

**LOVE'S COMING-OF-AGE:
A SERIES OF
PAPERS ON THE
RELATIONS OF THE SEXES**

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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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EDWARD CARPENTER

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[The little god of Love is generally represented as a child; and rightly perhaps, considering the erratic character of his ways among the human race. There are signs however of a new order in the relations of the Sexes; and the following papers are, among other things, an attempt to indicate the inner laws which, rather than the outer, may guide Love when—some day—he shall have come to his full estate.]

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THE SEX-PASSION

THE subject of Sex is difficult to deal with.

There is no doubt a natural reticence connected with it. There is also a great deal of prudery. The passion occupies, without being spoken of, a large part of human thought; and words on the subject being so few and inadequate, everything that is said is liable to be misunderstood. Violent inferences are made and equivocations surmised, from the simplest remarks; qualified admissions of liberty are interpreted into recommendations of unbridled licence; and generally the perspective of literary expression is turned upside down.

There is in fact a vast deal of fetishism in the current treatment of the question. Nor can one altogether be surprised at this when one sees how important Sex is in the scheme of things, and how deeply it has been associated since the earliest times not only with man's personal impulses but even with his religious sentiments and ceremonials.

Next to hunger it is doubtless the most primitive and imperative of our needs. But in modern civilised

life Sex enters probably even more into *consciousness* than hunger. For the hunger-needs of the human race are in the later societies fairly well satisfied, but the sex-desires are strongly restrained, both by law and custom, from satisfaction—and so assert themselves all the more in thought.

To find the place of these desires, their utterance, their control, their personal import, their social import, is a tremendous problem to every youth and girl, man and woman.

There are a few of both sexes, doubtless, who hardly feel the passion—who have never been “in love,” and who experience no strong sexual appetite—but these are rare. Practically the passion is a matter of universal experience; and speaking broadly and generally we may say it is a matter on which it is quite desirable that every adult at some time or other *should* have actual experience. There may be exceptions; but, as said, the instinct lies so deep and is so universal, that for the understanding of life—of one's own life, of that of others, and of human nature in general—as well as for the proper development of one's own capacities, such experience is as a rule needed.

And here in passing I would say that in the social life of the future this need will surely be recognised, and that (while there will be no stigma