

Collected Works of Voltairine de Cleyre

Voltairine de Cleyre



Compiled on 09.14.2019; Original works date from late 19th to early 20th centuries.

Contents

Direct Action	7
Anarchism	23
Anarchism and American Traditions	39
Introduction	41
<i>Anarchism & American Traditions</i> by Voltairine de Cleyre	44
A New Hope	59
The New Hope: Voltairine de Cleyre's Forgotten Poem	61
The New Hope	61
Collected Poems	65
And Thou Too	67
The Hurricane	70
At the Grave in Waldheim	72
Ut Sementem Feceris, Ita Metes	74
The Dirge of the Sea	75
I Am	79
Love's Ghost	80

Life or Death	82
The Toast of Despair	83
Mary Wollstone Craft	85
John P. Altgeld	88
In Memoriam	89
The Feast of Vultures	90
The Suicide's Defense	94
Germinal	98
Santa Agueda	99
The Road Builders	100
Ave Et Vale	101
Marsh-Bloom	105
"Light Upon Waldheim"	106
Written — in — Red	107
A Correction	109
The Dawn-Light of Anarchy	111
Direct Action	119
The Dominant Idea	135

<i>Contents</i>	5
The Economic Relations of Sex	147
Economics of Dyer D. Lum	151
The Economic Tendency of Freethought	155
The Economic Tendency of Freethought	158
Events Are the True Schoolmasters	171
Francisco Ferrer	175
A Glance at Communism	193
The Gods and the People	197
In Defense of Emma Goldmann and the Right of Expropriation	205
A Lecture. Delivered in New York, Dec. 16. 1894.	207
McKinley's Assassination from the Anarchist Standpoint	219
Sex Slavery	223
Some Nihilists I Have Met	235
An introduction	237
Some Nihilists I Have Met	239

The Eleventh of November, 1887	249
The Making of an Anarchist	257
The Mexican Revolution	267
They Who Marry Do Ill	283
Why I Am an Anarchist	295

Direct Action

Voltairine de Cleyre

From the standpoint of one who thinks himself capable of discerning an undeviating route for human progress to pursue, if it is to be progress at all, who, having such a route on his mind's map, has endeavored to point it out to others; to make them see it as he sees it; who in so doing has chosen what appeared to him clear and simple expressions to convey his thoughts to others, — to such a one it appears matter for regret and confusion of spirit that the phrase "Direct Action" has suddenly acquired in the general mind a circumscribed meaning, not at all implied in the words themselves, and certainly never attached to it by himself or his co-thinkers.

However, this is one of the common jests which Progress plays on those who think themselves able to set metes and bounds for it. Over and over again, names, phrases, mottoes, watchwords, have been turned inside out, and upside down, and hindside before, and sideways, by occurrences out of the control of those who used the expressions in their proper sense; and still, those who sturdily held their ground, and insisted on being heard, have in the end found that the period of misunderstanding and prejudice has been but the prelude to wider inquiry and understanding.

I rather think this will be the case with the present misconception of the term Direct Action, which through the misapprehension, or else the deliberate misrepresentation, of certain journalists in Los Angeles, at the time the McNamaras pleaded guilty, suddenly acquired in the popular mind the interpretation, "Forcible Attacks on Life and Property." This was either very ignorant or very dishonest of the journalists; but it

has had the effect of making a good many people curious to know all about Direct Action.

As a matter of fact, those who are so lustily and so inordinately condemning it, will find on examination that they themselves have on many occasion practised direct action, and will do so again.

Every person who ever thought he had a right to assert, and went boldly and asserted it, himself, or jointly with others that shared his convictions, was a direct actionist. Some thirty years ago I recall that the Salvation Army was vigorously practising direct action in the maintenance of the freedom of its members to speak, assemble, and pray. Over and over they were arrested, fined, and imprisoned; but they kept right on singing, praying, and marching, till they finally compelled their persecutors to let them alone. The Industrial Workers are now conducting the same fight, and have, in a number of cases, compelled the officials to let them alone by the same direct tactics.

Every person who ever had a plan to do anything, and went and did it, or who laid his plan before others, and won their co-operation to do it with him, without going to external authorities to please do the thing for them, was a direct actionist. All co-operative experiments are essentially direct action.

Every person who ever in his life had a difference with anyone to settle, and went straight to the other persons involved to settle it, either by a peaceable plan or otherwise, was a direct actionist. Examples of such action are strikes and boycotts; many persons will recall the action of the housewives of New York who boycotted the butchers, and lowered the price of meat; at the present moment a butter boycott seems looming up, as a direct reply to the price-makers for butter.

These actions are generally not due to any one's reasoning overmuch on the respective merits of directness or indirectness, but are the spontaneous retorts of those who feel oppressed by a situation. In other words, all people are, most of the time, believers in the principle of direct action, and practices of it. However, most people are also indirect or political actionists. And they are both these things at the same time, without making much of an analysis of either. There are only a limited number of persons who eschew political action under any and all circumstances; but there is nobody, nobody at all, who has ever been so "impossible" as to eschew direct action altogether.

The majority of thinking people are really opportunist, leaning, some perhaps more to directness, some more to indirectness as a general

thing, but ready to use either means when opportunity calls for it. That is to say, there are those who hold that balloting governors into power is essentially a wrong and foolish thing; but who nevertheless under stress of special circumstances, might consider it the wisest thing to do, to vote some individual into office at that particular time. Or there are those who believe that in general the wisest way for people to get what they want is by the indirect method of voting into power some one who will make what they want legal; yet who all the same will occasionally under exceptional conditions advise a strike; and a strike, as I have said, is direct action. Or they may do as the Socialist Party agitators (who are mostly declaiming now against direct action) did last summer, when the police were holding up their meetings. They went in force to the meeting-places, prepared to speak whether-or-no, and they made the police back down. And while that was not logical on their part, thus to oppose the legal executors of the majority's will, it was a fine, successful piece of direct action.

Those who, by the essence of their belief, are committed to Direct Action only are — just who? Why, the non-resistants; precisely those who do not believe in violence at all! Now do not make the mistake of inferring that I say direct action means non-resistance; not by any means. Direct action may be the extreme of violence, or it may be as peaceful as the waters of the Brook of Shiloh that go softly. What I say is, that the real non-resistants can believe in direct action only, never in political action. For the basis of all political action is coercion; even when the State does good things, it finally rests on a club, a gun, or a prison, for its power to carry them through.

Now every school child in the United States has had the direct action of certain non-resistants brought to his notice by his school history. The case which everyone instantly recalls is that of the early Quakers who came to Massachusetts. The Puritans had accused the Quakers of “troubling the world by preaching peace to it.” They refused to pay church taxes; they refused to bear arms; they refused to swear allegiance to any government. (In so doing they were direct actionists, what we may call negative direct actionists.) So the Puritans, being political actionists, passed laws to keep them out, to deport, to fine, to imprison, to mutilate, and finally, to hang them. And the Quakers just kept on coming (which was positive direct action); and history records that after the hanging of four Quakers, and the flogging of Margaret Brewster at the cart's tail through the streets of Boston, “the Puritans gave up trying

to silence the new missionaries”; that “Quaker persistence and Quaker non-resistance had won the day.”

Another example of direct action in early colonial history, but this time by no means of the peaceable sort, was the affair known as Bacon’s Rebellion. All our historians certainly defend the action of the rebels in that matter, for they were right. And yet it was a case of violent direct action against lawfully constituted authority. For the benefit of those who have forgotten the details, let me briefly remind them that the Virginia planters were in fear of a general attack by the Indians; with reason. Being political actionists, they asked, or Bacon as their leader asked, that the governor grant him a commission to raise volunteers in their own defense. The governor feared that such a company of armed men would be a threat to him; also with reason. He refused the commission. Whereupon the planters resorted to direct action. They raised volunteers without the commission, and successfully fought off the Indians. Bacon was pronounced a traitor by the governor; but the people being with him, the governor was afraid to proceed against him. In the end, however, it came so far that the rebels burned Jamestown; and but for the untimely death of Bacon, much more might have been done. Of course the reaction was very dreadful, as it usually is where a rebellion collapses or is crushed. Yet even during the brief period of success, it had corrected a good many abuses. I am quite sure that the political-action-at-all-costs advocates of those times, after the reaction came back into power, must have said: “See to what evils direct action brings us! Behold, the progress of the colony has been set back twenty-five years;” forgetting that if the colonists had not resorted to direct action, their scalps would have been taken by the Indians a year sooner, instead of a number of them being hanged by the governor a year later.

In the period of agitation and excitement preceding the revolution, there were all sorts and kinds of direct action from the most peaceable to the most violent; and I believe that almost everybody who studies United States history finds the account of these performances the most interesting part of the story, the part which dents into the memory most easily.

Among the peaceable moves made, were the non-importation agreements, the leagues for wearing homespun clothing and the “committees of correspondence.” As the inevitable growth of hostility progressed, violent direct action developed; e.g., in the matter of destroying the revenue stamps, or the action concerning the tea-ships, either by not

permitting the tea to be landed, or by putting it in damp storage, or by throwing it into the harbor, as in Boston, or by compelling a tea-ship owner to set fire to his own ship, as at Annapolis. These are all actions which our commonest textbooks record, certainly not in a condemnatory way, not even in an apologetic way, though they are all cases of direct action against legally constituted authority and property rights. If I draw attention to them, and others of like nature, it is to prove to unreflecting repeaters of words that *direct action has always been used, and has the historical sanction of the very people now reprobating it.*

George Washington is said to have been the leader of the Virginia planters' non-importation league; he would now be "enjoined," probably by a court, from forming any such league; and if he persisted, he would be fined for contempt.

When the great quarrel between the North and the South was waxing hot and hotter, it was again direct action which preceded and precipitated political action. And I may remark here that political action is never taken, nor even contemplated, until slumbering minds have first been aroused by direct acts of protest against existing conditions.

The history of the anti-slavery movement and the Civil War is one of the greatest of paradoxes, although history is a chain of paradoxes. Politically speaking, it was the slave-holding States that stood for greater political freedom, for the autonomy of the single State against the interference of the United States; politically speaking, it was the non-slave-holding States that stood for a strong centralized government, which, Secessionists said and said truly, was bound progressively to develop into more and more tyrannical forms. Which happened. From the close of the Civil War one, there has been continual encroachment of the federal power upon what was formerly the concern of the States individually. The wage-slavers, in their struggles of today, are continually thrown into conflict with that centralized power against which the slaveholder protested (with liberty on his lips by tyranny in his heart). Ethically speaking, it was the non-slave-holding States that in a general way stood for greater human liberty, while the Secessionists stood for race-slavery. In a general way only; that is, the majority of northerners, not being accustomed to the actual presence of negro slavery about them, thought it was probably a mistake; yet they were in no great ferment of anxiety to have it abolished. The Abolitionists only, and they were relatively few, were the genuine ethicals, to whom slavery itself — not secession or union — was the main question. In fact, so paramount was

it with them, that a considerable number of them were themselves for the dissolution of the union, advocating that the North take the initiative in the matter of dissolving, in order that the northern people might shake off the blame of holding negroes in chains.

