

### *VIII – The Necessity for Love and Its Primitive Cause*

This time, Marquis, you have not far to go, your hour has come. The diagnosis you give me of your condition tells me that you are in love. The young widow you mention is certainly capable of rousing an inspiration in your heart. The Chevalier de --- has given me a very favorable portrait of her. But scarcely do you begin to feel a few scruples, when you turn into a crime the advice I have been giving you. The disorder which love brings to the soul, and the other evils which follow in its train, appear to you, so you say, more to be feared than the pleasures it gives are to be desired.

It is true that some very good people are of the opinion that the sorrows of love are about equal to its pleasures, but without entering upon a tiresome discussion to ascertain whether they are right or wrong, if you would have my opinion, here it is: Love is a passion which is neither good nor bad of itself; it is only those who are affected by it that determine whether it is good or bad. All that I shall say in its favor is, that it gives us an advantage with which any of the discomforts of life cannot enter into comparison. It drags us out of the rut, it stirs us up, and it is love that satisfies one of our most pressing wants. I think I have already told you that our hearts are made for emotion; to excite it therefore, is to satisfy a demand of nature. What would vigorous youth be without love? A long illness – it would not be existence; it would be vegetating. Love is to our hearts what winds are to the sea. They grow into tempests, true; they are sometimes even the cause of shipwrecks. But the winds render the sea navigable, their constant agitation of its surface is the cause of its preservation, and if they are often dangerous, it is for the pilot to know how to navigate in safety.

But I have wandered from my text, and return to it. Though I shock your sensitive delicacy by my frank speaking, I shall add, that besides the need of having our emotions stirred, we have in connection with them a physical

machinery, which is the primitive cause and necessity of love. Perhaps it is not too modest for a woman to use such language to you, but you will understand that I would not talk to every one so plainly. We are not engaged in what may be called “nice” conversation; we are philosophizing. If my discussions seem to you to be sometimes too analytical for a woman, remember what I told you in my last letter. From the time I was first able to reason, I made up my mind to investigate and ascertain which of the two sexes was the more favored. I saw that men were not at all stinted in the distribution of the rôles to be played, and I therefore became a man.

If I were you, I would not investigate whether it be a good or a bad thing to fall in love. I would prefer to have you ask whether it is good or bad to be thirsty, or, that it be forbidden to give one a drink because there are men who become intoxicated. Inasmuch as you are not at liberty to divest yourself of an appetite belonging to the mechanical part of your nature, as could our ancient romancers, do not ruin yourself by speculating and meditating on the greater or less advantages in loving. Take love as I have advised you to take it, only do not let it be to you a passion, only an amusement.

I understand what you are going to say: you are going to overwhelm me again with your great principles, and tell me that a man has not sufficient control over his feelings to stop when he would. Pooh! I regard those who talk in that fashion in the same light as the man, who believes he is in honor bound to show great sorrow on the occasion of a loss or accident, which his friends consider great, but which is nothing to him. Such a man feels less than any one the need of consolation, but he finds pleasure in showing his tears. He rejoices to know that he possesses a heart capable of excessive emotion, and this softens it still more. He feeds it with sorrow; he makes an idol of it, and offers it incense so often that he acquires the habit. All

such admirers of great and noble sentiments, spoiled by romances or by prudes, make it a point of honor to spiritualize their passion. By force of delicate treatment, they become all the more infatuated with it, as they deem it to be their own work, and they fear nothing so much as the shame of returning to common sense and resuming their manhood.

Let us take good care, Marquis, not to make ourselves ridiculous in this way. This fashion of straining our intelligence is nothing more, in the age in which we are living, than playing the part of fools. In former times people took it into their heads that love should be something grave; they considered it a serious matter, and esteemed it only in proportion to its dignity. Imagine exacting dignity from a child! Away would go all its graces, and its youth would soon become converted into old age. How I pity our good ancestors! What with them was a mortal weariness, a melancholy frenzy, is with us a gay folly, a delicious delirium. Fools that they were, they preferred the horrors of deserts and rocks, to the pleasures of a garden strewn with flowers. What prejudices the habit of reflection has brought upon us!

The proof that great sentiments are nothing but chimeras of pride and prejudice, is, that in our day, we no longer witness that taste for ancient mystic gallantry; no more of those old fashioned gigantic passions. Ridicule the most firmly established opinions, I will go further, deride the feelings that are believed to be the most natural, and soon both will disappear, and

men will stand amazed to see that ideas for which they possessed a sort of idolatry, are in reality nothing but trifles which pass away like the ever changing fashions.

You will understand, then, Marquis, that it is not necessary to acquire the habit of deifying the fancy you entertain for the Countess. You will know, at last, that love to be worthy of the name, and to make us happy, far from being treated as a serious affair, should be fostered lightly, and above all with gayety. Nothing can make you understand more clearly the truth of what I am telling you, than the result of your adventure, for I believe the Countess to be the last woman in the world to harbor a sorrowful passion. You, with your high sentiments will give her the blues; mark what I tell you.

My indisposition continues, and I would feel like telling you that I never go out during the day, but would not that be giving you a rendezvous? If, however, you should come and give me your opinion of the "Bajazet" of Racine, you would be very kind. They say that the Champmeslé has surpassed herself.

I have read over this letter, Marquis, and the lecture it contains puts me out of humor with you. I recognize the fact that truth is a contagious disease. Judge how much of it goes into love, since you bestow it even upon those who aim to undeceive you. It is quite strange, that in order to prove that love should be treated with levity, it was necessary to assume a serious tone.