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Carmen Lareva

Free Love

1896

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The ignorant believe and the malicious say that the Anarchist idea flies in the face of everything fine and beautiful, of art, the sciences and, above all, home life. In fact, time after time we have had occasion to hear this from the lips of some working women: "Oh, some splendid idea, this Anarchist idea of yours is! You want all us women — wives, daughters, mothers and sisters — turned into concubines, sordid playthings for man's unrestrained passions!"

It is to those who talk this way and think this way that we address ourselves. Let us see.

We hold that in society as it exists there is no one and nothing more disgraced than hapless woman. Scarcely have we attained puberty than we become targets for lubricious, cynically sexual leering by the stronger sex. Of the exploiter and exploited classes alike. Later, on reaching "womanhood," we are most often tricked into the quagmires of impurity, or held to the scorn and ridicule of a society which looks upon our downfall as anything but idealistic and loving, and sees it quite simply as a "lapse."

If we achieve what some women believe will bring them happiness, namely marriage, then we are even worse off, a thousand times worse off. Our status being what it is, our "spouse's" loss

of work, his meagre earnings, illness, etc., turn what might otherwise have been the last word in bliss into a grave and terrifying burden upon our "husbands." Indeed, there is nothing so lovely, poetic, tender, pleasing and winsome as a child, a son — the last word in wedded bliss! — but woe betide the poor man! Woe betide the household upon which poverty settles and which holds a little one in need of our care, caresses and attention. Woe betide that household! It will not be long before a thousand squabbles and countless woes beset it. Do you know why? Because the new-born makes a thousand demands that prevent the young mother from helping her partner to bear the costs of running the home, which, indeed, grow even as their incomes shrink, whereupon what should be the dearest wish and greatest happiness of the household comes to be regarded as a burden, a hindrance and a source of upset and impoverishment that the greatest care must be taken to avert, through coitus interruptus and fraudulent and aberrant intercourse with its whole sequel of nauseating diseases. Hence the thousands upon thousands of nauseating and repulsive practices whereby the nuptial bed is turned into a sink of disgusting obscenities and hence the degradation, the boredom, the diseases and the much trumpeted "trespass" against "honour." Adultery!

Do away with the cause and the effect disappears, and with poverty abolished, the vileness too will be gone, and the home, far from being what it is today, would be a paradise of pleasures and delights.

How often have we heard confidences from our female friends who have been the scapegoats for such acts! — So what? came our partner's response when we cast such deeds up to him: Don't you know how expensive a business it is to raise a child? Midwife, doctor, medical bills, dietary costs, care and then there is the wet nurse: how could I cope when, with two of us working now, we can barely scrape a living? How could I manage on my own with expenses increasing and income shrinking? Never mind children! To the devil with them!

by squabbling, friction and a thousand other things and happenings to embitter the lives of both partners.

If they were free in their actions, this would not happen and they might enjoy whatever culture our society of the future will have to offer.

How do you like that? Dear female comrades, is that love, home life, tenderness? It is painful to think that a woman must go through this: yet, go through it she must!

Now, in proclaiming free love, a free union of the sexes, it is our staunch belief that it can banish all of these distasteful experiences. Freely united and with nothing to fear, ill that we would have made provision for the upkeep of those beings, the fruits of love, which might spring from the union of those who, soaring on the wings of love, melted into a single being, of course both would be happy and free; as partners in their respective actions, they would have no cause to fear anything from each other. We have been told that if love, if union, etc., were free, as we wish them to be, the man would be continually switching from one woman to the next and that, with nothing to fear from society or the law, there would be no more fidelity, whereas today, because the law punishes the adulteress or adulterer, out of a fear of social stigma, spouses put up with each other's failings and waywardness.

Nothing, dear female comrades, could be further from the truth. What both of the sexes are looking for is not the gratification of a more or less carnal appetite. No, what they are after is happiness, bliss, tranquility and decency and every semi-educated creature looks to procreate and achieve his dream, his yearning; today's society is so materially and cynically selfish because, capital being what one needs in order to buy or procure one's pleasures and needs, everybody makes a greater or lesser effort to acquire it.

Moreover, we, the "dregs" of society as we are called, living as we do from an early age subject to work as it is currently practiced, not merely degrading and mortifying, but also brutalizing, naturally do not have the education over which the bourgeois also wield a monopoly, in their eagerness to wield a monopoly upon everything, and so we are not conversant with the thousand delights which it affords those of higher status: things such as painting, music, poetry, sculpture, etc., etc., and this being the case, there is no question but that in everything we do during our wretched

lives, we are a lot more materialistic than we ought to be and than we would be if we were to be educated, not just the way the bourgeoisie is today, but even better. Art elevates one's feelings and, without even the slightest glimmer of these, plainly we cannot attain such heights.

Education not being free and we not having enough time to acquire it, how are we to be educated? Who does not know that from our most tender years we are swallowed up and tormented by the workshop? We will get no education there. Very much the opposite. We will find everything there, everything except that! And time after time, wretched female workers have been targets of bourgeois lust, quickly dispatched to uneasy graves and cast, defenceless, into the increasingly hungry, insatiable chasm of vice under a mantle of mud and tears, while little more than children, gladly embracing perdition as a means of escape from the derision and sneers of their tormentors!

In this society, this is all quite natural, given the extent of the ignorance in which we wallow. Take some famished soul and offer him a crust of bread, no matter how blackened, and at the same time offer him a rebec [stringed musical instrument], a painting or a poem, even should these be an immortal creation by Shakespeare or Lord Byron, and which would he go for first? The bread! Rather than the book or the rebec; plainly, before it can manifest its presence, the spirit has needs that must be met and material needs take precedence over and are more pressing than the spiritual.

So there is no disputing that in a society whose members or component parts have been educated pretty much to perfection, couples can come together freely and without fear that their happiness will be in any way diminished by the absence of a blessing from a third party.

In their eagerness to be all-governing, the law and society compel us to do blind homage to them in this ritual. We women do not believe in such blessings or ritual, which, to us, is like taking two dogs frolicking in the street and telling them, as we join them to-

gether: "You have my leave to be happy." In which case they would carry on just as if we had done the opposite.

When the time comes, the dying bourgeois have to pass on the spoils of their thievery to their children, and they must be parcelled out here or there: because, unless they do so, the law would not recognize their inheritance. It is a business arrangement and in their eyes business takes priority over all.

But in a society where there will be no place for such "deals," there will be no need for such nonsense. Marriage, as the current dictum has it, or rather the blessing ceremony, merely symbolizes society's assent to the act, so, should another society embrace the practice of free union of the sexes, plainly it would be giving its endorsement to that practice and that would be that. But for their fear of the criticism of others, many women and men would be content with free unions and this is the only thing stopping them; so let us allow them to get on with it and let us do as we please and whatever we may please to do without detriment to any.

As for fear of punishment being a preservative against marital infidelity, it is not our belief that this sophism is worth even the effort required to refute it. Anyone will grant that it is a "lapse" which, ninety times out of every hundred, can occur without the authorities and the law knowing, etc., and we believe too that a person who, for fear of punishment, stays "faithful" to a commitment into which she may well have been tricked or otherwise inveigled, might as well be "unfaithful," except that it would be better if she were ... to walk out because, if she loves another male or female, this is plainly because she does not love the person with whom society requires her to share her bread and her roof and, while this may not quite amount to prostitution, it comes close, very close to that, because in so doing, she is required to feign love of someone she simply detests, to deceive and be a hypocrite, in short, to give herself to a man or woman whom she despises. In which case it is only natural that it will not be long before their household is beset