduce myself like that."

"Oh, it is quite customary here," he answered. "But even if it had not been, we can't all be bound by the same common laws. The ordinary stars and planets have an ordinary course mapped out for them, and they daren't diverge an inch. But every now and then a comet comes and goes its own eccentric way, and all the lesser lights wonder and admire and let it go."

"That would be very fine for us if only we were comets among the stars," she said.

"Oh, you might condescend to claim a kindred with them," he answered lightly.

"The only heavenly body I ever feel akin to is one of those meteors that flash and fall," she said. "They go their own way, too, do they not, and are lost?" "There is no question of being lost here," he interposed. "The most scrupulous have made an exception in favour of one person, and the world has not blamed them. After having endured so much you are entitled to some relaxation. I should do as I liked now, if I were you."

She looked at him inquiringly. It seemed as if he were not expressing himself, but trying the effect of what he said upon her.

He was sitting in his usual place now, drawing figures on the blotting- pad.

"You have read, I suppose?" he added, after a pause, and without looking up. "I wish I had never read anything," she exclaimed passionately. "I wish I could neither read,

write, nor think."

But the trouble now was, if only she could have recognised it, that she did not think; she only felt.

She got up and went to the mantelpiece; he remained where he was, sitting with his back to her. Presently she began to look at the china, absently at first, but afterwards with interest. There were some new specimens, just unpacked, and all crowded together.

"What a lovely lotus-leaf," she said at last. "Satsuma, I suppose—no, Kioto; but what a good specimen. And it is broken, too. What a pity! I should so like to mend it."

"Would you?" he said, rousing himself. "Then you shall."

He went to one of the cabinets and got out the materials, and in a few minutes they were bending busily over the broken plaque, as interested and eager about it as if no subject of more vital importance had ever distracted them. They were like two children together, often as quarrelsome, always as inconsequent; happy hard at work, and equally happy idling; apt to torment each other at times about trifles, but always ready to forget and forgive, and with that habit in common of forgetting everything utterly but the occupation of the moment.

They talked on now for a little longer, but not brilliantly. They were both considered brilliant in conversation, but somehow on these occasions neither of them shone. I suppose when two such bright and shining lights come together they put each other out.

Then it was time for Ideala to go. A bitter wind met them in the face on their way to the station, and before they had gone far Ideala noticed that Lorrimer's mood had changed again. His face grew pale, his step less elastic, his manner cold and formal. All the brightness, all the sympathy, which made their intimacy seem the most natural, because it was the pleasantest, thing in the world to Ideala, had gone; he was

like a man seized with a sudden fit of remorse, disgusted with himself, and moved to repent.

"I should bear with your husband, if I were you," he said at last, breaking the silence. "He behaves like a brute, but I dare say he can't help it. A man can't help his temperament, and probably you provoke him more than you think."

Ideala was surprised, it was so long since they had mentioned her husband. "I fear I am provoking," she answered, humbly. "But how am I to help it? I have tried so hard, and for so long, to be patient. And I only want to do right."

They were parting then, and he looked down at her in silence for some seconds, and when Ideala saw the expression of his face, her heart sank. In that one moment she realised all that his friendship had been to her, and foresaw the terrible blank there would be for her if it should ever end. That there was any danger, that there could be anything but friendship between men and women who must not marry, had not even yet occurred to her. Her intimacy with myself had prepared the way for Lorrimer, and made this new intimacy seem also perfectly right.

"What is the matter with you to-day?" she said. "What spirit of dissatisfaction has got hold of you?"

"I am dissatisfied," he said, raising his hat, and brushing his hand back over his hair. Then he looked at her. "Why don't you help me?" he asked.

"How can I help you?" she answered. "I don't understand you."

"You ought to. I wish to goodness you did"—and then his face cleared. "But you will come again," he added, in the old way. "I shall expect you soon."

And so he let her go; and Ideala was glad, because an unpleasant jar was over. She did not trouble herself about his private worries; if he wished her to know he would tell her. Lorrimer had a temper—but then she had known that all along; and Lorrimer was Lorrimer—that was all about it.

CHAPTER XIX.

He let her go, somewhat bewildered, and not understanding herself or him, nor caring to understand, only happy, dangerously happy. The train bore her through an enchanted region of brightness and summer, and, although the power of thought was for the moment suspended, she was conscious of this, and her own delight was like the unreasoning pleasure of earth when the sun is upon it.

There was no carriage to meet her at the station, and she set off to walk home. It was the first time she had been alone on foot in the squalid disorderly streets of that dingy place, and her way, which she was not quite sure of, took her through some of the worst of them. They were filled with loud-laughing uncleanly women, and skulking hang-dog- looking men, and the grime-clogged atmosphere was heavy with foul odours; but she noticed nothing of this. The golden glow the sun made in his efforts to shine through the clouds of smoke might have been a visible expression of her own ecstatic feeling, and she would have thought so at any other time, but now she never saw it.

In a somewhat open and more lonely part of the road she met a tramp, a great rude, hulking, common fellow, with fine blue eyes. He stopped in the middle of the road and stared at Ideala as she came up to him, walking, as usual, with a slight undulating movement that made you think of a yacht in a breeze, her face up-raised and her lips parted. He took off his cap as she approached. The gesture attracted her attention, and, thinking he wanted to beg or ask some question, she stopped and looked at him inquiringly.

"Well, you are a nice lady!" he exclaimed.

He hadn't the gift of language, but she saw the soul of a man in his eyes, and she understood him.

"Thank you," she answered, and passed on, unsurprised.

In the next street a breathless creature came running after her, a tawdry, painted, dishevelled girl. She stopped Ideala and stood panting, with hot dry lips, and eyes full of animal suffering. Her clothes exhaled the smell of some vile scent that was overpowering. Involuntarily Ideala shrank from her, and all the joy left her face.

"I've run"—the girl gasped—"such a way—they said you'd gone this road. I've waited about all day to catch you. Come, for God's sake!"

"But where?"

"There's a girl dying"—and she clutched Ideala's arm, trying to drag her along with her—"or she would die and have done with it, but she can't till she's seen you. She've something on her mind—something to tell you. Come, my lady, come, for the love of the Lord and the Blessed Virgin. No harm'll happen to you." Ideala made a gesture. "Show me the way," she said. "But you don't seem able to walk. There's an empty cab coming. Get in and tell the man where to drive to."

They stopped at a row of many-storeyed houses in a low by-street. A stout elderly woman with an evil countenance met them at the door. She began some speech in a cringing tone to Ideala, but the tawdry girl pushed her aside rudely.

"Hold your jaw, and get out of the way," she said. "I'll show the lady up."

The woman muttered something which Ideala fortunately did not hear, and let them pass. They went upstairs to the very top of the house, and entered a low room, furnished with a broken chair and a small bed only. On the bed lay a girl, who, in spite of disease and approaching death, looked not more than twenty, and was probably two years younger. She turned her haggard face to the door as it opened, and a gleam of satisfaction caused her eyes to dilate when she saw Ideala. They were large dark eyes, but her face was so distorted with suffering and discoloured by disease, it was impossible to imagine what it once had been.

"Here she is, Polly," said the Tawdry One, triumphantly. "I said I'd bring her, now didn't I?"

Ideala knelt down by the bed.

"My! but you're a game un!" said the Tawdry One, admiringly. "You ain't afraid of catching nothing! Now, I'd have asked what was up before I'd have done that; and I wouldn't touch her with the tongs, nor stay in the room with her was it ever so. You just holler when you want me and I'll come back." And so saying she left them.

"You are not afraid to touch me—you don't mind?" said the dying girl when Ideala had taken off her gloves, and knelt, holding her hands.

"Afraid? Mind?" Ideala whispered, her eyes full of pity. "I only wish you would let me do something for you."

At that moment they were startled by an uproar downstairs. A man and woman were quarrelling at the top of their voices. At first only their tones were audible, but these grew more distinct, and in a few seconds Ideala could hear what was said, and it was evident that the combatants were approaching.

"I tell you the lady's all right," the woman Ideala had seen downstairs was heard to shriek, with sundry vile epithets. "Polly's dying, and she've come to visit her."

"Seein' 's believin'," the man rejoined, doggedly. "Just show me the lady and shut up, you foul-mouthed devil you."

The door was flung open, and there stood the fat harridan, and towering over her was a great red-haired policeman, who seemed both relieved and abashed when he saw Ideala.

"What is the meaning of this?" she said, rising, and drawing herself up indignantly. "Don't you see how ill this girl is? Such an uproar at such a time is indecent."

The woman shrank from her gaze and slunk away. The policeman wiped his hot face with a red handkerchief.

"I saw the girl fetch you here, ma'am," he said, apologetically, "and I thought it was a trap. It ain't safe for a woman, let alone a lady, to come to no such a place. I'll just

wait and see you safe out of it."

He shut the door, and Ideala heard him walking up and down on the landing outside.

The dying girl seemed scarcely conscious of what was passing. Ideala looked round for something to revive her. There was not even a cup of water in the room. She knelt once more beside the bed, and raised her in her arms, and let her head rest on her shoulder. All the mother in her was throbbing with tenderness for this poor outcast. The girl drew a long deep sigh.

"Could you take anything?" Ideala asked.

"No, lady, not now. The thirst was awful awhile ago, and I cried and cried, although I knew no one would listen to me, or come if they heard. They'd rather we'd die when we get ill. It's a bad thing for the house." She could only speak in gasps.

"And what have you had?" Ideala asked.

"The scarlet fever, ma'am. There's an awful bad kind about, and I caught it. They all die that gets it."

Ideala drew her closer, and laid her own cool cheek on her damp forehead.

"Tell me why you wished to see me," she said. "You are so good," the girl answered—"I thought you'd better know—and get—away from—that low brute." Ideala understood, and would fain have stopped the story, but it seemed a relief to the girl to speak, and so she listened. It was the old story, the old story aggravated by every incident that could make it more repulsive—and her husband was the hero of it.

"Shall I go to hell?" the girl asked, shrinking closer.

"For these Christ died," Ideala murmured. The words flashed through her mind, and the meaning of them was new to her. Her heart was wrung for the desolate girl, dying alone in sin and sorrow without a creature to care for her—dying alone in the arms of a strange woman, with a policeman outside guarding her. Ideala cried in her

heart with an exceeding bitter cry: "God do so to him, and more also."

"Pray for me, lady."

But Ideala could not pray with a curse on her lips—and, besides, the power to pray had been taken from her for many a weary day before that. She thought of the policeman, and called him in.

"See, she is dying," she said, looking up at him helplessly; "and she has asked me to pray, and I can't. Will you?"

And, quite simply and reverently, as if it had been part of his ordinary duty, he took off his helmet and knelt down, a great rough- looking man in a hideous dress, and prayed: "Dear Lord, forgive her!"

They were the last words she heard.

CHAPTER XX.

The people seemed to have deserted the house. Even the Tawdry One had disappeared, and Ideala was obliged to lay out the poor dear girl herself, and make her ready for decent burial. As soon as she could leave the place she went, escorted by the policeman, to the fever hospital to have her things fumigated. The risk of infection had not troubled her till she remembered the likelihood of taking it to others, but as soon as she thought of that she took the necessary precautions to prevent it. She sent a message from the hospital to her maid, telling her to pack up some things and meet her at the station in time for the mail at eleven o'clock that night. She had thought of some friends who lived a nine hours' journey from her home, and had determined to go to them for a time.

She wrote to her husband also from the hospital. "The girl, Mary Morris, died of scarlet fever this afternoon in the house to which you sent her when you were tired of her," she said. "I was with her when she died. I am going to the Trelawneys

to-night; but at present I have formed no plans for the future."

During the first few days of her stay with the Trelawneys she just lived from hour to hour, not thinking of anything, past, present, or to come; but out of this apathy a desire grew by degrees. She wanted to see Lorrimer. She could speak to him, and she was sure he would help and advise her. She wrote to him, telling him she particularly wished to see him on a certain day, and asking him to meet her at the station, adding by way of postscript: "I do not think I quite know what you meant when you advised me to go my own way; but if any wrong-doing were part of the programme I should not be able to carry it out. However, I feel sure that you would be the last person in the world to let me do wrong, even if I were inclined to."

She knew that her husband was away from home, and her intention had been to sleep there that night, and go on to Lorrimer the next morning; but she had been misinformed about the trains, and after many changes and tedious waits, she found herself alone in the middle of the night at a little railway junction, with no chance of a train to take her on for several hours; and what was worse, without money enough in her purse to pay her bill if she went to an hotel. The waiting-rooms were all closed for the night, and there seemed nothing for it but to wander about the station till the train came and released her. She told her dilemma to an old Scotch inspector who was waiting to see what she meant to do. He gave the matter his best consideration, but it evidently perplexed him.

"If you was a box," he said, rubbing his chin thoughtfully, "we could put you in the left-luggage office."

"But I am not a box," Ideala answered, as if only the most positive denial would prevent mistake on the subject.

It was raining hard, and bitterly cold. Only part of the platform was roofed in, and every now and then a gust of wind splashed the raindrops into their faces as they stood beside Ideala's luggage in a circle of yellow light cast upwards by a lantern

which the inspector had put on the ground at their feet.

"There's me and Tom, the porter," he said at last; "we've got to wait for the two o'clock down and the four o'clock up. Tom, he'll come 'ome and sit over the kitchen fire with me. I suppose, now, you wouldn't like to do that?"

"Indeed I should be very glad to," Ideala answered; "that is," she added quickly, "if it would not inconvenience you."

He made an inexplicable gesture, and seemed to consider the matter settled.

"I'll just put this here luggage in the office," he said, shouldering a box and taking up a portmanteau; but he muttered as he went: "It's a pity, now, you wasn't luggage."

Ideala followed him meekly from the luggage-office out into the lane, and down a country path to a little cottage. The door opened into the kitchen, and a young man in a porter's uniform was sitting over a cheery fire reading a newspaper by the light of a tallow candle. The kitchen was large for the size of the house. Besides the door they had entered by there were two others, both closed. The walls were panelled from floor to ceiling with wood darkened by age. Several of the panels were doors of cupboards that projected slightly from the wall, and shelves had been sunk in flush with it, and placed angle-wise in the corners. The shelves were covered with old china. There was a row of brass candlesticks of good design on the high mantelpiece, and more china stood behind them. On a panel above the mantelpiece a curious design of dogs and horses in a wood had been carved with much patience and some skill. The furniture of the place was an old oak table standing in the window—the window itself had a deep sill, on which was arranged a row of flower-pots, from which a faint perfume came at intervals—a long narrow oak chest, carved and polished, with the date, 1700, on the side of it, a settle, and a dresser covered with the ordinary crockery used by poor people. The brick floor was rudded and sanded, the hearthstone was yellow, and the part under the grate was white. One high-backed old-fashioned chair stood on each side of the hearth. Tom the Porter

was sitting in one of them, and at his elbow was a small round table with a pipe, tobacco jar, and two or three books upon it. A square table in the middle of the room was laid out for supper, with a dish, two plates, a beer mug, and half a loaf of bread. Some potatoes were roasting on the hob.

"The old woman's asleep, I expects. You'll mind and not make a noise," the inspector said to Ideala, as if he were warning a child to be good.

Tom the Porter rose, and gazed at the lady with his mouth open in a state of astonishment that was justified by the time and place of her advent; but he offered her his chair with the courtesy of a gentleman, and the old inspector bade her make herself at home, which she did by removing her hat and wraps and taking off her gloves. In a higher sphere of life those two men would have stared her out of countenance, but Tom the Porter and the old inspector, not from want of appreciation, but from the refinement that seems natural to people who come of an old stock, whatever their station, and have had china and carved oak in their possession from one generation to another—forebore even to look at her lest she should be embarrassed by their curiosity. They did the honours of the house with dignity, and without vulgar apology for a state of things that was natural to them, and Ideala at once adapted herself to the circumstances, and burnt her fingers while attending to the baked potatoes, which Tom had somewhat neglected.

She always declared afterwards that there was nothing so good in the world as baked potatoes and salt, provided the company was agreeable; and now and then she would thrill us with reminiscences of that evening's entertainment—with wonderful accounts of railway accidents— and of one in particular that happened on a pitch-dark night when fires had to be made to light the workers as they toiled fearfully amongst the wreck of the trains, searching for the mangled and mutilated, the dying and the dead, while the air was filled with horrid shrieks and groans.

For it seems these three, when they had finished the baked potatoes, drew their

chairs to the fire and talked. And one can well imagine what Ideala's stories were—her tales of the Japanese with whom she had lived; of Chinese prisons into which she had peeped; of earthquakes, tornadoes and shipwrecks, and other perils by land and sea, all told in a voice that thrilled you, whatever it said. Tom the Porter and the old Scotch inspector were in luck that night, and they knew it. When at last it was time for Ideala to go, and in return for her thanks for his kind hospitality, and the contents of her purse, which had rather more in it than she had fancied, the inspector expressed his appreciation with an earnest smack.

