

# A Healthy Comparison

James W. Adams

January 1901

Whenever the subject of free love is mentioned it is customary for monogamists to denounce it as a delusion and its advocates as vile and unclean, and those who write or otherwise devote themselves to the cause of the common people are ostracized, slandered, arrested, fined, imprisoned—anything to insure their silence and thus prevent the spread of radical ideas.

Freeloaders have no warfare to make upon any truth that monogamy teaches, but when monogamy obtrudes itself in the pathway of progress it then becomes the duty of every thinking man and woman to utter an emphatic protest.

So far as I am individually concerned, I prefer not to see one system arrayed against the other as a system, but would leave everyone free to accept the truth and reject the errors of both systems, fully believing that it will redound to the benefit of both freeloaders and monogamists if they will profit by the injunction laid down in the twelfth commandment: "Mind your own business, and let others alone."

But since the enemies of free love insist that no one who rejects monogamy can be honest, truthful and reliable, or good enough to associate with, let us candidly compare the two systems not by the large professions of their advocates, but by their visible fruits, and learn, if we can, which system, after a thorough investigation, will compel the earnest seeker for truth to adopt as a system.

It is an indisputable fact that a consistent belief in natural selection, in justice, in liberty, will lead to free love, but I am sorry to say that those who are most persistent in trying to array free love on one side and monogamy on the other in an imaginary fight between the two are generally ignorant of the teachings and tendencies of either system, and, unfortunately, decline to investigate the facts and claims as presented by their respective advocates.

Since the enemies of freelovism throw down the gauntlet we cheerfully take it up, firmly relying upon principles based on truth that it will not only stand the test as applied by monogamic ethics, but also the crucial test of reason. In proof of this confidence I lay down the proposition that there is not anything bad in free love, nor can there be said to be anything bad in it that is not found in monogamy. It is not my purpose (here) to reply to arguments against free love, but to show that if there is any logical force in such argument it applies, with all its force, against monogamy. The consensus of objections urged against free love is that it is immoral in its tendency. There is nothing immoral in it I emphatically deny. I admit that there are mercenary, narrow, bigoted freelovers, just as are found in all other classes—those who have not profited by

the mistakes of the past. Free love finds them as they are, and not as we would have them. It finds them where monogamy, or Christian marriage, has left them, hence, whatever of crudeness and error that may be attached to them is justly chargeable to the Christian system, a system that forbids investigation. The believers in freedom in love come from among the saints and sinners, from among all classes; from every condition in life, and, as a consequence, we have all sorts of characters and opinions, every phase of society, and every degree of culture.

Free love appeals to them as a natural fact, and the application of this fact to their daily lives depends on their mental and moral development. They are wise or unwise, cultured or illiterate, moral or immoral, in exact accord with the education, character and standing of the individual.

“They have seen that our laws bearing upon the relation of the sexes had their rise in the traditions of the Bible. They have seen that the status of the wife and the prostitute is identically the same; that is, the passional gratification of man is the chief consideration; have seen that marriage laws were not made for the protection of the wife, or the good of the children, or the welfare of the home, but to protect each man from the encroachments of every other man, to insure him in the peaceable possession of the woman he claims.

“They find that it is the maintenance of compulsory monogamy that makes the courtesan and brothel facts just as our homes and our firesides. They find that the bickering and strife, the envy and jealousy, the misery and crime, the suicides and murders that grow out of marital infelicity are the result of the faulty ethical system that produces them. The fact that marriage is responsible for the half-hidden skeletons in the family closets of respectable homes, the sad story of motherhood, ground to the dust under the misrule of masculine ignorance and superstition, is enough to condemn the system which produces them.

“Freelovers demand for woman the ownership of herself and her emancipation from sexual bondage, the rich to her children against the claims of the reputed father.

