



LOVE'S COMING-OF-AGE

EDWARD CARPENTER

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LOVE'S COMING-OF-AGE

A SERIES OF PAPERS

ON

THE RELATIONS OF THE SEXES

BY

EDWARD CARPENTER

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I have only touched the fringe of this great subject. The more it is examined into the more remarkable is the mass of corroborative matter belonging to it. The conclusion towards which one seems to be impelled is that these two great primitive ideas,, sexual and astronomical, are likely to remain the poles of human emotion in the future, even as they have been in the past.

Some cynic has said that the two great ruling forces of mankind are Obscenity and Superstition. Put in a less paradoxical form, as that the two ruling forces are Sex and the belief in the Unseen, the saying may perhaps be accepted. To call the two Love and Faith (as Dr. Bucke does in his excellent book on *Man's Moral Nature*) is perhaps to run the risk of becoming too abstract and spiritual.

Roughly speaking we may say that the worship of Sex and Life characterised the Pagan races of Europe and Asia Minor anterior to Christianity, while the worship of Death and the Unseen has characterised Christianity. It remains for the modern nations to accept both Life and Death, both the Greek and the Hebrew elements, and all that these general terms denote, in a spirit of the fullest friendliness and sanity and fearlessness.

A curious part of all the old religions, Pagan or Christian--and this connects itself with the above--is Asceticism: that occasional instinct of voluntary and determined despite to the body and its senses. Even in the wildest races, rejoicing before all things in the consciousness of Life, we find festivals of fierce endurance and torments willingly undergone with a kind of savage glee;⁴⁵ and during the Christian centuries--monks, mystics, and world-spiting puritans--this instinct was sometimes exalted into the very first place of honor. I suppose it will have to be recognised--whatever absurd aberrations the tendency may have been liable to--that it is a basic thing in human nature, and as ineradicable in its way as the other equally necessary instinct towards Pleasure. To put it in another way, perhaps the ordinary Hedonism makes a mistake in failing to recognise the joy of Ascendancy, and (if it is not a 'bull' to say so) the pleasure which lies in the denial of pleasure. In order to enjoy life one must be a master of life--for to be a slave to its inconsistencies can only mean torment; and in order to enjoy the senses one

⁴⁵ Note especially the ordeals through which the youth of so many savage races have had to pass before being admitted to manhood.

