

XXIV. LOVE

SOPHIA IVANOVNA, as I afterwards came to know her, was one of those rare, young-old women who are born for family life, but to whom that happiness has been denied by fate. Consequently all that store of their love which should have been poured out upon a husband and children becomes pent up in their hearts, until they suddenly decide to let it overflow upon a few chosen individuals. Yet so inexhaustible is that store of old maids' love that, despite the number of individuals so selected, there still remains an abundant surplus of affection which they lavish upon all by whom they are surrounded--upon all, good or bad, whom they may chance to meet in their daily life.

Of love there are three kinds--love of beauty, the love which denies itself, and practical love.

Of the desire of a young man for a young woman, as well as of the reverse instance, I am not now speaking, for of such tendresses I am wary, seeing that I have been too unhappy in my life to have been able ever to see in such affection a single spark of truth, but rather a lying pretence in which sensuality, connubial relations, money, and the wish to bind hands or to unloose them have rendered feeling such a complex affair as to defy analysis. Rather am I speaking of that love for a human being which, according to the spiritual strength of its possessor, concentrates itself either upon a single individual, upon a few, or upon many--of love for a mother, a father, a brother,

little children, a friend, a compatriot--of love, in short, for one's neighbour.

Love of beauty consists in a love of the sense of beauty and of its expression. People who thus love conceive the object of their affection to be desirable only in so far as it arouses in them that pleasurable sensation of which the consciousness and the expression soothes the senses. They change the object of their love frequently, since their principal aim consists in ensuring that the voluptuous feeling of their adoration shall be constantly titillated. To preserve in themselves this sensuous condition, they talk unceasingly, and in the most elegant terms, on the subject of the love which they feel, not only for its immediate object, but also for objects upon which it does not touch at all. This country of ours contains many such individuals--individuals of that well-known class who, cultivating "the beautiful," not only discourse of their cult to all and sundry, but speak of it pre-eminently in FRENCH. It may seem a strange and ridiculous thing to say, but I am convinced that among us we have had in the past, and still have, a large section of society--notably women--whose love for their friends, husbands, or children would expire to-morrow if they were debarred from dilating upon it in the tongue of France!

Love of the second kind--renunciatory love--consists in a yearning to undergo self-sacrifice for the object beloved, regardless of any consideration whether such self-sacrifice will benefit or injure the object in question. "There is no evil which I would not endure to show

both the world and him or her whom I adore my devotion." There we have the formula of this kind of love. People who thus love never look for reciprocity of affection, since it is a finer thing to sacrifice yourself for one who does not comprehend you. Also, they are always painfully eager to exaggerate the merits of their sacrifice; usually constant in their love, for the reason that they would find it hard to forego the kudos of the deprivations which they endure for the object beloved; always ready to die, to prove to him or to her the entirety of their devotion; but sparing of such small daily proofs of their love as call for no special effort of self-immolation. They do not much care whether you eat well, sleep well, keep your spirits up, or enjoy good health, nor do they ever do anything to obtain for you those blessings if they have it in their power; but, should you be confronting a bullet, or have fallen into the water, or stand in danger of being burnt, or have had your heart broken in a love affair--well, for all these things they are prepared if the occasion should arise. Moreover, people addicted to love of such a self-sacrificing order are invariably proud of their love, exacting, jealous, distrustful, and--strange to tell--anxious that the object of their adoration should incur perils (so that they may save it from calamity, and console it thereafter) and even be vicious (so that they may purge it of its vice).

