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Madeleine Pelletier
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Marriage or Free Love

Madeleine Pelletier

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In “La Voix des Femmes”, Madeleine Vernet talks about the disadvantages of free love for women. “Men”, she writes, “who advocates free love. The male sees, in this theory, a way to satisfy his instinct which drives him towards change. Women, on the contrary, is despoiled, since if there are children, they remain her burden. Even without children, she is still despoiled since, while men’s love is first of all sensual, while women’s love is mostly sentimental; when she is abandoned, she always suffers. It is therefore with reason that women envision suspiciously some ideas which are beautiful only as long as they are detached from reality.”

All this is true, but are the realities of marriage much better? That is not sure.

Those men who, like dogs or cats, only wish to leave, once their passion is quenched, legal union manages to keep them, most of the time. But when the chains feel too heavy on them, they express their discontent, at home, without any reason, through sweet and sour words, often through insults and even blows.

Every household is not like that; it happens that friendship survives love in couples. And this friendship can only be owed to the legal ties; without marriage, the man would have left his partner,

but he has a commitment, so he stayed, and, with habit, he ended up liking the home which was first a burden to him.

All things considered, however, the life of married women in the working class is far from enviable; they stand their condition however because they have children to feed and above all because she has been brought up in the idea that she cannot survive on her own. She believes that there are no means of existence for her without support.

Women get attached, obviously; she has been fed illusions. She has been made to believe that friendship is the rule when it is only an exception; we must teach women, as well as men by the way, to be self-sufficient, both morally and materially.

Family, despite the praises it gets, is far from bringing ideal happiness. It is only good among the bourgeoisie, where people know how to stand each other. Among the working-class, family is considerably reduced and the protection it offers is very often an illusion.

The young woman who wants to practice free love must first get rid of all her old ideas: the nest, the home, the strong shoulder to lean on, etc. If that is what she is looking for, she's making a mistake, she should marry.

But if a good worker, clerk, teacher, etc. has a trade which ensures her existence, she can easily look for men, like men look for women.

She won't be cheated, or at least not much if she's only looking for comradeship with a little extra something in her relations.

Women are cheated because they make a huge deal from sexual union which is only a small thing. They build their whole lives around it, whereas, in life, everyone only has themselves to rely on.

What about children? Obviously, a woman who practices free love would better not have any. Children, on top of being a burden, have the great disadvantage to limit freedom; for them, women would do anything.

But when a woman reaches the age of 27 or 28, it is not a bad idea for her to have a child. She will be alone to raise them, but whatever; it will cost her a little money but she will save on other things.

In her mature years, the child will be a consolation to her; she will be less alone and they will give a sense of purpose to her life.

All of this is transitory; free love will only fully bloom when society substitutes family in raising children.