"SHE FOR GOD IN HIM."

The other day, in a certain Catholic chapel, I chanced upon a document which, during all these clamorous discussions of what women are or are not, suddenly let a flood of light upon my own uninvested experience, almost automatic expectations concerning my sisters in Eve. It was a printed prayer tacked on a pillar, bilingual, unsigned, entitled "A prayer to the Blessed Virgin for all those who love and suffer." "Poor woman," I said to myself, "how much she must have been through!" And then it occurred to me by what sign I knew, and knew that everyone else would know just as unhesitatingly, that this wholly anonymous writer could by no possibility be a man? By the insistence, unrestrained, heart melting, on the sorrow of those who are not loved or who are loved no longer; the taking for granted that loving and being loved must be the permanent and paramount interest in life and the measure of life's happiness. That constitutes, I fancy, the feminine note in literature, from Sappho to St. Catherine, and from Heloise to the Broustes and Mrs. Browning.

This love which is thus treated not as an incident of life, but as life's chief business, need by no means be love for a lover. In the reality of things it is quite as often love for a child, sometimes for a brother or a parent. Nowadays it is often for a friend, a teacher, or political leader. In former days it was often for Christ. But it is always love which can or could be reciprocated; it is love of a person (even if that person should be divine); it is not love for things or for ideas, whose only return is precisely whatever attracts one to them. This love is human love with human love's lurking jealousy and fear of loss. However variously applied, its pattern is originally the love of Eve for Adam; and it bears the traces of that peculiar unsymmetrical position in which Adam and Eve have stood not only towards one another, but each towards God, or, if you prefer, towards everything in the universe except themselves:

"For contemplation he and valor formed;
For softness she and sweet attractive grace.
He for God only; she for God in him."

Milton has been fallen foul of by us modern people for an uncivil old retrograde. But that incident of the prayer "for all who love and suffer," and my unhesitating attribution of its authorship to a woman, brings home to me that Milton was merely describing in theological language the present state of affairs. Only I differ from Milton in that this unsymmetrical position of the sexes strikes me as anything but paradisiacal. Indeed, it alone would lead me to guess that Adam and Eve are make-shifts of that purblind and fumbling chaos called evolution, rather than of a fine deliberate Creator who knew what he was after, namely, his own greater glory and incidental philanthropical intentions. It was an oversight (and does not Bergson's "Creative Evolution" pique itself on lack of mere reason!) to give all the valor and the contemplation to Adam, while endowing Eve with nothing but attractions entailing Adam's constant
attention. Since valor and contemplation, indeed less exalted capacities for business, take as much interest in themselves, and in other valor and contemplation which can collaborate or compete with them, as they take interest in a person who, like Eve, is wholly destitute of anything similar. Whence the undoubted fact to which Eve (either as wife or as mother) awakes with surprise, and sometimes with pain, that men require not merely helpmates, but that other and very different kind of mate, a fellow worker, a competitor, even a possible enemy; also, as Milton emphasized a little unduly, that men do occasionally want to contemplate their particular God. Thus Eve, having neither valor nor contemplation, is left out in the cold whenever Adam turns away from the charms which, by definition, are all she has to offer him. And when she sees nothing but the Divinity mirrored in her husband’s eyes, what she says is not always: “How splendid of you to be looking at God! Do please go on.” But rather: “O, Adam, dear, couldn’t you stop looking at God and just look for a wee moment at me?” Sometimes, indeed, finding that this is not the thing to say, she will train herself into extraordinary interest and pride in Adam’s contemplative exercitations; she will even jealously acquire a smattering of the ideas or occupations which happen to be his particular God. If, as may happen, Adam is thick-skinned or fatuous, Eve’s improvised interest, her pleasure solely in what he does, and indifference or jealousy towards what others do in the same field, will never rub him the wrong way, and he will merely grow more fatuous and thick-skinned in consequence. While if (which also happens) Adam is gifted with “feminine” insight and “feminine” horror of inflicting pain, a hundred customary acts of self-sacrifice, self-restraint, a sort of deliberate dissimulation, keep her in the happy delusion that loving intrusion into the holy of holies is the very thing he wants most. “You know, dear Adam, I can’t do without me to talk everything over.” That self-congratulating formula! The wife or mother from whose lips we hear it is perhaps genuinely
unconscious that those subjects "he has to talk over with her" are her dreaded and hated rivals. But we who happen to know it wonder, amazed, which of the inseparable companions is deceiving the others of whether we are in the presence of a self-satisfied one or of some half broken-hearted creature repeating the vital lie she cannot believe. And thus we may fall to wondering also whether these daughters of Milton's Eve will ever learn that, as the mother is needed only by the helpless or ailing child, so the woman who lives for love is needed by the man only in those episodes when he, too, lives only for love. Will the time ever come when Eve will meet Adam not only as mother or wife, but accidentally, unintentionally, as one meets another creature interested in the same business, a possible rival, a conceivable comrade? Or will there always be that pathetic clinging when the man turns to view his work or the child grows up: "Don't go. Don't change!"—and the terrible need of that tragic prayer, "For all those who love and who suffer"?