Of course, there were all sorts of people with all sorts of temperaments among those who advocated the abolition of slavery. There were Quakers like Whittier (indeed it was the peace-at-all-costs Quakers who had advocated abolition even in early colonial days); there were moderate political actionists, who were for buying off the slaves, as the cheapest way; and there were extremely violent people, who believed and did all sorts of violent things.

As to what the politicians did, it is one long record of "hoe-not-to-to-it," a record of thirty years of compromising, and dickering, and trying to keep what was as it was, and to hand sops to both sides when new conditions demanded that something be done, or be pretended to be done. But "the stars in their courses fought against Sisera;" the system was breaking down from within, and the direct actionists from without as well were widening the cracks remorselessly.

Among the various expressions of direct rebellion was the organization of the "underground railroad." Most of the people who belonged to it believed in both sorts of action; but however much they theoretically subscribed to the right of the majority to enact and enforce laws, they didn't believe in it on that point. My grandfather was a member of the "underground;" many a fugitive slave he helped on his way to Canada. He was a very patient, law-abiding man in most respects, though I have often thought that he respected it because he didn't have much to do with it; always leading a pioneer life, law was generally far from him, and direct action imperative. Be that as it may, and law-respecting as he was, he had no respect whatever for slave laws, no matter if made by ten times of a majority; and he conscientiously broke every one that came in his way to be broken.

There were times when in the operation of the "underground" that violence was required, and was used. I recollect one old friend relating to me how she and her mother kept watch all night at the door, while a slave for whom a posse was searching hid in the cellar; and though they were of Quaker descent and sympathies, there was a shotgun on the table. Fortunately it did not have to be used that night.

When the fugitive slave law was passed with the help of the political actionists of the North who wanted to offer a new sop to the

slave-holders, the direct actionists took to rescuing recaptured fugitives. There was the "rescue of Shadrach," and the "rescue of Jerry," the latter rescuers being led by the famous Gerrit Smith; and a good many more successful and unsuccessful attempts. Still the politicals kept on pottering and trying to smooth things over, and the Abolitionists were denounced and decried by the ultra-law-abiding pacificators, pretty much as Wm. D. Haywood and Frank Bohn are being denounced by their own party now.

The other day I read a communication in the *Chicago Daily Socialist* from the secretary of the Louisville local Socialist Party to the national secretary, requesting that some safe and sane speaker be substituted for Bohn, who had been announced to speak there. In explaining why, Mr. Dobbs makes this quotation from Bohn's lecture: "Had the McNamaras been successful in defending the interests of the working class, they would have been right, just as John Brown would have been right, had he been successful in freeing the slaves. Ignorance was the only crime of John Brown, and ignorance was the only crime of the McNamaras."

Upon this Mr. Dobbs comments as follows: "We dispute emphatically the statements here made. The attempt to draw a parallel between the open — if mistaken — revolt of John Brown on the one hand, and the secret and murderous methods of the McNamaras on the other, is not only indicative of shallow reasoning, but highly mischievous in the logical conclusions which may be drawn from such statements."

Evidently Mr. Dobbs is very ignorant of the life and work of John Brown. John Brown was a man of violence; he would have scorned anybody's attempt to make him out anything else. And once a person is a believer in violence, it is with him only a question of the most effective way of applying it, which can be determined only by a knowledge of conditions and means at his disposal. John Brown did not shrink at all from conspiratorial methods. Those who have read the autobiography of Frederick Douglass and the *Reminiscences* of Lucy Colman, will recall that one of the plans laid by John Brown was to organize a chain of armed camps in the mountains of West Virginia, North Carolina, and Tennessee, send secret emissaries among the slaves inciting them to flee to these camps, and there concert such measures as times and conditions made possible for further arousing revolt among the negroes. That this plan failed was due to the weakness of the desire for liberty among the slaves themselves, more than anything else.

Later on, when the politicians in their infinite deviousness contrived a fresh proposition of how-not-to-do-it, known as the Kansas-Nebraska Act, which left the question of slavery to be determined by the settlers, the direct actionists on both sides sent bogus settlers into the territory, who proceeded to fight it out. The pro-slavery men, who got in first, made a constitution recognizing slavery and a law punishing with death any one who aided a slave to escape; but the Free Soilers, who were a little longer in arriving since they came from more distant States, made a second constitution, and refused to recognize the other party's laws at all. And John Brown was there, mixing in all the violence, conspiratorial or open; he was "a horse-thief and a murderer," in the eyes of decent, peaceable, political actionists. And there is no doubt that he stole horses, sending no notice in advance of his intention to steal them, and that he killed pro-slavery men. He struck and got away a good many times before his final attempt on Harper's Ferry. If he did not use dynamite, it was because dynamite had not yet appeared as a practical weapon. He made a great many more intentional attacks on life than the two brothers Secretary Dobbs condemns for their "murderous methods." And yet history has not failed to understand John Brown. Mankind knows that though he was a violent man, with human blood upon his hands, who was guilty of high treason and hanged for it, yet his soul was a great, strong, unselfish soul, unable to bear the frightful crime which kept 4,000,000 people like dumb beasts, and thought that making war against it was a sacred, a God-called duty, (for John Brown was a very religious man — a Presbyterian).

It is by and because of the direct acts of the forerunners of social change, whether they be of peaceful or warlike nature, that the Human Conscience, the conscience of the mass, becomes aroused to the need for change. It would be very stupid to say that no good results are ever brought about by political action; sometimes good things do come about that way. But never until individual rebellion, followed by mass rebellion, has forced it. Direct action is always the clamorer, the initiator, through which the great sum of indifferentists become aware that oppression is getting intolerable.

We have now and oppression in the land — and not only in this land, but throughout all those parts of the world which enjoy the very mixed blessings of Civilization. And just as in the question of chattel slavery, so this form of slavery has been begetting both direct action and political action. A certain percent of our population (probably a much smaller

percent than politicians are in the habit of assigning at mass meetings) is producing the material wealth upon which all the rest of us live; just as it was 4,000,000 chattel Blacks who supported all the crowd of parasites above them. These are the *land workers* and the *industrial workers*.

Through the unprophesied and unprophesiable operation of institutions which no individual of us created, but found in existence when he came here, these workers, the most absolutely necessary part of the whole social structure, without whose services none can either eat, or clothe, or shelter himself, are just the ones who get the least to eat, to wear, and to be housed withal — to say nothing of their share of the other social benefits which the rest of us are supposed to furnish, such as education and artistic gratification.

These workers have, in one form or another, mutually joined their forces to see what betterment of their condition they could get; primarily by direct action, secondarily by political action. We have had the Grange, the Farmer's Alliance, Co-operative Associations, Colonization Experiments, Knights of Labor, Trade Unions, and Industrial Workers of the World. All of them have been organized for the purpose of wringing from the masters in the economic field a little better price, a little better conditions, a little shorter hours; or on the other hand to resist a reduction in price, worse conditions, or longer hours. None of them has attempted a final solution of the social war. None of them, except the Industrial Workers, has recognized that there is a social war, inevitable so long as present legal-social conditions endure. They accepted property institutions as they found them. They were made up of average men, with average desires, and they undertook to do what appeared to them possible and very reasonable things. They were not committed to any particular political policy when they were organized, but were associated for direct action of their own initiation, either positive or defensive.

Undoubtably there were and are among all these organizations, members who looked beyond immediate demands; who did see that the continuous development of forces now in operation was bound to bring about conditions to which it is impossible that life continue to submit, and against which, therefore, it will protest, and violently protest; that it will have no choice but to do so; that it must do so or tamely die; and since it is not the nature of life to surrender without struggle, it will not tamely die. Twenty-two years ago I met Farmer's Alliance people who said so, Knights of Labor who said so, Trade Unionists who said so. They

wanted larger aims than those to which their organizations were looking; but they had to accept their fellow members as they were, and try to stir them to work for such things as it was possible to make them see. And what they could see was better prices, better wages, less dangerous or tyrannical conditions, shorter hours. At the stage of development when these movements were initiated, the land workers could not see that their struggle had anything to do with the struggle of those engaged in the manufacturing or transporting service; nor could these latter see that theirs had anything to do with the movement of the farmers. For that matter very few of them see it yet. They have yet to learn that there is one common struggle against those who have appropriated the earth, the money, and the machines.

Unfortunately the great organizations of the farmers frittered itself away in a stupid chase after political power. It was quite successful in getting the power in certain States; but the courts pronounced its laws unconstitutional, and there was the burial hole of all its political conquests. Its original program was to build its own elevators, and store the products therein, holding these from the market till they could escape the speculator. Also, to organize labor exchanges, issuing credit notes upon products deposited for exchange. Had it adhered to this program of direct mutual aid, it would, to some extent, for a time at least, have afforded an illustration of how mankind may free itself from the parasitism of the bankers and the middlemen. Of course, it would have been overthrown in the end, unless it had so revolutionized men's minds by the example as to force the overthrow of the legal monopoly of land and money; but at least it would have served a great educational purpose. As it was, it "went after the red herring" and disintegrated merely from its futility.

The Knights of Labor subsided into comparative insignificance, not because of failure to use direct action, nor because of its tampering with politics, which was small, but chiefly because it was a heterogeneous mass of workers who could not associate their efforts effectively.

The Trade Unions grew strong as the Knights of Labor subsided, and have continued slowly but persistently to increase in power. It is true the increase has fluctuated; that there have been set-backs; that great single organizations have been formed and again dispersed. But on the whole trade unions have been a growing power. They have been so because, poor as they are, they have been a means whereby a certain section of the workers have been able to bring their united force to bear

directly upon their masters, and so get for themselves some portion of what they wanted — of what their conditions dictated to them they must try to get. The strike is their natural weapon, that which they themselves have forged. It is the direct blow of the strike which nine times out of ten the boss is afraid of. (Of course there are occasions when he is glad of one, but that's unusual.) And the reason he dreads a strike is not so much because he thinks he cannot win out against it, but simply and solely because he does not want an interruption of his business. The ordinary boss isn't in much dread of a "class-conscious vote;" there are plenty of shops where you can talk Socialism or any other political program all day long; but if you begin to talk Unionism you may forthwith expect to be discharged or at best warned to shut up. Why? Not because the boss is so wise as to know that political action is a swamp in which the workingman gets mired, or because he understands that political Socialism is fast becoming a middle-class movement; not at all. He thinks Socialism is a very bad thing; but it's a good way off! But he knows that if his shop is unionized, he will have trouble right away. His hands will be rebellious, he will be put to expense to improve his factory conditions, he will have to keep workingmen that he doesn't like, and in case of strike he may expect injury to his machinery or his buildings.

