

THE HISTORY OF LOVE.

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THE great writers of all times have held themselves well away from grave and formal discussion of the sentiment of love. Humanity, charity, benevolence, friendship, have been subjected to abundant literary treatment, but the moralist and the general students of nature have for reasons, known and unknown, passed by in silence that tumult of the heart, which in youth writes love letters, sends gifts of flowers, quotes much poetry, grows sad and happy, thinks alternately of paradise and prison, and which sings and swears and laughs and sighs until the end is reached in a suicide or a wedding. Michelet has indeed furnished a treatise upon L'Amour, but his thoughts will be found grouped around only one single stage of this ailment, and around that stage only as

seen in an idle French woman in her early married life. His book is the history of a day, and not of an epoch, and the picture of some one person, and not of the human heart. It will be the task, delightful and useful, of some Lecky or Draper to compose a history of this powerful passion, just as it was the task of Alger to compose a life of the notion of immortality, and as it was the work of Taylor to record a history of enthusiasm. Love is, indeed, an enthusiasm, and also an immortality.

Such a treatise has, no doubt, been kept back by a reluctance upon the part of profound thinkers to treat with dignity and soberness a sentiment so marred, as they imagine, by association with guitars and perfumed envelopes and bouquets, and with adjectives and adverbs, but it is probable that our profound thinkers are as much over-dressed in their robes of dignity as our lovers are over-bedecked by their clothing and their adjectives. The philosopher

may be guilty of two errors—he may, perhaps, underrate the average quality of the love affair, and he may, to a similar degree, overrate the virtues of himself. If there is not much in the average human heart, it is probable that in the head of the philosopher there may be an equal scarcity of things of real worth. Indeed, no supreme court has yet handed in its opinion that the human race, in its temple of religion or porch of intellectual research, is any greater than the same race in its wide and amazing subjection to this sentiment of love. It is tacitly assumed that there is something very childish and silly in such seven-year courtships as those conducted by that character in the Bible, and by all similar waitings and longings, be they long or short, but there are no visible grounds for such assumptions, and hence the whole question of the fact and value and beauty of this one passion lies before our times an open question.

Let us hope, therefore, that our era, which is more fond of tracing the natural history of an idea than the path of some captain or some king, will sooner or later furnish our libraries with a biography of that strange affection of the heart which has attacked, with more or less violence, all the mortals who have appeared upon this earthly scene.

The career of this disturbance, which is both a convalescence and a decline, a blush of health and a pallor, a giant and an invalid, repeats the general theory of the new philosophy of development, for, in the barbaric races, love is as narrow and as humble as are the languages and the arts. In the savage tribes love exists only in a most elementary form. And, indeed, by barbaric, not only the Indian or the negro is meant, but also all that expanse of territory covered even by the songs of Homer or of Solomon. Attachments between man and woman were weak and epheme-

ral. The cruelty charged upon a Hebrew psalm-weaver on account of his having taken possession of the beautiful wife of one of his captains, is fully equalled by the willingness with which the wife passed over from the first fireside to the second. The tears shed over that affair did not fall in the Hebrew age; they have fallen in those later periods, which have reached a new appreciation of the word home, and the relations under its roof. Helen in Homer did not seem to care much in what tent she hung up her embroidered garments. From the immortal song we learn that this same Helen was an ideal woman of that early Greek period. She was so exceedingly beautiful that about a score of chiefs began to quarrel over her when she was only ten years of age; and when she was a little older, the great men of the land began to enlist armies that they might possess this exquisite jewel of a girl. All the female charms

and virtues known to Greece in that day met in this one name, and therefore she stands as a mark to show us how high the sentiment of love ever rose in that epoch; and when we recall the apparent facility with which this representative woman attached herself to Theseus and Pirithous and Menelaus and Paris and Deiphobus, we must conclude that in her day, the sentiment of love must have been only a few removes from the parallel appetite in the kingdom of brutes. Compared with the modern Evangeline and Lucille, Helen was a poor specimen of high womanhood. But she was on the same general level with the beauties which graced the low harems of David and Solomon.

