

roar. If one sat silent and listened, the noise appeared extraordinary.

In spite of its large size, the room was oppressively hot; high over head the glass roof was obscured by clouds of tobacco smoke; the electric light shone down as through a fog; there were warm odours of cooked food.—It would be dreadful to enter from the pure air outside.

Now the chairman is speaking again. Not a speech this time; he has merely to announce that a young lady will sing to the assembled diners.

A fat and grey accompanist has come in with a girl, and led her to the estrade. The men turn on their chairs to hear the singing girl. Nearly all are perspiring slightly, and the electric light shows upon greasy noses and bald heads. Old men, as suddenly the faces turn, look haggard, worn out, half dead; middle-aged men look pallid, unhealthy, overwhelmed with fatigue; even the young men look weary, feeble, stupefied. All are smoking. Some puff at big cigars dreamily, thoughtfully, while the girl sings in her clear contralto; some have fish-like eyes and lower jaw dropping, as they sit in easy attitudes with a hand hanging loosely upon the back of a neighbour's chair; some, elated, whisper loudly. No one is drunk, but nearly all of them are affected by alcohol.

And the song is sweetly pretty, and the girl seems clean and kind. It is a princess, who for amusement is singing to a herd of swine. It is a girl, forced by need of bread to offer her charms to the bread-holding men. It is a blameless prostitution, as of one who strips herself naked to be painted by men. Timidly, yet frankly, she offers her youth, her grace, her fresh, kind voice for the pleasure of these replete men.

As they sit thus—so ugly to view in their clumsy lolling pose,—who can say the thoughts behind the stupid masks? The food has warmed them, the wine confused them; the music stirs their pulses, sends perhaps a gentle fire flowing through their extended veins. And, most wonderful yet true, there rise here and there splendid, if broken thoughts: noble aspirations, lofty aims, repentant vows—to be great, to be strong, to be chivalrous; to be brave in facing danger, to be tender in sheltering weakness; to turn from sensual joys and seek spiritual happiness.

Thought is so rapid.

The song is ended: all the thoughts are gone. The