It is often said, and parrot-like repeated, that the bosses are "class-conscious," that they stick together for their class interest, and are willing to undergo any sort of personal loss rather than be false to those interests. It isn't so at all. The majority of business people are just like the majority of workingmen; they care a whole lot more about their individual loss or gain than about the gain or loss of their class. And it is his individual loss the boss sees, when threatened by a union.

Now everybody knows that a strike of any size means violence. No matter what any one's ethical preference for peace may be, he knows it will not be peaceful. If it's a telegraph strike, it means cutting wires and poles, and getting fake scabs in to spoil the instruments. If it is a steel rolling mill strike, it means beating up the scabs, breaking the windows, setting the gauges wrong, and ruining the expensive rollers together with tons and tons of material. IF it's a miners' strike, it means destroying tracks and bridges, and blowing up mills. If it is a garment workers' strike, it means having an unaccountable fire, getting a volley of stones through an apparently inaccessible window, or possibly a brickbat on the manufacturer's own head. If it's a street-car strike, it means tracks torn up or barricaded with the contents of ash-carts and slop-carts, with

overturned wagons or stolen fences, it means smashed or incinerated cars and turned switches. If it is a system federation strike, it means “dead” engines, wild engines, derailed freights, and stalled trains. If it is a building trades strike, it means dynamited structures. And always, everywhere, all the time, fights between strike-breakers and scabs against strikers and strike-sympathizers, between People and Police.

On the side of the bosses, it means search-lights, electric wires, stockades, bull-pens, detectives and provocative agents, violent kidnapping and deportation, and every device they can conceive for direct protection, besides the ultimate invocation of police, militia, State constabulary, and federal troops.

Everybody knows this; everybody smiles when union officials protest their organizations to be peaceable and law-abiding, because everybody knows they are lying. They know that violence is used, both secretly and openly; and they know it is used because the strikers cannot do any other way, without giving up the fight at once. Nor do they mistake those who thus resort to violence under stress for destructive miscreants who do what they do out of innate cussedness. The people in general understand that they do these things through the harsh logic of a situation which they did not create, but which forces them to these attacks in order to make good in their struggle to live or else go down the bottomless descent into poverty, that lets Death find them in the poorhouse hospital, the city street, or the river-slime. This is the awful alternative that the workers are facing; and this is what makes the most kindly disposed human beings — men who would go out of their way to help a wounded dog, or bring home a stray kitten and nurse it, or step aside to avoid walking on a worm — resort to violence against their fellow men. They know, for the facts have taught them, that this is the only way to win, if they can win at all. And it has always appeared to me one of the most utterly ludicrous, absolutely irrelevant things that a person can do or say, when approached for relief or assistance by a striker who is dealing with an immediate situation, to respond with “Vote yourself into power!” when the next election is six months, a year, or two years away.

Unfortunately the people who know best how violence is used in union warfare cannot come forward and say: “On such a day, at such a place, such and such specific action was done, and as a result such and such concession was made, or such and such boss capitulated.” To do so would imperil their liberty and their power to go on fighting. Therefore

those that know best must keep silent and sneer in their sleeves, while those that know little prate. Events, not tongues, must make their position clear.

And there has been a very great deal of prating these last few weeks. Speakers and writers, honestly convinced I believe that political action and political action only can win the workers' battle, have been denouncing what they are pleased to call "direct action" (what they really mean is conspiratorial violence) as the author of mischief incalculable. One Oscar Ameringer, as an example, recently said at a meeting in Chicago that the Haymarket bomb of '86 had set back the eight-hour movement twenty-five years, arguing that the movement would have succeeded but for the bomb. It's a great mistake. No one can exactly measure in years or months the effect of a forward push or a reaction. No one can demonstrate that the eight-hour movement could have been won twenty-five years ago. We know that the eight-hour day was put on the statute books of Illinois in 1871 by political action, and has remained a dead letter. That the direct action of the workers could have won it, then, cannot be proved; but it can be shown that many more potent factors than the Haymarket bomb worked against it. On the other hand, if the reactive influence of the bomb was really so powerful, we should naturally expect labor and union conditions to be worse in Chicago than in the cities where no such thing happened. On the contrary, bad as they are, the general conditions of labor are better in Chicago than in most other large cities, and the power of the unions is more developed there than in any other American city except San Francisco. So if we are to conclude anything for the influence of the Haymarket bomb, keep these facts in mind. Personally I do not think its influence on the labor movement, as such, was so very great.

It will be the same with the present furore about violence. Nothing fundamental has been altered. Two men have been imprisoned for what they did (twenty-four years ago they were hanged for what they did not do); some few more may yet be imprisoned. But the forces of life will continue to revolt against their economic chains. There will be no cessation in that revolt, no matter what ticket men vote or fail to vote, until the chains are broken.

How will the chains be broken?

Political actionists tell us it will be only by means of working-class party action at the polls; by voting themselves into possession of the sources of life and the tools; by voting that those who now command forests,

mines, ranches, waterways, mills, and factories, and likewise command the military power to defend them, shall hand over their dominion to the people.

And meanwhile?

Meanwhile, be peaceable, industrious, law-abiding, patient, and frugal (as Madero told the Mexican peons to be, after he sold them to Wall Street)! Even if some of you are disenfranchised, don't rise up even against that, for it might "set back the party."

Well, I have already stated that some good is occasionally accomplished by political action — not necessarily working-class party action either. But I am abundantly convinced that the occasional good accomplished is more than counterbalanced by the evil; just as I am convinced that though there are occasional evils resulting through direct action, they are more than counterbalanced by the good.

Nearly all the laws which were originally framed with the intention of benefitting the workers, have either turned into weapons in their enemies' hands, or become dead letters unless the workers through their organizations have directly enforced their observance. So that in the end, it is direct action that has to be relied on anyway. As an example of getting the tarred end of a law, glance at the anti-trust law, which was supposed to benefit the people in general and the working class in particular. About two weeks since, some 250 union leaders were cited to answer to the charge of being trust formers, as the answer of the Illinois Central to its strikers.

But the evil of pinning faith to indirect action is far greater than any such minor results. The main evil is that it destroys initiative, quenches the individual rebellious spirit, teaches people to rely on someone else to do for them what they should do for themselves; finally renders organic the anomalous idea that by massing supineness together until a majority is acquired, then through the peculiar magic of that majority, this supineness is to be transformed into energy. That is, people who have lost the habit of striking for themselves as individuals, who have submitted to every injustice while waiting for the majority to grow, are going to become metamorphosed into human high-explosives by a mere process of packing!

I quite agree that the sources of life, and all the natural wealth of the earth, and the tools necessary to co-operative production, must become freely accessible to all. It is a positive certainty to me that unionism must widen and deepen its purposes, or it will go under; and I feel sure that the

logic of the situation will gradually force them to see it. They must learn that the workers' problem can never be solved by beating up scabs, so long as their own policy of limiting their membership by high initiation fees and other restrictions helps to make scabs. They must learn that the course of growth is not so much along the line of higher wages, but shorter hours, which will enable them to increase membership, to take in everybody who is willing to come into the union. They must learn that if they want to win battles, all allied workers must act together, act quickly (serving no notice on bosses), and retain their freedom to do so at all times. And finally they must learn that even then (when they have a complete organization) they can win nothing permanent unless they strike for everything — not for a wage, not for a minor improvement, but for the whole natural wealth of the earth. And proceed to the direct expropriation of it all!

They must learn that their power does not lie in their voting strength, that their power lies in their ability to stop production. It is a great mistake to suppose that the wage-earners constitute a majority of the voters. Wage-earners are here today and there tomorrow, and that hinders a large number from voting; a great percentage of them in this country are foreigners without a voting right. The most patent proof that Socialist leaders know this is so, is that they are compromising their propaganda at every point to win the support of the business class, the small investor. Their campaign papers proclaimed that their interviewers had been assured by Wall Street bond purchasers that they would be just as ready to buy Los Angeles bonds from a socialist as a capitalist administrator; that the present Milwaukee administration has been a boon to the small investor; their reading notices assure their readers in this city that we need not go to the great department stores to buy — buy rather of So-and-so on Milwaukee Avenue, who will satisfy us quite as well as a "big business" institution. In short, they are making every desperate effort to win the support and to prolong the life of that middle-class which socialist economy says must be ground to pieces, because they know they cannot get a majority without them.

The most that a working-class party could do, even if its politicians remained honest, would be to form a strong faction in the legislatures which might, by combining its vote with one side or another, win certain political or economic palliatives.

But what the working-class can do, when once they grow into a solidified organization, is to show the possessing class, through a sudden

cessation of all work, that the whole social structure rests on them; that the possessions of the others are absolutely worthless to them without the workers' activity; that such protests, such strikes, are inherent in the system of property and will continually recur until the whole thing is abolished — and having shown that effectively, proceed to expropriate.

"But the military power," says the political actionist; "we must get political power, or the military will be used against us!"

Against a real General Strike, the military can do nothing. Oh, true, if you have a Socialist Briand in power, he may declare the workers "public officials" and try to make them serve against themselves! But against the solid wall of an immobile working-mass, even a Briand would be broken.

Meanwhile, until this international awakening, the war will go on as it had been going, in spite of all the hysteria which well-meaning people who do not understand life and its necessities may manifest; in spite of all the shivering that timid leaders have done; in spite of all the reactionary revenges that may be taken; in spite of all the capital that politicians make out of the situation. It will go on because Life cries to live, and Property denies its freedom to live; and Life will not submit.

And should not submit.

It will go on until that day when a self-freed Humanity is able to chant Swinburne's Hymn of Man:

"Glory to Man in the highest,
For Man is the master of Things."

Anarchism

Voltairine de Cleyre

October 13, 1901

There are two spirits abroad in the world,—the spirit of Caution, the spirit of Dare, the spirit of Quiescence, the spirit of Unrest; the spirit of Immobility, the spirit of Change; the spirit of Hold-fast-to-that-which-you-have, the spirit of Let-go-and-fly-to-that-which-you-have-not; the spirit of the slow and steady builder, careful of its labors, loath to part with any of its achievements, wishful to keep, and unable to discriminate between what is worth keeping and what is better cast aside, and the spirit of the inspirational destroyer, fertile in creative fancies, volatile, careless in its luxuriance of effort, inclined to cast away the good together with the bad.