"Well," he said, "you're rare good company. I shan't mind when you come along this way again."

The train was late in arriving, and she had only time to rush up to the house, change her dress, and return to the station to catch the one by which she had asked Lorrimer to meet her. Perhaps it was the thought of what she had come to tell him that made her heart beat nervously as the train drew up at her destination, and she leant forward to look for him among the people on the platform. She looked in vain—he was not there. Something, of course, had happened to detain him; doubtless he had sent a message to explain. She waited a little, but nobody appeared to be looking for her. Then she left the station and walked in the direction of the Hospital, thinking he had missed the train, and she should probably meet him on the way. Her nervousness increased as she went. She was not used to be alone in crowded streets, and she began to feel faint and bewildered. Her heart seemed to stop whenever she saw a fair- headed man, but she reached the Hospital at last, and no Lorrimer had met her.

Then a new fear disturbed her. Perhaps he was ill. She went up to the door, and there, just coming out, Lorrimer's secretary met her.

"I was just coming to meet you, madam," he said; "I am sorry I am too late. Mr. Lorrimer has been detained by visitors, and sent me to apologise for his absence. If

you will be so good as to come to the library, he will join you there as soon as he is disengaged."

When she was settled in the library a servant brought her books to her. She had not come to read, but work was the daily habit of her life, and she went on now, mechanically, but carefully as usual, though with a curious sinking of the heart, and benumbing sense of loss and pain. As she came along in the train she had been thinking how it would amuse Lorrimer to hear of her night's adventure, and of the relief it would be to tell him of all the other things she had come to tell; but now she felt like one bidden to a bridal, and brought to a burial. People were going and coming continually in the library. A gentleman sat at a table near her, busily writing. Servants went backwards and forwards with books. Another gentleman came in and looked at her curiously, and then went away. She began to feel uncomfortable, and wondered what was keeping Lorrimer so long. She thought, too, of leaving the place at once, and going back by an earlier train than she had intended, but it would hardly have been polite. A servant came and told her the library was closed to visitors at two.

"I am waiting for Mr. Lorrimer," she said.

"Oh, in that case——" and the man withdrew. The name was an open sesame to all parts of the building.

At last he came. She rose with a great sense of relief.

"Let me take your books," he said.

"I have done with them," she answered.

And without another word he led the way to his own room.

They took their accustomed seats.

"I am sorry I could not meet you," he said. "I hope you do not think me rude. Some wretched people turned up at the last moment, and wanted to see everything. Just

look at the room!"

Every cabinet seemed to have been ransacked, and treasures of all kinds were lying about in most admired disorder. Lorrimer looked round him desperately, and pushed his hat back from his forehead. Ideala smiled. It was so like him to forget he had it on.

Outside a heavy thundercloud gathered and darkened the room. Presently big drops of rain splashed against the window, and it began to lighten. Long claps of thunder rolled and muttered incessantly away in the distance, and every now and then one would burst directly above them, as it seemed, with splendid effect.

Lorrimer looked up at the window straight before him, and played with a pen; and Ideala, half turning her back to him, sat silent also, watching the storm.

There were some high houses opposite of which only the upper storeys were visible. Two children were playing in a dangerous position at an open window in one of them. Above the houses a strip of sky, heavy and dark and changeful, was all that showed. Ideala felt cold and faint. The long fast and fatigue were beginning to tell upon her. She was nervous, too; the silence was oppressive, but she could not break it. She felt some inexplicable change in her relations with Lorrimer which made it impossible to speak. Furtively she watched him, trying to discover if he felt it too. The look of age was on his face, and it was clouded with discontent. Anxiously she sought some sign of sickness to account for it. But, no. There was no trace of physical suffering; the trouble was mental.

"You are not looking well," Lorrimer said at last. "I suppose you have been starving yourself since I saw you. You have had no lunch to-day again. You will kill yourself if you go on like that. I was speaking about you to a doctor the other day. He said you could not fast as you do without taking something—stimulants or sedatives." Ideala winced. "What an insulting thing to say," she exclaimed, indignantly. "I will not allow you to adopt that tone with me. You have no right to scold me."

"I have, and shall," he retorted. "I suppose you want to kill yourself. Perhaps it is the best thing people can do who hate their lives."

"I don't hate my life; I don't want to die," she rejoined.

"The other day you said you loathed your life."

"You are accusing me of inconsistency," she said. "You! who are in two states of mind every time I see you!" She got up. "And I do mean what I say," she resumed. "I loathed the old life, but that is done with. I am living a new life now——"

He turned to look at her, red chasing white from his face at every breath; then, yielding to an irresistible impulse, he went to her, grasped her folded hands in both of his, and looked into her eyes for one burning moment. The hot blood flamed to her face. She was startled.

"Don't let us quarrel," he said, hoarsely.

"Why do you try to?" she retorted. "It is always you who begin."

"I think you want pluck," he said.

"Oh, no; not that," she answered.

"Just now you do."

"Then I think you want discernment," she retorted with spirit.

And so they went on, as if neither of them had ever heard of such a thing as conventional propriety.

Lorrimer did not answer that last remark. He was standing at a little distance from her, watching her. Ideala was looking grave.

"What is your conscience troubling you about now?" he asked. "I never listen to my conscience."

"I don't believe you," she answered, promptly.

"That is polite," he observed.

Then there was another pause.

"It must be time for me to go," she said at last.

The rain was still falling in torrents.

"Oh, no!" he exclaimed. "You mustn't go yet. Your train does not leave for another hour. Why do you want to go?"

She was struggling with the button of a glove, and he went to help her, but she repulsed him, half unconsciously, as she would have brushed off a troublesome fly.

The gesture irritated him.

"I cannot believe you are not conscientious," she said, with a frown of intentness. "When a man of talent ceases to be true, he loses half his power."

He turned from her coldly, sat down at the writing table, and began to write.

Ideala was still putting on her gloves.

Outside, the rain fell lightly now, and the clouds were clearing. The children were still playing at the open window of the house opposite. Lorrimer had often been obliged to answer notes when she was there; she thought nothing of that; but he was a long time, and at last she interrupted him. "Forgive me if I disturb you," she said, "but I am afraid I shall miss my train."

"Oh, pardon me," he answered, jumping up, and looking at his watch. "But it is not nearly time yet. I cannot understand why you are in such a hurry to-day."

"Yet you know that I always go when I have done my work," she said.

"You have done unusually early then," he replied; "and I wish to goodness I had." He looked round the room pettishly, like a schoolboy out of temper. "I shall have to put all these things away when you're gone—a task I hate, but nobody can do it but myself."

"Why wait till I've gone? Let me help you," said Ideala.

His countenance cleared, and they set to work merrily, he explaining the curious

histories of coins and cameos, of ancient gems, ornaments of gold and silver, and valuable intaglios, as they returned them to their places. Both forgot everything in the interest of the collection; so that, when the last tray was completed, they were surprised to find that two trains had gone while they were busy, and another had become due, and there was only time to jump into a hansom to catch it.

Lorrimer was still irritable.

"Why on earth does a lady always carry her purse in her hand?" he said, as they drove along.

Ideala laughed, and put hers in her pocket.

"When are you coming to go on with your work?" he asked.

"I will write and fix a day," she said.

"I shall be away a good deal for the next three weeks," he continued. "The twenty-third or twenty-sixth would be the most convenient days for me, if they would suit you."

"Thank you," she answered, and hurried down the platform, without having said a word or given a thought to what she had come to say.

And then at last the twenty-four hours' fasting, fatigue, and mental suffering overcame her. A little later she was lying insensible on the floor of her room, and she was alone. The servants had not seen her enter, and there was not a creature near her to help her.

CHAPTER XXI.

Ideala was unable to exert herself for many days after this. At last, however, she began to think of work again, and of Lorrimer. She was uneasy about him. He had not been himself on that last occasion. Something was wrong, she could not think what, but she felt anxious; and out of her anxiety arose an intense longing to see him

again. So she wrote, first of all fixing the twenty-third for her visit; but when the day came she found herself unequal to the exertion, and wrote again, begging him to expect her on the twenty-sixth instead.

He did not reply. He was generally overwhelmed with correspondence, and she had therefore begged him not to do so if the days she named suited him.

Up to this time she had never heard Lorrimer mentioned by any one; but now, suddenly, his name seemed to be in everybody's mouth. She thought of him incessantly herself, and it was as if the strength of her own mind compelled all other minds to think of him while she was present, and to yield to her will and tell her all they knew. For, curiously enough, she had begun to want to know about him. I call it curious, because she was so confiding so unsuspicious, and also so penetrating, she never seemed to care to know more of people than she learnt from intercourse with them. But with regard to Lorrimer, she had evidently begun to distrust her own judgment, which is significant.

One night, at a dinner-party, she was thinking of a gratuitous piece of information an old woman, who brought her some milk on one occasion at the Great Hospital, had given her. Ideala had noticed that the old woman had a bad cough, and had asked her, in her usual kindly way, if she were subject to it, and what she did for it, remarking that the north country air was trying to people with delicate chests, and warmer clothing and greater care were more necessary there than in the south; and thereupon the old woman had launched forth, as such people will upon the slightest provocation, with minute details of her own sufferings, and the sufferings of all the people she ever knew, from "the bronchitis" during the winter and spring, Mr. Lorrimer being included among the number.

"Does Mr. Lorrimer suffer in that way?" Ideala had asked with interest.

"Indeed, yes," was the answer, given with many shakings of the head and that air of importance and pleasure which vulgar bearers of bad news assume. "He was very

bad in the spring. He coughed so as never was, and had to give in at last and keep his room, which he should have done at first; but it takes a deal to make him give in, for he takes no care of hisself though not strong, and we were in a way! Eh! but it would be a bad thing for this place if anything happened to Mr. Lorrimer!" Ideala gave the woman half-a-crown.

"People may have bronchitis without being delicate," she asserted. "Mr. Lorrimer is very kind to all of you, I suppose?" "If I was to tell you all his good deeds, ma'am," the woman said, impressively, "I'd not have done before to-morrow morning. But as to his not being delicate," she continued—in the hope, perhaps, of scoring another on that point— "why, it just depends on what you call delicate."

Ideala absently gave her another half-crown, and another after that, but she could not get her to say that Mr. Lorrimer's chest was strong. Later, when Lorrimerre turned, and they were both at work, he was interrupted in the middle of some cynical remarks on over-population, and the good it would do to check it by allowing the spread of epidemics and encouraging men to kill each other, by the arrival of another old woman in great distress.

His manner changed in a moment. "I am afraid he is worse," he said to her most kindly.

She could only shake her head.

"There is the order," he went on, giving her a paper—"get him these things at once, and tell him I will come as soon as I am disengaged."

When they were alone again, Ideala looked at Lorrimer and laughed. "Another instance, I shrewdly suspect, of the difference between theory and practice," she observed.

He brushed his hand back over his forehead and hair, a trifle disconcerted. "He was the only son of his mother, and she was a widow," he said.

"And one can approve of capital punishment without having the nerve to see it

inflicted, I suppose," Ideala commented, "and be convinced that it would be good for the human race to have a certain number of their children drowned, like kittens, every year, and yet not be able to see a single one disposed of in that way without risking one's own life to save it. Verily, I have heard this often, and yet I think I am more surprised to find it true than if I had never been warned! But that is always the way. Things surprise us just as much as we expect them to. When we went up the river to Canton and saw the Pagoda, we all exclaimed, 'Why, it is just like the pictures—river, and junks, and all!' If we had not seen the pictures I believe we should scarcely have noticed it, and certainly we should not have been surprised at all."

"Haven't you done being surprised yet?" Lorrimer asked.

"No. Have you?"

"Quite. Nothing ever surprises me."

"I have read somewhere," she said, trying hard to recall the passage, "that fast men, stupid men (I think), and rascals, profess to feel no surprise at anything."

The colour flew over his face, he seemed about to speak, but took up his pen again as if the thing were not worth the trouble of a word, and went on with his work. The habit of treating men as ideas is not to be got rid of in a moment, and it was only when she thought it over at dinner this evening that she saw anything to hurt him in what she had said. Now that she did think of it, however, it certainly seemed natural that he should object to being classed in any category which included fast men, stupid men, or rascals; but even while she blamed herself, and credited him with much forbearance in that he had allowed her rudeness to pass unpunished, she was conscious of the existence, in that substratum of thought which goes on continually irrespective of our will, of a doubt as to whether he might not after all be one of these—say, a fast man. For what did she know about him? Nothing, except that his manners were agreeable. True, she had heard of his good deeds, and there is never

smoke without fire; but a man may balance his accounts, and many men do, in that way, topping up the scale of good deeds pretty high when the bad ones on the other side threaten to turn it; and, seeing that she knew nothing definitely about his private character, suppose she had been deceived in him? But, no! The thing was impossible. And just as she thought it, a gentleman, sitting opposite, one whom she had not met before, looked across the table and asked her if she knew Mr. Lorrimer.

"I have seen him," she answered, with a burning blush, being taken unawares.

"He's a charming fellow—don't you think so?"

"Yes, I think so," she agreed, with an indescribable sense of relief.

And the next day a young clergyman whom she stopped to speak to in the street began at once about Lorrimer. "I met him at dinner the other night," he said. "I suppose you know him? There is much truth in 'birds of a feather.' He fascinated us all with his talk of art and literature. He gave us such new ideas—described such varied experiences, and all with such grace and power."

"Yes," she answered, thoughtfully. "I believe he is brilliant."

"Many people are that," was the reply, given with hearty enthusiasm; "but Lorrimer is something more. He is good. He makes you feel it, and know it, and believe in him, without ever saying a word about himself."

"Ah!" she sighed, "there is power in that. What lovely summer weather! It makes me dream. Don't you love the time of nasturtiums? Their pungent scent, and their colours? They seem to penetrate and glow through everything, and make the time their own."

And so she left him.

But that same day, an old gentleman, who came from another county, and looked as if he had come from another century—an old gentleman with curious wavy hair, parted in the middle, who worshipped the Idol of Days—the past and all that

belonged to it—and, for evening dress, wore knee-breeches, frilled shirt, black silk stockings, and diamond buckles in his shoes; and had a bijou house, filled with a thousand relics of his Idol of Days, where noble ladies were wont to loll and listen to him, and drink tea out of his wonderful cups, and love him— so it was said—this gentleman called on Ideala. He came to charm and to be charmed; and he, of all people in the world the one from whom she would least have expected it, although she knew they had met, began to sing Lorrimer's praises.

"He raises the tone of everything he is engaged upon," this gentleman said. "He has not quite kept faith with me about a matter he promised to look into for me a year ago, but doubtless he is busy. I suppose you know him?"

"Yes, I know him. He seems to be very much above the average."

"Oh, very much above the average," was the warm response. "He's a charming fellow, and a thoroughly good fellow, too."

This was the chorus to everything, and there was only one dissentient voice—that of a man who admired Ideala, and was a good soul himself, having gone out of his way to pay her trifling attentions, and even found occasion to do her some small acts of kindness. He began with the rest to praise Lorrimer, but when he saw he was doing so at his own expense, by diverting her attention from himself to his subject, he somewhat lowered his tone.

"Every one seems to like Mr. Lorrimer," Ideala said.

"O yes, he's certainly a nice fellow; but he puts a lot of side on."

"And well he may, being so very good and well-beloved," she answered, smiling.

"So spoilt and conceited, you might say," was the rejoinder; but she felt that there was jealousy in the tone, and only laughed.

"What an interesting face he has," a lady remarked, who was having tea with Ideala, tete-a-tete, one afternoon, and had brought the conversation round to Lorrimer, as

seemed inevitable in those days. "He must make a charming portrait."

"Yes, it is a fine face," Ideala answered, dreamily—"a face for a bust in white marble; a face from out of the long ago—not Greek, but Roman —of the time when men were passing from a strong, simple, manly, into a luxuriously effeminate, self-indulgent stage; the face of a man who is midway between the two extremes, and a prey to the desires of both. I wish I had been his mother."

"His mother was a noble woman."

"I know; but she was not omniscient, and she never could have understood the boy. I daresay he was not enough of an ugly duckling to attract special attention, and with many other chicks in the brood he could not have more than the rest, and yet he required it. He ought to have been an only child. If he had been mine, I should have known what his dreaminess meant, why he loved to wander away and be alone; what was the conflict that began in his cradle—or earlier. Surely a mother must remember what there was in her mind to influence her child; she must have the key to all that is wrong in him; she must know if his soul is likely to be at war with his senses." And then Ideala forgot her listener, and burst out with one of those curious flashes of insight, irrespective of all knowledge, to which she was subject: "If I were only a soul to be saved, he would save me; but I am also a body to be loved, and whether he loves me or not, he suffers. It is the eternal conflict of mind and matter, spirit and flesh, two prisoners chained together—the one despising the other, yet ruled by him, and subservient to the needs of his lower nature."