Beyond doubt, dreams of something better came at times to those old periods. In Penelope, Homer seems to have had a prophetic vision of an ideal attachment, but Penelope was chained to the absent Ulysses more by

politics than by romance, and, indeed, the wanderer would return, not so much to see her as his old love, as to save the little kingdom and the annual income. Penelope represented considerable property. Such chieftains as Ulysses held their petty kingdoms only by the law of might. The suitors who made night hideous in the palace were not pure worshippers of beauty, but they were adventurers, on the look out for what the Queen was attempting to hold in the shape of money and lands. The fights in and around the palace, the efforts of Telemachus to expel the suitors, his subsequent journey in search of his father, the return of the lost hero, and his assault upon the men who were waiting for the hour for a successful *coup d'etat*, assure us that Penelope was standing guard, not simply over an old love affair, but over the property, real and personal, of herself and Telemachus. In this story of the faithful Queen, we can detect,

therefore, only faint traces of such a friendship as was to be seen between man and woman in some subsequent date in Christian history.

One of the early Greeks, coming just after the Homeric age, objects to marriage, on the ground that when a man takes such a partner he will be annoyed by her wish to eat with him at his table. It was thus a form of calamity to have at the same board what modern times would call the kind eyes and bright face of the wife. It must be avoided, and the true, philosophic mind must be slow to form a friendship which might make a companion of some beauty, who should be in the kitchen or in the garden while the noble husband should be breaking his bread and sipping his wine. If Lord Byron made the remark that he could not bear to see a woman eat, that fact would relegate him back to the low period just alluded to, for that desire for isolation from the society of noble womanhood is pretty well known to

come from a quality of soul which does not love to look its victim in the face. It indicates that passions of a low order have risen in power above all the finer forms of thought and emotion, that words and the general exchange of ideas are unable to bring any pleasure, and that woman, to be anything, must be only a party to a flirtation or a darker intrigue. What was exceptional in Lord Byron was a common sentiment in early Greece. The poet Simonides, in a poem describing the different kinds of women that had filed along before his point of review, tells us indirectly that in most of the classic homes there were domestic broils of a very extreme character—that the words, “Take thee for better or worse, &c., to love and cherish,” had not yet come into the marriage relations of his generation. He mentions the ugly woman as being one at whom men hoot and laugh in the street, thus plainly showing that the sentiment of love had not yet

learned to make any high estimate of spiritual and mental qualities, and that Greece had no such chivalry and romance as may now be found in England and America, where woman is not laughed at on the street, and where a bright mind and a cheerful heart will rival the highest beauty in the art of entrapping a husband.

When the Greeks had made a laughing stock of all the homely women, they found another class equally worthy of ridicule—the class that was fond of personal decoration. This awful creature took baths daily, and made use of perfumed oils. She was such a barbarian that she did her hair up in tresses, and was even so self-conceited as to put flowers into that well-combed hair. Such a woman, says the poet, will make her husband “familiar with poverty.” In an age when such sentiments appeared in popular poetry, marriage must have been very much like the purchase

of an ox or a horse—a careful study of the work to be done on the premises of the purchaser. But when Simonides comes to contemplate the tattling woman, the endless talker, he lets in a flood of light upon the relation of the husband to the so-called “partner of his joys.” “Nor,” says the poet, “can the husband stop her with threats, though in a rage he should knock out her teeth with a stone.” How many blushing brides could have been found in old Greece with their front teeth thus wanting we have no way of learning, but we must confess that when a honeymoon is liable in the first families of the land to be followed by a loss of articles so useful and beautiful, and that, too, in an age which had no dental art of restoration, then, indeed, is the passion of love only ephemeral and brutal. Much as the nineteenth century may secretly wish that ladies given to interminable clatter might in some way be deprived of those ivories which

help make the articulate sounds in question, yet so kind and romantic is the age that the man who would displace those talkative teeth with a rock cannot be found in our best society.

Thus, if we may believe an old observer of old times, there were three groups of ladies that received from Greek gentlemen sneers and jeers, and not a few most violent blows with hand or club—the ugly woman, the dressy woman, and the tattling woman. What woman, then, was lovable in that far-off land? Very kindly the poet tells us, the real good woman is “like the busy bee ; under her care his living prospers and increases.” The early Greek wife, then, was a classic squaw. From the condition of a bride she passed quickly to the drudgery of a slave or humble domestic. Just before marriage, the noble young man of the period perhaps smiled at the girl of his choice. She was happy to take off the military cap

of her lover and put it on her own head, and walk all around the uncovered hero, and perhaps she said to him, "Am not I a pretty soldier?" In answer, he would place his hand under her chin, and turn up the face until the eyelids fell down, covering the beautiful eyes with beautiful lashes, thus starting the problem whether the eye of woman is handsomer when open or when shut. But after a few days of this lingering upon the borders of the earthly paradise the pair turned away, the husband to resume the character of domestic tyrant, and the wife to enter upon dreary years, full of all the possible sorrows of woman. Love was in those ages only a rudiment of a coming noble sentiment. It was Darwin's ape, from which a humanity was to come by slow steps. It was a wild olive, too bitter for human lips, but waiting for the cultivation of reason to make it rich and sweet for all who should come with the reason and the cultivation.