Society is a quivering balance, eternally struck afresh, between these two. Those who look upon Man, as most Anarchists do, as a link in the chain of evolution, see in these two social tendencies the sum of the tendencies of individual men, which in common with the tendencies of all organic life are the result of the action and counteraction of inheritance and adaptation. Inheritance, continually tending to repeat what has been, long, long after it is outgrown; adaptation continually tending to break down forms. The same tendencies under other names are observed in the inorganic world as well, and anyone who is possessed by the modern scientific mania for Monism can easily follow out the line to the vanishing point of human knowledge.

There has been, in fact, a strong inclination to do this among a portion of the more educated Anarchists, who having been working men first and Anarchists by reason of their instinctive hatred to the boss,

later became students and, swept away by their undigested science, immediately conceived that it was necessary to fit their Anarchism to the revelations of the microscope, else the theory might as well be given up. I remember with considerable amusement a heated discussion some five or six years since, wherein doctors and embryo doctors sought for a justification of Anarchism in the development of the amoeba, while a fledgling engineer searched for it in mathematical quantities.

Myself at one time asserted very stoutly that no one could be an Anarchist and believe in God at the same time. Others assert as stoutly that one cannot accept the spiritualist philosophy and be an Anarchist.

At present I hold with C. L. James, the most learned of American Anarchists, that one's metaphysical system has very little to do with the matter. The chain of reasoning which once appeared so conclusive to me, namely, that Anarchism being a denial of authority over the individual could not co-exist with a belief in a Supreme Ruler of the universe, is contradicted in the case of Leo Tolstoy, who comes to the conclusion that none has a right to rule another just because of his belief in God, just because he believes that all are equal children of one father, and therefore none has a right to rule the other. I speak of him because he is a familiar and notable personage, but there have frequently been instances where the same idea has been worked out by a whole sect of believers, especially in the earlier (and persecuted) stages of their development.

It no longer seems necessary to me, therefore, that one should base his Anarchism upon any particular world conception; it is a theory of the relations due to man and comes as an offered solution to the societal problems arising from the existence of these two tendencies of which I have spoken. No matter where those tendencies come from, all alike recognize them as existent; and however interesting the speculation, however fascinating to lose oneself back, back in the molecular storm-whirl wherein the figure of man is seen merely as a denser, fiercer group, a livelier storm centre, moving among others, impinging upon others, but nowhere separate, nowhere exempt from the same necessity that acts upon all other centers of force,—it is by no means necessary in order to reason oneself into Anarchism.

Sufficient are a good observant eye and a reasonably reflecting brain, for anyone, lettered or unlettered, to recognize the desirability of Anarchistic aims. This is not to say that increased knowledge will not confirm and expand one's application of this fundamental concept; (the beauty

of truth is that at every new discovery of fact we find how much wider and deeper it is than we at first thought it). But it means that first of all Anarchism is concerned with present conditions, and with the very plain and common people; and is by no means a complex or difficult proposition.

Anarchism, alone, apart from any proposed economic reform, is just the latest reply out of many the past has given, to that daring, break-away, volatile, changeful spirit which is never content. The society of which we are part puts certain oppressions upon us,—oppressions which have arisen out of the very changes accomplished by this same spirit, combined with the hard and fast lines of old habits acquired and fixed before the changes thought of. Machinery, which as our Socialistic comrades continually emphasize, has wrought a revolution in Industry, is the creation of the Dare Spirit; it has fought its way against ancient customs, privilege, and cowardice at every step, as the history of any invention would show if traced backward through all its transformations. And what is the result of it? That a system of working, altogether appropriate to hand production and capable of generating no great oppressions while industry remained in that state, has been stretched, strained to fit production in mass, till we are reaching the bursting point; once more the spirit of Dare must assert itself—claim new freedoms, since the old ones are rendered null and void by the present methods of production.

To speak in detail: in the old days of Master and Man—not so old but what many of the older workingmen can recall the conditions, the workshop was a fairly easy-going place where employer and employed worked together, knew no class feelings, chummed it out of hours, as a rule were not obliged to rush, and when they were, relied upon the principle of common interest and friendship (not upon a slave-owner's power) for overtime assistance. The proportional profit on each man's labor may even have been in general higher, but the total amount possible to be undertaken by one employer was relatively so small that no tremendous aggregations of wealth could arise. To be an employer gave no man power over another's incomings and outgoings, neither upon his speech while at work, nor to force him beyond endurance when busy, nor to subject him to fines and tributes for undesired things, such as ice-water, dirty spittoons, cups of undrinkable tea and the like; nor to the unmentignable indecencies of the large factory. The individuality of the workman was a plainly quantity: his life was his own; he could not

be locked in and driven to death, like a street-car horse, for the good of the general public and the paramount importance of Society.

With the application of steam-power and the development of Machinery, came these large groupings of workers, this subdivision of work, which has made of the employer a man apart, having interests hostile to those of his employees, living in another circle altogether, knowing nothing of them but as so many units of power, to be reckoned with as he does his machines, for the most part despising them, at his very best regarding them as dependents whom he is bound in some respects to care for, as a humane man cares for an old horse he cannot use. Such is his relation to his employees; while to the general public he becomes simply an immense cuttle-fish with tentacles reaching everywhere,—each tiny profit-sucking mouth producing no great effect, but in aggregate drawing up such a body of wealth as makes any declaration of equality or freedom between him and the worker a thing to laugh at.

The time is come therefore when the spirit of Dare calls loud through every factory and work-shop for a change in the relations of master and man. There must be some arrangement possible which will preserve the benefits of the new production and at the same time restore the individual dignity of the worker,—give back the bold independence of the old master of his trade, together with such added freedoms as may properly accrue to him as his special advantage from society's material developments.

This is the particular message of Anarchism to the worker. It is not an economic system; it does not come to you with detailed plans of how you, the workers, are, to conduct industry; nor systemized methods of exchange; nor careful paper organizations of "the administration of things." It simply calls upon the spirit of individuality to rise up from its abasement, and hold itself paramount in no matter what economic reorganization shall come about. Be men first of all, not held in slavery by the things you make; let your gospel be, "Things for men, not men for things."

Socialism, economically considered, is a positive proposition for such reorganization. It is an attempt, in the main, to grasp at those great new material gains which have been the special creation of the last forty or fifty years. It has not so much in view the reclamation and further assertion of the personality of the worker as it has a just distribution of products.

Now it is perfectly apparent that Anarchy, having to do almost entirely with the relations of men in their thoughts and feelings, and not with the positive organization of production and distribution, an Anarchist needs to supplement his Anarchism by some economic propositions, which may enable him to put in practical shape to himself and others this possibility of independent manhood. That will be his test in choosing any such proposition,—the measure in which individuality is secured. It is not enough for him that a comfortable ease, a pleasant and well-ordered routine, shall be secured; free play for the spirit of change—that is his first demand.

Every Anarchist has this in common with every other Anarchist, that the economic system must be subservient to this end; no system recommends itself to him by the mere beauty and smoothness of its working; jealous of the encroachments of the machine, he looks with fierce suspicion upon an arithmetic with men for units, a society running in slots and grooves, with the precision so beautiful to one in whom the love of order is first, but which only makes him sniff—"Pfaugh! it smells of machine oil."

There are, accordingly, several economic schools among Anarchists; there are Anarchist Individualists, Anarchist Mutualists, Anarchist Communists and Anarchist Socialists. In times past these several schools have bitterly denounced each other and mutually refused to recognize each other as Anarchists at all. The more narrowminded on both sides still do so; true, they do not consider it is narrow-mindedness, but simply a firm and solid grasp of the truth, which does not permit of tolerance towards error. This has been the attitude of the bigot in all ages, and Anarchism no more than any other new doctrine has escaped its bigots. Each of these fanatical adherents of either collectivism or individualism believes that no Anarchism is possible without that particular economic system as its guarantee, and is of course thoroughly justified from his own standpoint. With the extension of what Comrade Brown calls the New Spirit, however, this old narrowness is yielding to the broader, kindlier and far more reasonable idea, that all these economic conceptions may be experimented with, and there is nothing un-Anarchistic about any of them until the element of compulsion enters and obliges unwilling persons to remain in a community whose economic arrangements they do not agree to. (When I say "do not agree to" I do not mean that they have a mere distaste for, or that they think might well be altered for some other preferable arrangement, but with which, nev-

ertheless, they quite easily put up, as two persons each living in the same house and having different tastes in decoration, will submit to some color of window shade or bit of bric-a-brac which he does not like so well, but which, nevertheless, he cheerfully puts up with for the satisfaction of being with his friend. I mean serious differences which in their opinion threaten their essential liberties. I make this explanation about trifles; because the objections which are raised to the doctrine that men may live in society freely, almost always degenerate into trivialities,—such as, “what would you do if two ladies wanted the same hat?” etc. We do not advocate the abolition of common sense, and every person of sense is willing to surrender his preferences at times, provided he is not compelled to at all costs.)

Therefore I say that each group of persons acting socially in freedom may choose any of the proposed systems, and be just as thorough-going Anarchists as those who select another. If this standpoint be accepted, we are rid of those outrageous excommunications which belong properly to the Church of Rome, and which serve no purpose but to bring us into deserved contempt with outsiders.

Furthermore, having accepted it from a purely theoretical process of reasoning, I believe one is then in an attitude of mind to perceive certain material factors in the problem which account for these differences in proposed systems, and which even demand such differences, so long as production is in its present state.

I shall now dwell briefly upon these various propositions, and explain, as I go along, what the material factors are to which I have just alluded. Taking the last first, namely, Anarchist Socialism,—its economic program is the same as that of political Socialism, in its entirety; —I mean before the working of practical politics has frittered the Socialism away into a mere list of governmental ameliorations. Such Anarchist Socialists hold that the State, the Centralized Government, has been and ever will be the business agent of the property-owning class; that it is an expression of a certain material condition purely, and with the passing of that condition the State must also pass; that Socialism, meaning the complete taking over of all forms of property from the hands of men as the indivisible possession of Man, brings with it as a logical, inevitable result the dissolution of the State. They believe that every individual having an equal claim upon the social production, the incentive to grabbing and holding being gone, crimes (which are in nearly all cases the instinctive answer to some antecedent denial of that claim

to one's share) will vanish, and with them the last excuse for the existence of the State. They do not, as a rule, look forward to any such transformations in the material aspect of society, as some of the rest of us do. A Londoner once said to me that he believed London would keep on growing, the flux and reflux of nations keep on pouring through its serpentine streets, its hundred thousand 'buses keep on jaunting just the same, and all that tremendous traffic which fascinates and horrifies continue rolling like a great flood up and down, up and down, like the sea-sweep,—after the realization of Anarchism, as it does now. That Londoner's name was John Turner; he said, on the same occasion, that he believed thoroughly in the economics of Socialism. Now this branch of the Anarchist party came out of the old Socialist party, and originally represented the revolutionary wing of that party, as opposed to those who took up the notion of using politics. And I believe the material reason which accounts for their acceptance of that particular economic scheme is this (of course it applies to all European Socialists) that the social development of Europe is a thing of long-continued history; that almost from time immemorial there has been a recognized class struggle; that no workman living, nor yet his father, nor his grandfather, nor his great-grandfather has seen the land of Europe pass in vast blocks from an unclaimed public inheritance into the hands of an ordinary individual like himself, without a title or any distinguishing mark above himself, as we in America have seen. The land and the land-holder have been to him always unapproachable quantities,—a recognized source of oppression, class, and class-possession.