The lady stared at her.

"You know Mr. Lorrimer very well, then, I suppose?" she remarked.

"Let me see," said Ideala, awaking from her trance, "that is a question I often ask myself. And sometimes I say I do know him very well, and sometimes I say I don't. I go to the Great Hospital frequently to read, and to look up information, and he helps me. He is a man who makes an instant impression, but he is many-sided, and, now

you ask me, I think on the whole that I do not know him well. I should not be surprised to hear any number of the most contradictory things about him."

"It is not a nice character to have," the lady said.

"No," Ideala answered, "not at all nice, but very interesting."

When at last the day arrived she felt an unusual impatience to see him. And she was in a strange flutter of nervous excitement. Should she tell him of those things which she had not been able to confide to him on the last occasion of their meeting? Could she? No; impossible! But she must see him, nevertheless. The desire was imperative.

The servant she had been accustomed to see met her at the door of the Great Hospital. She fancied he looked at her peculiarly. He said he had heard something about Mr. Lorrimer being absent that day, but he would inquire. He left her, and, returning in a few minutes, told her Mr. Lorrimer was not there.

"Did he leave no note, no message for me?" Ideala asked, faintly.

"No, madam, nothing," was the reply.

CHAPTER XXII.

For quite three months we heard nothing of Ideala, but we were not alarmed, as she often neglected us in this way when she was busy. At last, however, Claudia received a note from her, written in pencil, and in her usual style.

"It has been dull down here to a degree," she said. "I am beginning to think we are all too respectable. Are respectability and imbecility nearly allied, I wonder? But don't tell me; I don't want to know. All the trouble in the world comes from knowing too much. And then, I'm so dreadfully clever! If people take the trouble to explain things to me, I am sure to acquire some of the information they try to impart. I heard of the block system the other day. It sounded mysterious. I like mystery, and I went about in daily dread of having it all made plain to me by some officious person. One

day I was sitting on a rail above the line watching the trains. A workman came and sat down near me. It is very hard to have a workman sit down near you and not to talk to him, so we talked. And before I knew what was coming, he had explained the whole of that block system to me. Only fancy! and I may never forget it! It is quite disheartening.

"He said he was a pointsman, and I asked him if he would send a train down a wrong line for fifty pounds. He said fifty pounds was a large sum, and he had a mother depending on him! The people here are delicious. I think I shall write a book about them some day.

"Have you felt the fascination of the trains? My favourite seat here is a lovely spot just above where they pass. I can look down on them, and into them. The line winds, rather, through meadows and between banks, where wild flowers grow; and under an ivied bridge or two, and by some woods. And the trains rush past—some slow, some fast; and now and then comes one that is just a flash and roar, and I cling to the railing for a moment till it passes, and quiver with excitement, feeling as if I must be swept away. I look at the carriage windows, too, trying to catch a glimpse of the people, and I always hope to see a face I know. In that lies all the charm.

"I seem to be expected in town, and some Scotch friends have asked me to pay them a visit en route. I should like to go that way above everything; one would see so much more of the country! But I daren't go to London while the Bishop is there. He is making a dead set at me again (confirmation this time), and I am afraid if he heard of my arrival he would do something rash—dance down the Row in his gaiters, perhaps—which might excite comment even if people knew what he was after."

And then she went on to say she had been a little out of sorts, and very lazy, and she thought the north country air would brace her nerves, and, if we would have her, she would like to go to us at once.

She arrived late one afternoon, and I did not see her until she came down to the

drawing-room dressed for dinner.

I had not thought anything of her illness, she made so light of it, and I was therefore startled beyond measure when she appeared.

"Why, my dear!" I exclaimed, involuntarily, "what have they done to you? You're a perfect wreck!"

"Well, so I thought," she answered; "but I did not like to tell you. I was afraid you might think I was trying to make much of myself— wrecks are so interesting."

There was a large party staying in the house, and I had no opportunity of speaking to her that evening; but the next morning she came into my studio with a brave assumption of her old manner. I cannot tell how it was that I knew in a moment she had broken down, but I did know it, and I could only look at her. Perhaps something in my look showed her she had betrayed herself, for all at once her false composure forsook her, and she stretched out her hands to me with a piteous little gesture:

"What am I to do?" she said. "Will it always be like this?"

But I could not help her. I turned to the picture I was working at, and went on painting without a word. By-and-by she recovered herself, and began to talk of other things.

I blamed myself afterwards. I ought to have let her tell me then; but I had no notion of the truth. I only thought of her husband, and I selfishly shrank from encouraging her to speak. Complaint seemed to be beneath her. But I know now that she never wanted to make any complaint of him to me. It was of her new acquaintance that she longed to tell me. She had settled the difficulty with her husband without consulting any one. She had returned to his house, and remained there as his wife, nominally, and because he particularly wished that the world should know nothing of the rupture. I believe that she had done it sorely against the grain, and only because he represented that by so doing she would save his reputation. But from that time forward she would accept nothing from him but house-room, for she held that no

high-minded woman could take anything from a man to whom she was bound by no tie more sacred than that of a mere legal contract.

She was very quiet when she first came to us, but beyond that I noticed nothing unusual in her manner, and after the first I was inclined to think that being out of health accounted for everything. My sister Claudia, however, was not so easily deceived. She declared that Ideala was suffering from some serious trouble, either mental or bodily; and as the days wore on and there was no change for the better in her, but rather the contrary, I began to share Claudia's anxiety. Ideala grew paler and thinner, and more nervous. She was oftenest depressed, but occasionally had unnatural bursts of hilarity that would end suddenly in long fits of brooding.

It seems she had at first believed that Lorrimer's absence was an intentional slight, and the humiliation, coming as it did upon the long train of troubles which had weakened her already both in body and mind, nearly killed her. She had been lying for weeks between life and death, and we had known nothing of it. But as her strength returned she began to think she had been unjust to Lorrimer. She could account for his absence in many ways. He had been called out suddenly, and had left no message because he expected to be back before she arrived, but had been detained; or perhaps he had left a message with one of the servants whom she had not seen—there were so many about the place; or it was just possible that he had never received her letter at all—a certain number are lost in the post every day; and altogether it was more difficult to think badly of him than to believe that there had been some mistake. But still there was a doubt in her mind, and she bore the torment of it rather than ask for an explanation which might only confirm her worst fears.

CHAPTER XXIII.

About a month after she came to us, Ideala caught a bad cold. The doctor said her chest was very delicate. There was no disease, but she required great care, and must

not go out of doors. Soon afterwards he ordered her to remain in two rooms, and my sister had a favourite sitting-room turned into a bedroom for her. It opened into the blue drawing-room, and we took to sitting there in the evening, so that Ideala might join us without change of temperature. Ideala had always been careless about her health, and we expected some trouble with her now, but she acquiesced in all our arrangements without a word. It was easy to see, however, that her docility arose from indifference. The one idea possessed her, and she cared for nothing else. Did he, or did he not, mean it? was the question she asked herself, morning, noon, and night, till at last she could bear it no longer. Anything was better than suspense. She must write to him, she must know the truth one way or the other.

I had stayed up in the blue drawing-room to read one night after the rest of the party had gone to their rooms, but my mind wandered from the book. Ideala had been very still that evening, and I could not help thinking about her. Once or twice I had caught her looking at me intently. It seemed as if she had something to say, but when I went to speak to her she answered quite at random. I was much troubled about her, and something happened presently which did not tend to set my mind at rest. The room was large, and the fire, though bright, and one shaded lamp standing on a low table, left the greater part of it in shadow. When I gave up the attempt to read, I had gone to the farther end of it to lie on a sofa which was quite in the shade. About midnight the door into Ideala's room opened and she stood on the threshold with a loose white wrapper round her. She could not see me, and I ought to have spoken and let her know I was there, but I was startled at first by her sudden appearance, and afterwards I was afraid of startling her. She was so nervous and fragile then that a very little might have led to serious consequences. I did not like to play the spy, but it was a choice of two evils, and I thought she had come for a book or something, and would go directly, and if she did discover me she would suppose me to be asleep. She walked about the room, however, for a little in an objectless way; then she sank down on the floor with a low moan beside a chair, and hid her

face on her arm. Presently she looked up, and I saw she held something in her hand. It was a gold crucifix, and she fixed her eyes on it. The lamplight fell on her face, and I could see that it was drawn and haggard. Claudia had maintained latterly that her illness arose more from mental than from physical trouble; did this explain it? And was it a religious difficulty?

A weary while she remained in the same attitude, gazing at the crucifix; but evidently there was no pity for her pain, and no relief. She neither prayed nor wept, and scarcely moved; and I dared not. At last, however, a great drowsiness came over me; and when I awoke I almost thought I had dreamt it all, for the daylight was streaming in, and I was alone.

Later in the day when I saw Ideala she had just finished writing a letter.

"Shall I take it down for you?" I asked. "The man will come for the others presently."

She handed it to me without a word. On the way downstairs I saw that it was addressed to Lorrimer, of whom I had not then heard, but somehow I could not help thinking that this letter had something to do with what I had seen the night before.

For a day or two after that Ideala seemed better. Then she grew restless, which was a new phase of her malady; she had been so still before; and soon it was evident that she was devoured by anxiety which she could not conceal. I felt sure she was expecting someone, or something, that never came. For days she wandered up and down, up and down, and she neither ate nor slept.

One afternoon I went to ask if she had any letters for the post. At first she said she had not, then she wanted to know how soon the post was going. In a few minutes, I told her. She sat down on the impulse of the moment, and hurriedly wrote a note, which she handed to me. It was addressed to Lorrimer; but I asked no questions.

Two days afterwards a single letter came by the post for Ideala. I took it to her myself, and saw in a moment that it was what she had waited for so anxiously: the

cruel suspense was over at last.

That evening she was radiant; but she told us she must go home next day, and we were thunderstruck. It was the depth of winter; the weather was bitterly cold, and she had not been out of the house for months, and under the circumstances to take such a journey was utter madness. But we remonstrated in vain. She was determined to go, and she went.

CHAPTER XXIV.

In a few days she returned to us, and we were amazed at the change in her. Her voice was clear again, her step elastic, her complexion had recovered some of its brilliancy; there was a light in her eyes that I had never seen there before, and about her lips a perpetual smile hovered. She was tranquil again, and self-possessed; but she was more than that—she was happy. One could see it in the very poise of her figure when she crossed the room.

"This is delightful, is it not?" Claudia whispered to me in the drawing-room on the evening of her return.

"Delightful," I answered; but I was puzzled. Ideala's variableness was all on the surface, and I felt sure that this sudden change, which looked like ease after agony, meant something serious.

She did not keep me long in suspense. The next morning she came to my studio door and looked in shyly.

"Come in," I said. "I have been expecting you," and then I went on with my painting. I saw she had something to tell me, and thought, as she was evidently embarrassed, it would be easier for her to speak if I did not look at her. "I hope you are going to stay with us some time now, Ideala," I added, glancing up at her as she came and looked over my shoulder at the picture.

Her face clouded. "I—I am afraid not," she answered, hesitating, and nervously fidgeting with some paint brushes that lay on a table beside her.

"I am afraid you will not want me when you know what I am going to do. I only came back to tell you."

My heart stood still. "To tell me! Why, what are you going to do?"

"It is very hard to tell you," she faltered. "You and Claudia are my dearest friends, and I cannot bear to give you pain. But I must tell you at once. It is only right that you should know—especially as you will disapprove."

I turned to look at her, but she could not meet my eyes.

"Give us pain! Disapprove!" I exclaimed. "What on earth do you mean, Ideala? What are you going to do?"

"An immoral thing," she answered.

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed, throwing down my palette, and rising to confront her. "I don't believe it."

"I mean," she stammered—the blood rushing into her face and then leaving her white as she spoke—"something which you will consider so.

"I cannot believe it," I reiterated.

"But it is true. He says so."

"He—who, in God's name?"

"Lorrimer."

"And who on earth is Lorrimer?"

"That is what I came to tell you," she answered, faintly.

I gathered up my palette and brushes, and sat down to my easel again.

"Tell me, then," I said, as calmly as I could.

I pretended to paint, and after a little while, still standing behind me so that I could

not see her face, she began in a low voice, and told me, with her habitual accuracy, all that had passed between them.

"And what did you think when you found he was not there?" I asked, for at that point she had stopped.

"At first I thought he did not want to see me, and had gone away on purpose," she answered; "then I was ill; but after that, when I began to get better, I was afraid I had been unjust to him. There might have been some mistake, and I was half inclined to go and see, but I was frightened. And every day the longing grew, and I used to sit and look at my watch, and think—'I could be there in an hour;' or, 'I might be with him in forty minutes.' But I never went. And after a while I could not bear it any longer, and so I came to you. But the thought of him came with me, and the desire to know the truth grew and grew, until at last I could bear that no longer either, and then I wrote; and day after day I waited, and no answer came; and then I was sure he had done it on purpose, but yet I could not bear to think it of him. And I began not to know what people said when they spoke to me, and I think I should have killed myself; but I come of an old race, you know, and none of us ever did a cowardly thing, and I would rather suffer for ever than be the first—noblesse oblige. I don't deserve much credit for that, though, for I knew I should die if I did not see him again—die of grief, and shame, and humiliation because of what I had written, for as the days passed, and no answer came, I was afraid I had said too much, and he had misunderstood me, and would despise me. If I had only been sure that he did not want to see me again, of course I should never have written; but so many people have lost their only chance of happiness because they had not the courage to find out the truth in some such doubtful matter; and I did believe in him so —I could not think he would do a low thing. I was in a difficult position, and I did what I thought was right; but when no answer came to my letter I began to doubt, and then in a moment of rage, feeling myself insulted, I wrote again. Yet I don't know what made me write. It was an impulse—the sort of thing that makes one scream when one is

hurt. It does no good, but the cry is out before you can think of that. All I said was: 'I understand your silence. You are cruel and unjust. But I can keep my word, and if I live for nothing else, I promise that I will make you respect me yet.' I never expected him to answer that second note, but he did, at once. And he offered to come here and explain—he was dreadfully distressed. But I preferred to go to him."

"And you went?"

"Yes. And I was frightened, and he was very kind."

By degrees she told me much of what had passed at that interview. She seemed to have had no thought of anything but her desire to see him, and have her mind set at rest, until she found herself face to face with him, and then she was assailed by all kinds of doubts and fears; but he had put her at her ease in five minutes—and in five minutes more she had forgotten everything in the rapid change of ideas, the delightful intellectual contest and communion, which had made his companionship everything to her. She did just remember to ask him why he had not answered her first letter.

He searched about amongst a pile of newly-arrived documents on his writing table. "There it is," he said, showing her the letter covered with stamps and postmarks. "It only arrived this morning—just in time, though, to speak for itself. I was abroad when you wrote, and it was sent after me, and has followed me from place to place as you see, so that I got your second letter first. You might have known there was some mistake."

"Pardon me," Ideala answered. "I ought to have known."

And then she had looked up at him and smiled, and never another doubt had occurred to her.

"But, Ideala," I said to her, "you used the word 'immoral' just now. You were talking at random, surely? You are nervous. For heaven's sake collect yourself, and tell me what all this means."

"No, I am not nervous," she answered. "See! my hand is quite steady. It is you who are trembling. I am calm now, and relieved, because I have told you. But, oh! I am so sorry to give you pain."

"I do not yet understand," I answered, hoarsely.

"He wants me to give up everything, and go to him," she said; "but he would not accept my consent until he had explained, and made me understand exactly what I was doing. 'The world will consider it an immoral thing,' he said, 'and so it would be if the arrangement were not to be permanent. But any contract which men and women hold to be binding on themselves should be sufficient now, and will be sufficient again, as it used to be in the old days, provided we can show good cause why any previous contract should be broken. You must believe that. You must be thoroughly satisfied now. For if your conscience were to trouble you afterwards—your troublesome conscience which keeps you busy regretting nearly everything you do, but never warns you in time to stop you—if you were to have any scruples, then there would be no peace for either of us, and you had better give me up at once.'"

"And what did you say, Ideala?"

"I said, perhaps I had. I was beginning to be frightened again."

"And how did it end?"

"He made me go home and consider."

"Yes. And what then?" I demanded impatiently.