It is confessed by all students of the classic world that there prevailed through the thousand years of that kingdom a general progress of all political and moral ideas and practices. In such a wide progress this great friendship between man and woman actively participated, cases of deep and true love came into being, and noble sentiments upon this subject began to sparkle in literature. In Sappho, love begins to speak in its native and powerful tongue, and all the better because it speaks not by masculine lips, but through those other lips which are most wont to spiritualize the words they utter. It is not fully known just who this Sappho was, nor just all that she said, but judging from the only evidence we possess, either for or against the girl, we seem shut up to the conclusion that this poetess had begun to see the sentiment of love in that higher light in which it is seen by our own Tennysons, and Longfellows, and Brown-

ings. Not that she or her era reached in reality the life-long union of heart to heart, but that she and a few others saw, as in prophetic vision, a friendship—a companionship between man and woman which had not been formulated by Moses, or David, or Solomon, or Homer, or Simonides.

In this woman from Mitylene, in the sixth century before our era, the passion of love shows signs of becoming a poetic and romantic sentiment—a branch of the eternal beauty. To the virtue of animal love is added the charm of a certain divine friendship, just as though an age was coming when a bride could hope to be the loved one of years, instead of the toy of a day. It is almost certain that Sappho was a woman of unrivaled mental power and personal attractiveness. She had the grasp and courage of Madame De Stael, and the tenderness of Mrs. Browning. It is inferred that she soon gathered around her feet a group of

gifted folk, old and young, and that she and they flung out upon the world more tender literature than has escaped oblivion, and that the high ideals of friendship, certain *glorias* over undying attachments, formed the burden of this combined song. What helps make Sappho stand at the gate of a new dispensation is the fact that, in her, woman began to sing upon a subject which had been treated by only the masculine branch of humanity. When the primitive man sings of love, then be on the lookout for coarseness. It was the primitive man, remember, who was wont to knock out the front teeth of the woman he had sworn to love and protect; it was the primitive man who feared his wife might desire to eat at his table; it was this masculine creature who reached the conclusion that an ugly woman might be laughed at in the street, and who anticipated the verdict of Thucydides that she is the best woman "Regarding

whom the world knows nothing either good or bad," and it was a masculine judge of these matters who, in a land not Greek nor Roman, retailed to the public such low animalisms as those found by some mistake in a holy book, and called the Song of Solomon by men and women who would dislike to sing its peculiar images in good society. It has been the disposition and inmost genius of woman to make her attachments spiritual and eternal. Virgil says: "Variable and mutable always is woman," but the probability that Virgil indulged here in a poetic license is very great, for, in the long page of history, we see man busy changing his mistresses and laying plans in politics or religion, by which he can bring the number of his female companions up to seven or eight hundred. Solomon's heart changed about eight hundred times, while the modern Mormon Chieftain called upon about fifty different wives to show us what a great slander

had fallen from the lips of Virgil. Between the Mormon and the Hebrew lies a large area of time and territory, quite thickly settled by eminent men who could not, without a blush, intimate that woman's love was ephemeral.

Not only do the nature and taste of woman make her the natural advocate of a perpetual friendship with one person, but her interests come to reinforce her nature and taste. She cannot accumulate husbands by law or religion; she cannot, even by persuasion, entrap and retain a multitude of these precious articles. If she is able to captivate a single one, she is deemed fortunate. In the philosophy of losing this one in a month or a year she can take no part. If she has caught an ugly one, she dares not laugh at him; if she has caught a garrulous one, she dares not knock out his front teeth. Not every day can she have a new choice out in the wide field. Thus it was, from the earliest period of history, much to the personal interest of

every bride to say to her husband, "You shall be mine forever." In the poetess Sappho love therefore found the first powerful champion, and in her verse began to push out those wings which were to be emblems of immortality. Clay is, indeed, to be found in her thoughts, but there is more gold than clay, showing a great change from those dreary centuries when passion had more clay than gold.