Again, the industrial development in town and city— coming as a means of escape from feudal oppression, but again bringing with it its own oppressions, also with a long history of warfare behind it, has served to bind the sense of class fealty upon the common people of the manufacturing towns; so that blind, stupid, and Churchridden as they no doubt are, there is a vague, dull, but very certainly existing feeling that they must look for help in association together, and regard with suspicion or indifference any proposition which proposes to help them by helping their employers. Moreover, Socialism has been an ever recurring dream through the long story of revolt in Europe; Anarchists, like others, are born into it. It is not until they pass over seas, and come in contact with other conditions, breathe the atmosphere of other thoughts, that they are able to see other possibilities as well.

If I may venture, at this point, a criticism of this position of the Anarchist Socialist, I would say that the great flaw in this conception of the State is in supposing it to be of simple origin; the State is not merely the tool of the governing classes; it has its root far down in the religious development of human nature; and will not fall apart merely through the abolition of classes and property. There is other work to be done. As to the economic program, I shall criticise that, together with all the other propositions, when I sum up.

Anarchist Communism is a modification, rather an evolution, of Anarchist Socialism. Most Anarchist Communists, I believe, do look forward to great changes in the distribution of people upon the earth's surface through the realization of Anarchism. Most of them agree that the opening up of the land together with the free use of tools would lead to a breaking up of these vast communities called cities, and the formation of smaller groups or communes which shall be held together by a free recognition of common interests only.

While Socialism looks forward to a further extension of the modern triumph of Commerce—which is that it has brought the products of the entire earth to your door-step—free Communism looks upon such a fever of exportation and importation as an unhealthy development, and expects rather a more self-reliant development of home resources, doing away with the mass of supervision required for the systematic conduct of such world exchange. It appeals to the plain sense of the workers, by proposing that they who now consider themselves helpless dependents upon the boss's ability to give them a job, shall constitute themselves independent producing groups, take the materials, do the work (they do that now), deposit the products in the warehouses, taking what they want for themselves, and letting others take the balance. To do this no government, no employer, no money system is necessary. There is only necessary a decent regard for one's own and one's fellow-worker's selfhood. It is not likely, indeed it is devoutly to be hoped, that no such large aggregations of men as now assemble daily in mills and factories, will ever come together by mutual desire. (A factory is a hot-bed for all that is vicious in human nature, and largely because of its crowding only.)

The notion that men cannot work together unless they have a driving-master to take a percentage of their product, is contrary both to good sense and observed fact, As a rule bosses simply make confusion worse confounded when they attempt to mix in a workman's snarls, as every mechanic has had practical demonstration of; and as to social effort,

why men worked in common while they were monkeys yet; if you don't believe it, go and watch the monkeys. They don't surrender their individual freedom, either.

In short, the real workmen will make their own regulations, decide when and where and how things shall be done. It is not necessary that the projector of an Anarchist Communist society shall say in what manner separate industries shall be conducted, nor do they presume to. He simply conjures the spirit of Dare and Do in the plainest workmen—says to them: "It is you who know how to mine, how to dig, how to cut; you will know how to organize your work without a dictator; we cannot tell you, but we have full faith that you will find the way yourselves. You will never be free men until you acquire that same self-faith."

As to the problem of the exact exchange of equivalents which so frets the reformers of other schools, to him it does not exist. So there is enough, who cares? The sources of wealth remain indivisible forever; who cares if one has a little more or less, so all have enough? Who cares if something goes to waste? Let it waste. The rotted apple fertilizes the ground as well as if it had comforted the animal economy first. And, indeed, you who worry so much about system and order and adjustment of production to consumption, you waste more human energy in making your account than the precious calculation is worth. Hence money with all its retinue of complications and trickeries is abolished.

Small, independent, self-resourceful, freely cooperating communes—this is the economic ideal which is accepted by most of the Anarchists of the Old World to-day.

As to the material factor which developed this ideal among Europeans, it is the recollection and even some still remaining vestiges of the mediaeval village commune —those oases in the great Sahara of human degradation presented in the history of the Middle Ages, when the Catholic Church stood triumphant upon Man in the dust. Such is the ideal glamored with the dead gold of a sun which has set, which gleams through the pages of Morris and Kropotkin. We in America never knew the village commune. White Civilization struck our shores in a broad tide-sheet and swept over the country inclusively; among us was never seen the little commune growing up from a state of barbarism independently, out of primary industries, and maintaining itself within itself. There was no gradual change from the mode of life of the native people to our own; there was a wiping out and a complete transplantation of the latest form of European civilization. The idea of the little commune,

therefore, comes instinctively to the Anarchists of Europe,—particularly the continental ones; with them it is merely the conscious development of a submerged instinct. With Americans it is an importation.

I believe that most Anarchist Communists avoid the blunder of the Socialists in regarding the State as the offspring of material conditions purely, though they lay great stress upon its being the tool of Property, and contend that in one form or another the State will exist so long as there is property at all.

I pass to the extreme Individualists,—those who hold to the tradition of political economy, and are firm in the idea that the system of employer and employed, buying and selling, banking, and all the other essential institutions of Commercialism, centering upon private property, are in themselves good, and are rendered vicious merely by the interference of the State. Their chief economic propositions are: land to be held by individuals or companies for such time and in such allotments as they use only; redistribution to take place as often as the members of the community shall agree; what constitutes use to be decided by each community, presumably in town meeting assembled; disputed cases to be settled by a so-called free jury to be chosen by lot out of the entire group; members not coinciding in the decisions of the group to betake themselves to outlying lands not occupied, without let or hindrance from any one.

Money to represent all staple commodities, to be issued by whomsoever pleases; naturally, it would come to individuals depositing their securities with banks and accepting bank notes in return; such bank notes representing the labor expended in production and being issued in sufficient quantity, (there being no limit upon any one's starting in the business, whenever interest began to rise more banks would be organized, and thus the rate per cent would be constantly checked by competition), exchange would take place freely, commodities would circulate, business of all kinds would be stimulated, and, the government privilege being taken away from inventions, industries would spring up at every turn, bosses would be hunting men rather than men bosses, wages would rise to the full measure of the individual production, and forever remain there. Property, real property, would at last exist, which it does not at the present day, because no man gets what he makes.

The charm in this program is that it proposes no sweeping changes in our daily retinue; it does not bewilder us as more revolutionary propositions do. Its remedies are self-acting ones; they do not depend upon conscious efforts of individuals to establish justice and build harmony;

competition in freedom is the great automatic valve which opens or closes as demand,? increase. or diminish, and all that is necessary is to let well enough alone and not attempt to assist it.

It is sure that nine Americans in ten who have never heard of any of these programs before, will listen with far more interest and approval to this than to the others. The material reason which explains this attitude of mind is very evident. In this country outside of the Negro question we have never had the historic division of classes; we are just making that history now; we have never felt the need of the associative spirit of workman with workman, because in our society it has been the individual that did things; the workman of to-day was the employer to-morrow; vast opportunities lying open to him in the undeveloped territory, he shouldered his tools and struck out single-handed for himself. Even now, fiercer and fiercer though the struggle is growing, tighter and tighter though the workman is getting cornered, the line of division between class and class is constantly being broken, and the first motto of the American is "the Lord helps him who helps himself." Consequently this economic program, whose key-note is "let alone", appeals strongly to the traditional sympathies and life habits of a people who have themselves seen an almost unbounded patrimony swept up, as a gambler sweeps his stakes, by men who played with them at school or worked with them in one shop a year or ten years before.

This particular branch of the Anarchist party does not accept the Communist position that Government arises from Property; on the contrary, they hold Government responsible for the denial of real property (viz.: to the producer the exclusive possession of what he has produced). They lay more stress upon its metaphysical origin in the authority-creating Fear in human nature. Their attack is directed centrally upon the idea of Authority; thus the material wrongs seem to flow from the spiritual error (if I may venture the word without fear of misconstruction), which is precisely the reverse of the Socialistic view.

Truth lies not "between the two," but in a synthesis of the two opinions.

Anarchist Mutualism is a modification of the program of Individualism, laying more emphasis upon organization, co-operation and free federation of the workers. To these the trade union is the nucleus of the free cooperative group, which will obviate the necessity of an employer, issue time-checks to its members, take charge of the finished product, exchange with different trade groups for their mutual advan-

tage through the central federation, enable its members to utilize their credit, and likewise insure them against loss. The mutualist position on the land question is identical with that of the Individualists, as well as their understanding of the State.

The material factor which accounts for such differences as there are between Individualists and Mutualists, is, I think, the fact that the first originated in the brains of those who, whether workmen or business men, lived by so-called independent exertion. Josiah Warren, though a poor man, lived in an Individualist way. and made his free-life social experiment in small country settlements, far removed from the great organized industries. Tucker also, though a city man, has never had personal association with such industries. They had never known directly the oppressions of the large factory, nor mingled with workers' associations. The Mutualists had; consequently their leaning towards a greater Communism. Dyer D. Lum spent the greater part of his life in building up workmen's unions, himself being a hand worker, a book-binder by trade.

I have now presented the rough skeleton of four different economic schemes entertained by Anarchists. Remember that the point of agreement in all is: no compulsion. Those who favor one method have no intention of forcing it upon those who favor another, so long as equal tolerance is exercised toward themselves.

Remember, also, that none of these schemes is proposed for its own sake, but because through it, its projectors believe, liberty may be best secured. Every Anarchist, as an Anarchist, would be perfectly willing to surrender his own scheme directly, if he saw that another worked better.

For myself, I believe that all these and many more could be advantageously tried in different localities; I would see the instincts and habits of the people express themselves in a free choice in every community; and I am sure that distinct environments would call out distinct adaptations.

Personally, while I recognize that liberty would be greatly extended under any of these economies, I frankly confess that none of them satisfies me.

Socialism and Communism both demand a degree of joint effort and administration which would beget more regulation than is wholly consistent with ideal Anarchism; Individualism and Mutualism, resting upon property, involve a development of the private policeman not at all compatible with my notions of freedom.

My ideal would be a condition in which all natural resources would be forever free to all, and the worker individually able to produce for himself sufficient for all his vital needs, if he so chose, so that he need not govern his working or not working by the times and seasons of his fellows. I think that time may come; but it will only be through the development of the modes of production and the taste of the people. Meanwhile we all cry with one voice for the freedom to try.