"And next day he came to me—to know my decision—and—and—I was satisfied. I cannot live without him." I groaned aloud. What was I to say? What could I do? An arrangement of this sort is carefully concealed, as a rule, by the people concerned, and denied if discovered; but here were a lady and gentleman prepared, not only to take the step, but to justify it—under somewhat peculiar circumstances, certainly—and carefully making their friends acquainted with their intention

beforehand, as if it were an ordinary engagement. I knew Ideala, and could understand her being over-persuaded. Something of the kind was what I had always feared for her. But, Lorrimer—what sort of a man was he? I own that I was strongly prejudiced against him from the moment she pronounced his name, and all she had told me of him subsequently only confirmed the prejudice.

"Why was he not there that day to receive you?" I asked at last.

"I don't know," she said. "I quite forgot about that. And I suppose he forgot too," she added, "since he never told me."

"Oh, Ideala!" I exclaimed, "how like you that is! It is most important that you should know whether he intended to slight you on that occasion or not. It is the key to his whole action in this matter."

"But supposing he did mean to be rude? I should have to forgive him, you know, because I have been rude to him—often. He does not approve of my conduct always, by any means," she placidly assured me.

"And does he, of all people in the world, presume to sit in judgment on you?" I answered, indignantly. "I always thought you the most extraordinary person in the world, Ideala, until I heard of this— gentleman."

"Hush!" she protested, as if I had blasphemed. "You must not speak of him like that. He is a gentleman—as true and loyal as you are yourself. And he is everything to me."

But these assurances were only what I had expected from Ideala, and in no way altered my opinion of Mr. Lorrimer. I knew Ideala's peculiar conscience well. She might do what all the world would consider wrong on occasion; but she would never do so until she had persuaded herself that wrong was right—for her at all events.

"He may be everything to you, but he has lowered you, Ideala," I resumed, thinking it best not to spare her.

"I was degraded when I met him."

"Circumstances cannot degrade us until they make us act unworthily," I rejoined.

"Oh, no, he has not lowered me," she persisted; "quite the contrary. I have only begun to know the difference between right and wrong since I met him, and to understand how absolutely necessary for our happiness is right-doing, even in the veriest trifle. And there is one thing that I must always be grateful to him for—I can pray now. But I belied myself to him nevertheless. He asked me if I ever prayed, and I was shy; I could not tell him, because I only prayed for him. It was easier to say that sometimes I reviled. Ah! why can we not be true to ourselves?"

"But I can't always pray," she went on sorrowfully; "only sometimes; generally when I am in church. The thought of him comes over me then, and a great longing to have him beside me, kneeling, with his heart made tender, and his soul purified and uplifted to God as mine is, possesses me—a longing so great that it fills my whole being, and finds a voice: 'My God! my God! give him to me!'"

"'Angels of God in heaven! give him to me! give him to me!'" I answered, bitterly.

"Yes, I remember," she rejoined, "I said it in my arrogant ignorance. I did not understand, and this is different."

"It is always different in our own case," I answered. "Do you remember that passage Ralph Waldo Emerson quotes from Lord Bacon: 'Moral qualities rule the world, but at short distances the senses are despotic'? it seems to me that when you call upon God in that spirit you are worshipping Him with your senses only."

"Then I believe it is possible to make the senses the means of saving the soul at critical times," she answered; "and at all events I know this, that I more earnestly desire to be a good woman now than I ever did before."

"It would be a dangerous doctrine," I began.

"Only in cases where the previous moral development had not been of a high order,"

she interrupted. I felt it was useless to pursue that part of the subject, so I waited a little, and then I said: "Am I to understand, then, that you are going to give up your position in society, and all your friends, for the sake of this one man, who probably does not care for you, who certainly does not respect you, and of whom you know nothing? Verily, he has gained an easy victory! But, of course, you know now what his object has been from the first."

"I know what you mean," she answered, indignantly; "but you are quite wrong; he does care for me. And if I give up my position in society for his sake, he is worth it, and I am content. And it is my own doing, too. I know that there cannot be one law for me and another for all the other women in the world, and if I break through a social convention I am prepared to abide by the consequences. Do you want to make me believe that his sympathy was pretended, that he deliberately planned—something I have no word to express—and would have carried out his plan absolutely in cold blood, without a spark of affection for me? It would be hard to believe it of any man; it is impossible to believe it of him. He is a man of strong passions, if you will, but of noble purpose; and if I make a sacrifice for him, he will be making one for me also. He may have been betrayed at times by grief, or other mental pain, which weakened his moral nature for the moment, and left him at the mercy of bad impulses; but I can believe such impulses were isolated, and any action they led him into was bitterly repented of; and no one will ever make me alter my conviction that I wronged him when I doubted him, even for a moment."

"This is all very well, Ideala," I said, trying not to irritate her by direct opposition, "if you appeared to him as you appear to me. Do you think you did? Was there anything in your conduct that might have given him a low estimate of your character to begin with? Anything that might have led him to doubt your honesty, and think, when you made your confession, that you were trying to get up a little play in which you intended him to take a leading part? That you merely wished to ease your mind from some inevitable sense of shame in wrong-doing by finding an excuse for

yourself to begin with—an excuse by which you would excite his interest and sympathy, and save yourself from his contempt?"

"Oh!" she exclaimed, "could he—could any one—think such a thing possible?"

"Such things are being done every day, Ideala, and a man of the world would naturally be on his guard against deception. If he thought he was being deceived, do you think it likely he would feel bound to be scrupulous?"

"But he did believe in me," she declared, passionately.

"He pretended to; it was part of the play. You see he only kept it up until he thoroughly understood you, and then his real feelings appeared, and he was rude to you. For I call his absence on that occasion distinctly rude, and intentionally so too, since he sent no apology."

"He was only rude to me to save me from myself, then, as Lancelot was rude to Elaine," she answered.

"Or is it not just possible that he was disappointed when he found you better than he had supposed? that he felt he had wasted his time for nothing, and was irritated——"

She interrupted me. "I forgive you," she said, "because you do not know him. But I shall never convince you. You are prejudiced. You do not think ill of me: why do you think ill of him?"

I made no answer, and she was silent for a little. Then she began again, recurring to the point at issue:

"If he did slight me on that occasion," she said—"and I maintain that he did not—but if he did, it was accidentally done."

"The evidence is against him," I answered, drily.

"Many innocent persons have suffered because it was," she said, with confidence.

"You are infatuated," I answered, roughly. And then my heart sent up an exceeding

great and bitter cry: "Ideala! Ideala! how did it ever come to this?"

She was silent. But her eyes were bright once more, her figure was erect, there was new life in her—I could see that—and never a doubt. She was satisfied. She was happy.

"Must I give you up?" she said at last, tentatively.

"No, you must give him up," I answered.

"Ah, that is impossible!" she cried. "We were made for each other. We cannot live apart."

"Ideala," I exclaimed, exasperated, "he never believed in you. He thought you were as so many women of our set are, and he showed it, if only you could have understood, when you saw him at the Hospital on that last occasion. You felt that there was some change, as you say yourself, and that was it. You talked to him of truth then, and it irritated him as the devil quoting Scripture might be supposed to irritate; and when you went back again he showed what he thought of you by his unexplained absence. He thought you were not worth consideration, and he gave you none."

"It would have been paying himself a very poor compliment if he had thought that only a corrupt woman could care for him," she answered, confidently. "But, I tell you, I am sure there is some satisfactory explanation of that business. I only wish I had remembered to ask for it, that I might satisfy you now. And, at any rate," she added, "whatever he may have thought, he knows better by this time."

I could say no more. Baffled and sick at heart, I left her, wondering if some happy inspiration would come before it was too late, and help me to save her yet.

CHAPTER XXV.

I went to consult my sister Claudia. The blow was a heavy one for her also; but I

was surprised to find that she did not share my contempt for the person whom I considered responsible for all this trouble.

"Ideala is no common character herself," Claudia argued; "and it isn't likely that a common character would fascinate her as this man has done."

"Will you speak to her, Claudia, and see what your influence will do?"

"It is no use my speaking to her," she answered, disconsolately. "Ideala is a much cleverer woman than I am. She would make me laugh at my own advice in five minutes. And, besides, if she be infatuated, as you say she is, she will be only too glad to be allowed to talk about him, and that will strengthen her feeling for him. No. She has chosen you for her confidant, and you had better talk to her yourself—and may you succeed!" she added, laying her head on the table beside which she was sitting, and giving way to a burst of grief.

I tried to comfort her, but I had little hope myself, and I could not speak at all confidently.

"I believe," Claudia said, before we parted, "that there is nothing for her now but a choice of two evils. If she gives him up she will never care for anything again, and if she does not, she will have done an unjustifiable thing; and life after that for such a woman as Ideala would be like one of those fairy gifts which were bestowed subject to some burdensome condition that made the good of them null and void."

I did not meet Ideala again until the evening, and then I was not sorry to see that her manner was less serene. It was just possible that she had been thinking over what I had said, and that some of the doubts I had suggested were beginning to disturb her perfect security.

After dinner she brought the conversation round to those social laws which govern our lives arbitrarily. I did not see what she was driving at, neither did the good old Bishop, who was one of the party, nor a lawyer who was also present.

"You want to know something," said the latter. "What is it? You must state your

case clearly."

"I want to know if a thing can be legally right and morally wrong," Ideala answered.

"Of course not," the Bishop rashly asserted.

"That depends," the lawyer said, cautiously.

"If I signed a contract," Ideala explained, "and found out afterwards that those who induced me to become a party to it had kept me in ignorance of the most important clause in it, so that I really did not know to what I was committing myself, would you call that a moral contract?"

"I should say that people had not dealt uprightly with you," the Bishop answered; "but there might be nothing in the clause to which you could object."

"But suppose there was something in the clause to which I very strongly objected, something of which my conscience disapproved, something that was repugnant to my whole moral nature; and suppose I was forced by the law to fulfil it nevertheless, should you say that was a moral contract? Should you not say that in acting against my conscience I acted immorally?"

We all fell into the trap, and looked an encouraging assent.

"And in that case," she continued, "I suppose my duty would be to evade the law, and act on my conscience?"

The Bishop looked puzzled.

"I should only be doing what the early martyrs had to do," she added.

"That is true," he rejoined, with evident relief.

"But I don't see what particular contract you are thinking of," said the lawyer.

"The marriage contract," Ideala answered, calmly.

This announcement created a sensation.

The lawyer laughed: the Bishop looked grave.

"Oh, but you cannot describe marriage in that way," he declared, with emphasis.

"Humph!" the lawyer observed, meditatively. "I am afraid I must beg to differ from your Lordship. Many women might describe their marriages in that way with perfect accuracy."

"Marriages are made in heaven!" the Bishop ejaculated, feebly.

"Let us hope that some are, dear Bishop." Claudia sweetly observed, and all the married people in the room looked "Amen" at her.

"I think an ideal of marriage should be fixed by law, and lectures given in all the colleges to teach it," Ideala went on; "and a standard of excellence ought to be set up for people to attain to before they could be allowed to marry. They should be obliged to pass examinations on the subject, and fit themselves for the perfect state by a perfect life. It should be made a reward for merit, and a goal towards which goodness only could carry us. Then marriages might seem to have been made in heaven, and the blessing of God would sanctify a happy union, instead of being impiously pronounced in order to ratify a business transaction, or sanction the indulgence of a passing fancy. But only the love that lasts can sanctify marriage, and a marriage without such love is an immoral contract."

"Marriage an immoral contract!" the Bishop exclaimed. "O dear! O dear! This is not right, you know; this is not at all right. I must make a note of this—I really must. You are in the habit of saying things of this sort, my dear. I remember you said something like it once before; and really it is not a subject to joke about. Such an idea is quite pernicious; it must not be allowed to spread—even as a joke. I wish, my dear, you had not promulgated it, even in that spirit. You have—ah —a knack of making things seem plausible, and of giving weight to opinions by the way you express them, although the opinions themselves are quite erroneous, as on the present occasion. Some of your ideas are so very mistaken, you know; and you really ought to leave these matters to those who understand them, and can judge. It

is very dangerous to discuss such subjects, especially—ah—when you know nothing about them, and—ah—cannot judge. I really must preach a sermon on the subject. Let me see. Next Sunday—ah, yes; next Sunday, if you will kindly come and hear me."

We all thanked him as enthusiastically as we could.

Later, I found Ideala alone in one of the conservatories. She took my arm affectionately, and we walked up and down for a time in silence. She was smiling and happy; so happy, indeed, that I found it hard to say anything to disturb her. For a moment I felt almost as she did about the step she proposed to take. There had been little joy in her life, and she had borne her cross long and bravely; what wonder that she should rebel at last, and claim her reward?

"Do you remember how you used to talk about the women of the nineteenth century, Ideala," I said at last, "and describe the power for good which they never use, and rail at them as artificial, milliner-made, man-hunting, self-indulgent animals?"

"I know," she answered; "and now you would say I am worse than any of them? I used to have big ideas about woman and her mission; but I always looked at the question broadly, as it affects the whole world; now my vision is narrowed, and I see it only with regard to one individual. But I am sure that is the right way to look at it. I think every woman will have to answer for one man's soul, and it seems to me that the noblest thing a woman can do is to devote her life to that soul first of all—to raise it if it be low, to help it to peace if peace be lacking, and to gather all the sunshine there is in the world for it; and, after that, if her opportunities and powers allow her to help others also, she should do what she can for them. I do not know all the places which it is legitimate for women to fill in the world, but it seems to me that they are many and various, and that the great object in life for a woman is to help. To be a Pericles I see that a man must have an Aspasia. Was Aspasia vile? some said so—yet she did a nobler work, and was finer in her fall, if she fell, than

many good women in all the glory of uprightness are. And was she impure? then it is strange that her mind was not corrupting in its influence. And was she low? then whence came her power to raise others? It seems to me that it only rests with ourselves to make any position in life, which circumstances render it expedient for us to occupy, desirable."

"And you propose to be an Aspasia to this modern Pericles?"

"If you like to put it so. The cases are not dissimilar, as there was an obstacle in the way of their marriage also."

"The law was the obstacle."

"Yes; another of those laws which are more honoured in the breach than in the observance. They might not marry because she came from Miletus! and Lorrimer may not marry me because I came out of the house of bondage. Unwise laws make immoral nations."

"But you have gone about this business in such an extraordinary way, Ideala," I said. "You seem to have tried to make it appear as bad for yourself as you can. Why did you not leave your husband when Lorrimer advised you to?"

"If I had gone then I should have been obliged to live somewhere else— a long way from Lorrimer; and I might never have seen him again."

"And do you mean to say you decided to endure a life that had become hateful to you in every way, simply for the sake of seeing this gentleman occasionally?"

"Yes. Ah! you do not know how good he is, nor how he raises me! I never knew the sort of creature I was until he told me. He said once, when we quarrelled, that I was fanciful, sentimental, lackadaisical, hysterical, and in an unhealthy state of mind, and yet—"

I made a gesture of impatience, and she stopped.

"But, Ideala," I asked her, after a little pause, "have you never felt that what you are

doing is wrong?"

"I cannot say that exactly," she answered. "I knew that certain social conventions forbade the thing—at least I began to acknowledge this to myself after a time. At first, you know, I thought of nothing. I was wholly absorbed in my desire to see him; that excluded every other consideration. Do you know what it is to be sure that a thing is wrong, and yet not to be able to feel it so—to have your reason acknowledge what your conscience does not confirm?"

I made no answer, and we were silent for a little; then she spoke again:

"One day when I was in Japan," she said, "I was living up in the hills at Hakone, a village on a lake three thousand feet above the level of the sea. The Mayor of the village was entertaining me, and whenever I went out he sent his son and several of his retainers as an escort, that I might not be subject to annoyance or insult from strangers. One day I was crossing the hills by a mountain-path there is between Hakone and Mianoshita, and after I passed Ashynoyou, where the sulphur springs are, I found myself in a dense fog. I could not see anything distinctly three yards in front of me. Kashywaya and the other men never walked with me; they used to hover about me, leaving me to all intents and purposes alone if I preferred it. The Japanese are very delicate in some things; it was weeks before I knew that I had a guard of honour at all. On that particular day I lost sight of them altogether, but I could hear them calling to each other through the fog; and I sat down feeling very wretched and lonely. I thought how all the beauty of life had been spoiled for me; how, past, present, and to come, it was all a blank; and I wished in my heart that I might die, and know no more. And, do you know, just at that moment the fog beneath me parted, and I saw the sea, sapphire blue and dotted with boats, and the sand a streak of silver, and the green earth, and a low horizon of shining clouds, and over all the sun! Dear Lord in heaven! how glad a sight it was!" She pressed her handkerchief to her eyes. "And I was wandering," she continued, "in some such

mental mist, lost and despairing, when Lorrimer came into my life, and changed everything for me in a moment, like the sun. Would you have me believe that he was sent to me then only for an evil purpose? That the good God, in whom I scarcely believed until in His mercy He allowed me to feel love for one of His creatures, and to realise through it the Divine love of which it is surely the foreshadowing—would you have me believe myself degraded by love so sent? Would you have me turn from it and call it sin, when I feel that God Himself is the giver?"