Led along by a new and immense quantity of love-song, made popular by Sappho and Corinna, and inflamed by a constant study of the beautiful in form, the Greeks, in the day of their glory, fell into a strange excess or fanaticism of passion, and wrote a chapter of history of which the civilized world is ashamed. It became the stupid dream of some of the greatest and best of the classics that all beauty of form and of motion was the pearl of great worth, and that, hence, an illustrious hero or scholar or statesman might select from the

streets or from the slave market some graceful boy and make a *Dulcinea* for a few years of his form and face. It does credit to the heart of Grote, in his wonderful volumes on Plato, that he has spread over this habit of Athens that mantle of charity found in the words: "It was all a simple worship of the beautiful." One might wish that so great a name as that of Grote might put all doubt to sleep, but in that classic world there was so much vice, and what we should now call vulgarity, such abundant remains of the horrible and infamous, that not even the eloquence of Grote can make that age of pet boys other than a cloud upon Greek memory. After having caused to pass before our mind all that delight which the Greek soul drew from all contact with the perfect in symmetry and feature, having recalled the fact that children having any blemish in limb or feature were not thought worthy of life, and that old persons were despised in Homeric and later days because they had lost

their physical charms, having recalled the truth that Greece was the Mother of the fine arts, and lost her state because she loved too much her statuary and pictures and temples, and died because she had exchanged statesmen for artists, the feeling still remains that in that same glorious land this form of friendship, under review, was one of those dark vices which so mar all the nations of antiquity. Xenophon made no æsthetic defense of these boy companions, but in enumerating the crimes and vices of Menon, the general, he designates as infamous that form of friendship for which Mr. Grote apologizes as being a method of loving the beautiful; and as Xenophon stood nearer than any English student to the facts, it seems necessary for us to conclude that sometimes the classic devotion to the beautiful was like that religious zeal which has often worshiped God by means of vulgarity and cruelty, and even murder. But let us dismiss from

thought this subject, uncongenial to modern taste.

Aspasia came to Athens to render woman more than ever an object of reverence, and thus her friendship more of a prize. Her picture must not be painted in the colors of the nineteenth century, but in the full light of that period in human history, when the wife was a silent, patient slave, and when the true love was the toy of a spring and a summer. It was necessary that woman should assert herself, and take possession of what empire she might, as a queen. If she had been formed by the Creator as a companion of man—a companion in thought and reason and sentiment, at the table and on the journey, and by the fireside, it was time some attention were called to such original significance of all affairs of the heart. At intervals great queens appeared, not to fight battles like the Amazons, but to lift love upward from passion to a high friendship, and

make it a communion of kindred, but dissimilar, spirits, for whose united life all the years of earth were only too brief. By some freak of nature, or decree of Providence, there was born, at Miletus, a child which received the name Aspasia. In Miletus two streams of thought and learning met—Greek lore came to it from the West, Asiatic lore from the East. There Cadmus and Hecatacus and Anaximander and the great Thales were born, and, as a result, each gifted child born in that city was cradled in an awakening air. The young Aspasia was so beautiful that she became in girlhood the favored of all the distinguished "Milesians;" and, as learning was, in that day and city, as essential as beauty, the favored girl was compelled to make her studies bear some relation to the matchless expression of her face. No reception, no symposium, no "coming with a few friends," was complete without the presence of this youthful

queen. Having reached early womanhood, her ambition grew with her growing mind, and her eye and heart turned toward that Athens which, lying across an arm of the Mediterranean, seemed brilliant in spiritual light, the light of philosophy, poetry and art. And just then the greatest of minds was ruling the most illustrious of States. It was only natural for one who must have felt conscious of being the greatest of women, to desire to live in a city ruled by Pericles, whose eloquence and learning and taste were making up for Greece its golden age. Perhaps it might be the happy destiny of this Milesian girl to see, to meet, perhaps even to speak to this Athenian statesman.

In carrying out the idea that there was nothing valuable on earth except the Greek stamp were on the goods, Athens passed a law that only marriage with a Greek woman was lawful—that only purely Greek children

were legitimate. Aspasia, then, could not marry in the narrow Athens. But great, powerful minds must have deeply felt the meanness of the law, and this girl from Miletus must have sailed from home with her mind more absorbed by the charms of learning and art and elevated society than by perplexity over the situation of foreign women in the domestic matters of this world. How long it was after the remarkable personage reached Athens before she had the happiness of meeting Pericles, and before Pericles had the parallel honor of meeting Aspasia, the chronicles do not tell us, but enough is known in the simple fact that their hearts became one for life and death. The unlawful, but absolute, wife assisted the statesman in study, in composition, in devising laws, in planning public buildings, and became a remarkable emblazonment on the sky of the divine idea that woman was created to be the full companion and

equal partner of her husband, and if this lesson was read to the Athenian libertines and wife-beaters by a woman who walked over a law perhaps already dead, it was only so much the worse for the law. Aspasia helped show the old world, and helped teach the nations now existing that love is a friendship between one man and one woman, which is theoretically to inspire two lives, and is to double the happiness and power of each member of the deep and imperishable contract. At times the Athenians derided the orator who, for so many years, idolized the one woman, and who made an equal of a supposed inferior, but the generations coming into the world long after the Athenian mob had ceased to mock, feel that Pericles uttered a significant thought when he said, in dying, "Athens entrusted her greatness, and Aspasia her happiness to me"—true to public duty and private love.

