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Jean Grave

Woman and Marriage

1895

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The idea of individual autonomy is beginning to gain ground, and like all ideas, it will triumph, no doubt, but there is another that has been separated from it, though it is fundamentally the same, and a number of individuals, even among workers, alas! claim against their own enslavement, and continue to see in woman only an inferior being, an instrument of pleasure, when they do not make her a beast of burden.

How many times have we not heard people say around us: "The woman! deal with politics! let her go and take care of her *pot-au-feu*, and patch up her husband's breeches". Very often, it is socialists, revolutionaries, who use this language; how many others who, without speaking thus, without thinking about it, act, in the family, like true masters! In addition to allowing the loss of one of the greatest forces of the revolution, this conduct also proves that they have not yet arrived at a full understanding of the solidarity of all human beings.

From this, a parallel current of opinion arose, which, not concerned with the economic question, pursues, in present-day society, the emancipation of women, their access to all jobs, their participation in political matters. Another blind way of looking at things, another oblivion of the situation. The enslavement

of the woman is a survival of the state of barbarism, which was maintained in the laws because the man considered her, in fact, as an inferior being, but, for the rich woman, this enslavement was soon only merely nominal; it was only maintained in all its force for the proletarian woman. The latter can effectively free herself only with her companion in misery, and her political emancipation would be only one more illusion, as it was for the working man. It is not alongside and outside the social revolution that women must seek their deliverance; it is by mingling their claims with those of all the disinherited.

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Without going back to the Fathers of the Church who seriously discussed whether the woman possessed a soul, how much nonsense has not been talked about! Even today, a number of scientists still assert that the woman is an inferior being. For the most part, it is true, they are the same who speak of the “inferior classes”, when it is a question of the worker, and staunchly support the inaptitude of certain races to be able to raise themselves to a certain level of education. These scholars are always ready to justify all oppressions, all iniquities, provided that they are paid for their complacency with decorations and badges. One would think, really, that by dint of lowering others, they imagine themselves raising as much.

What has not been invoked to prove this alleged inferiority of woman: her muscular weakness, compared to that of man, the lower capacity of her brain, to speak only of perfectly established things, not to speak of a so-called inaptitude for the exact sciences, and of an alleged physiology which would like to demonstrate that the sexual organs of the woman are only an arrest of development of the organs of the man.

But, when it was well established that the brain was the organ of thought, the partisans of female inferiority believed they had finally found an unshakeable basis for their doctrine, and

this is where they entrenched themselves. In all human races, indeed, the female brain is normally less in weight than that of the male.

It has also been proven that, all things considered, the heavier brain is more likely to be better gifted, which is beyond dispute. What to answer to these facts?

A very simple thing: when one makes science, actually science, in order to learn, to increase our knowledge, and not in order to make a weapon of war to justify an idea conceived of a priori, one compares, one by one, the elements of the process, one takes into account all the accessory relations which complete the thing by complicating it, one studies the modifications that these relations can bring to the main element, and between them; and only then can we hope to have more or less certain conclusions.

Our scientists in question, happy to find a fact which supported their theory, have forgotten only one thing, which is that if the weight had been everything, if it had been the only factor to be taken into account, the whale and the elephant would be the most intelligent beings that exist, their brains surpassing, certainly, that of the man.

But the weight is not the only factor to cooperate in the richness of the brain; some have understood this. It is necessary to take into account its relation with the size, with the total weight of the body. The brain is made up of thinking cells, but also of nerve cells whose only function is to activate the various muscles. The heavier the mass is to move, the more numerous and voluminous the latter are, and their mass has nothing to do with intelligence.

Then there is the richness of the convolutions which has as much, if not more, value than the weight; chemical composition is another value to be taken into account. A difference in the structure of the cells can modify the functioning of the brain, and, finally, there is to be taken into consideration the nutritional conditions which, according to whether the flow of

blood takes place, more or less regularly, in a more or less active way, slows down or accelerates brain activity.

And, last reason, it is not enough to have a very gifted brain; it is also necessary to give it exercise by education. Now, for the woman, as for the worker, they have always been maintained in an inferiority of education, under the pretext that what has reserved for the rulers was too beyond their comprehension, and moreover, was useless for them to fill the posts which have been reserved for them. And it is this “acquired” inferiority that we are presented today as a natural law!

