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Emma Goldman

The New Woman

An Address by Emma Goldman before the Liberal Progressive
Society, of Providence, R.I.

1898

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The bible story of woman's inequality and inferiority is based on the declaration of her being created from the rib of man. Woman cannot without equal opportunity ever rise to equality with him, and hence women are slaves to society as a consequence, and intensified under the marriage code. Despotism causes people to revolt, and they will, do so as a necessity. Woman is bred to be seen and for outside show, and hence the sham in society. Her only mission is to marry and to be a wife and mother, and to cater to a husband who for this will support her. She thus degrades herself. The present mothers are not so much to be blamed for this condition, this comes about by copying their mothers. The mother who is thus raised cannot have any conception of the true knowledge of the rearing of the children, i.e., of raising children as a profession, and she never can bring up the child as she ought to under this system. Mothers are conquered by the child, the exception being a good mother.

The duty of a wife is considered as an impure subject for consideration to the young, unmarried woman, and thus the ignorant

girl is forced in the battle unprepared for life consequences. Another great error in the ideal new woman, and one that is to be condemned, is that of aping the male, seeking to become masculine, considering that man is superior to woman. No decent woman can emulate them. We must first have the New Man. In all things women are the equal of men, even in the productive field. Even radicals do not differ from the Christians; they do not wish their wives to become radical; even they deem themselves necessary to her protection. So long as she needs protection she is not on equal footing, we need only to protect weaklings. One of the invasive points in the character of man is, that he is too authoritative for the forced progress in woman, and while he has evolved slowly he is making the fatal mistake of securing more liberty for woman through the very thing that was his own enslavement, i.e., authority. Opposition to this will correct this evil.

Contemptible marriage laws and the adherence to them tend to still farther increase the degradation. To assert that freedom of the sex relations is the natural law is interpreted to mean free lust. The law of love governs this as in all matters, love being the fulfillment of the law. Motherhood and its beauty, of which poets have sung and written, is a farce, and cannot be otherwise until we have freedom—economically.

Men are all heroes at home, but cowards abroad. Women, too, would be as unjust at the ballot box as are the men. They are tyrants as well as are the men. Woman, to be free, must be the mutual friend and mate of man. The individual is the ideal liberty. We owe no duty to anyone, save ourselves. When universal woman once comprehends this ideal, then all protective laws, intended for protection, which is indeed her weakness, will disappear, and this adulterous system goes, and with it charity and all its attendant ills. In short, the new woman movement demands an equal advancement by the modern man.