

Free Love, Free Motherhood

Paul Robin

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Marriage has been practiced everywhere and always under conditions so absurd, so odious, so oppressive; it has resulted, in such an immense majority of cases, in changing the joys of love into an atrocious double, reciprocal slavery; so much and so often efforts have been made in vain to improve it, that it is not astonishing that a very large number of thinkers have long adopted the only radical and effective solution, the complete freedom of love.

Among the works in which this thesis has been defended, I like to cite, in the first line, the remarkable book, *The Elements of Social Science* [*Éléments de science sociale*], by a Doctor in medicine, published in 1854, in English, translated into many languages.¹⁽¹⁾

One of its chapters is audaciously titled: "Poverty, Its *Only* Cause, Its *Only* Cure!" The cause is marriage; the remedy is... sterile love (the author uses a more precise expression that I dare not reproduce). This work is big, compact, very stuffed with facts and arguments; he is one of those that light-minded people rarely read.

On the contrary, *The Gospel of Happiness* [*l'Évangil du Bonheur*], published two years ago by Armand Charpentier, is a book that could not be more pleasant to read for all, thanks to its elegance, clarity and conciseness. But, if it indicates the evil very well, the remedy which it proposes, simply free love, is a solution which it is necessary to complete.

Others have approached only part of the problem by combating legal marriage and replacing it with union, free marriage, which must, in their minds, present chances of duration, of constancy, equal or superior to that of marriage consecrated by authority. Paul Lacombe defends this idea in his already old book, *Free Marriage* [*le Mariage libre*].

Better still, making propaganda by the fact, a large number of couples declare with brilliance to unite freely and to abstain from any ceremony, or accompany their act only with family ceremonies.

Let us cite, in France, the unions of the daughters of Elisée Reclus; in England, those of E. Lanchester, of Walstall...

¹ The French translation, 3rd edition, bears the date 1885, publisher Alcan. (It can be found at the League of Human Regeneration [*Ligue de la Régénération Humaine*], 18, rue Duperré.) [Robin's note]

⁽¹⁾ The original English version of that book, by an anonymous doctor, can be accessed here: https://books.google.pt/books?id=_z0zAQAAMAAJ [Transtator's note]

These new unions are rid of a fatal detail, so be it! but they still have all the germs of suffering that make marriage detestable.

Naturally, neophobes of all kinds do not fail to protest against what they call at the very least "the most abominable shamelessness", as if the current apparent, legalistic, official society, affecting correctness, respectability, were the impeccable collection of all virtues, including the exclusive, so silly, virtue of woman, chastity.

I do not want to dwell for a single moment on the objections of theological origin presented against free love. Whoever is with the fiction of God is against the reality of man. He who seeks the happiness of man quickly rejects the idea of an almighty and ferocious God, created by the terrorized imagination of the primitives, exploited by the clever, preserved by a thoughtless feeling, an idea having no practical use, but, quite the contrary, being immediately, after the question of overpopulation and the resulting misery, the second cause of the innumerable and horrible killings of which history gives us the account.

To the frankly theological objections are attached those of the metaphysicians who want to impose on humanity certain moral ideals which satisfy their own prejudices, but not at all the legitimate aspiration of the great mass to happiness, as it understands it.

The only serious objection is that of the situation of children outside the so-called legal protection, and, whatever people may think who have not submitted the matter to calculation, the objection would remain even in a communist society, even in a moment freed from any material concern. The answer to the objection is the same in the hypothesis of this ideal society and in the reality of today's individualistic society: freedom of love presupposes freedom of motherhood.

The woman must have, I do not say the right, I do not know any more what this old abused word means, but the power and the science of not being a mother unless she has resolved it after mature reflection.

I think I was the first to clearly affirm this unique solution at the Feminist Congress of Paris (April 1896), and at the Second Congress for the protection and increase of the population⁽²⁾ (December 1896), the latter organized by a society of a dozen members that its creator and secretary modestly calls: "Alliance of Savants and Philanthropists of all countries"⁽³⁾

* * *

I thus summarize my doctrine from the feminine point of view:

A young girl is wrong to marry, to alienate the little freedom she possesses. May she remain as much as possible mistress of herself, may she freely choose her *compañeros* and *compañeras*;⁽⁴⁾ and, in order to ensure that her freedom is respected on this point, may she take care to respect that of others; may she be careful not to criticize the acts of others, and may each begin with herself the reform of the so-called "public opinion" which always meddles in what does not concern it and is more tyrannical than the positive laws themselves.

