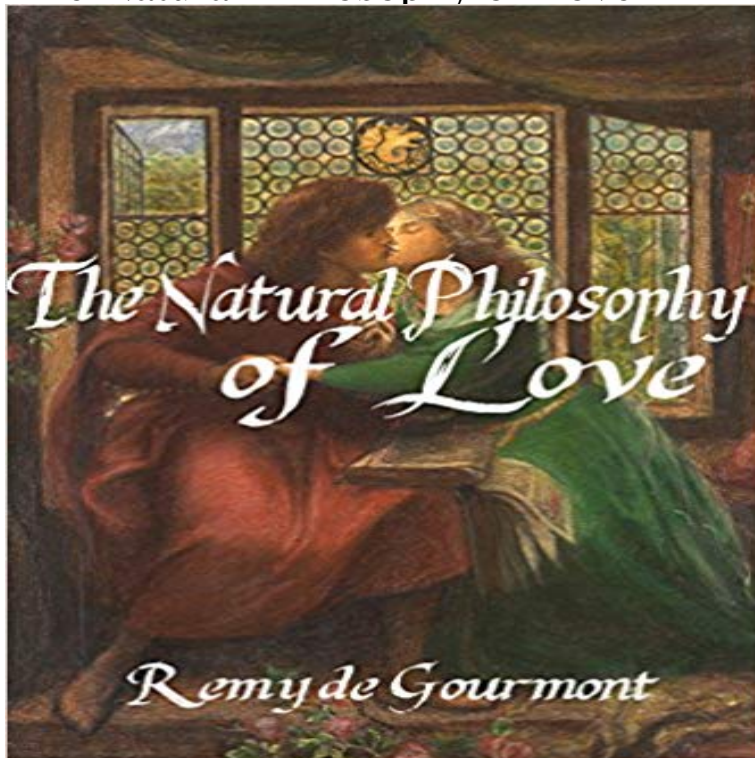


The Natural Philosophy of Love



This book, which is only an essay, because its subject matter is so immense, represents, nevertheless, an ambition: one wanted to enlarge the general psychology of love, starting it in the very beginning of male and female activity, and giving man's sexual life its place in the one plan of universal sexuality. Certain moralists have, undeniably, pretended to talk about love in relation to natural causes, but they were profoundly ignorant of these natural causes: thus Senancour, whose book, blotted though it be with ideology, remains the boldest work on a subject so essential that nothing can drag it to triviality. If Senancour had been acquainted with the science of his time, if he had only read Reaumur and Bonnet, Buffon and Lamarck; if he had been able to merge the two ideas, man and animal into one, he, being a man without insurmountable prejudices, might have produced a still readable book. The moment would have been favorable. People were beginning to have some exact knowledge of animals' habits. Bonnet had proved the startling relationships of animal and vegetable reproduction; the essential principle of physiology had been found; the science of life was brief enough to be clear; one might have ventured a theory as to the psychological unity of the animal series. Such a work would have prevented numerous follies in the century then beginning. One would have become accustomed to consider human love as one form of numberless forms, and not perhaps, the most remarkable of the lot, a form which clothes the universal instinct of reproduction; and its apparent anomalies would have found a normal explanation amid Nature's extravagance. Darwin arrived, inaugurated a useful system, but his views were too systematized, his aim too explanatory and his scale of creatures with man at the summit, as the culmination of universal effort, is of a too theologic

simplicity. Man is not the culmination of nature, he is in Nature, he is one of the unities of life, that is all. He is the product of a partial, not of total evolution; the branch whereon he blossoms, parts like a thousand other branches from a common trunk. Moreover, Darwin, truckling to the religiose pudibundery of his race, has almost wholly neglected the actual fact of sex; this makes his theory of sexual selection, as the principle of change, incomprehensible. But even if he had taken account of the real mechanism of love, his conclusions, possibly more logical, would still have been inexact, for if sexual selection has any aim it can be but conservation. Fecundation is the reintegration of differentiated elements into a unique element, a perpetual return to the unity. It is not particularly interesting to consider human acts as the fruits of evolution, for upon animal branches as clearly separate as those of insect and mammifer one finds sexual acts and social customs sensibly analogous, if not identical in many points. If insects and mammifers have any common ancestor, save the primordial jelly, there must indeed have been very different potentialities in its amorphous contours to lead it here into being bee and there into being giraffe. An evolution leading to such diverse results has interest only as a metaphysical idea, psychology can get from it next to nothing of value. We must chuck the old ladder whose rungs the evolutionists ascended with such difficulty. We will imagine, metaphorically, a centre of life, with multiple lives diverging from it; having passed the unicellular phase, we will take no count of hypothetic subordinations. One does not wish to deny, one wishes rather not to deny, either general or particular evolutions, but the genealogies are too uncertain and the thread which unites them too often broken: what, for example, is the origin of birds, organisms which seem at once a progress and a retrogression from the mammifer? On reflection, one will consider the different love-mechanisms of all the dioicians as parallel and

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