Suppose, now, that you are living in the country with a wife who loves you in this self-sacrificing manner. You may be healthy and contented, and have occupations which interest you, while, on the other hand, your wife may be too weak to superintend the household work (which,

in consequence, will be left to the servants), or to look after the children (who, in consequence, will be left to the nurses), or to put her heart into any work whatsoever: and all because she loves nobody and nothing but yourself. She may be patently ill, yet she will say not a word to you about it, for fear of distressing you. She may be patently ennuyee, yet for your sake she will be prepared to be so for the rest of her life. She may be patently depressed because you stick so persistently to your occupations (whether sport, books, farming, state service, or anything else) and see clearly that they are doing you harm; yet, for all that, she will keep silence, and suffer it to be so. Yet, should you but fall sick--and, despite her own ailments and your prayers that she will not distress herself in vain, your loving wife will remain sitting inseparably by your bedside. Every moment you will feel her sympathetic gaze resting upon you and, as it were, saying: "There! I told you so, but it is all one to me, and I shall not leave you." In the morning you maybe a little better, and move into another room. The room, however, will be insufficiently warmed or set in order; the soup which alone you feel you could eat will not have been cooked; nor will any medicine have been sent for. Yet, though worn out with night watching, your loving wife will continue to regard you with an expression of sympathy, to walk about on tiptoe, and to whisper unaccustomed and obscure orders to the servants. You may wish to be read to--and your loving wife will tell you with a sigh that she feels sure you will be unable to hear her reading, and only grow angry at her awkwardness in doing it; wherefore you had better not be read to at all. You may wish to walk about the room--and she will tell you that it would be far

better for you not to do so. You may wish to talk with some friends who have called--and she will tell you that talking is not good for you. At nightfall the fever may come upon you again, and you may wish to be left alone whereupon your loving wife, though wasted, pale, and full of yawns, will go on sitting in a chair opposite you, as dusk falls, until her very slightest movement, her very slightest sound, rouses you to feelings of anger and impatience. You may have a servant who has lived with you for twenty years, and to whom you are attached, and who would tend you well and to your satisfaction during the night, for the reason that he has been asleep all day and is, moreover, paid a salary for his services; yet your wife will not suffer him to wait upon you. No; everything she must do herself with her weak, unaccustomed fingers (of which you follow the movements with suppressed irritation as those pale members do their best to uncork a medicine bottle, to snuff a candle, to pour out physic, or to touch you in a squeamish sort of way). If you are an impatient, hasty sort of man, and beg of her to leave the room, you will hear by the vexed, distressed sounds which come from her that she is humbly sobbing and weeping behind the door, and whispering foolishness of some kind to the servant. Finally if you do not die, your loving wife--who has not slept during the whole three weeks of your illness (a fact of which she will constantly remind you)--will fall ill in her turn, waste away, suffer much, and become even more incapable of any useful pursuit than she was before; while by the time that you have regained your normal state of health she will express to you her self-sacrificing affection only by shedding around you a kind of benignant dullness which involuntarily communicates itself both to

yourself and to every one else in your vicinity.

The third kind of love--practical love--consists of a yearning to satisfy every need, every desire, every caprice, nay, every vice, of the being beloved. People who love thus always love their life long, since, the more they love, the more they get to know the object beloved, and the easier they find the task of loving it--that is to say, of satisfying its desires. Their love seldom finds expression in words, but if it does so, it expresses itself neither with assurance nor beauty, but rather in a shamefaced, awkward manner, since people of this kind invariably have misgivings that they are loving unworthily. People of this kind love even the faults of their adored one, for the reason that those faults afford them the power of constantly satisfying new desires. They look for their affection to be returned, and even deceive themselves into believing that it is returned, and are happy accordingly: yet in the reverse case they will still continue to desire happiness for their beloved one, and try by every means in their power--whether moral or material, great or small--to provide it.

Such practical love it was--love for her nephew, for her niece, for her sister, for Lubov Sergievna, and even for myself, because I loved Dimitri--that shone in the eyes, as well as in the every word and movement, of Sophia Ivanovna.

Only long afterwards did I learn to value her at her true worth. Yet even now the question occurred to me: "What has made Dimitri--who

throughout has tried to understand love differently to other young fellows, and has always had before his eyes the gentle, loving Sophia Ivanovna--suddenly fall so deeply in love with the incomprehensible Lubov Sergievna, and declare that in his aunt he can only find good QUALITIES? Verily it is a true saying that 'a prophet hath no honour in his own country.' One of two things: either every man has in him more of bad than of good, or every man is more receptive to bad than to good. Lubov Sergievna he has not known for long, whereas his aunt's love he has known since the day of his birth."