If men had been less infatuated with this anthropocentric spirit which makes them relate everything to themselves, and which comes from the same mindset as the geocentric error, they would not have dared to emit this scientific heresy. But, seeing this supremacy they boasted of being dismantled little by little, they attempt a final transformation:¹ the “virocentrism” [*“virocentrie”*] which, like the others, is not based on any real data.

If it had been a question of two different races, and without any relation, we would understand, at a pinch, that the question could also have been raised wrongly, no doubt, but that would have been to be discussed. But between the two members of the same family, the two strains equally necessary for the perpetuation of the species, one must be idiot to have raised the question.

Does the man and the woman reproduce each separately, to better give birth, the man to sons, the woman to daughters, thus transmitting their qualities and their defects separately to their descendants?—No, they are forced to cooperate together to engender, indiscriminately, males and females. They both transmit their qualities to their offspring, without choice of

¹ Without forgetting the pedants who want to prove the superiority of certain races and the sub-pedants who come afterwards, to assert the superiority of certain classes. So many errors that derive from the same spirit.

sue the emancipation of *all* human beings without distinction of sex or race.

sex. Sometimes the male dominates, sometimes it is the female. Sometimes the individual can predominate in the product of his sex, but also in the product of the opposite sex. No one has yet been able to give the reason for these variations, but it remains nonetheless certain that, according to the (unknown) circumstances, one or the other sex can indifferently dominate in the products of the generation.

Now, if this is so, and admitting that, from the start, a real inferiority would have characterized the female sex, the following would have happened: either the female would have ended up by imposing her inferiority, or else the male would have imposed its superiority, or even, it would have ended up being made between the two components a balance of faculties which would have put them at the same level.

In the first case, with each generation the female would have come to add a part more of her inferiority, and her negative properties would have ended up eliminating the positive qualities of the man. But, in this case, since the time that the human species is perpetuated by generation, it would have long since returned to animality.

In the second case, it is the positive qualities of man that would have triumphed. Advocates of female inferiority will be forced to reject this hypothesis, because since the time that the sexes have intermixed through generation, the two sexes have been kneaded enough to have acquired equal properties, and their assertion [of female inferiority] would have no more reason to be.

They will also deny the third case which still implies an average, lower level for both sexes. They would therefore only have a fourth hypothesis left, the one that, despite the mixtures, each sex would have retained through the crossings its own qualities. Apart from the fact that this hypothesis is the least admissible of all, what will those say who are desperately attached to the absolute theory of the “struggle for existence” and the survival of the fittest?

Thus, simple logical reasoning shows us the solution: the equality of the sexes with various nuances and properties, but which are qualities relating to the physiological organization to which they are attached, and which make them equivalent if not equal in aptitudes.

* * *

The woman, by virtue of her physical weakness, has, in inferior societies, always suffered the authority of the male, to varying degrees of violence; the latter has always more or less imposed his love on her. Property of the tribe first, then of the father, to pass under the authority of the husband, she thus changed masters without anyone deigning to consult her preferences.

Object of property, her masters watched over her to prevent her from lending without their consent what they wanted to be the only ones to have, except in countries where, a rich posterity being a pledge of wealth, the master was kind enough to close his eyes to the origin of goods which he could dispose of. In all other cases, the master could sometimes, in a fit of generosity, lend her to a friend, a host or a client, as one lends a chair, but, believing himself frustrated if they had disposed of it without his knowledge, he took a ferocious vengeance on her as the culprit.

Admittedly, this dependence of women, if it is always recognized by the laws—highly advocated by some—either by trickery or by the power that their sex exercises over man in the relations of the two sexes, this so-called authority of man has de facto fallen. At the present time, in our so-called civilized societies, the rich woman is emancipated de facto, if not de jure; it is only the poor woman who at present undergoes slavery and the letter of the law.

Even in the most backward peoples, doesn't she manage to create privileges for herself? Ancient historians tell us about

Some admit all this, but claim that in today's society marriage is a guarantee for women. Error. It is the man who makes the laws, and he has been careful not to forget to make them to his advantage. The rich woman, we have said it, is freed, she will find in the law a protection, she can make herself free; the rich man himself, is he not absolutely free, and what worries him so much about the laws? Money in today's society is the great liberator. But for the proletarian woman, legal marriage offers only illusory guarantees against the man who would like to let go of her with the kids.