Are these all the aims of Anarchism? They are just the beginning. They are an outline of what is demanded for the material producer. If as a worker, you think no further than how to free yourself from the horrible bondage of capitalism, then that is the measure of Anarchism for you. But you yourself put the limit there, if there it is put. Immeasurably deeper, immeasurably higher, dips and soars the soul which has come out of its casement of custom and cowardice, and dared to claim its Self.

Ah, once to stand unflinchingly on the brink of that dark gulf of passions and desires, once at last to send a bold, straight-driven gaze down into the volcanic Me, once, and in that once, and in that once forever, to throw off the command to cover and flee from the knowledge of that abyss,—nay, to dare it to hiss and seethe if it will, and make us writhe and shiver with its force! Once and forever to realize that one is not a bundle of well-regulated little reasons bound up in the front room of the brain to be sermonized and held in order with copy-book maxims or moved and stopped by a syllogism, but a bottomless, bottomless depth of all strange sensations, a rocking sea of feeling wherever sweep strong storms of unaccountable hate and rage, invisible contortions of disappointment, low ebbs of meanness, quakings and shudderings of love that drives to madness and will not be controlled, hungerings and meanings and sobbing that smite upon the inner ear, now first bent to listen, as if all the sadness of the sea and the wailing of the great pine forests of the North had met to weep together there in that silence audible to you alone. To look down into that, to know the blackness, the midnight, the dead ages in oneself, to feel the jungle and the beast within,—and the swamp and the slime, and the desolate desert of the heart's despair—to see, to know, to feel to the uttermost,—and then to look at one's fellow, sitting across from one in the street-car, so decorous, so well got up, so nicely combed and brushed and oiled and to wonder what lies beneath that commonplace exterior,—to picture the cavern in him which somewhere far below has a narrow gallery running into your own—to imagine the pain that racks him to the finger-tips perhaps while he wears that

placid ironed-shirt-front countenance—to conceive how he too shudders at himself and writhes and flees from the lava of his heart and aches in his prison-house not daring to see himself—to draw back respectfully from the Self-gate of the plainest, most unpromising creature, even from the most debased criminal, because one knows the nonentity and the criminal in oneself—to spare all condemnation (how much more trial and sentence) because one knows the stuff of which man is made and recoils at nothing since all is in himself,—this is what Anarchism may mean to you. It means that to me.

And then, to turn cloudward, starward, skyward, and let the dreams rush over one—no longer awed by outside powers of any order—recognizing nothing superior to oneself—painting, painting endless pictures, creating unheard symphonies that sing dream sounds to you alone, extending sympathies to the dumb brutes as equal brothers, kissing the flowers as one did when a child, letting oneself go free, go free beyond the bounds of what fear and custom call the “possible,”—this too Anarchism may mean to you, if you dare to apply it so. And if you do some day,—if sitting at your work-bench, you see a vision of surpassing glory, some picture of that golden time when there shall be no prisons on the earth, nor hunger, nor houselessness, nor accusation, nor judgment, and hearts open as printed leaves, and candid as fearlessness, if then you look across at your lowbrowed neighbor, who sweats and smells and curses at his toil,—remember that as you do not know his depth neither do you know his height. He too might dream if the yoke of custom and law and dogma were broken from him. Even now you know not what blind, bound, motionless chrysalis is working there to prepare its winged thing.

Anarchism means freedom to the soul as to the body,— in every aspiration, every growth.

A few words as to the methods. In times past Anarchists have excluded each other on these grounds also; revolutionists contemptuously said “Quaker” of peace men; “savage Communists” anathematized the Quakers in return.

This too is passing. I say this: all methods are to the individual capacity and decision.

There is Tolstoy,—Christian, non-resistant, artist. His method is to paint pictures of society as it is, to show the brutality of force and the uselessness of it; to preach the end of government through the repu-

diation of all military force. Good! I accent it in its entirety. It fits his character, it fits his ability. Let us be glad that he works so.

There is John Most—old, work-worn, with the weight of prison years upon him,—yet fiercer, fiercer, bitterer in his denunciations of the ruling class than would require the energy of a dozen younger men to utter—going down the last hills of life, rousing the consciousness of wrong among his fellows as he goes. Good! That consciousness must be awakened. Long may that fiery tongue yet speak.

There is Benjamin Tucker—cool, self-contained, critical,—sending his fine hard shafts among foes and friends with icy impartiality, hitting swift and cutting keen,—and ever ready to nail a traitor. Holding to passive resistance as most effective, ready to change it whenever he deems it wise. That suits him; in his field he is alone, invaluable.

And there is Peter Kropotkin appealing to the young, and looking with sweet, warm, eager eyes into every colonizing effort, and hailing with a child's enthusiasm the uprisings of the workers, and believing in revolution with his whole soul. Him too we thank.

And there is George Brown preaching peaceable expropriation through the federated unions of the workers; and this is good. It is his best place; he is at home there; he can accomplish most in his own chosen field.

And over there in his coffin cell in Italy, lies the man whose method was to kill a king, and shock the nations into a sudden consciousness of the hollowness of their law and order. Him too, him and his act, without reserve I accept, and bend in silent acknowledgement of the strength of the man.

For there are some whose nature it is to think and plead, and yield and yet return to the address, and so make headway in the minds of their fellowmen; and there are others who are stern and still, resolute, implacable as Judah's dream of God;—and those men strike—strike once and have ended. But the blow resounds across the world. And as on a night when the sky is heavy with storm, some sudden great white flare sheets across it, and every object starts sharply out, so in the flash of Bresci's pistol shot the whole world for a moment saw the tragic figure of the Italian people, starved, stunted, crippled, huddled, degraded, murdered; and at the same moment that their teeth chattered with fear, they came and asked the Anarchists to explain themselves. And hundreds of thousands of people read more in those few days than they had ever read of the idea before.

Ask a method? Do you ask Spring her method? Which is more necessary, the sunshine or the rain? They are contradictory—yes; they destroy each other—yes, but from this destruction the flowers result.

Each choose that method which expresses your selfhood best, and condemn no other man because he expresses his Self otherwise.

Anarchism and American Traditions

Voltairine de Cleyre

1932

Introduction

“Nature has the habit of now and then producing a type of human being far in advance of the times; an ideal for us to emulate; a being devoid of sham, uncompromising, and to whom the truth is sacred; a being whose selfishness is so large that it takes the whole human race and treats self only as one of the great mass; a being keen to sense all forms of wrong, and powerful in denunciation of it; one who can reach in the future and draw it nearer. Such a being was Voltairine de Cleyre.”

What could be added to this splendid tribute by Jay Fox to the memory of Voltairine de Cleyre?

The real biography of Voltairine de Cleyre is to be found in the letters she wrote to her comrades, friends and admirers, for like many other women in public life, she was a voluminous writer.

Born shortly after the close of the Civil War, she witnessed during her life the most momentous transformation of the nation; she saw the change from an agricultural community into an industrial empire; the tremendous development of capital in this country with the accompanying misery and degradation of labor. Her life path was sketched when she reached the age of womanhood; she had to become a rebel! To stand outside of the struggle would have meant intellectual death. She chose the only way.

Voltairine de Cleyre was born on November 17, 1866, in the town of Leslie, Michigan. She died on June 6, 1912, in Chicago. She came from French-American stock on her father's side, and of Puritan on her mother's. Her father, Auguste de Cleyre, was a native of Western Flanders, but of French origin. Being a freethinker and a great admirer of Voltaire, he named his daughter Voltairine. She did not have a happy childhood; her earliest life was embittered by want of the common necessities, which her parents, hard as they tried, could not provide. A vein of sadness can be traced in her earliest poems — the songs of a child of talent and great fantasy.

Strength of mind did not seem to have been a characteristic of Auguste de Cleyre, for he recanted his libertarian ideas, returned to the fold of the church, and became obsessed with the idea that the highest vocation for a woman was the life of a nun; so he sent her to the Convent of Our Lady of Lake Huron at Sarnia, Province of Ontario, Canada. But

Voltairine's spirit could not be imprisoned in a convent. After she was there a few weeks she ran away. She crossed the river to Port Huron but as she had no money she started to walk home. After covering: seventeen miles, she realized that she could never do it; so she turned around and walked back, and entering the house of an acquaintance in Port Huron, asked for something to eat. They sent for her father who afterwards took her back to the convent. After a while, however, she again ran away, this time never to return.

Reaction from repression and the cruel discipline of the Catholic Church helped to develop Voltairine's inherent tendency toward free thought; the five-fold murder of the labor leaders in Chicago in 1887 shocked her mind so deeply that from that moment dates her development toward Anarchism. When in 1886 the bomb fell in the Haymarket Square, and the Anarchists were arrested, Voltairine de Cleyre, who at that time was a free thought lecturer, shouted: "They ought to be hanged!" They were hanged, and now her body rests in Waldheim Cemetery, near the grave of those martyrs. Speaking at a memorial meeting in honor of those comrades, in 1901, she said: "For that ignorant, outrageous, blood-thirsty sentence I shall never forgive myself, though I know the dead men would have forgiven me, though I know those who loved them forgive me But my own voice, as it sounded that night, will sound so in my ears till I die — a bitter reproach and a shame I have only one word of extenuation for myself and the millions of others who did as I did that night — ignorance."

She did not remain long in ignorance. In "The Making of an Anarchist," she describes why she became a convert to the idea and why she entered the movement. "Till then," she writes, "I believed in the essential Justice of the American law and trial by jury. After that I never could. The infamy of that trial has passed into history, and the question it awakened as to the possibility of Justice under law has passed into clamorous crying across the world."

Voltairine spent the greater part of her life in Philadelphia. Here, among congenial friends, and later among the Jewish immigrants, she did her best work, producing an enormous amount. Her poems, sketches, propagandist articles and essays may be found in *Open Court*, *Twentieth Century*, *Magazine of Poetry*, *Truth*, *Lucifer*, *Boston Investigator*, *Rights of Labor*, *Truth Seeker*, *Liberty*, *Chicago Liberal*, *Free Society*, *Mother Earth*, and in *The Independent*.

In an exquisite tribute to her memory, Leonard D. Abbott calls Voltairine de Cleyre a priestess of Pity and of Vengeance, whose voice has a vibrant quality that is unique in literature. We are convinced that her writings will live as long as humanity exists.

***Anarchism & American Traditions* by Voltairine de Cleyre**

American traditions, begotten of religious rebellion, small self-sustaining communities, isolated conditions, and hard pioneer life, grew during the colonization period of one hundred and seventy years from the settling of Jamestown to the outburst of the Revolution. This was in fact the great constitution-making epoch, the period of charters guaranteeing more or less of liberty, the general tendency of which is well described by Wm. Penn in speaking of the charter for Pennsylvania: "I want to put it out of my power, or that of my successors, to do mischief."

