

ARTICLE VI.

"THE MASTER-PASSION."

BY WILLIAM I. FLETCHER, A.M.

A FEW years ago there came from the press two books of apparently contradictory titles—Drummond's "The Greatest Thing in the World"¹ and Trumbull's "Friendship the Master-Passion."² Professor Drummond's book was not so much an argument for its thesis as an assertion of it, with ample illustration and enforcement. Probably it never occurred to him that any argument was called for, especially in view of the source of the saying, "the greatest . . . is love."

But when Dr. Trumbull's book appeared, it seemed that it might have been written as a reply to "The Greatest Thing in the World." In a chapter entitled "[Friendship] Transcending all Loves," and elsewhere throughout the book, there is a strenuous argument that love is a thing inferior to friendship. The following may be cited as representative sayings from different parts of the volume: "Friendship is love with the selfish element eliminated." "Friendship, in short, is love apart from love's claim or love's craving." "Other loves are based upon a love received or desired." "Friendship is the love of loves, by the Bible standard." "Thus always from the earliest ages to the latest, in sacred writings and in secular, friendship finds its recognition as, the preëminent and surpassing affection of the human heart. The distinction between the

¹ New York : James Pott & Co. 1889.

² Philadelphia : J. D. Wattles & Co. 1892.

love that craves and seeks, and the friendship that would unfailingly serve, has been perceived all along the centuries; as it was sententiously expressed by Publilius Syrus (and afterward by Seneca), 'Friendship always benefits; but love also injures.'" "It is *agape*, a love without 'desire' or craving, not *philia*, a love which goes out 'longingly' for the possession of its object, that seems to be recognized in Bible usage as friendship-love, and that would be better thus translated. 'Friendship-love is of God; and every one that [thus] loveth is begotten of God and knoweth God.' The divinest exhibit of God-likeness in man is in this friendship-love of which the Apostle Paul sounds the praises so glowingly." [And then follows a new rendering of the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians, with the compound "friendship-love" substituted throughout for "charity" or "love."]

Perhaps it may appear that this is a mere logomachy or word-play. If this writer chooses to make the word "friendship" stand for what has always been counted the best quality and highest range of love, it might seem to be a matter of small moment, so long as he disarranges words only and not things. But it will be found that the discussion goes deeper than words and takes hold on great realities, and that in a way subtly dangerous. When Dr. Trumbull says, "Friendship is love with the selfish element eliminated," he makes it clear that he has chosen to confine the word "love" to its baser uses. Recognizing that the word has had to do duty for a wide range of meanings, he would attempt to clarify language and thought by debasing the word "love" to the lower meanings, and substituting "friendship" when the higher sentiments are to be spoken of. But one who reads this book with any care will perceive the serious dangers of the path upon which its author has entered.

It is obvious that such an argument as Dr. Trumbull's

must deal more or less with the family relation, and in this part of the treatise the author makes it evident that he is "on thin ice" and is not unaware of it. For it requires a miracle of dialectics to prove friendship superior to love, without putting a slight on the love of marriage. It does not avail that the writer attempts (in the dedication of his book to his wife, and elsewhere) to make the relation of husband and wife the highest exemplification of friendship. Although one is nearly confused by such juggling with terms, the writer's real meaning seems to come out as he quotes the following from Sir Thomas Browne, the words in brackets being Dr. Trumbull's addition: "I never yet cast a true affection on a woman [yet this was published, unchanged, by the author, two years after his happy marriage]; but I have loved my friend as I do virtue, my soul, and my God." Unless it was by an oversight that Sir Thomas published this unchanged after his marriage, that union, however "happy," was no true marriage, though solemnized by all the bishops in England.

Another expression used with apparent relish by Dr. Trumbull is that of "the keen-witted Frenchman, Joseph Roux, when he defined 'love' as 'two souls and one flesh' and 'friendship' as 'two bodies and one soul.'" This may be French keen wit, but it is nothing less than a direct blow at the sacredness of married love.

Our writer's chief error in the treatment of love is in the effort to mark it off into two divisions: the lower, consisting of loves which seek return, which "desire" and "long"; and the higher "friendship-love" which seeks no return but expends itself freely. Into the lower class of loves, from which souls may graduate into "friendship," mother-love is put as well as married love. But can it be admitted that mother-love is so tainted with selfishness as to be inferior to "friendship"? How absurd the claim! To be sure, the young mother has, in her first child, the greatest

treasure, the richest "possession," conceivable to her. But who doubts that she would give life itself, without thought of hesitation, for her child? Has the world indeed been wrong all these ages in counting this mother-love as the very type of unselfish devotion?

