

I D E A L.

(The artist speaks.)

I D E A L, are they? Nay, they're true
 To very life. The tints, the flower-like grace,
 The swaying form, the poise of head sublime,
 The rapt expression of the dreaming face,
 Are hers; I've seen her look so, many a time.
 You've not? so much the worse for you.

And his; throw the light on that side.
 His own bright look just when about to speak, —
 A half-smile on the lips, the young man's joy
 In life, and strength, and youth; 't were vain to seek
 To make him handsome as he was, poor boy!
 Too young? But thirty when he died.

Why, blind man, what would you advise?
 Shall we paint in the cares that come and go,
 The pain with which this sickly world is curst,
 The little ills that hover to and fro, —
 Take every face and paint it at its worst?
 It's truth, say you? Half-truths are lies.

Each face has clear identity;
 And down beneath the dust and stains of earth,
 The lines and scars with which it seems o'ergrown,
 It shines as God intended at its birth,
 As it will shine before the great white throne
 When we are in eternity.

Sometimes we see this soul-face shine
 From out the mask which mortals here must wear,
 When youth counts back but few bright years of life;
 Sometimes when aged eyes, grown dim with care,
 Count forward but few years to end the strife,
 We catch the ideal light divine.

Let us still paint, then, the ideal, —
 Our God's ideal of us at our best;
 Paint it in heavenly hues, and fix it fast
 With prayer and earnest love within our breast,
 Strive hourly to grow like it, till, at last,
 The ideal shall become the real.

Constance Fenimore Woolson.