The revolution is the sudden and unified consciousness of these traditions, their loud assertion, the blow dealt by their indomitable will against the counter force of tyranny, which has never entirely recovered from the blow, but which from then till now has gone on remolding and regrappling the instruments of governmental power, that the Revolution sought to shape and hold as defenses of liberty.

To the average American of today, the Revolution means the series of battles fought by the patriot army with the armies of England. The millions of school children who attend our public schools are taught to draw maps of the siege of Boston and the siege of Yorktown, to know the general plan of the several campaigns, to quote the number of prisoners of war surrendered with Burgoyne; they are required to remember the date when Washington crossed the Delaware on the ice; they are told to "Remember Paoli," to repeat "Molly Stark's a widow," to call General Wayne "Mad Anthony Wayne," and to execrate Benedict Arnold; they know that the Declaration of Independence was signed on the Fourth of July, 1776, and the Treaty of Paris in 1783; and then they think they have learned the Revolution — blessed be George Washington! They have no idea why it should have been called a "revolution" instead of the "English War," or any similar title: it's the name of it, that's all. And name-worship, both in child and man, has acquired such mastery of them, that the name "American Revolution" is held sacred, though it means to them nothing more than successful force, while the name "Revolution" applied to a further possibility, is a spectre detested and abhorred. In neither case have they any idea of the content of the word, save that of armed force. That has already happened, and long happened, which Jefferson foresaw when he wrote:

“The spirit of the times may alter, will alter. Our rulers will become corrupt, our people careless. A single zealot may become persecutor, and better men be his victims. It can never be too often repeated that the time for fixing every essential right, on a legal basis, is while our rulers are honest, ourselves united. From the conclusion of this war we shall be going down hill. It will not then be necessary to resort every moment to the people for support. They will be forgotten, therefore, and their rights disregarded. They will forget themselves in the sole faculty of making money, and will never think of uniting to effect a due respect for their rights. The shackles, therefore, which shall not be knocked off at the conclusion of this war, will be heavier and heavier, till our rights shall revive or expire in a convulsion.”

To the men of that time, who voiced the spirit of that time, the battles that they fought were the least of the Revolution; they were the incidents of the hour, the things they met and faced as part of the game they were playing; but the stake they had in view, before, during, and after the war, the real Revolution, was a change in political institutions which should make of government not a thing apart, a superior power to stand over the people with a whip, but a serviceable agent, responsible, economical, and trustworthy (but never so much trusted as not to be continually watched), for the transaction of such business as was the common concern and to set the limits of the common concern at the line of where one man's liberty would encroach upon another's.

They thus took their starting point for deriving a minimum of government upon the same sociological ground that the modern Anarchist derives the no-government theory; viz., that equal liberty is the political ideal. The difference lies in the belief, on the one hand, that the closest approximation to equal liberty might be best secured by the rule of the majority in those matters involving united action of any kind (which rule of the majority they thought it possible to secure by a few simple arrangements for election), and, on the other hand, the belief that majority rule is both impossible and undesirable; that any government, no matter what its forms, will be manipulated by a very small minority, as the development of the States and United States governments has strikingly proved; that candidates will loudly profess allegiance to platforms before elections, which as officials in power they will openly

disregard, to do as they please; and that even if the majority will could be imposed, it would also be subversive of equal liberty, which may be best secured by leaving to the voluntary association of those interested in the management of matters of common concern, without coercion of the uninterested or the opposed.

Among the fundamental likeness between the Revolutionary Republicans and the Anarchists is the recognition that the little must precede the great; that the local must be the basis of the general; that there can be a free federation only when there are free communities to federate; that the spirit of the latter is carried into the councils of the former, and a local tyranny may thus become an instrument for general enslavement. Convinced of the supreme importance of ridding the municipalities of the institutions of tyranny, the most strenuous advocates of independence, instead of spending their efforts mainly in the general Congress, devoted themselves to their home localities, endeavoring to work out of the minds of their neighbors and fellow-colonists the institutions of entailed property, of a State-Church, of a class-divided people, even the institution of African slavery itself. Though largely unsuccessful, it is to the measure of success they did achieve that we are indebted for such liberties as we do retain, and not to the general government. They tried to inculcate local initiative and independent action. The author of the Declaration of Independence, who in the fall of '76 declined a reelection to Congress in order to return to Virginia and do his work in his own local assembly, in arranging there for public education which he justly considered a matter of "common concern," said his advocacy of public schools was not with any "view to take its ordinary branches out of the hands of private enterprise, which manages so much better the concerns to which it is equal"; and in endeavoring to make clear the restrictions of the Constitution upon the functions of the general government, he likewise said:

"Let the general government be reduced to foreign concerns only, and let our affairs be disentangled from those of all other nations, except as to commerce, which the merchants will manage for themselves, and the general government may be reduced to a very simple organization, and a very inexpensive one; a few plain duties to be performed by a few servants."

This then was the American tradition, that private enterprise manages better all that to which it is equal. Anarchism declares that private

enterprise, whether individual or cooperative, is equal to all the undertakings of society. And it quotes the particular two instances, Education and Commerce, which the governments of the States and of the United States have undertaken to manage and regulate, as the very two which in operation have done more to destroy American freedom and equality, to warp and distort American tradition, to make of government a mighty engine of tyranny, than any other cause, save the unforeseen developments of Manufacture.

It was the intention of the Revolutionists to establish a system of common education, which should make the teaching of history one of its principal branches; not with the intent of burdening the memories of our youth with the dates of battles or the speeches of generals, nor to make the Boston Tea Party Indians the one sacrosanct mob in all history, to be revered but never on any account to be imitated, but with the intent that every American should know to what conditions the masses of people had been brought by the operation of certain institutions, by what means they had wrung out their liberties, and how those liberties had again and again been filched from them by the use of governmental force, fraud, and privilege. Not to breed security, laudation, complacent indolence, passive acquiescence in the acts of a government protected by the label "home-made," but to beget a wakeful jealousy, a never-ending watchfulness of rulers, a determination to squelch every attempt of those entrusted with power to encroach upon the sphere of individual action — this was the prime motive of the revolutionists in endeavoring to provide for common education.

"Confidence," said the revolutionists who adopted the Kentucky Resolutions, "is everywhere the parent of despotism; free government is founded in jealousy, not in confidence; it is jealousy, not confidence, which prescribes limited constitutions to bind down those whom we are obliged to trust with power; our Constitution has accordingly fixed the limits to which, and no further, our confidence may go... In questions of power, let no more be heard of confidence in man, but bind him down from mischief by the chains of the Constitution."

These resolutions were especially applied to the passage of the Alien laws by the monarchist party during John Adams' administration, and were an indignant call from the State of Kentucky to repudiate the right of the general government to assume undelegated powers, for said they, to accept these laws would be "to be bound by laws made, not with our consent, but by others against our consent — that is, to surrender the

form of government we have chosen, and to live under one deriving its powers from its own will, and not from our authority." Resolutions identical in spirit were also passed by Virginia, the following month; in those days the States still considered themselves supreme, the general government subordinate.

To inculcate this proud spirit of the supremacy of the people over their governors was to be the purpose of public education! Pick up today any common school history, and see how much of this spirit you will find therein. On the contrary, from cover to cover you will find nothing but the cheapest sort of patriotism, the inculcation of the most unquestioning acquiescence in the deeds of government, a lullaby of rest, security, confidence — the doctrine that the Law can do no wrong, a Te Deum in praise of the continuous encroachments of the powers of the general government upon the reserved rights of the States, shameless falsification of all acts of rebellion, to put the government in the right and the rebels in the wrong, pyrotechnic glorifications of union, power, and force, and a complete ignoring of the essential liberties to maintain which was the purpose of the revolutionists. The anti-Anarchist law of post-McKinley passage, a much worse law than the Alien and Sedition acts which roused the wrath of Kentucky and Virginia to the point of threatened rebellion, is exalted as a wise provision of our All-Seeing Father in Washington.

Such is the spirit of government-provided schools. Ask any child what he knows about Shays' rebellion, and he will answer, "Oh, some of the farmers couldn't pay their taxes, and Shays led a rebellion against the court-house at Worcester, so they could burn up the deeds; and when Washington heard of it he sent over an army quick and taught 'em a good lesson" — "And what was the result of it?" "The result? Why — why — the result was — Oh yes, I remember — the result was they saw the need of a strong federal government to collect the taxes and pay the debts." Ask if he knows what was said on the other side of the story, ask if he knows that the men who had given their goods and their health and their strength for the freeing of the country now found themselves cast into prison for debt, sick, disabled, and poor, facing a new tyranny for the old; that their demand was that the land should become the free communal possession of those who wished to work it, not subject to tribute, and the child will answer "No." Ask him if he ever read Jefferson's letter to Madison about it, in which he says:

"Societies exist under three forms, sufficiently distinguishable.

1. Without government, as among our Indians.
2. Under government wherein the will of every one has a just influence; as is the case in England in a slight degree, and in our States in a great one.
3. Under government of force, as is the case in all other monarchies, and in most of the other republics.

To have an idea of the curse of existence in these last, they must be seen. It is a government of wolves over sheep. It is a problem not clear in my mind that the first condition is not the best. But I believe it to be inconsistent with any great degree of population. The second state has a great deal of good in it...It has its evils too, the principal of which is the turbulence to which it is subject. ...But even this evil is productive of good. It prevents the degeneracy of government, and nourishes a general attention to public affairs. I hold that a little rebellion now and then is a good thing."

Or to another correspondent:

"God forbid that we should ever be twenty years without such a rebellion!...What country can preserve its liberties if its rulers are not warned from time to time that the people preserve the spirit of resistance? Let them take up arms... The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants. It is its natural manure."

Ask any school child if he was ever taught that the author of the Declaration of Independence, one of the great founders of the common school, said these things, and he will look at you with open mouth and unbelieving eyes. Ask him if he ever heard that the man who sounded the bugle note in the darkest hour of the Crisis, who roused the courage of the soldiers when Washington saw only mutiny and despair ahead, ask him if he knows that this man also wrote, "Government at best is a necessary evil, at worst an intolerable one," and if he is a little better informed than the average he will answer, "Oh well, he [Tom Paine] was an infidel!" Catechize him about the merits of the Constitution which he has

learned to repeat like a poll-parrot, and you will find his chief conception is not of the powers withheld from Congress, but of the powers granted.

Such are the fruits of government schools. We, the Anarchists, point to them and say: If the believers in liberty wish the principles of liberty taught, let them never entrust that instruction to any government; for the nature of government is to become a thing apart, an institution existing for its own sake, preying upon the people, and teaching whatever will tend to keep it secure in its seat. As the fathers said of the governments of Europe, so say we of this government also after a century and a quarter of independence: "The blood of the people has become its inheritance, and those who fatten on it will not relinquish it easily."