And this brings me to yet another reason for suspecting that Eve must be the random work of the blundering 'prentice Evolution, rather than (as Milton thought) the twin masterpiece of a creator careful of his greater glory. The prayer in question was for consolation, or, failing that, for resignation. I cannot think of any instance in literature, and not many in real life, of a woman having prayed for renovation, hoped for such steady or catastrophic shuffling of personal trouble, such renewal of spiritual virginity and vigor as we see in Tolstoi's heroes and in Rolland's "Christophe." Indeed, apart from any such exalted and almost mystical examples, where are the feminine counterparts of the mere masculine rank and file, taking as part of life to begin life once, twice, or thrice, with renovated hearts? Women would take no pride in such a renewal, as they take none, alas, in the forgetfulness of harrowing anniversaries. Rather they have learned to pride themselves on such constancy as is but a lingering decay, that of the lady who sat like Patience on a monument, letting concealment prey on her damask cheek. When they are consoled (the very word savors of innuendo!), the consolation is a new love which, moreover, is thought of the really first, the only real one, and this time for God and all.

Such Eve-like concentration on purely personal affections means denying the great impersonal universe its claims on the soul's passions. No woman, so far as I recollect, has written cosmic poetry in the sense of Goethe's, Wordsworth's, or Shelley's. And to the female mystic the starry heavens have told not the glory of God, but the coming of the Bridegroom. And, putting poets and mystics aside, there is often in the mind of even high-minded women something personal and egoistic in their finest scruples and cruellest self-immolations. While, as to the others! There is about most feminine souls a shuttered, glazed-in quality, a warmth and closeness as of nurseries and sick rooms. Also the thought of death seems oftener present than that of things eternal, for it is the nature of mortal beings to die; and the love of Eve does not go forth to things impersonal and immortal.

This concentration of the feminine soul on personal affections occurs to me as its most undoubted and, oddly enough, its least deprecated inferiority. That this should be the case shows how completely both man and womankind have really acquiesced in the arrangement described by Milton, however much they fall foul of the description. It is quite possible there may be quite
incurable bodily reasons for this lack of what Milton called "contemplation" in the female soul. Or again, the pressure of certain sociological conditions may have lasted too long, left an inheritance of over personality in the sex, killed off without progeny all the individual Eves who wanted to see God face to face, and not in their male relations only. In either case, it is very likely that the Eve-attitude and the results thereof I have been pointing out, may be the price for the race's survival, and even its progress up to a certain point. Our history is full of such fearful, never liquidated debts. But because "and she for God in him" has been thus needful, and may even be inevitable, I see no reason for warping our judgment and spoiling our attitude by going on insisting that it is beautiful. Beautiful is a quality we strive after, not one which is always furnished us gratis by everything which happens to exist and be needful and inevitable.

But I was forgetting "Cavendish Evolution" has a dodge of botching up its occasional bungles by warping our judgment and taste in their favor. The "She-for-God-in-him" arrangement having been useful to the race at some time or other, required cultivation and consecration as holy. And thus we find it duly enshrined not only in immortal verse, but in prejudices and preferences, alas, a great deal more immortal still.

Vernon Lee.
the satire of "Dead Souls" as he had been in the romance of "Taras Bulba." It was still the same man who turned in the premature decay and nervous collapse which overtook him at forty and a peculiarly Russian form of mysticism and pietism, and to the renunciation not only of his own works but of all literature. The same and more constructive development of the same tendency in Tolstoy reminds us how profoundly the ascetic, other-worldly, contemplative Russian soul differs from the positive Western mind. An invisible frontier separates East from West in the life of every Russian of genius. In youth or middle life he will adventure boldly in the Western zone, and produce in it masterpieces of European literature. In old age or ill-health he recrosses the line and goes home to the monastery and the village.