“The leaders in this warfare against sexual freedom are unscrupulous designing men and women, whoknowingly perpetrate wickedness, and from evil motives, but the multitude who take up the cry of ‘obscenity’ are not necessarily bad people. They are too indolent and too superstitious to think for themselves. They swallow without examination whatever is presented to them by the elders, and accept as truth the traditions of the divine origin of old customs and institutions. They are taught to consider the copulative act as being all there is to the sexual problem—a surrender to the carnal appetite at best, but licensed and protected by monogamic marriage in the best manner possible. They believe that in some mysterious way the marriage ceremony changes a very vile and sinful act into a pure and commendable one. Just how this mysterious power operates in changing uncleanness and wrong into chastity and righteousness they are unable to explain, but they accept it as they do the atoning power of the blood of Jesus which cleanses from all sin. Christian marriage being symbolical of the Christian religion, they would no more doubt the perfection of one than the holiness of the other.”

So long as people believe that sexuality in the flesh is analogous to total depravity it is useless to expect them to rationally consider the sex question. Sexual attraction, natural, orderly and obedient to the law of love, is not a virtue in the proper sense of the word. Fashionable virtue is always of the feminine gender and measured by the legal standard. A woman to be virtuous must live a celibate or else become a legal wife, a thing she cannot do without a personal surrender to herself to the keeping of her husband, and an agreement to serve him sexually for the rest of her life according to the marriage law, a law so constructed and administered that there is no phase

of sexual abomination that may not be practiced with its full sanction. It justifies mercenary marriages and gives license for excess and debauchery.

“The most cruel outrage and abuse will receive its sanction if they bear the semblance and seal of law. The coarsest, filthiest, and most sensual animal in human form may associate with a woman, if he be her husband, and he may treat her in the most brutal manner that woman can be treated by man, may infect her with sexual disease until her whole system is filled with rottenness, without any damage to her virtue. Her health, her happiness, and even her life may be destroyed. The marriage certificate does double duty—it is at once his license and her shield of honor.

“On the other hand, when a healthy, happy pair find each other just too sweet for anything and drink of stolen waters, what is the result? Well, nothing so far as the man is concerned; he is not damaged any, but the poor woman! her virtue is lost; she is fallen, dishonored, ruined forever.”

A person would be thought crazy who would seriously propose such a rule for masculine virtue as the one by which woman is measured. No one thinks of driving the bad boy from home and friends, thus shutting him off from all good influences. A boy only “sows his wild oats,” and then settles down into a sober man and becomes a good husband, a fond parent, a respectable citizen, and there is no reason in nature why the girl who has a partner in the “wild-oats” business should not become a good mother, a loving wife, and a useful member of society.

Monogamy deals kindly with our prodigal sons and harshly and cruelly with our wayward sisters. Monogamy is so excessively nice about keeping out of sight the poor girl who has passed the borders of the enchanted land of pleasures that she is driven out of its janus-faced fold lest she contaminate the blushing bride who has sold her body to old Moneybags.

We may shut our eyes and try to persuade ourselves that our conjugal relations are regulated on a monogamic basis; we may boast of our schools and churches, our advance in the arts and sciences, but whether we recognize the fact or not, it cannot be successfully denied that sexual prostitution is continually circling and seething in our midst, carrying down to unfathomable depths of misery thousands of women every year.

According to statistics there are in the United States 500,000 women who make sexual prostitution their regular business as a means of obtaining a livelihood. From the same source we learn that the average length of a woman’s life after entering this maelstrom of despair is five years; as their number does not grow less the conclusion is forced upon us that 100,000 new victims are added every year to satisfy the demands of monogamy.

In stating these unpalatable facts, and saying that marriage is responsible for woman’s sexual enslavement to unbridled passion, we do not rush headlong against that union which exists only in the dreams of the poets, but we do make uncompromising warfare upon marriage as exemplified in common usage, in common law, where the woman is “given in marriage” and becomes a household drudge and a sexual slave in her husband’s home.

Jas. W. Adams.

The Anarchist Library (Mirror)  
Anti-Copyright



James W. Adams  
A Healthy Comparison  
January 1901

Scan of original, Discontent vol. 4 no. 27, April 2, 1902  
Document scanned and uploaded to The Anarchist Library

[usa.anarchistlibraries.net](http://usa.anarchistlibraries.net)