

CARNEY

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*Wood Cut by Wharton H. Esherick.*

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Mary E. Marcy

# MARY MARCY

*By Jack Carney*

THE world's revolutionary movement has lost one of its best fighters and clearest thinkers in the death of Mary E. Marcy. The loss sustained by the world at large is great, but that of the movement in the United States is greater, for there is no one to occupy the place left vacant by Mary, as she was affectionately known by thousands who knew her only by correspondence.

Mary Marcy was born in 1877, in Belleville, Illinois. At an early age she found herself bereft of parents, together with two younger members of the family, Inez and Roscoe. Her greatest hardship, she once said, was when her brother and sister were taken away from her and were sent to live with relatives. But undaunted, Mary worked on through high school and finally succeeded in securing a job in an office, at the telephone switch-board. Her wages were \$9.00 per week. Although the pay was small, she set up housekeeping, and took her brother and sister under her sheltering wing. She guided her sister through high school and her brother also, the latter securing a job as "printers' devil". With her "savings", she bought a text-book on short-hand, and soon became an efficient stenographer.

From this time on, Mary took a deep interest in economic, political and social questions. During the Bryan campaign of 1896, she was informed by her employers that no Bryan buttons would be tolerated. Instinctively the soul of Mary revolted, and wearing a Bryan button she found herself without a job. It is interesting to note

that her employers were engaged in the business of manufacturing American flags.

Clarence Darrow, well known to the radicals, hearing of Mary's dismissal and the reasons that led up to it, secured her a position under William R. Harper, president of the University of Chicago. "One of the characteristic things about President Harper", said Mary, "was his deep concern for those students who were poor. He always seemed eager to assist them." Her tuition was free, and during her spare hours Mary had an opportunity rarely presented to working-class girls, which she was not slow to take advantage of. She studied psychology under Dr. John Dewey, and took advanced courses in English literature and philosophy. Contact with university circles gave her a slant on life that assisted her considerably in the study of economic questions.

After three years of intense university studies, Mary joined hands with her life partner, Leslie H. Marcy. They decided to go West and made Kansas City their home. Here they found that the main question, as with all members of the working class, was that of earning a living. Mary secured a position as secretary to the treasurer of a large packing firm. She held this position during the years 1902-05. As a result of her new work she gained an insight into the methods pursued by Big Business, which helped her considerably in her Socialist Party work. (She was a member of the party from 1903 to 1917.) Readers of the *International Socialist Review* will recall her illuminating serial entitled "Letters of a Pork-Packer's Stenographer", which first brought her to the attention of radicals throughout the world.

About this time Congress appropriated \$50,000 to investigate the Beef Trust; "trust busting" was then the favorite indoor sport in political circles. The letters, appearing in the *International Socialist Review*, resulted in Mary being subpoenaed to appear before a grand jury

in Chicago. As a result of her testimony the packers were indicted. Judge Humphries issued his famous "immunity bath" decision, so nothing came of the investigation. As was to be expected, Mary again found herself without a job. The packers had given "loyal" employees free trips to Canada, Mexico and Europe that they might not be subpoenaed.

Mary later secured a job with the Associated Charities and obtained first-hand information as to how charity organizations functioned. Her experiences here gave her an invaluable insight into the mental workings of rich and poor. Mary found that it was not considered scientific to help a person first and investigate afterwards. The custom was to investigate first and "encourage" afterwards. Mary upset all this and reversed the order of things. The packers, on hearing that she was working for the Associated Charities, stated that they would withdraw their annual donations, which were of considerable size, if Mary were not dismissed. Let it be said to the credit of Mr. Damon, at the head of the Associated Charities of Kansas City, that he refused to accede to their request.

As a result of her charity organization work Mary wrote "Out of the Dump", which appeared serially in the International Socialist Review. It is interesting to note that it was illustrated by Ralph Chaplin, now serving a twenty years' sentence in Leavenworth penitentiary. Mary clinched the argument in her "Out of the Dump" when she had her leading character, old Granny Nome, declare, "Take keer of the stummicks, sez I, en' the morals 'll take keer of themselves." As a result of her articles, the magazine began to grow at a very rapid pace.

Mary was never of robust health, and she spent a year at Hot Springs, Arkansas, with a view to building herself up. Through her articles in the International Socialist Review, more especially her packing house letters,

a demand arose for more of her writings. In 1908 she joined the staff of the Review and became secretary of Charles H. Kerr & Company, holding that position until the day of her death.

For fourteen years Mary gave of her best. No worker ever did more for the revolutionary movement. Into her work she poured her heart and soul. Readers of the International Socialist Review need not be reminded of this, for within its pages are enshrined the best writings of Mary.

