

IDEALS AND PROGRESS.

Look at it how you will, Ideals are, after all, the really practical side of life—and Progress is the outcome of Ideals.

The intensely practical side of the Ideal forms the kernel of that epoch-making inaugural address recently delivered by the incoming President of the United States to that intensely practical and money-getting collection of men and women, absorbed from all portions of the habitable world into one great whole, the American nation. That address was ably summarised in the *Spectator*:—"The nation had at length made up its mind to 'square every process' of its life with the ideals set up at the beginning." Here speaks the idealist indeed.

It is doubtful whether the true Idealist has ever been, what he has, with a pitying contempt been labelled, merely a dreamer of dreams. Jesus, the Christ, an utter failure to the eyes of his contemporaries, with Peter and John his more immediate followers, and that whole body of idealists called Christians, succeeded in revolutionising the position of women, in spreading civilisation and culture wherever their influence penetrated, in providing for the sick, in laying the foundations of what we now term education, in evolving through the course of nineteen centuries the wholly ideal principle of the rights of the weak. These men were no dreamers, but practical idealists: progress could not but be the outcome of their work.

The real truth of the matter is that whilst the sensible, matter-of-fact men and women who form the majority, the immense majority of our population, are excellent in their way, and serve to carry on the business of the world quietly and unostentatiously on a business footing, it is the practical idealists who supply the principles of government, initiate reforms, influence public opinion, and maintain the standard of right living, without which races and individuals must alike perish.

Every social reformer must necessarily be an idealist. So must every pioneer. And, once their ideals have passed into reality, we no longer call them idealists, but practical reformers, forgetting that these men and women were first idealists and thinkers, secondly fighters, and lastly, after they had won through a deep slough of opprobrium and misrepresentation, progressive reformers. Looking back upon their work, we are too apt to see merely the fact of the reform consummated, and forget the deep thought, the noble aspira-

tion, the courageous and inspiring idealism which preceded action.

There is abundant reason why progress must necessarily be the outcome of ideals. Most of the human family are born with a hedge about their lives, which limits their vision, emphasises their inherited selfishnesses, obstructs their growth, and shepherds them gently down the path called "What Everybody Does." Your hedge is not, of course, my hedge—yours may be of sweetly scented honeysuckle, mine of thorny cactus, whilst my friend's over the way is of the toughest yew, with poison berries. But they all serve the same purpose: they hold an equal danger. Try to pass through your honeysuckle: the interlacing stems, flowery and delicious, hold you back as effectually as the rough stubby yew, and my thorny, touch-me-not cactus leaves. The name of your hedge may be on the one side "Nobody Does," and on the other "What Will the Neighbours Say?" of my friend's, "It Wouldn't Look Well," and "We Never Did It At Home"; of mine, "I Can't Help It," and "Why Should I Bother About What Doesn't Concern Me?"

Oh yes, after all, the journey down "What Everybody Does" Street is with hundreds of thousands of cases summarised very aptly in the old ditty:—"Jonathan Grundy was born on Monday, Christened on Tuesday, Married on Wednesday, Lived on Thursday Better than Friday, Died on Saturday, Buried on Sunday—and there's an end of Jonathan Grundy." And all because of their hedge which they couldn't push through, and did not even want to push through. There is no help for them unless soft-winged Ideals come to bear them upwards, teaching them first to look over their hedge into the great, unknown, terrible world beyond, where men and women, yes, and children, are wrestling with nature, and fighting with science, and succumbing to the demons of sloth and want and riches and disease, and then inspiring them to soar upwards, above and over their hedge, mounting on the wings of noble aspiration and of steadfast purpose, until they reach the golden æther of Progress which culminates at the gate of Heaven.

Ideals they were which opened the eyes and enlightened the minds and carried the reforms of a Shaftesbury, a Maurice, a Kingsley, a Florence Nightingale, an Agnes Jones, a John Howard. Ideals again which inspired the constancy of the martyrs of all ages, wringing from a reluctant heathendom the tribute of conversion. Ideals have given us the eternal truths of a Bible, a Dante, a Ruskin, a Marcus Aurelius. The Ideals of Faith and Hope and

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