

What Is Love?

Karen Baker

ON SAINT VALENTINE'S DAY most of us received Valentines from our favorite person. The cards ranged from comic contemporary folders decorated with absurd little stick-figures to lovely, filigree cards inscribed with the words "I love you." But what is love?

The dictionary defines "love" as a "feeling of strong personal attachment induced by that which delights or commands admiration by sympathetic understanding." Countless songs have been written with countless characteristics of love expressed. From *Carousel* a girl in love with a fisherman sings

"The first time he kissed me,
The whiff of his clothes knocked me flat
on the floor of the room.
But now that I love him,
My heart's in my nose
And fish is my favorite perfume."

She calls it love; I call it sinus trouble. In another song our heroine tells a gathering of hopeful brides

"What's the use of wondering if he's good
or if he's bad,
Or if you like the way he wears his hat?
Oh! What's the use of wondering,
If he's good or if he's bad?
He's your feller and you love him.
That's all there is to that."

"So, when he wants your kisses,
You will give them to the lad,
and anywhere he leads you, you will walk
And anytime he needs you, you'll go running
there like mad!
You're his girl and he's your feller
And all the rest is 'talk'."

In music, words and phrases associated with "love" are "paradise," "bewilderment," "breathlessness," "violins," "beauty," "dizziness," "adventure," "stars in the skies" or in "sparkling eyes," "flashes of lightning," "bees buzzing," "birds singing," "great strength," "gentle flame," "hungry yearning," "flight to the moon," "apple blossoms," "April roses," and "helpless as a kitten up a tree."

A person in love is "joyful," "jaunty," "purring," "cooing," "flying," "floating," "bedeviled," "trite," "corny as Kansas in August," "gay as a daisy in May," "high as a flag on the Fourth of July," unable to speak because of a "lump in his throat," and unable to walk on the ground because of "wings on his heels." These characteristics are all beautiful and ideal, but can you picture a person in love by the definitions so far given? He (or she) would have wings on his back and heels. To hear all the minute twittering and buzzing of the birds and the bees, he would have ears like an African elephant. He would be constantly reeling in circles like a top, making incoherent sounds like a member of the animal kingdom. He would be unable to speak because of the huge lump in his throat, and he would never be seen lower than the top of a flagpole.

For a more meaningful definition of "love" one has to turn to religious books. The JEWISH ENCYCLOPEDIA defines pure love as the "suppression of all care for the self." Love is divine bliss and should regulate the conduct of man toward man. The CATHOLIC ENCYCLOPEDIA states that "love is the third and greatest of the Divine Virtues and is usually called charity, which is a divinely infused habit inclining the human will to cherish God for His own sake above all things and man for the sake of God." The RELIGIOUS ENCYCLOPEDIA defines "love" as "the unselfish relation between persons in which the personality of one is lost in the other and in which each esteems the other to be better than himself." True love can exist only between rational beings. To speak of love for animals or of love for a thing is to use improper language. "Love" for wealth and "love" of the world are perversions of love to its destruction.

Turning to the HOLY BIBLE one finds such passages as "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might," and "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." I believe that the true meaning of love, both heavenly and earthly, is found in the passage that begins "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal." It goes on to say that prophetic powers, knowledge of all mysteries, faith to move mountains, and great generosity mean nothing without love. What is love? "Love is patient and kind; it is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends."