

"Don't you think"—she leant forward a little, and I was impressed by the eager youthfulness of her face—"don't you think the only thing to do with our fellow-beings is to take them at their best—to look out all for the best in them? I have an idea—and I don't believe it is altogether a fanciful idea—that the more persistently one digs out the good in everybody, the more the good rises to the surface."

"If there is any good to rise," the lady of the red gown murmured. But there was no longer malice in her tones; she only spoke doubtfully.

"Oh, surely there is always good to rise in everybody, if one only digs deep enough." Miss Larpent's blue eyes shone with a wonderful light. "It is only a matter of going to the right depth." And she laughed a deliciously youthful laugh, which somehow had the effect of making one think of spring and growing things, and the songs of birds, and gladness.

It was an extraordinary thing how the whole atmosphere of that hotel lounge seemed to have changed since the blue-eyed lady came into it. She brought with her an atmosphere of her own, and it spread through the whole place, as a current of fresh air spreads through a stuffy room; and again I was struck, as I had been struck at her first entrance, by the way in which spiteful gossip died away at her coming. Something about her very presence had the effect of checking spitefulness and sharp tongues.

Presently those immediately round us drifted away to their cards or other amusements, and the white-haired lady and I were left practically alone in our corner.

"I wonder you can be patient with such shameless gossips," I said. "Before you came in they were tearing people's reputations to pieces in a most shocking way. They belong to the class of persons who cheerfully does 'others to death with slanderous tongues.'"

For an instant a shadow fell over her serene face. Then she smiled again.

"They have so little to do or to think about excepting their neighbours," she said. "But do you know that in both of them there is a best—quite a big best? The lady in the red gown is more than kind to the over-worked girl in the bureau here. She has given her lots of little treats; she always chats to her pleasantly. And the little fair lady has a small child to whom she is devoted. Her one child makes her feel kindly to all children."

"You must have done a great deal of spade work—