I was silent, not knowing how to answer her.

Presently I asked: "But why not have a legal separation, a divorce, from your husband now?"

"I cannot," she answered, sadly. "At one time I had written proof of his turpitude, but I could not make up my mind to use it then, and I destroyed it eventually; so that now my word would be the only evidence against him, and that would not do, I suppose, although you all know, better than I do, I fancy, what his life has been."

Other people had by this time come into the conservatory, and we were therefore obliged to change the subject.

In the days that followed every one seemed to become conscious of some impending trouble. We were all depressed, and one by one our party left us, until at last only Ideala remained, for we had not the heart to ask other guests, even if it had been expedient, and, under the circumstances, Claudia did not consider it so.

Ideala spent much of her time in writing to Lorrimer. Some of these letters were never sent. I fancy she wrote exactly as she felt, and often feared when she had done so that she had been too frank. How these two ever came to such an understanding I am at a loss to imagine, and I have searched in vain for any clue to the mystery. Only one thing is plain to me, that when at last Ideala understood her feeling for Lorrimer, she cherished it. After she found that her husband had broken every tie, disregarded every obligation, legal and moral, that bound her to him, she seems to

have considered herself free. But I feel quite sure she had not acknowledged this, even to herself, when she returned to Lorrimer, and that simply because she had not contemplated the possibility of being asked to take any decided step. When the time came, however, she apparently never questioned her right to act on this fancied freedom. The circumstances under which they had met were probably responsible for a great deal. The whole of their acquaintance had had something unusual about it, which would naturally predispose their minds to further unaccustomed issues when any question of right or expediency arose. The restrictions which men and women have seen fit to place upon their intercourse with each other are the outcome of ages of experience, and they who disregard them bring upon themselves the troubles against which those same restrictions, irksome at times as they must be, are the only adequate defence.

One letter I have here shows something of the strength and tenderness of Ideala's devotion; and I venture to think that, even under the circumstances, it must be good for a man to have been loved once in his life like that. The letter begins abruptly—"Oh, the delight of being able to write to you," she says, "without fear and without constraint. If it were possible to step from the dreary oppression of the northern midnight into the full blaze of the southern noon, the transition would not be greater than is the sense of rest and relief that has come to me after the weary days which are over. Do you know, I never believed that any one person could be so much to another as you are to me; that any one could be so happy as I am! I think I am too happy. But, dear, I want you! I want you always; but most of all when anything good or beautiful moves me; I feel nearer to you then, and I know you would understand. Every good thought, every worthy aspiration, everything that is best in me, and every possibility of better things, seems due to your influence, and makes me crave for your presence. You have been the one thing wanting to me my whole life long. I believe that no soul is perfect alone, and that each of us must have a partner-soul somewhere, kept apart from us—by false marriages, perhaps, or

distance, or death, but still to be ours, if not in this state, then in some other, when both are perfect enough to make the union possible. We are not all fit for that love which is the beginning of heaven, and can have no end. [Transcriber's Note: Lengthy footnote relocated to chapter end.] Does this seem fanciful to you? It would comfort me if we were ever separated. If—I cannot tell you how it makes my heart sink just to look at that word, although I know it does not suggest anything that is possible in our case. What power would take you from me now, when there is no one else in the whole wide world for me but you? and always you! and only you! You, with your ready sympathy and perfect refinement; your wit, your rapid changes, your ideality, your kindness, your cruelty, and the terrible discontent which makes you untrue to yourself. You are my world. But unless I can be to you what you are to me, you will always be one of the lonely ones. Tell me, again, that my absence makes a blank in your life. You did not write the word, you only left a space, and do you know how I filled it at first? 'It was such a relief when you left off coming,' I read, and I raged at you.

"I have heard it said lately that you are fickle, but these people do not understand you. You are true to your ideal, but the women you have hitherto known were only so many imperfect realisations of it, and so you went from one to the other, always searching, but never satisfied. And you have it in you to be so much happier or so much more miserable than other men—I should have trembled for you if your hopes had never been realised.

"But what would satisfy you? I often long to be that mummy you have in the Great Hospital, the one with the short nose and thick lips. When you looked at me spirit and flesh would grow one with delight, and I should come to life, and grow round and soft and warm again, and talk to you of Thebes, and you would be enchanted with me—you could not help it then. I should be so old, so very old, and genuine!

"Dear, how I laugh at my fears now, or rather, how I bless them. If I had never

known the horror of doubt, how could I have known what certainty is? And I did doubt you; I dare acknowledge it now. I wonder if you can understand what the shame of that doubt was? When I thought your absence and your silence were intentional slights, I knew how they felt when 'they called on the rocks to cover them, and I wished—oh, how I wished!—that a thousand years had passed, and my spirit could be at the place where we met, and see the pillars broken, and. the ivy climbing over the ruins, and the lizards at home amongst them, and the shameless sunlight making bare the spot where we stood.

"It was as if I had been punished for some awful unknown sin, and when I seemed to be dying, and I dared not write to you, and all hope of ever knowing the truth had departed, I used to exclaim in my misery: 'Verily, Lord, if Thy servant sinned she hath suffered! for the anguish of death has been doubled, and the punishment of the lost has begun while yet the tortured mind can make its lament and moan with the tortured body!'

"But all that bitter past only enhances the present.

"I wonder where you will be to-day. I believe you are always in that room of yours. You only leave it to walk to the station with me, after which you go back to it, and work there till it is dark; and then you rest, waiting for the daylight, and when it comes you go to work again. I cannot fancy you anywhere else. I should not like to realise that you have an existence of which I can know nothing, a life through which I cannot follow you, even in imagination.

"But sometimes you come to me, and then how glad I am! You come to me and kiss me, and it is night and I am dreaming, and not ashamed.

"Yes, the days do drag on slowly, for after all I am never quite happy, never at peace even, never for a moment, except when I am with you. I am sorry I feel so, for it seems ungrateful in the face of all the kindness and care that is being lavished on me by my friends. One lady here has seven children—another instance of the unequal

distribution of the good things of this world. She has lent me one of them to comfort me because I am jealous. He sleeps in my room, and is a fair- haired boy, with eyes that remind me of you. Will he also, when he grows up, have 'the conscience of a saint among his warring senses'? I hope not, I should think when sense and conscience are equally delicate, and apt to thrill simultaneously, life must be a burden. Would such a state of things account for moods that vary perpetually, I wonder?"

Here she breaks off, and I think these last reflections account for the fact that the letter was never sent.

[Relocated Footnote: This passage might have been taken from Plato verbatim, but Ideala had not read Plato at the time it was written. The inborn passionate longing of the human soul for perfect companionship doubtless accounts for the coincidence, which also shows how deep-rooted and widely spread the hope of eventually obtaining the desired companionship is. Some will maintain that the desire for such a possibility has created the belief in it, but others claim to have met their partner-souls, and to have become united by a bond so perfect that even distance cannot sever it, there being some inexplicable means of communication between the two, which enables each to know what befalls the other wherever they may be. The idea might probably be traced back to that account of Adam which describes him as androgynous, or a higher union of man and woman—a union of all the attributes of either, which, to punish Adam for a grievous fault, was subsequently sundered into the contrast between man and woman, leaving each lonely, imperfect, and vainly longing for the other.]

CHAPTER XXVI.

Ideala lingered unwillingly, but the reason of her reluctance to go was not far to seek. Now that Lorrimer knew she loved him she was ashamed to go back. It would

have been bad enough had he been able to come to her; but going to him was like reversing the natural order of things and unsexing herself. I suppose, however, that she forgot her shyness in her desire to be with him as the time went on, and the effort it cost her to conquer her fear and go to him was not so dreadful as the blank she would have been obliged to face had she stayed away. At all events, she fixed a day at last, and one morning she announced to us, sadly enough, that on the morrow she must say farewell. She made the announcement just after breakfast, and Claudia rose and left the room without a word. My sister had never been able to speak to Ideala on the subject, but she did not cease to urge me to expostulate, and she had suggested many arguments which had affected Ideala, and made her unhappy, but without altering her determination.

I could not find a word to say to her that morning, and during the slow hours of the long day that dragged itself on so wearily for all of us, nothing new occurred to me.

"It will be a relief when it is over," I said to my sister.

"Yes," she answered; "it is worse than death."

In the evening she came to my study and said: "Ideala is alone in the south drawing-room. I wish you would go to her, and make a last effort to dissuade her."

I consented, hopelessly, and went.

Ideala was standing in a window, looking out listlessly. She was very pale, and I could see that she had been weeping. I sat down near the fire; and presently she came and sat on the floor beside me, and laid her head against my knee. In all the years of my love for her she had never been so close to me before, and I was glad to let her rest a long, long time like that.

"Were you happy while you were with Lorrimer, Ideala?" I asked at last.

She did not answer at once, and when she did, it was almost in a whisper.

"No, never quite happy till this last time," she said; "never entirely at ease, even. It

was when I left him, when I was alone and could think of him, that the joy came."

"There was nothing real in your pleasure, then," I went on; "it was purely imaginary—due to your trick of idealising everything and everybody, you care for?"

"I do not know," she said.

"Do you think it was the same with him?" I asked again—"I mean all along. Did it always make him happy to have you there?"

"I cannot tell," she said. "Yes, I think at times he was glad. But a word would alter his mood, and then he would grow sad and silent."

"Even on the last occasion?"

"No, not on the last occasion. He was happy then"—and she smiled at the recollection—"ah, so happy! It was like new life to him, he was so young, so fresh, so glad—like a boy."

"But before, when his moods varied so often, did it ever seem to you that he was troubled and dissatisfied with himself? that the intimacy had begun on his part under a misapprehension, and that when he began to know you better, he had tried to end it, and save you, by not seeing you on that occasion?"

"Ah, that occasion again!" she ejaculated. "I forgot to tell you, but I asked for an explanation just to satisfy you. Here it is!" And she took a note from her pocket-book and handed it to me. It was one which she had written to him.

"I do not understand," I said.

"Read it," she answered, "and you will find I asked him to expect me on Monday, the 26th. It was a clerical error. Tuesday was the 26th, and I went on Tuesday. He waited for me the whole long Monday, and that night he had to set off suddenly for the Continent on business connected with the Great Hospital. He went, wondering what had detained me, and expecting an explanation. When he returned he inquired, but nobody could tell him whether I had been or not. So he waited, and waited, as I

did, expecting to hear, and as much perplexed and distressed as I was, and as proud, for he never thought of writing to me—nor did he think of looking at my note again until I wrote the other day, and then he discovered the mistake. Now, are you satisfied?"

"About that—yes," I answered, reluctantly. It was no relief to end him blameless.

"But what did he mean when he talked of conscience and scruples?"

"He used to laugh at my 'troublesome conscience,' as he called it," she answered, evasively.

"Would he have known you had a conscience, do you think, if he had had none himself?" I asked her. "Did he ever say anything that showed he was yielding to a strong inclination which he could not justify and would not conquer?"

"Oh, no!" she said; then added, undecidedly: "at least—he did say once: 'Of course, in the opinion of the world the thing cannot be justified,' but then he went on as if it had slipped from him involuntarily: 'Bah! I am only doing as other men do.'"

"Which shows he was not exactly satisfied to be only as other men are."

"That is what I have often told you," she said; "his ideal of life, both for himself and others, is the highest possible, and he suffers when he falls below it, or even belies himself with a word."

"Passion never lasts, and love does not lead to evil," I continued, meditatively; "if you love him, Ideala, how will you bear to feel that he has degraded himself by degrading you?"

"Oh! do not speak like that!" she exclaimed. "There is no degradation in love. It is sin that degrades, and sin is something that corrupts our minds, is it not? and makes us unfit for any good work, and unwilling to undertake any. This is very different."

"Ideala, do you remember telling me once that you had a strange feeling about yourself? that you thought you would be made to go down into some great depth of

sin and suffering, in order to learn what it is you have to teach?"

"Ah, yes!" she answered, "but I have not gone down. I must obey my own conscience, not yours; and my conscience tells me the thing is right which you hold to be wrong. I am quite willing to believe it would be wrong for you, but for me it is clearly right. You said the other day he had lowered me. What a fiction that is! In what have I changed for the worse? Do I fail in any duty of life since I knew him in which I previously succeeded? Oh, no! he has not lowered me! Love like this rounds a life and brings it to perfection; it could not wreck it."

"But, Ideala, you are going to fail in a duty; you are going to fail in the most important duty of your life—your duty to society."

"I owe nothing to society," she answered, obstinately.

"I have always admired you," I pursued, "for not letting your own experience warp your judgment. Oh, what a falling-off is here! I have heard you wish to be something more than an independent unit of which no account need be taken. How can we, any of us, say we owe nothing to society, when we owe every pleasure in life to it? Do we owe nothing to those who have gone before, and whom we have to thank for the music, the painting, the poetry, and all the arts which would leave a big blank in your life, Ideala, if they ceased to exist? You would have been a mere savage now, without refinement enough to appreciate that rose at your waistbelt, but for the labour and self-denial which the hundreds and thousands who lived, and loved, and suffered in order to make you what you are have bestowed on you, and on all of us. You would not say, if you thought a moment, that society had done nothing for you; and no one can honestly think that they owe it nothing in return. It seems to me that a rigid observance of the laws which hold society together, and make life possible for all of us, and pleasant for some, is the least we can do; and do you know, Ideala, when a woman ever thinks of doing what you propose to do, she has already gone down to a low depth—of ingratitude, if of nothing else."

"I do not propose to do anything that will injure any one," she answered, coldly. "I am free, am I not, to dispose of myself as I like —to give myself to whomsoever I please?"

"We are none of us free in that sense of the word," I replied.

"All are but parts of one stupendous whole Whose body Nature is, and God the soul.

You are, as I know you have desired to be, part of a system, and an important part. All the toil and trouble of the world, and all the work which began with the life of man, is directed towards one great end— the doing away with sin and suffering, and the establishment of purity and peace. And this work seems almost hopeless, not because the multitude do not approve of it, but because individuals are cowardly, and will not do their share of it. Every act of yours has a meaning; it either helps or hinders, what is being done to further this, the object of life. Lately, Ideala, you have been talking wildly, without for a moment considering the harm you may be doing. You have expressed opinions which are calculated to make people discontented with things as they are. You rob them of the content which has made them comfortable heretofore, and yet you offer them nothing better in return for it. You would have society turned topsy-turvy, and all for what? Why, simply to make a wrong thing right for yourself! If your example were followed by all the unhappy people in the world, how would it end, do you think? There must be moral laws, and it is inevitable that they should press hardly on individuals occasionally; but it is clearly the duty of individuals to sacrifice themselves for the good of the community at large."

"I do not understand your morality," she said. "Do you think that, although I love another man, it would be right for me to go back and live with my husband?"

"Right, but, under the circumstances, not advisable. And, at any rate, nothing would make it moral for you to go to that other man."

"Oh! do not fill my mind with doubt," she pleaded, piteously. "I love him. Let me

go."

I did not answer her, and after a while she began again, passionately— "We are free agents in these things. Individuals must know what is best for themselves. If I devote my life to him, as I propose, who would be hurt by it? Should I be less pure-minded, and would he be less upright in all his dealings? When things can be legally right though morally wrong, can they not also be morally right though legally wrong?"

"I have already tried to show you, Ideala," I answered, preparing to go over the old ground again, patiently, "that we none of us stand alone, that we are all part of this great system, and that, in cases like yours, individuals must suffer, must even be sacrificed, for the good of the rest. When the sacrifice is voluntary, we call it noble."

"If I go to him I shall have sacrificed a good deal."

"You will have sacrificed others, not yourself. He is all the world to you, Ideala; the loss would be nothing to the gain"—she hid her face in her hands—"and what is required of you is self-sacrifice. And surely it would be happier in the end for you to give him up now, than to live to feel yourself a millstone round his neck."

"I do not understand you," she said, looking up quickly.

"The world, you see, will know nothing of the fine sentiments which made you determine to take this step," I said. "You will be spoken of contemptuously, and he will be 'the fellow who is living with another man's wife, don't you know,' and that will injure him in many ways."

"Do you think so?" she asked, anxiously.

"I know it," I replied. "And look at it from that or any other point of view you like, and you must see you are making a mistake. A woman in your position sets an example whether she will or not, and even if all your best reasons for this step were made public, you would do harm by it, for there are only too many people apt enough as it is at finding specious excuses for their own shortcomings, who would be glad, if they dared, to do likewise. And you would not gain your object after all.