So with married love. Doubtless possession, self-gratification, has been too predominant an element in the current ideas of marriage. But neither love nor marriage is to be judged by its lower exemplifications. True married love is simply the highest known earthly form of unselfish devotion. In the very nature of the case, wedlock, with offspring, makes demands for self-sacrificing service and helpfulness that no other relation in life can equal. Marriage is essentially the devotion of one life to another. Not what one receives, but what one gives, is emphasized in the ceremony. The surrender of the selfhood and its absorption into the one complex personality of the family is what makes of marriage a sacrament. Human life is sacred, and when two lives are actually commingled, religion is invoked to witness to the solemnity and divinity of the transaction, and the blessing of God is pronounced on those whom he "hath joined together." Let no one interpret this phrase to mean that the union has been sanctioned and made divine by sacred rite or word of priest or minister. Whom love has joined are joined by God; for "whosoever loveth is born of God." Is it a mere rhapsody by which the love of marriage is thus made divine in its origin and character? Or is there profounder significance than is often noted in its use by inspired writers to typify the union of Christ and his church? With the low views of marriage which have too widely prevailed, doubtless this imagery has seemed low and the analogy quite imperfect. But as a more lofty view of wedlock, a more spiritual, and so truer, conception of the family relation, comes to be accepted through the progressive development in society of

the higher life, this biblical imagery will take on new force and meaning. The point here insisted on is simply this: that only as love assumes the form of complete self-devotion necessarily involved in a true marriage can it be permitted fruition, in any well-regulated state of society, or in any society which does not contain the seeds of its own destruction. So far from friendship being superior to love in that the selfish element is eliminated from love to constitute it friendship, love is itself the elimination of selfishness. So-called love, in which selfishness is a predominant element, is only the shadow of true love, only the baser passion from which the flower of love may grow under the sweet alchemy of love's own law, but which, if it be not brought under that law of joyfully accepted self-devotion and surrender, can work only destruction and misery.

But, to pass to the other half of the truth, there is perhaps no more error in charging common human love with the taint of selfishness, than there is in depicting the highest love as caring nothing for reciprocity. Dr. Trumbull makes much of this feature of friendship. "The very joy of friendship is found in loving, not in being loved," he says, and he quotes the following beautiful lines of Helen Hunt's in support of his view of friendship, although she wrote them of love. "When love is strong," she says,

"It hardly asks
If it be loved at all ; to take
So barren seems, when it can make
Such bliss, for the beloved's sake,
Of bitter tasks."

"The divine pattern of love is a love that loves without any condition of love returned, and that consists in loving rather than in being loved," continues the argument.

One cannot help asking, Is this, after all, the whole truth? No doubt a mother often loves her wayward child when there is no return. Many a wife cherishes a love "strong as death" for a creature, miscalled husband, whose

love (counterfeit that it is) is all bestowed elsewhere. But who would say the mother and the wife do not care for any return? Of course they do, it might be replied, their love being of the baser kind, not so refined as the friendship-love which Dr. Trumbull is depicting.

But how about this higher love? Is it true that even divine love does not seek return? Jesus Christ came to this world not more to reveal to men the love of God than to win theirs. The one thing we understand God lacks and is hungry for is the love of his children. "Lovest thou me?" was Christ's appeal to Peter, and as the word of God to man is the most pathetic utterance that ever fell on human ears. No, it is no mere "love of benevolence" with which our Heavenly Father regards us. We are his children. His love to us is beyond our comprehension in its fullness and extent, but it does not exceed his desire that we should love him.

Love is a holy mystery. It is not complete unless it both gives and takes. Neither is it genuine unless it finds it "more blessed to give than to receive." But in view of this divinely expressed anti-climax, is there harm in "receiving" at the hand of love? Was there ever stranger mistake than to brand as selfish the joy of taking delight from a loved one? There can be no selfishness where there is not the preference of self to another, and in the give-and-take of mutual ministrations taught by love, there is no room for a "selfish element." Still it holds true that great as is the joy of receiving what a loved one gives, the joy of giving is "more blessed."

The perfection of love can be found only in the merging of personalities. Parental and filial love have their strong seat in the fact of this merging of the personalities in the backward look. But as life goes on and the identity of the personalities slips away into the past, the ties dependent upon it weaken. Here is seen the superiority

of the love of wedlock. "For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh," and so the love of marriage is declared to be the one typical and all-powerful love known to human life, and a symbol of the love by which man is united to God in a true merging of the human spirit and the divine.

