

Woman—Comrade and Equal

By EUGENE V. DEBS.

The London Saturday Review in a recent issue brutally said: "Man's superiority is shown by his ability to keep woman in subjection." Such a sentiment is enough to kindle the wrath of every man who loves his wife or reveres his mother. It is the voice of the wilderness, the snarl of the primitive. Measured by that standard, every tyrant has been a hero, and brutality is at once the acme of perfection and the glory of man.

Real men do not utter such sentiments. He who does so prostitutes his powers and links himself once more to the chattering ape that wrenches the neck of the cowering female, glorying as he does so in the brute force that is his.

Yet the sentiment is not confined to a moral degenerate, who writes lies for pay, or to sycophants who sell their souls for the crumbs that arrogant wealth doles out to its vassals. It is embodied and embedded in the cruel system under which we live, the criminal system which grinds children to profits in the mills, which in the sweatshops saps women of their power to mother a race of decent men, which traps the innocent and true-hearted, making them worse than slaves in worse than all that has been said of hell. It finds expression in premiers hiding from petticoated agitators, in presidents ignoring the pleading of the mothers of men, in the clubbing and jailing of suffragettes, in Wall street gamblers and brigands cackling from their piles of loot at the demands of justice. It is expressed in laws which rank mothers and daughters as idiots and criminals. It writes, beside the declaration that men should rebel against taxation without representation, that women must submit to taxation without representation. It makes property the god that men worship, and says that woman shall have no property rights. Instead of that, she herself is counted as property, living by sufferance of the man who doles out the pittance that she uses.

Woman is made the slave of a slave, and is reckoned fit only for companionship in lust. The hands and breasts that nursed all men to life are scorned as the forgetful brute proclaims his superior strength and plumes himself that he can subjugate the one who made him what he is, and would have made him better had customs and institutions permitted.

How differently is woman regarded by the truly wise and the really great! Paolo Lombroso, one of the deepest students of mind that time has ripened, says of her: "The most simple, most frivolous and thoughtless woman hides at the bottom of her soul a spark of heroism, which neither she herself nor anybody else suspects, which she never shows if her life runs its normal course, but which springs into evidence and manifests itself by actions of

devotion and self-sacrifice, if fate strikes her or those whom she loves. Then she does not wince, she does not complain nor give way to useless despair, but rushes into the breach. The woman who hesitates to put her feet into cold, placid water, throws herself into the perils of the roaring, surging maelstrom."

Sardou, the analytical novelist, declares: "I consider women superior to men in almost everything. They possess intuitive faculty to an extraordinary degree, and may almost always be trusted to do the right thing in the right place. They are full of noble instincts, and, though heavily handicapped by fate, come well out of every ordeal. You have only to turn to history to learn the truth of what I say."

Lester F. Ward, the economist, the subtle student of affairs, gives this testimony: "We have no conception of the real amount of talent or of genius possessed by woman. It is probably not greatly inferior to that of man even now, and a few generations of enlightened opinion on the subject, if shared by both sexes, would perhaps show that the difference is qualitative only."

I am glad to align myself with a party that declares for absolute equality between the sexes. Anything less than this is too narrow for Twentieth century civilization, and too small for a man who has a right conception of manhood.

Let us grant that woman has not reached the full height which she might attain—when I think of her devotion to duty, her tender ministries, her gentle spirit that in the clash and struggle of passion has made her the savior of the world, the thought, so far from making me decry womanhood, gives me the vision of a race so superior as to cause me to wonder at its glory and beauty ineffable.

Man has not reached his best. He never will reach his best until he walks the upward way side by side with woman. Plato was right in his fancy that man and woman are merely halves of humanity, each requiring the qualities of the other in order to attain the highest character. Shakespeare understood it when he made his noblest women strong as men and his best men tender as women.

Under our brutal forms of existence, beating womanhood to dust, we have raged in passion for the individual woman, for use only. Some day we shall develop the social passion for womanhood, and then the gross will disappear in service and justice and companionship. Then we shall lift woman from the mire where our fists have struck her, and set her by our side as our comrade and equal, and that will be love indeed.

Man's superiority will be shown, not in the fact that he has enslaved his wife, but in that he has made her free.

Consider for a moment the beastly debasement to which womanhood is subjected in capitalist society. She is simply the property of man, to be governed by him as may suit his convenience. She does not vote, she has no voice and must bear silent witness to her legally ordained inferiority.

She has to compete with man in the factories and workshops and stores,

and her inferiority is taken advantage of to make her work at still lower wages than the male slave gets who works at her side.

As an economic dependent she is compelled to sacrifice the innate refinement, the inherent purity and nobility of her sex, and for a pallet of straw she marries the man she does not love.

The debauching effect of the capitalist system upon womanhood is accurately registered in the divorce court and the house of shame.

In Socialism woman would stand forth the equal of man. All the avenues would be open to her and she would naturally find her fitting place and rise from the low plane of menial servility to the dignity of ideal womanhood.

(From "Debs; His Life, Writings and Speeches.")

MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT.

In chains the heart of beauteous woman lay,
Subdued by man and robbed of half its power;
Love, that should spring up sweetly like a flower,
Aborted lived, midst blasting and decay.
Whose life broke free, she perished in dismay;
Who spoke of freedom soon must sadly cower,
Seeing the brow of her taskmaster lour,
His hand upraised to smite her or to slay.

Among those lives abject, one, brave, arose,
And cried, "Behold! This shall not always be:
Woman arise; only the bold are free!"
Nor insults, heavier bonds, nor bitter blows
Availed to still her, where midst daunted foes
She stood with voice that called futurity.

(From *Tongues of Toil*, by Wm. Francis Barnard.)

As a worker the married woman is "far more docile" than the unmarried one. Consideration for her children compels her to exert her strength to the utmost in order to earn what is needful for their livelihood, and she therefore quietly submits to much that the unmarried working woman would not submit to, far less so the working man. As a rule working women rarely combine with their fellow workers to obtain better working conditions. That also enhances their value in the eyes of the employers; sometimes they even are a good means to subdue rebellious male workers. Women moreover are more patient, they possess greater nimbleness and a more developed taste, qualities that make them better suited to many kinds of work than men.

These womanly virtues the virtuous capitalist appreciates fully; and so, with the development of industry, the field of woman's work is extended each year, but—and this is the decisive factor—without materially improving her social condition. Where female labor power is employed, it frequently releases male labor power. But the displaced male workers must earn their living; so they offer their labor power at lower wages, and this offer again

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