You would neither be happy yourself, nor make Lorrimer happy. People like you are sensitive about their honour—it is the sign of their superiority; and the indulgence of love, even at the moment, and under the most favourable circumstances of youth, beauty, and intellectual equality, does not satisfy such natures, if the indulgence be not regulated and sanctified by all that men and women have devised to make their relations moral."

This was my last argument, and when I had done she sat there for a long time silent, resting her head against my knee, and scarcely breathing. She was fighting it out with herself, and I thought it best to leave her alone—besides, I had already said all there was to say; repetition would only have irritated her, and there was nothing now for it but to wait.

Outside, I could hear the dreary drip of raindrops; somewhere in the room a clock ticked obtrusively; but it was long past midnight, and the house was still. I thought that only the night and silence watched with me, and waited upon the suffering of this one poor soul.

At last she moved, uttering a low moan, like one in pain.

"I do see it," she said, almost in a whisper; "and I am willing to give him up."

"God in His mercy help you!" I prayed.

"And forgive me," she answered, humbly.

She was quite exhausted, and passively submitted when I led her to her room. I closed the shutters to keep out the cheerless dawn, and made the fire burn up, and lit the lamps. She sat silently watching me, and did not seem to think it odd that I should do this for her. She clung to me then as a little child clings to its father, and, like a father, I ministered to her, reverently, then left her, as I hoped, to sleep.

My sister opened her door as I passed. She was dressed, and had been watching, too, the whole night long.

"Well?" she asked.

I kissed her. "It is well," I answered; and she burst into tears.

"Can I go to her now?" she said.

"Yes, go." I went to Claudia's room, and waited. After a long time she returned.

"She is quiet at last," she told me, sorrowfully.

And so the long night ended.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Ideala had returned to us quite under the impression that if she took the step she proposed we should think it right to cast her off; and that little tentative: "Must I give you up?" was the only protest she had offered. But such was not our intention. Far from it! We do not forsake our friends in their bodily ailments, and we are poor, pitiful, egotistical creatures indeed when we desert them for their mental and moral maladies, leaving them to struggle against them and fight them out or succumb to them alone, according to their strength and circumstances. The world will forsake them fast enough, and that is sufficient punishment—if they deserve punishment. Of course, Ideala could never have come back to us as an honoured guest again, after taking such a step, but she would have continued to fill the same place in our affections, if not in our esteem.

"And you will drive everybody else away, and keep the house empty all the year round, in order to be able to receive her—and Mr. Lorrimer— whenever they choose to visit us," Claudia had declared when we discussed the subject.

That was not quite what I intended; but I had made Ideala understand that nothing she could do would affect her intercourse with us. I told her so at once, because I would not have her alter her determination for any consideration but the highest. She might at the last have hesitated to separate herself from us for ever; but I felt sure if

that were the case, and it was not a better motive entirely which deterred her, she would not be satisfied eventually; and I know now that I was right.

Ideala wrote to Lorrimer, and when she had finished her letter I found that she intended to impose a terrible task upon me.

"Until you know him yourself you will always misjudge him," she said. "I want you to take him my letter, and make his acquaintance."

I hesitated.

"It is the least you can do," she pleaded. "I shall be easier in my mind if you will. It will be better for him to see you, and hear all the things I cannot tell him in my letter; and—and—if I must not see him myself it will be a comfort to see somebody who has. Do go. I shall be pained if you refuse."

This decided me, and I went at once.

It was a long journey, the same that Ideala herself had taken under such very different circumstances so short a time before. I thought of her going in doubt and uncertainty, her own feelings colouring the aspect of all she saw on the way; and returning in the first warm glow of her great and unexpected joy—her new-found happiness which was destined, alas! to be so short-lived. Miserable fate which robbed her of all that would have made her life worth having—a husband on whom she could rely; her child; and now the man upon whom she had been prepared to lavish the long pent-up passion, the concentrated devotion of her great and noble nature! Poor starved heart, crushed back upon itself, suffering silently, suffering always, but never hardening—on the contrary, growing tenderer for others the more it had to endure itself! Would it always be so? Was there no peace on earth for Ideala? No one who could be all her own? I felt responsible for this last hard blow; had I done well? The rush and rattle of the train shaped itself into a sort of sub-chorus to my thoughts as we sped through the pleasant fields: Was it right? Was it right? Was it right? And I saw Ideala, with soft, sad eyes, pleading—mutely

pleading—pleading always for some pleasure in life, some natural, womanly joy, while youth and the power to love lasted. By an effort of will I banished the question. I told myself that my action in the matter had been expedient from every point of view; but presently

The rush of the grinding steel! The thundering crank, and the mighty wheel!

took me to task again, and the chorus now became: Expediency right! Expediency right! Expediency right! which, when I banished it, resolved itself into: Cold, proud Puritan! Cold, proud Puritan! for the rest of the way.

But the journey ended at last—though that was little relief with the task I had before me still unaccomplished.

A bulbous functionary took my card to Lorrimer when I presented myself at the Great Hospital next day, and returning presently informed me that Mr. Lorrimer was disengaged, and would see me at once, if I would be so good as to come this way. How familiar the whole proceeding seemed! And how well I knew the place! the soothing silence, the massive grandeur, the long, dimly lighted gallery to the right, the door at which the servant stopped and knocked, the man who opened it, and met my eyes fearlessly, bowing with natural grace, and bidding me enter—a tall, fair man; self-contained and dignified; cold, pale, and unimpassioned—so I thought—but my equal in every way: the man who was "all the world" to Ideala.

When I saw him I understood.

* * * * *

Lorrimer, after dismissing his secretary, was the first to speak.

"You come to me from Ideala?" he said. "Is there anything wrong? Is she ill?"

And I fancied he turned a trifle paler as the fear flashed through his mind.

I reassured him. "Physically she is better," I said.

"But mentally?" he interposed. "You give her no peace."

I was silent.

"I know you are no friend of mine," he added.

"On the contrary," I answered. "I hope I am the best friend you have just now."

"I know what that means," he said. "You have tried to dissuade Ideala, and having failed, you have come here to use your influence with me"

"No," I answered. "I have not come to discuss the subject. I have brought you a letter from Ideala at her special request, and I am ready to take her any reply which you may think fit to send."

I gave him the letter, and rose to go, but he detained me.

"Stay till I have read it, if you can spare me the time," he said. "It is just possible that there is something in it which we ought to discuss."

I turned to the mantelpiece, and tried to interest myself in the lovely things with which it was crowded; but never in my life did my heart sink so for another; never have I endured such moments of pained suspense.

I heard him open the envelope; I heard the paper rustle as he turned the page; and then there was silence—

Full of the city's stilly sound—

a moment only, but filled with

Something which possess'd The darkness of the world, delight, Life, anguish, death, immortal love. Ceasing not, mingled, unrepress'd, Apart from space, witholding time—

a moment's silence, and then a heavy fall. Lorrimer had fainted.

* * * * *

I stayed three days at the Great Hospital, three days of the most delightful converse. At first, Lorrimer had rebelled, not realising that Ideala's last decision was irrevocable.

"You have over-persuaded her," he said.

"No," I answered; "I have convinced her. And I shall convince you, too."

He pleaded for her pathetically, not for himself at all. "She has had so little joy!" he said; using the very words that had occurred to me. "And I wanted to silence her. I wanted to save her from her fate. For she is une des cinq ou six creatures humaines qui naissent, dans tout un siècle, pour aimer la vérité, et pour mourir sans avoir pu la faire aimer des autres. She must suffer terribly if she goes on."

This was a point upon which we differed. He would have given her the natural joys of a woman—husband, home, children, friends, and only such intellectual pursuits which are pleasant. I had always hoped to see her at work in a wider field. But she was one of those rare women who are born to fulfil both destinies at once, and worthily, if only circumstances had made it possible for her to combine the two.

Before I had been with him many hours, I began to be sensible of that difference of feeling on certain subjects which would have made their union a veritable linking of the past to the future—his belief that nothing can be better than what has been, and that the old institutions revised are all that the world wants; and her faith in future developments of all good ideas, and further discoveries never yet imagined. For one thing, Lorrimer considered famine and war inevitable scourges of the human race, necessary for the removal of the surplus population, and useless to contend against, because destined to recur, so long as there is a human race; but he would have limited intellectual pursuits for women, because culture is held to prevent the trouble for which the elder expedients only provided a cure—a point upon which Ideala did not agree with him at all. "Nothing is more disastrous to social prosperity," she held, "or more likely to add to the criminal classes, than families which are too large for their parents to bring up, and educate comfortably, in their own station. If the higher education of women is a natural check on over-production of that kind, then encourage it thankfully as a merciful dispensation of providence for the prevention

of much misery. I can see no reason in nature or ethics for a teeming population only brought into existence to be removed by famine and war. Why, this old green ball of an earth would roll on just as merrily without any of us."

* * * * *

Lorrimer wrote to her at last. He had been obliged to acquiesce; and I took Ideala his letter; but she, womanlike, though nothing would have altered her decision, was not at first satisfied with his compliance. It seemed to her too ready; and that made her doubt if she might not have been to blame after all. They wrote to each other once again, and when she received his last letter, she spoke to me about it.

"He must have seen it as you do from the first, for he has said no word to alter my determination—rather the contrary," she told me. "We are not to meet again, nor to correspond; and doubtless it is a relief to him to have the matter settled in this way; but one thing puzzles me. In my last letter I bade him good-bye, adding 'since that is what you wish,' and he has replied: 'I never said I wished it; will you remember that?' I do remember it, and it comforts me; but why?"

I knew that Lorrimer had said little in order to make her sacrifice as easy for her as possible; and I was silent, too, for the same reason. I thought if she felt herself to blame, her pride would come to the rescue, and make her loss appear rather inevitable than voluntary. For, say what we will, we reconcile ourselves to the inevitable sooner than to those sorrows which we might have saved ourselves had we deemed it right.

"You insinuated once that it was all my fault," she said. "Perhaps it was—if fault there be. But if I tempted him, it must have been generosity that made him yield to the temptation. He pitied me, and was ready to make me happy by devoting himself to me, since that was what I seemed to require. And I agree with you now. I don't think we should, either of us, have found any real happiness in that way. But, oh, how I long for him! for his friendship! for his companionship! for his love! It is

hard, hard, hard, if he does not miss me as I do him."

Then I told her: "But he does. And he did not yield to your decision until I had convinced him that he could never make you happy in such a position."

A great sigh of relief escaped her. And then I saw that I ought to have been frank with her from the first. It strengthened her to know that they still had something left to them in common, though that something was only their grief.

I tried to comfort her by speaking of the many ways in which she might still find happiness. She listened patiently until I was obliged to stop for want of words, then she said:

"This is all very well, but you know you are talking nonsense. What is the use of offering people everything but the one thing needful? What I say to myself is:

Well, I have had my turn, have been Raised from the darkness of the clod, And for a glorious moment seen The brightness of the skirts of God.

And I try to think I have no right to complain, but still I am not better satisfied than the child that has eaten its cake and wants to have it too. And I suppose there are many who would call me wretched, and say that my life, with my sorrowful marriage—which was no marriage, but a desecration of that holy state, and a sin—and my hopeless love, is a broken life. Certainly I feel it so. And yet I don't know. With his nature it seems to me that some wrong-doing was inevitable. Do you think my suffering might be taken as expiation for his sins? Do you think we are allowed the happiness of bearing each other's burdens in that way if we will? If I were sure of that I should not fancy, as I used to, that I had a work to do in the world; I should know that my work is done, and that now I may rest. Ah, the blessing of rest!"

Not long after this a cruel rumour reached us, on good authority, that Lorrimer was engaged to be married. I confess that my feeling about it was one of unmitigated contempt for the man, and I trembled for the effect of the news upon Ideala. She

made no sign, however, when first she heard it. I was surprised, and fear I showed that I was, in spite of myself, for she spoke about it.

"You do not understand," she said. "One event in his career is not of more consequence to me than another, because all are of the greatest consequence. But I have none of the dog-in-the-manger spirit. I think there must be something almost maternal in my feeling for him, which is why it does not change. Were I less constant it would prove that my affection is of a lower kind, less enduring because less pure. I do not care to talk about him, but I think of him always. I think of him as I saw him last with the sun on him. Do you know his hair is like light gold with the sun on it. Sometimes the memory of him fades a little, and I cannot recall his features, and then I am tormented; but of course he comes back to me—so vividly that I have started often when I looked up and found myself alone, The desire to be with him never lessens; it burns in me always, and is both a pain and a pleasure. But my love is too great to be selfish. His wishes for himself are my wishes, and what is best for him is happiest for me. Am I never jealous? Jealous! No! Do you not know that he is mine, mine through every change? Neither time nor distance separates us really. No common tie can keep him from me. Let him be bound as and to whomsoever he pleases, his soul is mine, and must return to me sooner or later. I like him to be happy in any way that is right, for I know that what he gives to others is not himself. I was not fit for the dear earthly love, but perhaps, if I keep myself pure, body and soul, for him, I shall be made worthy at last, and of something better. And my love is so great it would draw him in spite of himself; but it will not be in spite of himself, for he will find by-and-by that he cannot live with a smaller soul, and then he will come to me. Do you not understand what I want? His soul—purified, strengthened, ennobled—nothing less will satisfy me; and his mother might ask as much. If I might be made the means of saving it—" Then after a little pause, she added: "Ah, how beautiful death is! He will be glad, as I should be now, to meet it— and yet more glad! for then the end will have come for him, but I

should have still to wait."

The rumour of Lorrimer's engagement, however, proved to be false. It was another Lorrimer, a cousin of his.

"Lorrimer is restored to your good graces now, I suppose," Claudia said, in her half sarcastic way, when the mistake was explained. I had not told her what was in my mind; she had read my thoughts. "You think that a man whom Ideala has loved should consider himself sacred," she added.

I did not answer. But I hold that all men who have felt or inspired great love will be sanctified by it if there be any true nobility in their nature; and I knew that one man, whom Ideala did not love, had been so sanctified by love for her, and held himself sacred always.

But it was a relief to my mind to know that Lorrimer was not unworthy. He was a distinguished man then, and I felt sure that he would become still more distinguished eventually. He was not one of the many who come and go, and are forgotten; but one of those destined to live for ever

In minds made better by their presence.

The good in his nature was certainly as far above the average as were his splendid abilities, and Ideala was right when she declared that she could answer for his principles. It is impulse that is beyond calculation, and for his own or another's impulses no wise man will answer.

Ideala continued to droop.

"She will never get over it;" I said to Claudia one day, when we were alone together.

"Indeed she will," Claudia answered, confidently. "Out of the depth of your profound ignorance of natural history do you speak, my brother. I dread the reaction, though. When it comes she will be overwhelmed with shame; but it will come. All this is only a phase. She is in a state of transition now. It is her pride that makes her

nurse her grief, and will not let her give him up. She cannot bear to think that she, of all women in the world, should have been the victim of anything so trivial as a passing fancy. Not that it would have been a passing fancy if they had not been separated; but as it is—why, no fire can burn without fuel."

Claudia had evidently changed her mind, and she might be right; but my own fear was that her first impression would be justified, and that Ideala would never be able to take a healthy interest in anything again.

"I cannot care," was her constant complaint. "Nothing ever touches me either painfully or pleasurably. Nothing will ever make me glad again."

She said this one evening when she was sitting alone with Claudia and myself, and there was a long silence after she had finished speaking, during which she sat in a dejected attitude, her face buried in her hands.

All at once she looked up.

"It is very strange," she said, "but half that feeling seems to have gone with the expression of it."

"I think," Claudia decided, in her common-sense tone, "that you are nursing this unholy passion, Ideala. You are afraid to give it up lest there should be nothing left to you. Can you not free your mind from the trammels of it, and grasp something higher, better, and nobler? Can you not become mistress of yourself again, and enter on a larger life which shall be full of love—not the narrow, selfish passion you are cherishing for one, but that pure and holy love which only the best— and such women as you may always be of the best—can feel for all? If you could but get the fumes of this evil feeling out of yourself, you would see, as we see, what a common thing it is, and you would recognise, as we recognise, that your very expression of it is just such as is given to it by every hysterical man or woman that has ever experienced it. It is a physical condition caused by contact, and kept up by your own perverse pleasure in it—nothing more. Every one grows out of it in time, and any

one with proper self-control could conquer it. You are wavering yourself. You see, now that you have crystallised the feeling into words, that it is a pitiful thing after all, that the object is not worth such an expenditure of strength—certainly not worth the sacrifice of your power to enjoy anything else. Such devotion to the memory of a dead husband has been thought grand by some, although for my part I can see nothing grand in any form of self- indulgence, whether it be the indulgence of sorrow or joy, which narrows our sphere of usefulness, and causes us to neglect the claims of those who love us upon our affection, and the claims of our fellow-creatures generally upon our consideration; but in your case it is simply——" Claudia paused for want of a word.