How natural, then, that love as between the sexes should form the staple of romantic and poetic literature and give charm to art and music! The merging of personalities through the influence of love is so completely at the base of all human relations, of society and the state, that the theme must always and everywhere be of captivating interest, so long as man is a social being. Unless the advocate of friendship is to prevail in his effort to change the meaning and usage of words, the distinction that has always been made between love and friendship will still be maintained. The word "friendship" stands for that sort of love which contemplates no union other than one in sentiment and feeling. The demand for love is often met with the offer of friendship as a substitute, but is it not the coldness of the offer that has led to the figure of the mitten given when the hand is asked?

If the range of meaning covered by the word "love" is too great and we must recast the language at this point, it seems plain that we must reclaim the word "love" from its baser uses to its higher and more legitimate ones, and substitute other words for the lower meanings. Quite in a line with the disposition to find the word "love" too low to express the divine and the higher human sentiment to which it especially belongs, is the tendency of a vicious romantic literature to grow up around love thus falsely conceived. The bane of most of the love-literature so current is that it is essentially selfish in its ideals and principles. Its great staple is the unhappy marriage, resulting from the

failure to find expected self-gratification. Its ideal of marriage is the union of two congenial spirits so impossibly harmonious that they can live together without self-sacrifice at any point on the part of either. This congeniality must be of such an extremely delicate character that it cannot survive the thought of duty or law or outward propriety. (One of the decisions of a mediæval "court of love" was that there could be no such thing as love in the married state.) This idea of marriage is as pestilential in literature as it is in life. Perhaps we have here a partial solution of the vexed question of the moral and immoral in literature. These terms have not to do with things but with persons. A book may by virtue of its "realism" (falsely so called) be an improper book because it violates the ordinary proprieties. If it deals with personalities, however, it becomes moral or immoral according as it breathes the spirit of love or that of selfishness. If the first, its leaves are for the healing of the nations. If the second, it is poison.

Repeating what has already been said—love is a mystery. Its mysteriousness was vastly heightened, when it was said "God is love." What a weight of meaning with which to charge one small word! But what is the purpose of such a definition as this? Surely it is to teach us where we see love to see God. It is to make all loves holy. When one has begun to interpret the loves of every-day life in the light of this great saying, into what perfect accord with one's sense of what is sweet and pure and true come the otherwise strange words of Scripture, "As the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee"! How natural that the Christ should have first "manifested forth his glory" while sitting at a village wedding-feast, by turning water into wine, so foreshadowing the wonderful work of the Divine Spirit through the centuries in progressively elevating the common things of

human life into the region of the divine! And again how natural that the consummation of this work is depicted as another, a heavenly, wedding-feast, celebrating the reception of a purified humanity, as a bride, into the house of its Divine Lover!

The sociological bearing of this theme is obvious. The family is recognized as the unit in society. But how can it be a unit in such a sense as is required by this conception, if it be not itself an integer? If husband and wife are separate entities bound together only, as some would have it, by a "contract," or as others say, by congeniality of temper and spirit, where is the "unit"? To constitute such a unit as will serve to construct human society so that it is not self-corrupting and self-destroying, we must have a family not tied together, but actually welded into one personality. Here is where the evident demands of the case are met by the Divine order. It is the law of God, not simply as given from Sinai and enforced by Christ, but as written on the first page of the book of human life, that sexual union shall exist only under the sanction of marriage, marriage being not a license given to two individuals, permitting them to live in certain relations, but a solemn pledge taken from two individuals that, in uniting their persons, they also unite their lives in the indissoluble union of love; love meaning nothing less than the abnegation of self in the interest of the loved one.

This is the foundation on which the fabric of society may rest and stand the shocks of the centuries. So viewed, love is seen to be the one vital and moving principle of human life as well as of divine. Some day the "dismal science" of political economy must be rewritten with love as the key to unlock its mysteries. Then it will be seen that when it is said "nothing is settled until it is settled right," the rightness of bare justice cannot be meant, but the rightness of love. Under this, the Christian economy,

the law of business, as of every relation, must be to try to give more than is received, to live for what we can add to the lives of others, not for what we acquire for ourselves. By the thousands of lives already so lived society is saved from corruption and is gradually being regenerated. When love, the "master-passion," shall control all lives, then will be fulfilled the petition of the ages, "Thy kingdom come!"