With painful slowness did the human fam-

ily learn its lessons of affection. Whether we think of the bonds that should attach parent to child or adult children to aged parents, or husband and wife to each other, we see in each direction that mankind has studied with great reluctance and with great negligence the relations of heart to heart.

The coming historian in this department of human experience will, if he writes justly, devote a long chapter to the influence of Christianity upon the quality of this sentiment. Christianity proper—that is, considered apart from Judaism and from accidental facts seen along its path, must be confessed to have done much toward spiritualizing the attachment between man and woman, much toward inculcating the idea of a relation of a high character between two souls, and toward establishing the principle that this friendship must last as long as life lasts. One of the most divine of Christ's teachings is his estimate of love. No

one so removed it from the lowness and coarseness of the street, and no one up to his day pointed out better the delicate shadings of its color. Had he spoken in the language of our time, or in such details as we find in the essayist and the novelist of the high school, what hot words he would have spoken against those who occupy street corners and crossings, and even stand at the gates of churches and theaters, that they may make a libertine's feast out of the beauty of the noble wives and daughters who may be passing and re-passing at such public doors! But Christ could utter only general truths, but truths they were which helped sweep away the degradation of woman and the less honorable thoughts and alliances of man. Awakened by a soul so pure, and aided by such an organizer as the church, which decreed the permanency of marriage, love began to put on its rich garments and to walk a queen. Romance and poetry and the

drama took up the general theory that the heart can love but once, and that in the advance of that attachment there is a paradise—beyond its tomb all is a desert. Even the songs of Burns rise above his actual life and sing the new theory in the verses to Mary in Heaven. The practice of an age is always inferior to its ideal, and hence individuals here and there enter into second and third and fourth marriages when death has come to terminate an association; but the high standard society has reached in its fundamental thought may be learned from every drama and poem and song of the heart. Even Byron felt the power and elegance of this public ideal, when, in his deep contempt for transient beauties, he had to sigh out the longing for one fair spirit for a minister,

“That he might all forget the human race,
And hating no one, love but only her.”

From Dante to Tennyson this highest form

of human attachment has been pictured as existing between two only, and as undying. Beatrice in her purity, and Francesca in her error and disgrace, join with the later Juliet and Ophelia in a beautiful advocacy of the dream that these partnerships of the soul are made in heaven, and involve mortals like the toils of a sweet, resistless fate. In modern romantic literature, the ideal lover, male or female, is the one who, amid the severest trials, stands most unshaken, and who comes from the furnace only a purer metal. Even such sentimental songs as those of Tom Moore carry the reader's best judgment whenever the verses convey the idea that

"Through the furnace unflinching, thy way I'll pursue,
And guard thee, and save thee, or perish there, too."

The recent progress in the education of woman is destined to mark a great progress in the career of the matrimonial idea. This higher intellectual culture makes woman a

companion for man, however eminent he may become by his study and his profession; and this equality of greatness will compel a devotion, which was once ephemeral and largely physical, to become a sympathy as well of mind with mind. The pathetic attachment of John Stuart Mill to his wife, and of the Brownings to each other, are only visible proofs that the men and women of the present age are carrying on a business in courtships and marriages far more honorable and far happier than were affairs of the heart, when the earth was peopled by Greeks and Romans and Medes and Persians. And out of the study of this coming history of a reformed sentiment and practice, there may come to the next generation of young persons a wisdom which will lay in deep reason the foundations of marriage, which will shun the rocks of a thoughtless fancy, and the yet more dangerous risks of a mere temporary passion which, in a few

months, dies, as pass away the attachments of brutes. The ideal day will approach when the young man's love of some equal in wisdom, but superior in beauty of mind and body, and in all the forms of taste and tenderness, will be for many years an inspiration of each morning and evening, as it may come in gladness or in depression. The love of money and of fame will be humble impulses compared with the desire to make happy the one companion of the heart, who has left home, even the infinite devotion of her mother, to find, under another's roof, the care which will rival the mother's solicitude, and to hear from other lips words of praise and esteem, which the tomb will prevent the mother from speaking always to her idolized child.