"You would say it is simply degrading," Ideala interposed. "I do not feel it so. I glory in it."

"I know," said Claudia, pitilessly. "You all do." And then she got up, and laid her hand on Ideala's shoulder. "It is time," she said, earnestly,

"It is time, O passionate heart and morbid eye, That old hysterical mock-disease should die."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

I hoped Claudia's plain speaking had made an impression, but for a long time after that it seemed as if Ideala's interest in life had really ended, that her sphere of usefulness had contracted, and that she herself would become like the rest—a doer of unconnected trifles that have meaning only as the straws have meaning which show which way the current sets. One cannot help thinking how many of these significant straws must go down to the ocean and be lost, their little use unrecognised, their little labour unavailing: because it does so little good merely to know which way the stream is setting, or what ocean will receive it at last, if we have no power to profit by the knowledge. At this time Ideala's own life was not

unlike one of these hapless straws, and it seemed a wretched failure of its early promise, that ending as a straw on the common stream, when so little might have made her influence in her own sphere like the river itself, strong and beautiful. Those who loved her watched her in her trouble with eager hope that some good might yet come of it; but the hope diminished always as the days wore on. At first her mind had raged and stormed; one could see it, though she said so little. Her renunciation was perfect, but nevertheless she could not reconcile herself to it. She would not go back, but she could not go on, and so she remained midway between the past, which was hateful to her, and the future, which was a blank, raging at both. But gradually the storm subsided; and then came a period of calm, but whether it was the calm of apathy or the calm of resignation it was hard to say—and meantime she lost her health again, and became so fragile that my sister only expressed what I felt when she was speaking of her one day, and said, sadly:

"Her cheek is so waxenly thin, As if deathward 'twere whitening in, And the cloud of her flesh, still more white, Were clearing till soul is in sight.

* * * * *

Her large eyes too liquidly glister! Her mouth is too red. Have they kissed her—- The angels that bend down to pull Our buds of the Beautiful, And whispered their own little Sister?"

We were anxious to take her abroad, but she would not accompany us. She talked of going alone, but she did not go, and after a time we gave up thinking about it. Then one day, quite suddenly, she said: "It is time this old hysterical mock-disease should die," and she told us that she had at last decided to travel—somewhere; nothing more definite than that, for she said she had no fixed plans. We concluded, however, that she meant to be away some time, for she said something about perils of the deep, and the uncertainty of life generally, and she confided her private papers to my care, telling me to look at them if they would interest me, and make what use of

them I pleased; and that was how those from which I have gathered much of her story came into my possession. And then she left us, and for a whole year we heard nothing of her—not one word. Claudia chafed a little, and complained, as women will when things do not arrange themselves exactly as they would have ordered them; but I was content to wait, and, because I expected nothing, the time did not seem so long as perhaps it might have done. We lived our usual life—part of the year in one of the eastern counties, and part in London, and then we came north again. It was winter weather, frosty and clear and bright, and I was tempted out a great deal, taking long rides, begun before sunset and ending by moonlight, and generally alone. And always when the world seemed most beautiful I thought of Ideala, and how she had loved its beauty— mountain and plain, flood and field, forest and flower, the snow and the sunshine, and all the alternations of light and shade; the wonders of form, and the depth and harmony of colour; the blue sky by day, with its glories of sunrise and sunset; the dark sky by night, with its moonlight and starlight—the sky always! that cloudland to which, when we are wearied by the more monotonous earth, we had only to lift our eyes and there the scene is changing for ever—the sky—and the sea:

In all its vague immensity!

Would she ever see it again in the old way? When she left us one might have said of her mental state:

O dark, dark, dark, amid the blaze of noon— Irrecoverably dark, total eclipse Without all hope of day!

And where was she now? and was she learning to see again? I own I sometimes had the presumption to think that if she had stayed with us I might have helped her. It seemed hardly credible that she should be able to stand alone at such a time, not to speak of the strength required to take her out of herself. And was not the loneliness itself an added misery? She never could bear to be alone, and I always thought the

worst trial of her married life was the mental solitude to which it had reduced her by making her feel the necessity for reserve, even with her best friends. Of course she had chosen to go alone; it was quite her own doing; but I could not help thinking, uneasily at times, that she would not have gone at all if she had not noticed how anxious we were about her, and fancied she could relieve us of our trouble by relieving us of her presence. That would have been so like Ideala! And then my thoughts would wander off, recalling her numberless little deeds of love, her perfect selflessness, and all the depth and beauty of her great and tender nature, as we do recall such things of one who has gone and will nevermore return, as in the old days, to make us glad. There was the day I had seen her from the club window stoop to pick up a little ragged barefooted child that was crying in the street, and wrap her furs about it and carry it off, smiling and happy, in her arms, with no more thought of the attention such an action would attract than if she had been alone with her waif in the desert. But many and many a time, and in many a way, she had made glad hearts by deeds like that; and now where was she? And was there never a one in the whole wide world to help her to bear her own sorrow and ease her pain?

One evening in particular I had been more than usually tormented by such thoughts. I had been blaming myself bitterly for having allowed her to go away alone, and when I rode up to my own door I was conscious of a half-formed resolution to follow her without delay and bring her back.

Claudia was standing on the steps in the crisp, fresh evening air, apparently watching for me. She put her arms round my neck when I alighted, and kissed me.

"Has she written?" I exclaimed, for Claudia was not demonstrative, and this meant something.

"She is here," was the answer.

My heart gave a great leap, but I could not ask if it were well with her. I could only look at Claudia, and wonder if it were the moonlight that made the expression of her

face so singularly content and sweet. I went into the lighted house, and being somewhat dazed and altogether too eager to see her at once, I dressed for the evening, leisurely, and then I went to find her. There was a change in the house already. It was lighted from top to bottom as befits a time of rejoicing, and our other guests, whom I passed in my search, seemed gayer—or I fancied so. She was not among them, but I took the liberty of going to her rooms and knocked at the sitting-room door, and entered. She rose to receive me, stretching out her hands, and my first impression was that she had grown; afterwards I understood that it was a change in the fashion of her dress that made it appear so. She wore a long robe, exquisitely draped, which was loose, but yet clung to her, and fell in rich folds about her with a grace that satisfied. I cannot describe the fashion of this robe, or the form, but I have seen one like it somewhere—it must have been in a picture, or on a statue of a grand heroic woman or a saint; and it suggested something womanly and strong, but not to be defined.

It was Ideala, herself—not as she had been, but as I always hoped she would be, and felt she might. She showed the change in every gesture, but most of all in her clear and steady eyes, which made you feel she had a purpose now, and a future yet before her. She looked as women look when they know themselves entrusted with a work, and have the courage and resolution to be true and worthy of their trust. She was very gracious, but somehow in the first moment of our meeting I felt abashed—abashed before this woman who had gone down to the verge of dishonour, but whose goodness, with the vitality of all goodness, had raised her again above the best; whose trouble had been to her, because of this goodness, as is a painful operation which must be gone through if the patient would ever be strong.

I fancy she thought me cold because my great respect made me shy, and I hesitated to show her all the joy I felt.

"Won't you kiss me once after my long, long voyage?" she said, holding up her face

like a child to be kissed. And it made me inexpressibly glad, to perceive that, while gaining in dignity and purpose, her character had lost none of the childlike faith and affection which had been one of the greatest charms of the old Ideala. I could not help examining her curiously, looking for traces of a conflict, for those lines of suffering which are generally left by fierce mental troubles like scars after a battle, showing that the fight has been no child's play, but a struggle for life or death. Such a conflict there must have been, but all trace of it was swept away by the wonderful peace that had succeeded it. Ideala looked younger, certainly, but the change showed itself most in her perfect serenity, and in the steadfast earnestness of her wonderful eyes.

But I had no time to talk to her, for Claudia, in diamonds and velvet and lace—her donning of which is her one way of expressing a satisfaction too deep for words—blazed in upon us. If it had occurred so her, she would certainly have had the bells of the parish rung— provided my authority as lay Rector could have accomplished such an extravagance. She took us away with her now to join our other guests, and when dinner was announced I offered Ideala my arm. She was silent as we went, but looked about her with a grave little smile on her lips, renewing her acquaintance with familiar objects, and noting every change. And so busy was she with her own reflections, so thoroughly absorbed, that, when we were seated at table, she put her serviette beside her plate and her bread on her lap mechanically, and took up her knife and fork to eat her soup. She seemed puzzled for a moment when she found that the implements did not answer, and then she laughed! Such a fresh, girlish laugh! It did one's heart good to hear her! Yes, verily! Ideala was herself again, absent-mindedness and all.

And before dinner was over a wonderful thing had happened. For whereas we had hitherto been the most commonplace and prosaic party imaginable, getting along smoothly, taking no particular interest in each other, or in anything else, and only remarkable for a degree of dulness which would have astonished us by its bulk could

it have been weighed and measured—to-night, for no apparent reason, we suddenly woke up and astounded ourselves by more originality than we had been accustomed to believe was left in the world altogether—while something put into our conversation just the right amount of polite friction to act as a counter-irritant, so that, when we left the table, each felt that he had been at his best—had been brilliant, in fact, and shone with lustre enough to make any man happy.

Once in a London theatre I saw an actress walk across the stage. She did not utter a word, she never looked at the audience, she was apparently unconscious of everything but what she had in her own mind; yet before she was half across the stage the people rose to their feet with a roar. Ideala's coming amongst us had produced some such startling effect; but her power was altogether occult. The audience knew what the actress meant, but we did not understand Ideala, and yet we applauded by laying our best before her, and acknowledged the charm of her presence in every word. She spoke very little, however. Indeed, I remember nothing she said until we went to the drawing-room. On the way thither Claudia had picked up a crumpled paper, and, glancing at it, had exclaimed—"Why, Ideala, here are some of your verses! Do you still write verses?"

It was curious that we all spoke as if she had been away for years.

"Yes," she answered, tranquilly; and Claudia coolly proceeded to read the verses aloud, a difficult task, as they were scribbled in pencil on half a sheet of note-paper, and were scarcely decipherable. Ideala, meanwhile, listened, with calm eyes fixed on vacancy, like one trying to be polite, but finding it hard for lack of interest.

"By Arno, when the tale was o'er, At sunset, as in days of yore, I wandered forth and dreamed. The sky above, the town below. The solemn river's silent flow, The ancient story-haunts I know, In varied colours gleamed.

By Arno calm my steps I stayed, Just where the river's bank displayed A tangled growth of weeds; Tall houses near, and on the right An arched bridge upreared its

height, And boats drew near, and passed from sight— I heard the tramp of steeds.

I heard, and saw, but heeded not; My feet were rooted to the spot, A fancy checked my breath. 'Twas here that Tito lay, I knew. His fair face upward to the blue, His velvet tunic soaking through, Most beautiful in death.

But Baldassarre was not there, 'Twas I that stooped to kiss the hair, Besprent with ooze and dew. Ah, God! light gold the locks caressed— I saw no Greek in velvet dressed— But wildly to my bosom pressed— Not Tito, love, but you!

The massive, godlike head and throat Belonged not to those days remote, The fine grey eye—the limb; It was the soul I know so well, So full of earth, and heaven, and hell, That came from out that time to dwell In you and make you him.

And I, the victim of your smiles, And I, the victim of your wiles, My vengeance shall prevail. The river Time shall float you nigh, And earth and hell your soul shall fly. And only heaven remain when I The deed triumphant hail!"

It surprised me to find that Claudia could read those verses to the end, their import—to me, at least—was so obvious. But Ideala continued unmoved; and when the little buzz of friendly criticism had subsided, she remarked, with unimpassioned directness:

"I am quite sure that all my verses are rubbish; but nevertheless they delight me. I should feel dumb without the power to make verses; it is a means of expression that satisfies when nothing else will. I always carry my last about in my pocket. I know them by heart, of course, but still it is a pleasure to read them; and so it continues until I write some more; and then I immediately perceive that the old ones are bad, and I destroy them—when I remember. Those were condemned ages ago, so please oblige me, Claudia, by putting them into the fire."

Claudia was about to obey, but I interposed. I had a fancy for keeping those verses. They are rubbishy if you will; but the sentiment which struggles to find expression in them is far from despicable.

No one smoked that evening; no one played billiards; no one cared for music; we just sat round the fire in a circle, and talked.

"And where have you come from, Ideala?" was the first question.

"From China," she answered.

There was a general exclamation. "I have been with the missionaries in China," she added.

"Oh, isn't it very strange, the life in China?" some one asked.

"It looks different," she said, "but its feels like our own. To begin with, one is struck by the strange appearance of the people, and the quaint humour of their art; but when the first effect wears off, and you learn to know them, you find after all that theirs is the same human nature, only in another garb; the familiar old tune, as it were, with a new set of variations. The like in unlikeness is common enough, but still the finding of a remarkable similarity in things apparently unlike continues to surprise us."

"But, Ideala, you cannot compare the Chinese to ourselves! Think of the state of degradation the people are in! Every crime is rife among them —infanticide is quite common!"

"Yes," said Ideala, as, if it were the most natural thing in the world. "Yes, doubtless, the lower classes in China kill their children; here, in certain districts, they insure them," Ideala concluded gravely.

"But then," said Claudia—"Oh! Ideala, I don't think you can establish your parallel. We all know the sort of a life a Chinese lady leads."

"When the lady is not at the head of her house it is certainly vacuous," Ideala agreed, "like the lives of our own ladies when they are not forced to do anything. Why, at Scarborough this year they had to take to changing their dresses four times a day; so you can imagine how they languish for want of occupation."

"Well, at all events, English girls are not sold into a hateful form of slavery," some one observed contentedly.

"Are they not?" Ideala rejoined with a flash. "I can assure you that both women and men, fathers, husbands, and brothers, of the same class in England, do sell their young girls—and I can prove it."

"We have the pull over them in the matter of marriage, then. We don't give our daughters away against their will as they do."

"That is not a fair way of putting it. A Chinese girl expects to be so disposed of, and accepts the arrangement as a matter of course. And the system has its advantages. The girl has no illusions to be shattered, she expects no new happiness in her married life, so that any that comes to her is clear gain. As to our daughters' inclinations not being forced, I suppose they are not, exactly. But have you never been conscious of the tender pressure that is brought to bear when a desirable suitor offers? Have you never seen a girl who won't marry when she is wanted to, wincing from covert stabs, mourning over cold looks, and made to feel outside everything—suffering a small martyrdom under the general displeasure of all for whom she cares, her world, without whose love life is a burden to her; whom she believes to know best about everything? As Mrs. Bread said about Madame de Cintre: 'She is a delicate creature, and they make her feel wicked'—and she ends by thinking any sacrifice light at the moment, if only it wins her back the affection and esteem of her friends."

Ideala had been carried away by her earnestness, and now she stopped abruptly, somewhat disconcerted to find every one listening to her. The ladies sat with their eyes on the floor, the gentlemen exchanged glances, but no one spoke for some time.

At last my sister made a move, and the spell was broken. We separated for the night, and many were the lady-like whispers that reached my ears, all ending in: "So like Ideala!"

But, as Ideala herself remarked on another occasion, "You can't sweep a room that requires it without raising a dust; the thing is to let the dust settle again, and then remove it."

CHAPTER XXIX.

Claudia did not see the change in Ideala all at once. She said: "She is looking her best, and is our own Ideala again—faults and all! How she talked last night!"

"Just in the old way," I agreed, "but with a difference; for in the old days she talked at random, but now I feel sure she has a plan and a purpose, and all that she says is part of it."

This suggested new possibilities to Claudia, and when Ideala joined us presently, she asked, abruptly: "Are you going back to China?"

Ideala answered deliberately: "I did think of becoming a missionary—that was why I went out there. But I know all radical reforms take time, and when I saw what the Chinese women were doing for themselves, and compared their state with our own, it seemed to me that there was work in plenty to be done at home, and so I returned. Certainly, the Chinese women of the day bind their feet. When a girl is seven or eight years old, her mother binds them for her, and everybody approves, If the mother did otherwise, the girl herself would be the first to reproach her when she grew up. It is wonderful how they endure the torture; but public opinion has sanctioned the custom for centuries, and made it as much a duty for a Chinese woman to have small feet as it is for us to wear clothes! And yet they do a wonderful thing. When they are taught how wrong the practice is, how it cripples them, and weakens them, and renders them unfit for their work in the world, they take off their bandages! Think of that! and remember that they are timid and sensitive in a womanly way to a degree that is painful. When I learnt that, and when I remembered that my countrywomen bind every organ in their bodies, though they know the harm

of it, and public opinion is against it, I did not feel that I had time to stay and teach the heathen. It seemed to me that there was work enough left yet to do at home."

