

Is It All A Dream?

James F. Morton Jr.

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The old cry that Anarchists are haters of mankind, and apostles of wholesale destruction, is beginning to die out. The educational propaganda of today is making its influence felt in most unexpected quarters. Multitudes of earnest and thoughtful men and women of every class are beginning to recognize the sublimity of the Anarchist ideal. The ground of criticism has entirely shifted. Instead of being denounced as human monsters, Anarchists are now accused of being unpractical idealists. Only the grossly ignorant now assail us from the old standpoint. It has become quite the fashion for the more progressive Socialists, Single Taxers, and reformers of other schools, no less than for many scholars, artists, philosophers, and men of letters, to announce themselves "ultimate Anarchists." Yet the goal of Anarchy appears to them so lofty and distant, that, out of sheer despair of attaining it without centuries of struggle, they fall back on what they consider measures of immediate practicability. Hence they wear out their lives in ceaseless political contests, chasing one *ignis fatuus* after another, only to be repeatedly led astray into the swamp. For lack of a unifying principle, each petty success proves utterly futile, as a means of securing permanent results. The causes of social evils being left in full operation, all tampering with mere results is as vain as the labor of Sisyphus. Experience demonstrates that it is wiser to move straight toward the true goal, concentrating all our energies on the removal of obstacles from the path, than to wander into the devious by-ways, however attractive, along which rapid progress is possible for a time, but which invariably end in a *cul de sac*. The truly practical man is he who conceives clearly the end to be sought, and swerves neither to the right nor to the left in his determined course.

It is with justice that well-informed thinkers now regard Anarchy as the highest ideal of human society. The free association of men and women in satisfying all the needs of life, the blossoming forth of full individuality, the redemption of the earth from the exploiters, the collapse of the wage system with its cruel inequalities, the vanishing forever of poverty, crime, and intemperance, the reduction of disease, insanity, and hurtful accidents to an almost negligible minimum, the full realization of the joy of existence, the expansion of art, science, philosophy, literature, to a degree only possible among a free people,—these, and such as these, are the fruits of such liberty as that to which we aspire. Is it any wonder that we wax earnest and enthusiastic, when picturing to ourselves the glories of the free society of the future?

After all, however, is this magnificent conception anything more than “the baseless fabric of a dream?” Are we merely wasting our energies in striving for the unattainable? Mere sentiment is an insecure foundation for a social structure.

Close investigation will demonstrate that Anarchists, so far from being dreamers, are the most practical of human beings. They know exactly what they want, and move directly toward it. The mass of mankind in every age can conceive of no conditions other than those to which they have become accustomed. Cazotte’s predictions of the French Revolution were treated as the wildest ravings by his cultured hearers. Blackstone could not imagine the slightest improvement in the common law of England. The abolitionists of the United States, hardly a generation ago, were reviled and persecuted, even unto death; and many thousands, even of sympathizers with their ideal, were swift and persistent in declaring that slavery always had existed, and was therefore too deeply rooted to be overthrown—at least for many hundreds of years. Such prophecies are always easily and glibly pronounced. The inertia of the mass has always to be reckoned with; but it is not an insurmountable barrier to the accomplishment of great social changes. What can be conceived by man, can be effected by him. — The only question is whether the result is worth the effort.

The conception of full human liberty is by far the grandest social generalization that has ever entered into the mind of man. It is in full harmony with the trend of history and the conclusions of science. It does not, as is often superficially objected, presuppose a superhuman race of beings, but appeals to the fundamental traits of average human nature. It demands no exalted self-sacrifice from individuals, but appeals to motives of intelligent self-interest. When we talk of brotherhood, we do not appeal to a mawkish sentimentality. We merely state a fact in nature, on the recognition of which social harmony and the happiness of the individual alike depend.

To the thoughtful student of life, it becomes increasingly evident that the method of living, by which alone the common aim of happiness can be attained, is through the fullest development of all the faculties. Man is a complex being, with multifarious wants and desires. No cut and dried system can fully satisfy his present needs, and leave ample margin for the constant shifting of conditions inseparable from growth. Flexibility, above all, is an imperative necessity in the more advanced stages of social association. With the disappearance of authority, and the setting free of natural resources, all monopoly must vanish, and with it the power of a few to hold the many in economic subjection. Rent, profit, interest, taxes, and all other forms of veiled robbery, cannot co-exist with equality of opportunity. A free people, meeting on equal terms, is capable of making whatever economic arrangements best subserve the interests of the individuals concerned, and of readjusting these arrangements as often as may be required, with the least possible friction. No elaborate machinery, no continual dependence on a stupid majority, no waiting for the often unsatisfactory decisions of a “Central Committee,” no cringing to political bosses, no party organization, no authorization by officials or legislative assemblies, will any longer be necessary. Individual initiative will take the place of all these. Men and women will put far more heart into their work, and will exercise their inventive faculties in an immeasurably superior manner, when no portion of the result of their labor is intercepted by employer, landlord, or tax gatherer. The result will not be a tendency toward isolation, as is fancied by some who strangely misread human nature. Rather will free men and women, once fairly rid of the unavoidable suspicions which inevitably mark their attitude toward one another in this age of industrial warfare, find their common interest in far more intimate social and economic association than would be possible today. This would be the unavoidable consequence, not of a radical organic change in human nature,

but of the needs of human nature as it exists today, under conditions of unrestricted freedom of development. It requires but the slightest knowledge of biology to recognize the elementary fact that social instincts are stronger in the long run than the anti-social instincts, and must survive in the struggle for existence. Force government, with its manifold opportunities for robbery and oppression, its creation of class and caste divisions between man and man, its false ethics as exemplified in war and capital punishment, its vile diplomatic intrigues, its hideous political corruption, and its unlimited supply of motives for friction, irritation, and hatred, is the worst possible stumbling-block in the pathway of the slowly evolving social consciousness.

For the foregoing reasons, it is clear that the logical evolutionist must, sooner or later, accept the premises of the Anarchist philosophy. Radical and idealistic as its teachings seem, they are founded on the undisputed conclusions of science. Being in harmony with the trend of human progress, and responsive to the needs of human nature, Anarchy offers itself to the world as the answer to its yearning questions and the realization of its loftiest aspirations.

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