Mary soon came to realize a weakness in the methods by which radicals were attempting to approach the masses. She saw from the outset that Marx had to be simplified if his teachings were to be accepted by them. As a result she wrote "Shop Talks on Economics". Sitting in her home, where it has been our pleasure to confide in her and ask her guidance in many matters that trouble the mind of a radical editor, we saw copies of her "Shop Talks" in various languages. It has been printed in Japanese, Chinese, Finnish, Roumanian, French, Italian and Greek. During the last year of her life a British edition was published by the Socialist Labour Press, and the Industrial Workers of the World brought out a special edition. No greater tribute has been paid to any revolutionary writer. Over two million copies of her "Shop Talks on Economics" have been sold throughout the world. The editor of the London "Communist", in recently reviewing a work on economics, said: "If the worker knows nothing at all about the subject and has no inclination for technical study, he had better stick to our old friend Mary Marcy's 'Shop Talks on Economics'."

One pamphlet followed another in rapid succession—"How the Farmer Can Get His", "Industrial Autocracy", "The Right to Strike" and "Open the Factories". Her pen was never idle; it turned out first a pamphlet, then

a leaflet. Her theme was always the emancipation of the workers by the workers.

Her first scientific work outside the field of economics was "Stories of the Cave People", which appeared serially in the International Socialist Review. In response to a persistent demand, it was later published in book form and, like her "Shop Talks", has circulated in every part of the world.

In later years the country found itself flooded with sex literature. Every intellectual misfit wrote on sex, because he knew he had something that could be peddled to the unthinking. It was left to Mary, aided by her brother Roscoe B. Tobias, to write a brochure that exposed the alleged scientific pretensions of those who claimed to know and understand the sex question. In "Women as Sex Vendors" Mary and her brother literally wiped the floor with these alleged sex experts. H. L. Mencken, editor of "The Smart Set", the keenest literary critic in America, praised it unreservedly and urged Mary to write more along such lines. We need hardly add that the book was promptly suppressed, but where there is a will there is a way, and thousands of copies are in circulation. A Japanese version is in press.

Mary was next attracted by the Little Theater movement, and wrote that breezy satire on "free love" entitled "A Free Union". That it hit the nail on the head was made manifest by the indignant protests of alleged Bohemians. It has been staged twice with success, and has delighted many readers.

Just before Mary died, her latest book, "Rhymes of Early Jungle Folk", was published. It is beautifully illustrated by Wharton H. Esherick, one of her many friends. Reviewers from coast to coast are praising the book. It is recognized by those who teach children as the finest work of its kind. Speaking to the writer a few days before her death, Mary said: "If I can write little

jingles that will acquaint children with an outline of pre-history, I will feel satisfied that I have achieved my ambition." Mary's ambition has been achieved.

Mary Marcy, agitator, author, playwright, editor, busy as a bee, yet always found time to write to her many fellow workers. Whether it was the lumber jack in his bunkhouse, the miner out in the wilds of Australia, the railroader, the longshoremen, sailor or man counting the ties, the boy in the penitentiary, they all knew Mary through her letters. Every worker who wrote to her for help or who had information to give felt cheered when he received a letter signed, "Yours for the big day, Mary Marcy." In later years, due to her Correspondence Course in Marxian Economics, her letters occupied an increasing proportion of her time. On the day before she died Mary received a typical letter from a Japanese worker, in which he told of a division in Japanese labor circles. In it he says:

Dear Comrade Marcy,—Delaying my answer to your kind letter which received on August 23rd, I am inexcusable for. The work of a Bunsen, a worker in Japanese printing industry; applying myself to the study of English; to be present to the meetings of comrades; all and other cases prevent me to catch the chance to write a letter in English, that is very much difficult to me.

I enclose herewith \$5.00, for which send me the "Correspondence Course in Marxian Economics". Your "Shop Talks on Economics" have been translated and edited by comrades many times in this country to be propaganda books. So your name is popular, not only with me, but also with mass of working class of Japan as distinct writer in Marxian economics.

Now in Japan there have reappeared the discussions between Anarchism and Marxism. Lately, a Conference, which proposed to establish a Confederation of trades unions in Japan, took place at Osaka on September 30, and hundreds of workers who belong to about 60 unions, all assembled and discussed the matters. The unharmonious opinions of both cliques, that unions of Tokio deeply influenced by the late Kotokus Anarchism and headed actively at conference by Japan Typographical union Shinyu-kai to which I belong, held the Anarchistic view, and that unions of Osaka led by Yuai-kai, the Japan Federation of Labor, asserted the need of centralization of powers, quoted from Russian communist theory, made the conference split up. Indeed, discussions between them may quicken the progress in workers' thought, but to be excessive will

impede the labor movement. In reality, I think, fierce conflict between them only served to strengthen capitalist and weaken the workers' combined fighting strength in this country.