It takes money to sue, and obtaining legal aid takes a lot of time and procedures. And then, what recourse can she have against the man who has no money, and who can make wage seizures futile by changing workshop and residence at each court judgement. If he has money, there are a lot of twists and turns in the laws, not to mention the means of intimidation.

As for the woman who would have a drunken, brutal husband, who would exploit and beat her, legally she could neither separate nor get rid of him; the law made her his property, the owner has the right to use and abuse. What tortures, what humiliations will she have to endure before the chain that attaches her to him is broken! And yet! the law intervenes in the event of serious abuses, but she is helpless in the face of moral abuses. How many cases where the woman would have time to die in pain, if she did not find more effective protection than the law!

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The proletarian woman, like the worker, can only free herself through the social revolution. Those who make her hope for her emancipation in today's society, blatantly deceive her. Considered as a helot by man and by the law, she too must conquer her place in the sun by her will, but she will only succeed by associating and making common cause with those who pur-

they will find this ideal in new relationships; The psychological moment arrives when they can possess this new ideal, which satisfies them, fixes them, or even disilludes them, but always having the effect of detaching them all the more from their first choice.

From the day when the man and the woman will no longer feel themselves chained by law and convenience, those who love will want to ensure the duration of the possession of the loved object; they will understand that they must continue, towards it, the care, the attentions which they employed to conquer it; that they must continue to prevail over their rivals, if they still want to be loved themselves. They will know how to prolong the love that they knew how to inspire. This can only be useful for the moral and physical evolution of the species.

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On the other hand, when the woman will no longer be forced to sell herself in order to eat or to obtain the luxury that she covets, she will choose, from the one she has elected, the qualities that she prefers, and constancy is one of those. Usually, too, she is more stable in her affections, so she will also do her best to bond with her lover.

On the other hand, when they have lived for a certain period of time together, the man and the woman experience a feeling of esteem and affection which outlasts the passionate outbursts of the first possession, and makes them neglect the adventurous crushes. If monogamy is the goal of human evolution, only the most complete freedom can lead it there. The test of compression is already done.

It may be that, while young, ardent, full of activity and expansion, man is inclined to change and inconstancy; but we see him calm down when he really loves, for fear of offending the object of his love. So, here, let nature correct itself.

* * *

that Gallic tribe where women were called upon to judge any disputes that the tribe might have with its neighbors, and whose decisions a Roman general had to respect.

Among the Australians, where she is treated like a beast of burden, where she only sits behind her lord and master, who throws at her on the fly the pieces of which he does not feel the need, we report a similar custom.² Indeed, if she has always endured the brutal force of man, woman, by her finesse and her ruse, has always known how to gain the upper hand over him. Today it is made a crime of this ruse, “the weapon of the weak”, it is said. She might reply to you that the reason of force is that of the brute.

The sexual union very probably began with promiscuity, and then the man asserted his right to property by capturing the one he wanted to make his “companion”. He then bought her, and then, customs becoming more and more mellow, we ended up taking into account the woman’s choice, and gradually emancipating her, while the spirit of property, which rested on despotic family organization of the father, sought to plunge the woman back into the close dependence of the male, and this is what has earned us this variety of laws and prejudices on sexual relations.

How many laws have been made to regulate the relationships between man and woman, how many errors and prejudices that official morality has helped to maintain and take root, but that nature has always been pleased to tumble without ever complying with their arbitrary decrees!

Man, in his capacity as master, finds it very good to forage on the neighbour’s property; this is very well worn; even in the most prudish societies, the man who can boast of numerous “conquests” is considered a fortunate lad! But the woman-property, she, by law, by education, by prejudices and current

² Élie Reclus : *Les Primitifs d’Australie*. [His book “Primitive Folk” is available in English here: archive.org (Translator)]

opinion, she is forbidden to give free rein to her feelings. Sexual relations are for her a forbidden fruit, she is only entitled to copulation sanctioned by the mayor and the priest! And this is how it is that, in an act committed by two, all the shame is for one and the glory for the other.

