

By no means. There are consolations, and I am going to try to administer them to any girl who, strictly between ourselves, is inclined to confide her grief to me.

The first consolation is that, as a means of attraction, beauty is not all-important, as the girl who is not beautiful is apt to suppose. The best-loved women are often plain. The author of *John Halifax* wrote a story—perhaps not a very great success—called *The Woman's Kingdom*, in order to prove this. Fiction cannot prove such a point; but in sober fact I have known plain girls—and very plain girls—succeed everywhere in social life. They were never neglected for an instant in gatherings of young people; they married happily and soon, and enjoyed troops of friends.

"They were rich," says one cynic. They were nothing of the sort. They were simply of the kind described by the misused adjective "nice;" bright, unselfish to a degree, full of the tact that wins confidence, never self-conscious, never at a loss, and always able to talk pleasantly. They could at once outshine any beauty of the "icily regular, splendidly null" type. This is literally true, and I could give names did I choose.

The form of one's features is outside one's own control; but matters of more consequence to personal charm are within one's own control.

Once again I disclaim the theory that a girl's happiness depends upon her marrying. But it does depend on her being able to gain affection in whatever walk of life she selects. Both men and women are influenced by appearance, but both, I repeat, are more susceptible to the charm of manner and disposition I have described. Nothing can be more disastrous to a plain girl than to say in effect: "I am too ugly: nobody cares for me," and enfold herself in a sullen gloom. She is avoided then, it is true, but in nine cases out of ten the avoidance is due to her unpleasant behaviour rather than to her personal defects.

Very few faces are so plain that there is no charm anywhere about them, and I have known even a sadly-marred countenance sweet to look upon by reason of its beautiful expression.

It is every girl's duty to make the best of herself, and girls who think themselves plain, ought to be, if anything, more careful in every little detail than their sisters of acknowledged beauty. How often one is sorry to see a girl who evidently has so poor an idea of her appearance, that she thinks it not worth while to take any trouble about it! She may have one good point but she omits to make the best of it. If, for instance, she has abundant hair, it is screwed up anyhow. Then she holds herself ill. There are few girls who could not cultivate an erect and graceful bearing if they chose, but one of the first results of the consciousness of plainness is an awkward, ungainly carriage.

Too often the "plain girls' hat and dress are chosen with no view whatever to the tints of her complexion and colour of her eyes. There is an art in all these little matters which is worth studying, but she has not thought it necessary to give any attention to it. What a marvellous difference this makes! The plain girl, of all girls, cannot afford to neglect the make and the hue of her frock, the shape of her hat, her gloves and her boots. These apparent trifles may make all the difference as to whether she is attractive or repellent in her personal appearance; and I am not ashamed to reiterate, this is a matter of importance. No matter how learned, how highly educated, how conscious of inner superiority, a girl may be, she has no business to neglect her looks. They are, as Aristotle said, the best credential, "better than any letter of introduction."

I need not explain how absurd it is to

devote too much time and thought to exterior details, for after all they are but the herald of the inner nature; if that is poor and mean, it is a commonplace to say that the most fascinating aspect will pall and prove a bitter disappointment.

This side of truth has been so much insisted upon that perhaps the other side has been a little overlooked—that the most estimable and worthy young woman finds it difficult to impress other people with her good qualities, unless she has something about her of personal charm.

So, while I sympathise sincerely with girls who are weighed down by a consciousness of their own plainness, I can honestly encourage them, and urge them above all things not to sink into a state of discontent, but to "make the best of themselves" in every possible way, avoiding morbid self-consciousness, but trying just to be as kind, and unselfish and agreeable as they know how. The rest will take care of itself.

Ill-health—the second half of our subject—is a far more serious trouble. Here again we can rejoice in a more rational tone of thought in modern days. There used to be a sort of unexpressed idea abroad that there was something "unladylike" and unfeminine in robust health, and that it was interesting to cultivate a delicate pallor and have a small appetite. A certain class of religious fiction, in which the heroine was wont to wear a hectic flush and sweetly fade away to an early grave, promoted this nonsense, and many young girls liked to imagine themselves prone in their last sleep, on a white couch thickly strewn with lilies, hands crossed upon their breast. This rubbish—mischievous rubbish too—is happily being swept away. Tennis, rowing, and swimming, even cricket, bicycling, outdoor exercise of every kind, is creating a different ideal. If I chance now to address a girl hovering on the borders of invalidism, let me urge her to take care of her health by every means in her power. There is so much advice on this subject given in *THE GIRL'S OWN PAPER* that I need not enlarge; only suggesting the thought to a would-be unselfish girl, that it is the truest kindness to other people not to overtask strength, and neglect hygienic laws.