"But, Ideala," Claudia protested, "what is the use of drawing degrading comparisons between ourselves and other nations? You gave great offence last night."

"I said more than I intended," she answered; "I always do. It was Tourgenieff, was it not, who said that the age of talkers must precede the age of practical reformers? I seem to have been born in the age of talkers. But I shall not say much more. Last night I did not really intend to say anything. You led me on. But I do want to make their hearts burn within them, and if I succeed, then I shall not care about the offence. An English-woman is nothing if she is not patriotic. She will not bear the humiliation, if she is made to see that she is really no better, with all her opportunities, than a much- despised Chinese. She would not like the contempt the women of that nation feel for her if she were made to acknowledge the truth—that she deserved it. And so much depends on our women now. There are plenty of people, you know, who believe that no nation can get beyond a certain point of prosperity, and that when it reaches that point it cannot stay there, but must begin to go down again; and they say that the English nation has now reached its extreme point. They compare it with Rome in the days which immediately preceded her decline and fall—when men ceased to be brave and self-denying, and became idle, luxurious, and effeminate; and women traded on their weakness, and made light of their evil deeds. It is a question of the sanctity of marriage now, as it was in the days of the decline of Rome. De Quincey traces her fall to the loosening of the marriage tie. He says that few indeed, if any, were the obligations in a proper sense moral which pressed upon the Roman. The main fountains of moral obligation had in Rome, by law or custom, been thoroughly poisoned. Marriage had corrupted itself through the facility of divorce, and through the consequences of that facility (viz., levity in choosing, and fickleness in adhering to the choice), into so exquisite a traffic of selfishness, that it could not yield so much as a phantom model of sanctity.

The relation of husband and wife had, for all moral impressions, perished amongst the Romans. And, although it is not quite so bad with ourselves at present, that is what it is coming to.

"But there are two sides to every question, and the one which we must by no means lose sight of just now is not that which shows the respects in which we resemble the Romans, so much as the one which shows the respects in which we differ from them. It is therein that our hope lies. And we differ from them in two important respects. We differ from them in the matter of experience, and in the use we are disposed to make of our experiences. We are beginning to know the rocks upon which they split, and we shall soon be making use of our knowledge to steer clear of them. But there is another respect in which we differ from all the older nations, not even excepting the Jewish. I mean morality. We have the grandest and purest ideal of morality that was ever preached upon earth, and, if we do but practise it, there is no doubt that the promise will be fulfilled, and our days as a nation will be prolonged with rejoicing.

"The future of the race has come to be a question of morality and a question of health. Perhaps I should reverse it, and say a question of health and morality, since the latter is so dependent on the former. We want grander minds, and we must have grander bodies to contain them. And it all rests with us women. To us is confided the care of the little ones—of the young bodies and the young minds yet unformed. Ours will be the joy of success or the shame of failure, and we should fit ourselves for the task both morally and physically by the practice of every virtue, and by every art known to the science and skill of man."

"Englishwomen could not sit still and know that their lovely homes will be wrecked eventually, and left desolate: that this country of theirs will become a wilderness of ruin, such as Egypt is, but rank and overgrown, its beauty of sweet grass and stately trees, and all its rich luxuriance of flowers and fruits and foliage plants, only

accentuating the ruin—bearing witness to the neglect. No, our greatness shall not depart. The decay may have begun, but it shall be arrested. I am not afraid."

"But if it is the fate of nations, Ideala——"

"I propose to conquer fate," said Ideala. "Fate itself is no match for one woman with a will, let alone for thousands! When horrid war is threatened, men flock to fight for their country; and they volunteer for every other arduous duty to be done. Do you think women are less brave? No. When they realise the truth they will fight for it. They will fly to arms. They will use the weapons with which Nature has provided them; love, constancy, self-sacrifice, their intellectual strength, and will. And so they will save the nation."

Claudia, the unimaginative, sat silent and perplexed.

"I would join," she said at last, "if I were quite sure——Oh, Ideala! it is not a sort of Woman's Rights business, and all that, you are going in for, is it? A woman can do good in her own sphere only."

Ideala laughed. "But 'her own sphere' is such a very indefinite phrase," she observed. "It is nonsense, really. A woman may do anything which she can do in a womanly way. They say that our brains are lighter, and that therefore we must not be taught too much. But why not educate us to the limit of our capacity, and leave it there? Why, if we are inferior, should there be any fear of making us superior? We must stop when we cannot go any further, and all this old-womanish cackle on the subject, the everlasting trying to prove what is already said to be proved—the looking for the square in space after laying it down as a law that only the circle exists—is a curious way of showing us how to control the 'exuberance of our own verbosity.' They say we shall not be content when we get what we want, and there they are right, for as soon as our own 'higher education' is secure we shall begin to clamour for the higher education of men. For the prayer of every woman worth the name is not 'Make me superior to my husband,' but, 'Lord, make my husband

superior to me!' Is there any more pitiful position in the world than that of a right-minded woman who is her husband's superior, and knows it! There is in every educated and refined woman an inborn desire to submit, and she must do violence to what is best in herself when she cannot. You know what the history of such marriages is. The girl has been taught to expect to find a guide, philosopher, and friend in her husband. He is to be head of the house and lord of her life and liberty, sole arbiter on all occasions. It is right and convenient to have him so; the world requires him to fill that position, and the wife prefers that he should. But the probabilities are about equal that he, being morally her inferior, will not be fit for it, and that, therefore, she will find herself in a false position. There will then be an interval of intense misery for the wife. Her education and prejudices will make her try to submit at first to what her sense knows to be impossible; but eventually she is forced out of her unnatural position by circumstances. To save her house and family she must rebel, take the reins of government into her own hands, and face life, a disappointed and lonely woman."

"Heaven help her!" said Claudia. "One knows that the future of a woman in that state of mind is only a question of circumstance and temperament; she may rise, but——"

Ideala looked up quickly. "But she may fall, you were going to say— yes. But you know if she does it is her own fault. She must know better."

"She may not be quite mistress of herself at the time—she may be fascinated; she may be led on!" I interposed, quickly. Claudia seemed to have forgotten. "But one thing is certain, if she has any real good in her she will always stop before it is too late."

"I think," said Claudia, "it would be better, after all, if women were taught to expect to find themselves their husbands' equals—the disappointment would not be so great if the husband proved inferior; but when a woman has been led to look for so much,

her imagination is full of dreams in which he figures as an infallible being; she expects him to be her refuge, support, and comfort at all times; and when a man has such a height to fall from in any one's estimation, there can be but little of him left if he does fall."

Ideala sighed, and after a short pause she said: "I have been wondering what makes it possible for a woman to love a man? Not the flesh that she sees and can touch, though that may attract her as the colour of the flower attracts. It must be the mind that is in him—the scent of the flower, as it were. If she finds eventually that his mind is corrupt, she must shrink from it as from any other form of corruption, and finally abandon him on account of it, as she would abandon the flower if she found its odour fetid—indeed, she has already abandoned her husband when she acknowledges that he is not what she thought him." She paused a moment, and then went on passionately: "I cannot tell you what it was—the battling day by day with a power that was irresistible because it had to put forth no strength to accomplish its work; it simply was itself, and by being itself it lowered me. I cannot tell you what it was to feel myself going down, and not to be able to help it, try as I would; to feel the gradual change in my mind as it grew to harbour thoughts which were reflections of his thoughts, low thoughts; and to be filled with ideas, recollections of his conversations, which had caused me infinite disgust at the time, but remained with me like the taste of a nauseous drug, until I almost acquired a morbid liking for them. Oh, if I could save other women from that!"

Claudia hastily interposed to divert her. "That is a good idea, the higher education of men," she said. "I don't know whether they have abandoned hope, or whether they think themselves already perfect, certain it is the idea of improving themselves does not seem to occur to them often. And we want good men in society. If the clergy and priests are good, it is only what is required of them, what everybody expects, and, therefore, their goodness is accepted as a matter of course, and is viewed as indifferently as other matters of course. One good man in society has more effect as

an example than ten priests."

"But you have not told us what you propose to do, Ideala?" I said.

"I hope it is nothing unwomanly," Claudia interposed, anxiously.

Ideala looked at her and laughed, and Claudia laughed too, the moment after she had spoken. The fear of Ideala doing anything unwomanly was absurd, even to herself.

"An unwomanly woman is such a dreadful creature," Claudia added, apologetically.

"Yes," said Ideala, "but you should pity her. In nine cases out of ten there is a great wrong or a great grief at the bottom of all her unwomanliness—perhaps both; and if she shrieks you may be sure that she is suffering; ease her pain, and she will be quiet enough. The average woman who is happy in her marriage does not care to know more of the world than she can learn in her own nursery, nor to see more of it, as a rule, than she can see from her own garden gate. She is a great power; but, unfortunately, there is so very little of her!

"What I want to do is to make women discontented—you have heard of a noble spirit of discontent? I thought for a long time that everything had been done that could be done to make the world better; but now I see that there is still one thing more to be tried. Women have never yet united to use their influence steadily and all together against that of which they disapprove. They work too much for themselves, each trying to make their own life happier. They have yet to learn to take a wider view of things, and to be shown that the only way to gain their end is by working for everybody else, with intent to make the whole world better, which means happier. And in order to accomplish this they must be taught that they have only to will it—each in her own family and amongst her own friends; that, after having agreed with the rest about what they mean to put down, they have only to go home and use their influence to that end, quietly, consistently, and without wavering, and the thing will be done. Our influence is like those strong currents which run beneath the surface of the ocean without disturbing it, and yet with irresistible force, and at a

rate that may be calculated. It is to help in the direction of that force that I am going to devote my life. Do not imagine," she went on hurriedly, "that I think myself fit for such a work. I have had conscientious scruples— been sorely troubled about my own unworthiness, which seemed to unfit me for any good work. But now I see things differently. One may be made an instrument for good without merit of one's own. So long as we do not deceive ourselves by thinking we are worthy, and so long as we are trying our best to become so, I think we may hope; I think we may even know that we shall eventually——" She stopped and looked at me.

"Be made worthy," said Claudia, kissing her; "and if it were not so, Ideala, if everybody had to begin by being as good themselves as they want others to be, there would be no good workers left in the world at all."

At this moment a noisy party burst in upon our grave debate and carried Ideala off for a ride. We saw them leave the house, and watched them ride away until the last glimpse of them was veiled by the misty brightness of the frosty air and the morning sunshine.

"How well she looks!" Claudia exclaimed; "better than any of them. She has quite recovered, and is none the worse."

"I do not know about recovery," I answered, dubiously. "She will never ——"

But Claudia interrupted hotly: "I know what you are going to say, and I do wish you would leave off speaking of Ideala in that way. Any one to hear you would suppose she had committed a sin, and you know quite well that that was not the case. If she acted without common prudence—and I will not deny that she did—it was entirely your own fault. She has never been intimate with any man but yourself, and you have made her believe that all men are like you. How could she harbour suspicion when she did not know what to suspect? Of course she saw everything wrongly and awry. The old life had become impossible to her, and she nearly made a mistake as to what the new one should be, that was all. I know she wavered for a moment, but

the weakness was more physical than moral, I think. Her vision was clouded at the time, but as soon as she was restored to health she saw things clearly enough. She is a great and good woman, pure-hearted and full of charity. God bless her for all her tenderness, and for her wonderful power to love. He alone can count the number who have reason to wish her well."

"That is true," I answered. "And I was merely going to remark, when you interrupted me, that she will never think herself 'none the worse'—"

"I don't see what difference that makes," Claudia again interposed. "She always did think herself least of the least when she thought of herself at all, and that was not often. You are dwelling too long on the past, really, and making too much of it. Men, when they are saints, are twice as bad as women."

I pointed out to my sister something confusing in her way of expressing the fact, but my kindness seemed to exasperate her.

"You know what I mean quite well," she said tartly.

"Yes, I know," I rejoined; "but I wanted to help you to make yourself intelligible to other people."

Claudia made a gesture of impatience, but laughed, and left me; and I remained for a long time thinking over all that Ideala had said, and also thinking of her as she looked at the time; and the subject was so inspiring that, although my strong point is landscape, in an ambitious mood I began to paint an allegorical picture of her as a mother nursing the Infant Goodness of the race. She saw it when it was nearly finished, but did not recognise herself, and exclaimed; "What a gaunt creature! and that baby weighs at least twelve stone!"

The picture was never finished.

CHAPTER XXX.

We soon found that Ideala, having at last put her hand to the plough, worked with a will, and although she was true to her principle that a woman's best work is done beneath the surface, I think her own labours will eventually make themselves felt with a good result in the world. But the life she has chosen for herself is martyrdom, and her womanly shrinking from the suffering she would alleviate is never lessened by use. Yet she does not waver. Other women admire her devotion, and follow in her footsteps; they do not doubt but that she has chosen the better part; but I fancy that most men who have seen her draw the little children about her and forget everything for a moment but her delight in them, have felt that there must be something wrong in the world when such a woman misses her vocation, and has to scatter her love to the four winds of heaven, for want of an object upon which to concentrate it in all its strength.

I do not know if her feeling for Lorrimer has changed. My sister declares in her positive way that of course it has, completely; but my sister is not always right. Ideala has never mentioned his name since she returned to us, nor given us any other clue by which we could judge. Only on one occasion, when some allusion was made to the course she had intended to pursue in the past, she exclaimed: "Oh, how could I!" and covered her face with her hands.

From where I sit just now I can see her walking up the avenue. She is as straight as an arrow, young-looking, and fresh. Her step is firm and light and elastic, and she moves with an easy grace only possible when every muscle is unconstrained. Her dress is a work of art, light in weight, but rich in colour and texture.

"What a beautiful woman!" I think involuntarily. I see her daily, and pay her that tribute every time we meet, for—

Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale Her infinite variety.

Her intellect and selflessness preserve her youth. She is changed, certainly. She has arisen, and can return no more to the lower walks, to the old purposeless life, and

desultory ways; but yet she is the same Ideala, and holds you always expectant—you, who see beneath the surface. The world will call her cold and self-contained till the end, and so she is and will be—a snow-crowned volcano, with wonderful force of fire working within. And she will not stop where she is; there is something yet to come—some further development—something more— something beyond! and she makes you feel that there is. What she says of other women is true of herself. "Do not stand in their way," she begs; "do not hinder them—above all, do not stop them. They are running water; if you check them they stagnate, and you must suffer yourself from their noisome exhalations. For the moral nature is like water; it must have movement and air and sunshine to stay corruption and keep it sweet and wholesome; and its movement is good works; its air, faith in their efficiency; its sunshine, the evidence of this and hope."

Comparative anatomists have proved that the human brain, from its first appearance as a semi-fluid and shapeless mass, passes in succession through the several structures that constitute the permanent and perfect brains of fishes, reptiles, birds, and mammalia; but ultimately it passes beyond them all, and acquires a marvellous development of its own. And so it is with the human soul. It must rise through analogous stages, and add to its own strength and beauty by daily bread of love and thought, growing to greatness by help of these aliments only, and reaching ultimately to such perfection as we cannot divine, for the end is not here. But we might reach it sooner than we do were it not for our own impatience. Growth is so exquisitely minute, it bursts upon us an accomplished fact. We know this, and yet we would see the process; and not seeing it we lose faith, waver, hesitate, stop, and recoil—a going back pour mieux sauter it is with the choicer spirit; but we all are deficient in hope, all have our retrograde moments of despair. We do not look about us enough to see what is being done for others, how they are progressing, by what strange paths they are led. We keep our eyes on our own ground too much, and, because we will not compare cheerfully, we think our own way the roughest, our

own journey the longest—if there be any end to it at all! Yet all the time we might see the end if only we would look up. And we need never despair and lag, need never be cold and comfortless, if we would but love and remember.

For, while the tired waves, vainly breaking, Seem here no painful inch to gain, Far out, through creeks and inlets making, Comes silent, flooding in, the main!

Ideala raises her eyes to mine now, and smiles as she passes beneath my window.

Another woman—a woman whom Claudia had long refused to know—is leaning on her arm, talking to her earnestly. And that is Ideala's attitude always. She gathers the useless units of society about her, and makes them worthy women. There is no kind of sorrow for which she has not found comfort, no folly she has not been successful in checking, no vice she has not managed to cure, and no form of despair which she has not relieved with hope. Her own experiences have taught her to sympathise with every phase of feeling, and be lenient to every shortcoming and excess. Wherever she is you may be sure that another woman is there also—some one with a sorrowful history, probably; and you may be equally sure that she is leaning on Ideala. God bless her!

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK IDEALA ***

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