This is because, say the masculinists, the harm done by the two participants is not comparable. The adultery of the woman risks introducing strangers into the family who would later steal the legitimate owners of a share of the inheritance. From this capitalist axiom we can infer that it is very good to harm your neighbor: there is only harm when you experience it yourself. This is capitalist morality in all its splendor. The woman-property, by having complacency for the male whose presence has subjugated her, does wrong to the master, down with her! The casual male who, like the cuckoo, goes to nest in the neighbor's nest, shows intelligence. No longer regency [*On n'est pas plus régence*].

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Religion then came to bring its share of anathema against those who obeyed the laws of nature more than the restrictions of moralists and jurists. The theory of original sin came to weigh with all its weight on the accomplishment of the reproductive act.

Unable to decree absolute continence, the Church had to sanction and bless the union of man and woman, in order to regulate their relationship, throwing its strongest anathemas to those who indulged in love without its consent. The ceremonies freely performed by the primitives within the tribe, to properly establish their entry into the household, became obligatory with religion and from there passed into the Civil Code, the heir of most of the of the Church's prerogatives.

After having forbidden to love without the authorization of the priest, it was forbidden to love without the authorization of

as an example, since she is the one who has more to fear the consequences; she does not care about the laws, the opinion, and all the rest. If, therefore, we cannot hinder a feeling that centuries and centuries of compression have forced to conceal, but were not able to prevent, so let it flow freely, and we will always gain frankness and good faith in our relationships, which would be a real improvement.

But that would not be the only improvement, for we claim that when coercion and official intervention are abolished, along with economic considerations, sexual associations being more normal, far from loosening, will become more stable and more tightened. The woman who possesses real modesty does not give herself to the first comer—Darwin proves that it is the same, moreover, among the animals. When greed is no longer at stake, she must feel attracted to an individual in order to give herself to him. Even then, what struggles and debates before the final abandonment! What better guarantees can we demand?

We have seen that, in present-day society, sexual unions were based more on economic considerations than on affection, and this is one of the causes that make individuals, after a very short period of cohabitation, get sick of the flu, and become unbearable to each other; people get caught up in the flu, and become unbearable to each other; especially if there were disappointments in the wake of their "hopes".

Even in marriages where love may have played a role, education and prejudice intervene to bring about feelings of discord. Individuals—man and woman—knowing that they are linked for life, in an indissoluble way, gradually lose those little attentions, those concerns which are what might be called the spice of love; little by little, habit, the satiety of the senses, imperceptibly detach lovers from one another; each forgets that personal care that the other loved at the time of their "courtship"; each regrets the ideal they had dreamed of and that they are know far from acknowledging in their chain mate; they believe

thousand francs more in the basket will not make him close his eyes to the “spots” on the fourth pages of the newspapers.

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It is objected that if there is no longer any brake to moderate libertinage in sexual relations, it will happen that unions will no longer have any stability. We can all see in today’s society that repressive laws have no value in preventing it. We are even certain that they contribute to a large extent to marital discord, so why do we want to insist on regulating what is incompressible? Isn’t it better to leave individuals free, thus being able to maintain respect for one another, when they will no longer be forced to endure each other, instead of duress making them, at times, fierce adversaries? Does one find it more worthy that, as can be seen now, the gentleman has mistresses in town and the lady has lovers, that everyone is “deceived” with the knowledge of all, lies on which everyone turns a blind eye, provided that scandal is avoided?

Today’s marriage is a school of lies and hypocrisy. Adultery is its essential corollary, as the lupanar is the obligatory accompaniment of this false modesty which wants us to blush when talking about the sexual act. We hide from feeling the need to accomplish it, but we turn to infamy when we believe ourselves hidden.

Because a woman has had relations with a man, current morality would have her condemned to have relations only with him. Why? If they were either wrong, can’t they look better??? That is the door open to libertinage, we are answered.—Then look at your society, you unfortunate bunch!

We have cited the case of seduced girls who find nothing better, then, to hide their alleged fault than abortion and infanticide. And, for each case where adultery causes scandal, how many do we see around us, going their way, under the curious eye of the neighbors? When the woman loves, we take her

the mayor. Public opinion, kept in ignorance by the priest and the legislator, shouted at those who found that they did not need anyone’s permission to prove their love for each other. But still from the idea of property, it was on the woman that the reprobation fell; the man was only blamed if he took this union seriously, and treated his lover as a true companion.

