

Lessard read this half a dozen times. He knew Firmalden well—as much by intuition as by a long acquaintance—and he understood, from the abrupt, curt sentences, that his friend was labouring under very strong emotion when he penned that letter. But his own astonishment and chagrin had to find their vent before he could consider Firmalden's troubles. If Lady Marlesford had no serious grievance, every one of his own secret hopes fell to the ground. A piqued woman is nearly always a desperate woman; a piqued woman who feels that she has been in two dangers—one of wronging the innocent, and the other of wronging herself—will nearly always devote the rest of her life to acts of atonement.

"Why is it my fate," asked Lessard, "to love fanatical, religious women? First, a stony Puritan and now this wayward Catholic—and both of them mad on the subject of virtue in its maddest form! They would both think *Isolde* immoral, and *l'union libre* an abomination. In the interest of a multitude of Philistines they are right, but the highest type of individual is sacrificed. This, I suppose, is the common law of life. Man is martyred for his ideals, slain for his crimes, but pampered for his hypocrisy. 'Conform to the law in public, and we'll give you special charters for your private freedom.' We are ruled by Pharisees and official liars who make good women captives, most men liars, and the whole of creation miserable!"

This was what he thought; for he was a rebel.