



## WOMAN—A MAN'S IDEAL.

By J. ROGERS REES, Author of "The Pleasures of a Bookworm," etc.

THERE are few things so nobly pure as a true man's ideal of a maiden. We are optimistic enough to look upon the formation of such an ideal as indicative of the present existence of much that is sweet and good, and prophetic of infinite development in the direction of what is of undoubted worth to the future.

Our ideal is, after all, but a mental creation, in which are focussed the varied qualities we consider highest, the possession of which would make our own being rounded and complete;

"For I hold  
That what we seek is but our other self,  
Other and higher, neither wholly like  
Nor wholly different, the half-life the gods  
Retained when half was given."

Plato speaks of us as half-creatures wandering in search of ourselves through the world. How true then is it that one who looks around him for the maiden who shall answer heart with heart, is but seeking for his other half, making the while his "unconscious protest against the incompleteness of each separate nature."

Nothing more truly reveals a man's character than the picture he forms of the maiden he would find and win. It is hardly necessary to say that to him she is high above all others, "as a green leek growing above the grass, or a high-footed hart above wild beasts, or plumb-bright gold above grey silver." It is of no manner of use to pooh-pooh this matter of the ideal, and to say that a man never finds a woman equal to one-half his dream. I honestly believe that where a pure and healthy heart cries out for one of like purity, the answer is generally forthcoming. One may not always find

"The fairest woman that the poet's dream  
Or a tist hand has fashioned;"

and I think it a blessed arrangement that he doesn't. A man's ideal, when qualified by the saving grace of common sense, is often the truest truth. Though poets may sing of beauty, rare and divine, their song is mostly meant for those who read their verse, not for themselves.

I do not remember any sweeter picture of its kind than the one made by Lewis Morris out of these few simple words:—

"I knew  
A woman perfect as a young man's dream,  
And breathing as it seemed the old sweet  
air  
Of the fair days of old, when man was  
young  
And life an epic."

It is a sorry thing to have to add, just here, another to the many reasons already existing against indiscriminate reading of modern novels. But in truth we discover in their pictures of women, little for our sisters and daughters to imitate in their lives, or for our young men to appropriate in their formation of an ideal. How few pure and unselfish women do we find created by our novelists! but alas! how many that are either crafty or coldly clever, not to name the unnumbered multitude standing out as blots on God's fair universe! Let us turn rather to

such a song of unflinching trust in the existence of sweet purity, as "My Queen." Well-known as I believe it to be in some quarters, it certainly is worthy a place here:—

"Where and how shall I earliest meet her;  
What are the words she first shall say;  
By what name shall I learn to greet her?  
I know not now, but 'twill come some  
day.  
With the self-same sunlight shining upon  
her,  
Streaming down on her ringlets' sheen,  
She is standing somewhere, she I would  
honour,  
She that I wait for, my Queen, my  
Queen.

"I will not dream of her tall and stately,  
She that I love may be fairy light;  
I will not say she should walk sedately,  
Whatever she does, it will sure be right.  
And she may be humble, or proud, my  
lady,  
Or that sweet calm which is just between;  
But whenever she comes she will find me  
ready  
To do her homage, my Queen, my  
Queen.

"But she must be courteous, she must be  
holy,  
Pure in her spirit, that maiden I love;  
Whether her birth be noble or lowly,  
I care no more than the spirit above.  
And I'll give my heart to my lady's  
keeping,  
And ever her strength on mine shall  
lean;  
And the stars shall fall and the angels be  
weeping  
Ere I cease to love her, my Queen,  
my Queen."

There is a beautiful suggestiveness here of symmetry of soul—an altogether different thing from the laborious cataloguing of bodily perfections which we find in the trashy pages of much of our so-called literature. Even where it is necessary to draw the actual picture of a heroine, true art often borrows more from reticence than fulness; and in this direction we may gather many a lesson from the productions of the past. Chriemhild (or Kriemhild) is thus portrayed in the "Nibelungen Lied":—

"A right noble maiden  
Did grow in Burgundy,  
That in all lands of earth,  
Nought fairer mote there be:  
Chriemhild of Worms she hight."

Elsewhere she is described as "shapely to a wish." Then again, in an old chap-book version we find "Patient Grissell":—

"A fair and comely maiden,  
As she did sit a-spinning  
\* \* \* \* \*  
Most fair and lovely,  
And of comely grace was she,  
Although in simple attire."

She is addressed as—

"Thou famous flower,  
Fair mistress of this homely bower,  
Where love and virtue  
Dwell with sweet content."

Many of the noblest deeds of chivalry that men have done, and the purest emotions they have felt, have been prompted by the belief that women are pure, and true, and unselfish. We find the same characteristics of womanhood in Holy Writ: the Bible history is full of the noble lives of good women. In the "Laws of Manou" it is set down that wherever women are honoured the gods are satisfied. It certainly is a well-established truth that no man can sneer against the true woman, without showing himself to be impure and depraved: for does she not maintain God's work in man—"all that is lasting, noble, and truly human in the race, poetry, religion, virtue, tenderness"? Amiel contended that she does, and it seems scarcely possible to recognise her worth in any higher manner.

There is, however, a daily responsibility resting on women to preserve themselves ever worthy of this homage we men pay so ungrudgingly to them. "Men are quite willing," says a thoughtful author, "to admire and respect, and almost worship women, so long as they are genuine; but when the claim to respect is laid for them on false grounds, much of the enthusiasm vanishes." The same writer adds: "The age of chivalry is indeed past, in one sense; that is to say, the homage which men pay to women is not so demonstrative as it used to be. . . . It is not that men are more apt to sneer at women than they used to be, but that women nowadays fairly lay themselves open to attack."

O maidens! fair to behold, tender and true, see to it then that you maintain yourselves ever worthy of this worship we men hunger and thirst to pay you—this devotion of our best thoughts, our choicest imaginings, our highest achievements. By your own priceless truth and purity—your womanhood, in short—continue to hold power over us, as the moon o'er the mighty waters of the deep.

"O woman! . . .  
. . . . We had been brutes without you.  
Angels are painted fair to look like you.  
There's in you all that we believe of  
heaven:

Amazing brightness, purity, and truth,  
Eternal joy, and everlasting love."

In the light of the high ideal of womanhood which pure-minded men possess, it is pleasant to read the responsive declaration made by the late Mrs. S. C. Hall: "I am quite sure," she says, "that the leading, guiding, and controlling impulse of women is to render themselves agreeable and helpful to men, whether by beauty, gentleness, forethought, energy, intelligence, domestic cares, home-virtues, toil—assistance, in 'hours of ease,' in sickness, or amid the perplexities, anxieties, disappointments, and labours that environ life; it is so, and ever will be so, in spite of the 'strong-minded' who consider and describe as humiliation that which is woman's glory, and should be her boast."