"If I be dear to someone else

Then I should be to myself more dear.  
Shall I not take care of all that I think,  
Yea, ev'n of wretched meat and drink?  
If I be dear,  
If I be dear to some one else."

This advice needs emphasising; and it may be said, in passing, to London girls, that tea and white bread and butter do not form a properly nutritious meal!

If there be one surviving of the class of girl who is inclined to be hypochondriacal, to lie about on sofas, to be continually taking her own temperature by a clinical thermometer, to assume languishing airs, I must beg her to fight against the tendency before she becomes an invalid in real earnest.

Setting aside the girlish *malade imaginaire*, now happily fast becoming extinct, let me acknowledge at once that to inherit a weakly frame, to be handicapped in the journey of life by some physical defect one is unable to help, is a most terrible trial, and calls for the exercise of the very strongest self-control, devotion, and patience. "The heart knoweth its own bitterness." No one, not even the kindest and tenderest nurse, can quite enter into the feelings of an invalid; can understand how long the hours are when sleep is impossible; how weary the confinement indoors becomes, day after day, nor how occupations pall; how hard it is to avoid letting drop the peevish word, the bitter complaint, when other girls are carrying on their

free and happy life all around, and some—perhaps not very serious—physical ailment is ever present to fetter and disable. Is it not hard to repress the bitter inward outcry, "Why hast Thou made me thus?"

It is hard. But again there are compensations; and it is well to remember that when one is young there is more hope of recovery than often appears. Then again we must try to grasp the fact, especially important in this very material age, that, valuable as physical health may be, it is not everything. Some of the best work of the world has been done by delicate and suffering women. The greatest women poets of England—Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Christina Rossetti—were both physically frail, and the former, before her marriage, was a prisoner to her couch, contemplating death as her only deliverer. The greatest—or one of the greatest—women novelists, Charlotte Brontë, was of poor health, and the story of her sisters is well known. The exquisite lines of Anne Brontë may be quoted here—

"I hoped that with the brave and strong

My portion'd task might lie,  
To toil amid the busy throng  
With purpose pure and high;  
But God has fixed another part,  
And He has fixed it well;  
I said so with my aching heart  
When first this trouble fell.

These weary hours will not be lost,

These days of misery,  
These nights of darkness, tempest-tost,  
Can I but turn to Thee,  
With secret labour to sustain  
In patience every blow,  
To gather fortitude from pain,  
And holiness from woe.

If Thou shouldst bring me back to life,  
More humble I should be,  
More wise, more strengthened for the  
strife,  
More apt to lean on Thee;  
Should death be standing at the gate,  
Thus should I keep my vow:  
But, Lord! whatever be my fate,  
O let me serve Thee now!"

These words express far better than I can do the "sweet uses of adversity" found in frail health.

"But Anne Brontë and the others you have named were women of genius," some one may reply. "Of what good can I be?"

The great temptation besetting the girl-invalid, especially when hope grows dim, is to feel bitterly "I am of no use. I am only a trouble to those about me." Often the secret repining goes on so far as to say, "I wish I were dead."

The very greatest good possible for man or woman to accomplish may be wrought by an invalid who turns her suffering to the account of character-discipline; who presents to others the lovely spectacle of a nature purified by pain, heroic in self-sacrifice. No active work in the world can be of half so much consequence as this; to reveal to those around one something of the Divine grace and might. "Can religion do this?" they ask; and honour in silent reverence its power, which by Divine alchemy can so transform base metal into gold.

Is not this worth while? It is a difficult task; but the sufferer who sets her whole nature to it, trusting in a strength higher than her own, and never yielding to despair, may yet be able to deserve the exquisite praise given to Caponsacchi by Brownings's "Pompilia."

"Through such souls alone  
God stooping shows sufficient of His light  
For us if the dark to rise by."