She does not disobey any rational law by having the lovers as she pleases, but she commits a great fault against true morality if she randomly creates children whose education and maintenance are nothing less than assured.

⁽²⁾ In the French original: "II Congrès pour protéger et accroître la population (décembre 1896)" [Translator's note]

⁽³⁾ "Alliance des Savants et des Philanthropes de tous les pays" [Translator's note]

⁽⁴⁾ "ses compagnes et ses compagnons" [Translator's note]

Those who really want the happiness of the young woman should not prevent her from knowing that science provides her with the means to be a mother only when she wants it.

The freedom of motherhood is the indispensable condition for the freedom of love. It must have no other guides than physiological science and sexual prudence.

If, after more or less numerous experiences, she finds a companion with whom, in perfect accordance of culture and tastes, she thinks she can spend a long happy life, she definitely associates with him, if it pleases her, without worrying about the vain legal sanctions, and gives herself the incomparable happiness of having children that she will be sure to be able to feed and raise well; and may these children bear only her name.

Many gynecologists teach that it is hardly good for a woman to be a mother before the age of twenty-five, and it is very obvious that her very natural desires for tenderness, for love, does not wait for that age.

If the loved companion, definitively chosen, achieves the dreamed ideal, something very rare in the current legal marriage, he will not need to be forced by the law to concur with the mother with all his strength, in every way, for the maintenance and education of the cherished children.

If by misfortune the lovers are mistaken, if the agreement does not last, if there is incompatibility of mood, if they separate, love will be followed not by hatred and horror, as today, but friendship or, at least, esteem. And the honest man will not fail to contribute his very suitable share to the material maintenance of the fruits of his former loves.

If, by some impossibility, after so many precautions, a woman is united with a scoundrel, she will separate from him, taking the children for whom she will have sole charge and direction, very unhappy no doubt, but not increasing her real misfortune of artificial torture added to it by oppressive laws.

Remaining major, the sole mistress of her children, she will not have made herself the slave of a tyrant who can molest her within very wide limits with impunity, legally steal the fruit of her labor, her savings, her children's bread and hers.

Degenerates with tyrannical instincts, deprived of the support of iniquitous laws by the woman's own initiative, by her abstention from legal marriage, would inevitably lose their brutality, would become humanized.

* * *

Here is yet another poignant question closely related to that of free love, in which it finds its perfect solution.

Among the innocent female babies brought into this cursed world by the chance of a brutal rapprochement, whether legitimate or not, there are, to speak only of the so-called civilized countries, at least one hundredth, often more, destined to become the most debased, the most crushed slaves and outcasts.

Prostitution is everywhere, frankly or hypocritically, transformed by the rulers into a social institution, designed to safeguard the unnatural and useless chastity of the girls of the bourgeoisie against the terrible, but perfectly natural, rut of the young males.

Our atrocious customs make some poor girls victims tortured by the abuse of pleasures of which many others are deprived. May the latter, who form a large majority, victims also for their disobedience to the physiological law of sexual exercise, revolt against prejudices, reconquer the pleasures so annoyingly refused to them by laws and mores; may they, saving themselves, save

at the same time their poor martyred sisters and destroy for ever, in the only effective way, the feminine slavery, prostitution!

In short, may women remain the sole arbiters of their destiny; may they expect nothing from the laws; let them know how to want; may they act. With one blow, they will realize the most important chapter of universal emancipation and will immediately enjoy these two goods which complement each other: freedom of love, freedom of motherhood!

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These tips are exclusively given from the feminine point of view. This is because in a legal union and in a free union, it is the woman who runs the greatest risks, as much by natural phenomena as by the aggravation that the laws and customs add to them. It has quite often been repeated with all possible proof that the laws have been made by men in favor of their sex, to the detriment of the other. It cannot be said too often that, still worse than the laws, the customs preserved by prejudices, especially the prejudices of women, maintain the slavery of the latter.