I wish to be a reader of American socialist papers or magazines. Write me, on occasion, the name and address of representative ones, please. Hoping to hear from you much again, I remain

Fraternally yours,

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Few writers received such a varied mass of letters as came to Mary. For radicals the world over found in her a clearing house for their many differences. It seemed as if she had been appointed to keep the radicals from destroying themselves. An I. W. W. member would write criticising the Communists and vice versa. Craft unionist and industrial unionist would write to her and detail their troubles. Mary advised them all and always wrote with a view to keeping them together, for well she knew that in the days when the masses are engaged in real struggle the revolutionists must unite.

Mary had a large following of "wobblies". In 1918 she joined the Industrial Workers of the World; the number of her card was 526613. When political chaos came in 1919 and resulted in the formation of the Communist Labor Party and the Communist Party, Mary foresaw the danger that presented itself. She foresaw—and how correct she was—that the "reds" would waste their time fighting each other, instead of fighting the boss. She urged them to remember that each side had its faults and that above all they must remember that in dealing with real things they should first, last and all the time be realists. She reminded them that in their haste they might commit acts that in after years they would regret. But the Russian Revolution, with its great emotional urge, had swept the comrades from off their feet. Many lost their perspective, and today the failure to heed the healthy advice of Mary Marcy has resulted in chaos.

In 1917, when the Communist Party, the Communist Labor Party and the Socialist Party were holding their rival conventions in Chicago, bitterly denouncing each other, she wrote for circulation among the delegates a leaflet entitled "A Revolutionary Party", which contained more common sense and sound tactics than the total output of the three conventions. In it she said:

If, instead of denouncing the only revolutionary movement that is actually making inroads in industry, we would learn what political action really is, and tell our friends what it is; if, instead of petty criticising, we were to back up this fighting organization and show it that an army is the **FORCE** that makes the State something besides a few words, or laws written upon pieces of paper; that mass action may be political action and that we are all so close together that we ought to present a **solid front to the capitalist enemy**, we might then develop a movement in this country that would actually move and grow."

Her advice passed unheeded, and today wherever you go men ask who you are, looking for your label. Heresy hunting has become the order of the day, and the great masses go floundering by. Rare opportunities meet us day after day and we fumble them. Viewing the situation now, the death of Mary Marcy becomes a greater tragedy than it appeared at first sight.

During the last four years, due to the strain of the war, her health gave way. Her home was ransacked by the Department of "Justice", and the sight of hundreds of fellow workers, many of them her own personal friends, going to jail played havoc with her. When the war-storm broke and the night was darkest she mortgaged her little home in order that A. S. Embree, acting secretary-treasurer of the I. W. W., might continue at his work. Later, when Embree had been convicted and imprisoned at Boise, Idaho, she again put up her home to secure the release of "Big Bill" Haywood.

Eugene Debs declared that Mary was the brainiest woman in the American movement. This is beyond dispute. Her preface to the Kerr edition of the "Life of

Debs" is recognized as one of the finest passages of writing contributed to the movement. "Leaders will never be able to carry the workers into the Promised Land", wrote Mary. "Men do not wage the great class struggle in the study, nor in the editorial rooms. Methods of class warfare do not come from the brains of the isolated scholar, but from the brains and experiences of the fighters. The workers are the fighters and the thinkers of the revolutionary movements." Only a few weeks ago she wrote a brilliant article, as yet unpublished, entitled "Shall Any Political Party Control the Unions?" In it she said: "Marx used to say that the emancipation of the working class must be the work of the workers themselves. And although this may seem a trifle old-fashioned in these days when folks want to 'do something for' us, it still holds true."

Mary took a keen delight in the writing of free verse. Only those of us who were privileged to sit inside her small circle of pals, and hear her read the poems, are aware of their existence. We feel that they are too beautiful to remain unpublished. They will appear in book form, along with other material on which Mary had been busy up to the day she was taken to the hospital. In it will be included a notable essay on "The Source of Moral Ideas."

Mary was a student in every sense of the term. Her well-chosen books were her tools; her library was her workshop. During the past year she over-taxed her strength by re-reading practically all the standard books put out by the publishing house, in order to re-write descriptions for the current catalog. She loved to read or be read to until late in the night. When she wrote the words came swiftly, and the keys of her typewriter fairly flew.

