

LOVE DISSECTED

By Woodbridge Riley

THIS is not a book of etiquette for lovers, not a manual to tell the amorous novice what is wrong with this picture of Romeo and Juliet. It is rather a characteristic French work on a difficult subject, a witty and learned treatise on love in all its phases — for that word to the author suggests not only sentimental attachment but also the love of objects such as the family and fatherland, of abstractions like truth and justice, and even the church and its doctrines.

The inquiry, then, ranges from romantic love to mystical adoration, from the works of the novelists, particularly the Gallic, to the philosophies of the idealists and pragmatists, of thinkers as wide apart as Hegel and William James. Thus Berl proceeds with a light touch through the various explanations of the divine passion. There are the magical theories of occult potency and the "*femme fatale*"; there are, at the other extreme, rationalistic theories like that of Plato according to which any love is but a part of a greater whole, a participation by the individual in a sublime idea. This notion is reflected in what the Frenchman calls the Anglo-Saxon prophets of optimism, believers in the "One", disciples "in tune with the Infinite".

Though wide apart, these theories

are really akin; they are both magical. The primitive mind believes in the occult potency of the object, such as the love philtre. The modern optimist believes in the potency of "Principle", or some equally recondite notion. Besides his references to the findings of anthropology and the vaporings of the New Thinkers, the author implicitly criticizes one theory which has been recently revived in the latest form of American philosophy. The so called critical realism is little but a revival of mediæval doctrine. It makes out that reality consists in the "essence", that two objects are beautiful because each partakes of essential beauty. As applied to his subject, the Frenchman neatly disposes of this by supposing that if Romeo's love for Juliet and Juliet's love for Romeo are one and the same in which both share, then we should have to distinguish between the Romeo whom Juliet loves and the Romeo who loves Juliet.

Descending from these fanciful theories, we come to the most prevalent explanation, the biological. Here love is considered a vital tendency; for without a tendency to be, to preserve, increase and reproduce itself, there is no individuality possible. The origin of love, then, is in the nature of things, whether we call it effort, evolution, will, life, or the Bergsonian *élan*. Yet even here there are difficulties. Facts, says Berl, sufficiently prove that sentimental love opposes the reproductive tendency quite as much as it favors it. There may be a tendency to reproduce, but there is also an independence of feelings in reference to tendencies, as witness the hold of chivalrous love, of the strangely ascetic affairs between the mediæval knights and their ladies.

The sociological explanation seems no better than the biological. The school of Auguste Comte would make

out that groups as such engender feeling, that whenever a new social unit is created by artificial grouping there springs up one or more feelings corresponding to the existence of this group. Men will love their own regiment, which they will extol at the expense of other regiments. Now Comte based his worship of humanity on the growth of the group, and Tarde showed how mob psychology will explain sentimental contagion. But Berl goes too far in asserting that everything happens as though society has a sentimental ideal, varying with country and age, an ideal imposing itself on individuals, who do their best to conform to it. On the contrary, sentiments cannot always be artificially created. In war times there are many who are bored with the propaganda of patriotism; in a political campaign the sentimental gush about party loyalty simply manufactures muggumps. So in sentimental love between individuals. The different ages have their types, and Berl ingeniously suggests a history of such variants: the "courteous" love of the Middle Ages and the sensual love of the Renaissance; the matrimonial bourgeois type of the seventeenth century and the libertinism of the Regency, where woman is the "male friend" type and in place of the "*femme bourgeoise*" the novelist extols a liaison outside of marriage. Finally there is the twentieth century type — a certain economic state, an increase in the number of young women relative to that of young men, creates feminism which calls in question the nature of the love bond. Here the author ironically quotes a compatriot who holds that we are reduced to the initial state of things: women choosing their husbands as do the bees, men representing strolling idleness, fantasy and lyricism by the side of their grave companions, amazon mistresses responsible for social order.

This is all very well, but the ideal types of one generation are not compelling upon all of that generation, and Berl's own principle of the irrationality of love might be used to refute his neat scheme. The present sentimental ideal of society may be largely in favor of the flapper, and the strong arm gang of new women may monopolize the headlines. But feelings are not wholly subject to fashions, and the author confesses as much in describing the opposition of feeling to social influences. As he puts it: Men say to themselves: "I love this woman who belongs neither to my country, to my religion, nor to my social rank. Everything conspires to prevent my loving her . . . consequently I love her truly."

The Nature of Love. By Emmanuel Berl.
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