It is for the privileged women of fortune, or of intelligence, or of both, to take in hand the cause of their sex and not to leave its burden to those of the other sex that so many of them wrongly accuse of being the sole cause of their ills. To succeed, they must first unite frankly with the humble and despised, not by considering themselves as their generous protectors, deigning to forgive their faults or their weaknesses; but, on the contrary, well imbued with this truth that it is up to them to make their martyr sisters forgive them for a social state of which they themselves have reaped all the benefits. Secondly, it is necessary that they renounce those vain words, wishes, protests, demands, addressed to the public authorities, and that, without waiting for the usurpers, masters of the world by our softness, to deign to grant them every bit of successive little freedoms, they take the entire freedom without any permission.

In England, a country of practical people, these examples have already been frequently and usefully given. The well-known act of Edith Lanchester has served the cause of feminine emancipation in a different way than an endless number of vain speeches. Her example of independence has been followed, and will be even more so when the indispensable neo-Malthusian note is given with more vigor.

* * *

For completeness, we must also address the question of free love from the male point of view. This is much easier, if you only consider the material side of the problem. In our so-called monogamous society, almost all men practice polygamy, enjoy the advantages of the freedom of love without accepting any of its responsibilities; they are glorified by the same act which for their partners is worth dishonor and contempt, resulting in misery. But there are a certain number of them whose conscience does not allow them to base their pleasures on the misfortune of others, and for whom a commitment is all the more powerful the less legal, and for them the freedom of love has the same importance and must have the same corrective as for the woman.

Married or not, the honest father finds himself absolutely bound to the mother of his children, and it is not enough for him to pay his share of the expenses: he rightly considers himself as obliged to provide his share of care and tenderness. The previous advice is as applicable to him as to his partner.

The first training in love is provoked by external charms: beauty, wit, gaiety... It is quite sufficient to exchange under the nose of public opinion, which pretends to prohibit the pleasures that nature allows and encourages. It is not at all any more when it is a question of taking care in common of the education of the fruits of love. It will therefore be in the interest of the man, as much as that of the woman, that this love does not become fertile until a common, intimate, long enough life has proved to both of them the perfect accordance of ideas, tastes, mores, of the lovers wanting to become parents.

There are faults or flaws that the chain exaggerates and true freedom attenuates: teasing, selfishness, rapacity; the weak woman, protected by the legal bond, has even more than the man a tendency to abandon herself to it, as if to console herself for the exclusive obligations imposed on her by the law, a tendency that she would not have if, in order to accept the joy of love, she had not had to renounce a very large part of her freedom.

In addition, our educations are so different that, in a forced intimate life, our tastes, our feelings, our tendencies collide at every moment. This is less for people with great joys, with less active brains, than for the delicate, the thinkers. It often happens that a man animated by high scientific and humanitarian concerns, once the so-called honeymoon period has passed, finds, under the more or less careful veneer of a very superficial education, a wife with vulgar, banal tastes, without ideal, which hinders both his actions and his thoughts, which diminishes and even annuls his life! This is a torture very equivalent to that of the exceptional woman referred to above.

More than any other, the young man who dreams of giving his life a grandiose goal, of leaving his mark in the work of progress, must be at least as cautious as a young woman, before transforming a superficial love into an austere parental duty that he could be prevented from fulfilling well, which would be for him an inexhaustible source of the most intense pain.

We can estimate with a terrible English observer that not two marriages in a thousand make the dreams of the fiancés come true. In the other 998, there is a distressing situation that ranges from silent disagreements to frequent bitter words, to violent battle, to murders. The latter exceed, in Paris, according to the count made by Mme. Chéliga-Lévy, the number of days during which they are fulfilled, and, for a victim of marriage killed entirely at once, how many dozens long martyred, and the slow death of which official statistics will designate a completely different cause!

* * *

The situation for adults is certainly very lamentable; but even worse is that of the children in the hell of the large legal family. Randomly torn by parental anger, muffled or violent, their education is the counterpart of what it should be.

All varieties of their moral and physical misery have been described often enough by realist novelists that I spare myself from going into them in detail. It suffices to sum them up by saying that the child born at random, raised by parents more than incapable, will become even worse than them!

Mercy for him, oh blind couples! If you cannot make sure that he will be useful later, always happy, give him, to his advantage and yours, this incomparable proof of love: do not call him to life. Be worthy of repeating the marmoreal verse of Sully-Prudhomme:

Oh most loved son who will never be born!

PAUL ROBIN.

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