

## *From THE SUMMING UP*

**By W.S. Maugham**

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*IT APPEARS* then impossible to say that either truth or beauty has intrinsic value. What about goodness? But before I speak of goodness I would speak of love; for there are philosophers who, thinking that it embraced every other, have accepted it as the highest of human values. Platonism and Christianity have combined to give it a mystical significance. The associations of the word lend it an emotion that makes it more exciting than plain goodness. Goodness in comparison is a trifle dull. But love has two meanings, love pure and simple, sexual love, namely; and loving-kindness. I do not think that even Plato distinguished them with exactness. He seems to me to ascribe the exultation, the sense of power, the feeling of heightened vitality which accompany sexual love to that other love which he calls the heavenly love and which I should prefer to call loving-kindness; and by doing so infects it with the ineradicable vice of earthly love. For love passes. Love dies. The great tragedy of life is not that men perish, but that they cease to love. Not the least of the evils of life, and one for which there is small help, is that someone whom you love no longer loves you; when La Rochefoucauld discovered that between two lovers there is one who loves and one who lets himself be loved he put in an epigram the discord that must ever prevent men from achieving in love perfect happiness. However much people may resent the fact and however angrily deny it, there can surely be no doubt that love depends on certain secretions of the sexual glands. In the immense majority these do not continue indefinitely to be excited by the same object and with advancing years they atrophy. People are very hypocritical in this matter and will not face the truth. They so deceive themselves that they can accept it with complacency when their love dwindles into what they describe as a solid and enduring affection. As if affection had anything to do with love! Affection is created by habit, community of interests, convenience and the desire of companionship. It is a comfort rather than an exhilaration. We are creatures of change, change is the atmosphere we breathe, and is it likely that the strongest but one of all our instincts should be free from the law? We are not the same persons this year as last; nor are those we love. It is a happy chance if we, changing, continue to love a changed person. Mostly, different ourselves, we make a desperate, pathetic effort to love in a different person the person we once loved. It is only because the power of love when it seizes us seems so mighty that we persuade ourselves that it will last for ever. When it subsides we are ashamed, and, duped, blame ourselves for our weakness, whereas we should accept our change of heart as a natural effect of our humanity. The experience of mankind has led them to regard love with mingled feelings. They have been suspicious of it. They have as often cursed as praised it. The soul of man, struggling to be free, has except for brief moments looked upon the self-surrender that it claims as a fall from grace. The happiness it brings may be the greatest of which man is capable, but it is seldom, seldom unalloyed. It writes a story that generally has a sad ending. Many have resented its power and angrily prayed to be delivered from its burden. They have hugged their chains, but knowing

they were chains hated them too. Love is not always blind and there are few things that cause greater wretchedness than to love with all your heart someone who you know is unworthy of love.

But loving-kindness is not coloured with that transitoriness which is the irremediable defect of love. It is true that it is not entirely devoid of the sexual element. It is like dancing; one dances for the pleasure of the rhythmic movement, and it is not necessary that one should wish to go to bed with one's partner; but it is a pleasant exercise only if to do so would not be disgusting. In loving-kindness the sexual instinct is sublimated, but it lends the emotion something of its own warm and vitalizing energy. Loving-kindness is the better part of goodness. It lends grace to the sterner qualities of which this consists and makes it a little less difficult to practise those minor virtues of self-control and self-restraint, patience, discipline and tolerance, which are the passive and not very exhilarating elements of goodness. Goodness is the only value that seems in this world of appearances to have any claim to be an end in itself. Virtue is its own reward. I am ashamed to have reached so common-place a conclusion. With my instinct for effect I should have liked to end my book with some startling and paradoxical announcement or with a cynicism that my readers would have recognized with a chuckle as characteristic. It seems I have little more to say than can be read in any copybook or heard from any pulpit. I have gone a long way round to discover what everyone knew already.