There remain, as the product of the brief literary life of this Russian genius, shy and gloomy, like most great humorists, what is probably the most irresistible rollicking comedy of the century, and a satirical novel which has no equal of its kind. "Dead Souls!" is an unfinished work; there are gaps in it, and its story can hardly be called a plot at all. As the study of a commonplace groove it affect us oddly. Tchichikoff was a great social success, for he had made a study of the art of pleasing, but he is altogether too selfish and ungenerous to enlist the reader's affections. The method by which Gogol enlivens our sympathy is really very subtle. We feel that the fraud in which this arch-scamp is engaged is something so deliciously humorous, so audacious, so full of a peculiar genius, that we want it to succeed. We are not particularly distressed when the thief comes to grief, but we are alarmed and vexed when his scheme is in danger. The cleverness of buying up dead serfs to pass them to the State is really the ideal revenge upon the whole system of slavery. The art with which this literary explosive is inserted beneath the foundations of Russian Society is a triumph of tact and self-restraint. There is not a line of sentiment, and our sympathies are hardly ever invoked on behalf of the serfs. They are described, indeed, from the conventional standpoint as idle and thievish, of no particular interest to well-bred people. But the fraud of the dead souls, none the less, seems to blow up the whole idea of property in human beings. The futility of the lives led by the Russian serf-owners is exposed (though without a word or a hint to point the moral) in a series of portraits which are in their realism perhaps the most effective in all the literature of satire. One never catches Gogol moralizing, and his manner is so quiet that one hardly even suspects him, until the book is laid down, of conscious satire. The framework of the novel may be criticized from the standpoint of form. One journeys with the dealer in dead serfs from estate to estate, and makes the acquaintance in turn of the sentimentalist, the glutton, the idler, the miser, the idealist, and the pedant among these landlords. But one does not meet them again. The book is rather an imaginary voyage with a purpose across old-world Russia shortly after 1812, than a conventional novel. For us it rather gains than loses by this peculiarity. It is a strange and original tale; it is a great satire; but it is also a priceless record of a vanished society. Fielding perhaps in his pictures of the rude manners of eighteenth-century England, comes the nearest to it of anything in our own literature. The comparison, if it is to the advantage of Fielding's strength and directness, reminds us how vastly more subtle and gifted is this Russian world. When it is futile, it is always because of some spiritual complication. It is never stupid, and even when it is gross there is an extra­vagance, a glory of exaggeration, a certain barbaric fantasy in its grossness. Gogol had the richer and stranger material of Russian life, and he was by far the finer artist of the two. It was Gogol's fate to become a classic. The society which he laughed at absorbed him and canonized him. Who remembers now that Tourgenieff was arrested and exiled for daring to write a eulogy of him on his death? The follies and foibles and corruptions still remain, and side by side with them stands the protest of genius. Follies and protests alike are the creation of the Russian soul.

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This love which is thus treated not as an incident of life, but as life's chief business, need by no means be love for a lover. In the reality of things it is quite as often love for a child, sometimes for a brother or a parent. Nowadays it is often for a friend, a teacher, or political leader. In former days it was often for Christ. But it is always love which can or could be reciprocated; it is love of a person (even if that person should be divine); it is not love for things or for ideas, whose only return is precisely whatever attracts one to them. This love is human love, this human love, this lurking jealousy and fear of loss. However variously applied, its pattern is originally the love of Eve for Adam; and it bears the traces of that peculiar unsymmetrical position in which Adam and Eve have stood not only towards one another, but each towards God, or, if you prefer, towards everything in the universe except themselves:—

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Thus Eve, having neither valor nor contemplation, is left and when she sees nothing but the Divinity mirrored occasionally want her husband's eyes, what she says is not with nothing but attractions entailing Adam's constant valor and the contemplation to Adam, while endowing Eve splendid of you t even jealously acquire a sm exalted gift of "feminine" insight and "feminine" attention. Since valor and contemplation, indeed less at God and just look anything. While if (which also happens) Adam is and half broken-hearted creature repeating the vital lie she cannot believe in. And thus we may fall to wondering up: "Don't go. Don't change!"—and the terrible need the man turns to talk everything over." That self-congratulating formula! The wife or mother from whose lips we hear it is perhaps genuinely unconscious that those subjects "he has to talk over with her" are her dreaded and hated rivals. But we, who happen to know it, wonder, amazed, which of the inseparable duties we are deceiving the other: whether we are in the presence of a self-satisfied dupe, or of some half broken-hearted creature repeating the vital lie she cannot believe in. And thus we may fall to wondering also whether these daughters of Milton's Eve will ever learn that, as the mother is needed only by the helpless or ailing child, so the woman who lives for love is needed by the man only in those episodes when he, too, lives only for love. Will the time ever come when Eve will meet Adam not only as mother or wife, but accidentally, unintentionally, as one meets another creature interested in the same business, a possible rival, a conceivable competitor? Or, Adam always be that pathetic clinging when the man turns to view his work or the child grows up: "Don't go. Don't change!"—and the terrible need of that tragic prayer, "For all those who love and who suffer!"

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