Her latest enthusiasm was for modern educational methods, and she was particularly attracted by Thorn-

dyke's "Educational Psychology". She was in close touch with the "School of Organic Education", at Fairhope, Alabama, where she took her vacation each winter for several years past. By correspondence and an occasional contribution, she showed her deep appreciation of the Plebs League and the work of the Labor colleges of Great Britain.

Her little cottage was the mecca of many revolutionists. So eager a life, so finely-poised an intellect, so poetic a nature, drew them to her. Her rare tolerance made them all feel at home, except an occasional careerist or politician. The neighboring children found in her a fairy godmother. Almost every morning they came to her to play. Surrounded by these children she wrote her jingles.

One of her great friendships, and a friendship that she prized more than any other, was that of Charles H. Kerr. Mary and Charles H. Kerr had worked together for many years. They had many interests in common, and together with Leslie Marcy they made a wonderful trio. To the rebels throughout the movement she was sister, brother, sweetheart and lover. Now she is dead!

Mary leaves a record that will remain as a permanent monument and tribute to her work. When saying good-bye to a comrade after a heart-to-heart talk, or in closing one of her wonderful letters, she would often say, "Remember, comrade, we are here to serve." Who will take her place?

Her last written words were: "I want **rest**. No funeral, no flowers, cremation." Her wishes were observed. But let two of her beautiful poems speak her last word:



### MY GOD

An hundred peoples  
Have fashioned their gods,  
And I shall fashion mine.

He shall be a god of thunder,  
Of fire and of storm,  
And he shall sweep away old worlds,  
For me and the foundlings.

He shall build a new world,  
And, with the foundlings,  
I shall sit upon the topmost mountain,  
And laugh through my tears;  
And see the Kings of Today  
Kneel at the feet of Tomorrow.

## SONG OF THE SWAMP

Only a little and she comes;  
Only a little waiting.  
She is my spider lily with golden feet,  
With golden feet that lie in the hollow of my hand;  
Red are her lips as the u-pon berries,  
And the savor of her is young and sweet;  
Sweeter than jasmine and the wild honeysuckle  
Is the savor of her.

Only a little and she comes;  
I am waiting for her in the swamp;  
I am waiting for her beneath the live oak,  
Where waited my fathers an hundred years ago.  
My song is hushed;  
I shall wait quietly for my love;  
But my heart is the mullet  
Leaping from the waters of the river in spring;  
My love for her is the arms of all the pear trees  
In blossom, flinging themselves upward.  
She is the straight pine, pungent and clean;  
I am the fingers of the Wind,  
Waiting in the swamp.

The moon has reached the top of the cedar tree;  
Yet a little waiting and the first song of the whip-poor-will  
Will tell me she is coming,  
My wild canary.  
Then I shall see her swaying in the cane brake;  
I shall see her cross the pontoon;  
She will come swiftly,  
For she knows I am waiting for her,  
Waiting in the swamp.

Shadows are growing heavy with the night;  
The waves of the river are kissing the feet of the lillies,  
As I shall kiss the feet of my spider lily.  
Ah! The first song;  
The cane bends low as she comes,  
My shy canary!

Soon we shall dance upon the white sands!  
We shall bathe in the purple pools,  
And the movement of her limbs  
Will leave shadows of gold  
Where she touches the waters;  
Phosphorescent, she will leave  
Showers of gold and of silver as she passes  
And in the swamp,  
I shall croon to her all the night.

Terre Haute, Ind., December 16th, 1922.

My Dear Leslie Marcy:

Your message containing the very sad, heart-breaking news has just come into my hands. How deeply pained and cruelly shocked I feel to hear of your dear Mary's going out cannot be expressed on this cold sheet of paper.

What a thousand pities this noble heart should have ceased to beat and this brilliant mind to think in the very morning of life! It is impossible for me to realize what you say and my heart refuses to believe that Mary Marcy is dead. I did not see her often, but I knew her well, and I loved and honored her more than well. She was one of the clearest minds and greatest souls in all our movement, and her passing into the great silence will be such a loss as will leave an aching void to those who knew her, for her place can never be filled. I admired her for her uncompromising integrity, and I loved her for her high-souled devotion to her ideals and her personal loyalty to her comrades. She was a sweet, fine, brilliant and truly noble little woman, and her precious memory will be sacredly cherished by me to the last of my life.

The book of Mary's, her last contribution to the cause, has just come and is in my hands, and I am thanking her and you through my tears. It is a rare volume and one we shall treasure among our garnered riches and most precious possessions.

Leslie, dear comrade, our hearts are with you and we share your bereavement as her soul goes marching on and grows more radiant with the passing years.

With love and sympathy and tears,

Yours always,

EUGENE V. DEBS.