But this false modesty, as well as all the penalties and punishments that we have been able to invent against those who practiced love freely had only one effect: to make individuals deceitful, liars and hypocrites, without making them more chaste or more continent. We deflect nature when we thwart it, but we do not tame it. What is happening in our so-called civilized society is there to prove it. We have taken prudery to the extreme: adultery, prostitution, corruption, the transformation of legal marriage into real pimping, are the consequences of this intelligent organization and legislation. The infanticides prove to us that the shame thrown on the girl who gives herself up to love does not prevent anyone from tasting it on occasion, but that the consequences which ensue from it can lead to crime to hide a so-called fault.

Today, however, society is losing its rigorism, religion, and we don’t even talk about it anymore. Except for some peacock who wants to display his white *toilette* or the heir who wants to reconcile the good graces of parents with inheritance, few people feel the need to go and kneel in front of a gentleman who disguises himself outside of carnival days. As for the legal sanction, if we wanted to make the census among the population of our big cities, we would find that all the households have passed through the town hall, but by examining a little more closely, we could see that the three quarters have broken, without fanfare, the legal knots to form new ones, this time without any official consecration, and that households are no longer formed as they were registered at the town hall: There is always a gentleman and a lady A., a gentleman and a lady B.,

but the lady A., known to the neighbors, is found to be a lady X. at the town hall, and the lady B. to be a legal lady Z.

This has become so general that the bourgeois, whatever they may have, had to include divorce into their code. Today anyone who wants to do without the official consecration for their free union, manages to impose it on their entourage and to be respected. Public opinion begins to find the union freely consented to as valid as the other, and if the official consecration can disappear only with the other social institutions, because property rests on it, and the laws of inheritance require that the family is well delimited to be legal, and held in check so that the fortune does not disperse, it [the official consecration] nonetheless received the fatal blow from the day when the legislator had to register the cases in which it could be dissolved.

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Wasn't it foolish, indeed, to want to force two individuals to spend their lives together, while they made each other's life unbearable?

Because in the first fire of youth they had liked each other, two individuals, male and female, were by law forced to end their careers together, without ever being able to break this chain. If life was too unbearable for them, and each wanted to regain his freedom of pace, the only way for them was to put themselves outside the Code and without being able to have their new family recognized as valid, whatever their preferences. They were forced to hide the legal irregularity of their situation like a blemish, public opinion being as stupid as the law.

Woe to those who made a mistake in their choice, or who let themselves be stuck under the kindness of deceptive smiles, false promises, perfidious oaths, or given in all sincerity, in a moment of expansion, but which circumstances make later

consider otherwise; once the step had been taken, it was no longer allowed to go back; it was made for life. Happiness or misfortune, we had to put up with it. It was just crazy.

The indissolubility of marriage was idiocy. Two individuals can like each other for a day, a month, two years, and then come to hate each other to death. Why force them to inflame their hatred by forcing them to stand each other, when it is so easy to go each their own way?

This is because, apart from religious prejudice, capital demanded this sacrifice. Marriages, in today's society, are more often than not the association of two fortunes—with their hopes—rather than the union of two sexes. To allow the association to dissolve was a disaster for many calculations, and there was also the question of the children which complicated the situation, not by the love that one or the other of the dissidents could have for them, but by the more vulgar question of who should feed them.

It is like the authority of the ascendants being able to oppose their veto to the inclinations of the young; was there not another absurdity without excuse? By what right did individuals who can no longer think or feel like young people be able to interfere with their feelings of affection to hinder them? And then you think about the young people who, thwarted in their passion, still resort to suicide, when it would be so logical to tell their Gerontes to go shove it.

Society having been freed from all its economic obstacles, sexual relations will once again become more natural and frank, by resuming their character: "the free understanding of two free beings." The man will no longer seek a dowry or a means of advancement, nor the woman a maintainer [*un entreteneur*]. When she chooses a companion, she will check more if the favorite male meets her aesthetic and ethical ideal, than if he is capable of ensuring her a life of luxury and idleness. When a man chooses a companion, he will look in her for moral and physical qualities rather than "hopes"; a few