

## BEAUTY OF COUNTENANCE --WHENCE?

**I**F we investigate the foundation of that which, in common parlance, passes for beauty of countenance, we shall find it to consist in a certain regularity of leading features. The Greek *ideal* displays a certain accord between the line of the forehead and that of the nose. That this produces a feeling of completeness with regard to the upper part half of the face is certain, because a nose, set on at an angle, seems as if it were stuck into the face rather than belonging to it. The upper lip is short, and the lips themselves the reverse of prominent. This also adds to the regularity of the countenance, inasmuch as a long upper lip, or lips pushed out, as in the negro, could not harmonize with the higher facial line, but must disturb it. Thus far we can account for the greater elegance of the Greek ideal cantour; the rest seems to be made out by sharpness of feature, by smoothness and decision of outline, by the absence of angles, and the idea of repose which a face so chiselled is sure to convey—for on “the human face divine,” as on the ocean, smoothness and repose are convertible terms. Such faces are ever, in words, admitted to be handsome. They possess nothing to offend and much to conciliate both the eye and the imagination—and hence the effect of such a countenance is pleasing, as far as it goes. But how far does it go? In the answer to that question comes our difficulty, inasmuch as it informs us that this sort of beauty, in practice, is often found to go a very little way indeed. So far from being a uni-

versal enchantment, *it enchants only a few*; and of this few many escape from the spell before they have well felt it, and are peradventure unchained, ultimately, by some countenance almost the reverse of this, as far as the Greek ideal is concerned. A result so perplexing of course sets us theorising again; and after much cudjelling of our brains and travail of our wits, we sagely find out that such countenances, though not “regularly handsome,” are “interesting.” What is the meaning of that? Why, that they contain something which interests us; which something is not contained in the regularity of a Greek or Roman ideal. Then comes the question, what *is* that something? and in the answer lies the solution of the difficulty for difficulty it is. That which forms the “interesting,” in contradistinction to the “beautiful” or the “handsome,” is, in plain terms, the expression of intellect and feeling. This accounts for the whole. This expression does not reside in the leading features, but in those minuter lines of the countenance upon which all the expression of the intellectual processes depends. In the countenances of most intellectual persons, whether male or female, the variety and play of expression is so varied and so perpetual, as totally to overcome the want of ideal regularity in the greater leading features; and hence such persons obtain a firmer and more lasting hold upon our imaginations and sympathies than mere regularity of feature can achieve. The one is inexhaustible, and never fails; the other is seen at a glance, and tires by mere repetition. Their junction in one face would be the