Public education, having to do with the intellect and spirit of a people, is probably the most subtle and far-reaching engine for molding the course of a nation; but commerce, dealing as it does with material things and producing immediate effects, was the force that bore down soonest upon the paper barriers of constitutional restriction, and shaped the government to its requirements. Here, indeed, we arrive at the point where we, looking over the hundred and twenty five years of independence, can see that the simple government conceived by the revolutionary republicans was a foredoomed failure. It was so because of:

1. the essence of government itself;
2. the essence of human nature
3. the essence of Commerce and Manufacture.

Of the essence of government, I have already said, it is a thing apart, developing its own interests at the expense of what opposes it; all attempts to make it anything else fail. In this Anarchists agree with the traditional enemies of the Revolution, the monarchists, federalists, strong government believers, the Roosevelts of today, the Jays, Marshalls, and Hamiltons of then — that Hamilton, who, as Secretary of the Treasury, devised a financial system of which we are the unlucky heritors, and whose objects were twofold: To puzzle the people and make public finance obscure to those that paid for it; to serve as a machine for corrupting the legislatures; "for he avowed the opinion that man could be governed by two motives only, force or interest"; force being then out of the question, he laid hold of interest, the greed of the legislators, to

set going an association of persons having an entirely separate welfare from the welfare of their electors, bound together by mutual corruption and mutual desire for plunder. The Anarchist agrees that Hamilton was logical, and understood the core of government; the difference is, that while strong governmentals believe this is necessary and desirable, we choose the opposite conclusion, *No Government Whatsoever*.

As to the essence of human nature, what our national experience has made plain is this, that to remain in a continually exalted moral condition is not human nature. That has happened which was prophesied: we have gone down hill from the Revolution until now; we are absorbed in "mere money-getting." The desire for material ease long ago vanquished the spirit of '76. What was that spirit? The spirit that animated the people of Virginia, of the Carolinas, of Massachusetts, of New York, when they refused to import goods from England; when they preferred (and stood by it) to wear coarse, homespun cloth, to drink the brew of their own growths, to fit their appetites to the home supply, rather than submit to the taxation of the imperial ministry. Even within the lifetime of the revolutionists, the spirit decayed. The love of material ease has been, in the mass of men and permanently speaking, always greater than the love of liberty. Nine hundred and ninety nine women out of a thousand are more interested in the cut of a dress than in the independence of their sex; nine hundred and ninety nine men out of a thousand are more interested in drinking a glass of beer than in questioning the tax that is laid on it; how many children are not willing to trade the liberty to play for the promise of a new cap or a new dress? That it is which begets the complicated mechanism of society; that it is which, by multiplying the concerns of government, multiplies the strength of government and the corresponding weakness of the people; this it is which begets indifference to public concern, thus making the corruption of government easy.

As to the essence of Commerce and Manufacture, it is this: to establish bonds between every corner of the earths surface and every other corner, to multiply the needs of mankind, and the desire for material possession and enjoyment.

The American tradition was the isolation of the States as far as possible. Said they: We have won our liberties by hard sacrifice and struggle unto death. We wish now to be let alone and to let others alone, that our principles may have time for trial; that we may become accustomed to the exercise of our rights; that we may be kept free from the contam-

inating influence of European gauds, pageants, distinctions. So richly did they esteem the absence of these that they could in all fervor write: "We shall see multiplied instances of Europeans coming to America, but no man living will ever seen an instance of an American removing to settle in Europe, and continuing there." Alas! In less than a hundred years the highest aim of a "Daughter of the Revolution" was, and is, to buy a castle, a title, and rotten lord, with the money wrung from American servitude! And the commercial interests of America are seeking a world empire!

In the earlier days of the revolt and subsequent independence, it appeared that the "manifest destiny" of America was to be an agricultural people, exchanging food stuffs and raw materials for manufactured articles. And in those days it was written: "We shall be virtuous as long as agriculture is our principal object, which will be the case as long as there remain vacant lands in any part of America. When we get piled upon one another in large cities, as in Europe, we shall become corrupt as in Europe, and go to eating one another as they do there." Which we are doing, because of the inevitable development of Commerce and Manufacture, and the concomitant development of strong government. And the parallel prophecy is likewise fulfilled: "If ever this vast country is brought under a single government, it will be one of the most extensive corruption, indifferent and incapable of a wholesome care over so wide a spread of surface." There is not upon the face of the earth today a government so utterly and shamelessly corrupt as that of the United States of America. There are others more cruel, more tyrannical, more devastating; there is none so utterly venal.

And yet even in the very days of the prophets, even with their own consent, the first concession to this later tyranny was made. It was made when the Constitution was made; and the Constitution was made chiefly because of the demands of Commerce. Thus it was at the outset a merchant's machine, which the other interests of the country, the land and labor interests, even then foreboded would destroy their liberties. In vain their jealousy of its central power made enact the first twelve amendments. In vain they endeavored to set bounds over which the federal power dare not trench. In vain they enacted into general law the freedom of speech, of the press, of assemblage and petition. All of these things we see ridden roughshod upon every day, and have so seen with more or less intermission since the beginning of the nineteenth century. At this day, every police lieutenant considers himself, and rightly so, as

more powerful than the General Law of the Union; and that one who told Robert Hunter that he held in his fist something stronger than the Constitution, was perfectly correct. The right of assemblage is an American tradition which has gone out of fashion; the police club is now the mode. And it is so in virtue of the people's indifference to liberty, and the steady progress of constitutional interpretation towards the substance of imperial government.

It is an American tradition that a standing army is a standing menace to liberty; in Jefferson's presidency the army was reduced to 3,000 men. It is American tradition that we keep out of the affairs of other nations. It is American practice that we meddle with the affairs of everybody else from the West to the East Indies, from Russia to Japan; and to do it we have a standing army of 83,251 men.

It is American tradition that the financial affairs of a nation should be transacted on the same principles of simple honesty that an individual conducts his own business; viz., that debt is a bad thing, and a man's first surplus earning should be applied to his debts; that offices and office holders should be few. It is American practice that the general government should always have millions [of dollars] of debt, even if a panic or a war has to be forced to prevent its being paid off; and as to the application of its income office holders come first. And within the last administration it is reported that 99,000 offices have been created at an annual expense of 1663,000,000. Shades of Jefferson! "How are vacancies to be obtained? Those by deaths are few; by resignation none." [Theodore] Roosevelt cuts the knot by making 99,000 new ones! And few will die — and none resign. They will beget sons and daughters, and Taft will have to create 99,000 more! Verily a simple and a serviceable thing is our general government.

It is American tradition that the Judiciary shall act as a check upon the impetuosity of Legislatures, should these attempt to pass the bounds of constitutional limitation. It is American practice that the Judiciary justifies every law which trenches on the liberties of the people and nullifies every act of the Legislature by which the people seek to regain some measure of their freedom. Again, in the words of Jefferson: "The Constitution is a mere thing of wax in the hands of the Judiciary, which they may twist and shape in any form they please." Truly, if the men who fought the good fight for the triumph of simple, honest, free life in that day, were now to look upon the scene of their labors, they would cry out together with him who said:

"I regret that I am now to die in the belief that the useless sacrifices of themselves by the generation of '76 to acquire self-government and happiness to their country, is to be thrown away by the unwise and unworthy passions of their sons, and that my only consolation is to be that I shall not live to see it."

And now, what has Anarchism to say to all this, this bankruptcy of republicanism, this modern empire that has grown up on the ruins of our early freedom? We say this, that the sin our fathers sinned was that they did not trust liberty wholly. They thought it possible to compromise between liberty and government, believing the latter to be "a necessary evil," and the moment the compromise was made, the whole misbegotten monster of our present tyranny began to grow. Instruments which are set up to safeguard rights become the very whip with which the free are struck.

Anarchism says, Make no laws whatever concerning speech, and speech will be free; so soon as you make a declaration on paper that speech shall be free, you will have a hundred lawyers proving that "freedom does not mean abuse, nor liberty license"; and they will define and define freedom out of existence. Let the guarantee of free speech be in every man's determination to use it, and we shall have no need of paper declarations. On the other hand, so long as the people do not care to exercise their freedom, those who wish to tyrannize will do so; for tyrants are active and ardent, and will devote themselves in the name of any number of gods, religious and otherwise, to put shackles upon sleeping men.

The problem then becomes, Is it possible to stir men from their indifference? We have said that the spirit of liberty was nurtured by colonial life; that the elements of colonial life were the desire for sectarian independence, and the jealous watchfulness incident thereto; the isolation of pioneer communities which threw each individual strongly on his own resources, and thus developed all-around men, yet at the same time made very strong such social bonds as did exist; and, lastly, the comparative simplicity of small communities.

All this has disappeared. As to sectarianism, it is only by dint of an occasional idiotic persecution that a sect becomes interesting; in the absence of this, outlandish sects play the fool's role, are anything but heroic, and have little to do with either the name or the substance of liberty. The old colonial religious parties have gradually become the "pil-

lars of society," their animosities have died out, their offensive peculiarities have been effaced, they are as like one another as beans in a pod, they build churches — and sleep in them.

As to our communities, they are hopelessly and helplessly interdependent, as we ourselves are, save that continuously diminishing proportion engaged in all around farming; and even these are slaves to mortgages. For our cities, probably there is not one that is provisioned to last a week, and certainly there is none which would not be bankrupt with despair at the proposition that it produce its own food. In response to this condition and its correlative political tyranny, Anarchism affirms the economy of self-sustenance, the disintegration of the great communities, the use of the earth.

I am not ready to say that I see clearly that this will take place; but I see clearly that this *must* take place if ever again men are to be free. I am so well satisfied that the mass of mankind prefer material possessions to liberty, that I have no hope that they will ever, by means of intellectual or moral stirrings merely, throw off the yoke of oppression fastened on them by the present economic system, to institute free societies. My only hope is in the blind development of the economic system and political oppression itself. The great characteristic looming factor in this gigantic power is Manufacture. The tendency of each nation is to become more and more a manufacturing one, an exporter of fabrics, not an importer. If this tendency follows its own logic, it must eventually circle round to each community producing for itself. What then will become of the surplus product when the manufacturer shall have no foreign market? Why, then mankind must face the dilemma of sitting down and dying in the midst of it, or confiscating the goods.

Indeed, we are partially facing this problem even now; and so far we are sitting down and dying. I opine, however, that men will not do it forever, and when once by an act of general expropriation they have overcome the reverence and fear of property, and their awe of government, they may waken to the consciousness that things are to be used, and therefore men are greater than things. This may rouse the spirit of liberty.

If, on the other hand, the tendency of invention to simplify, enabling the advantages of machinery to be combined with smaller aggregations of workers, shall also follow its own logic, the great manufacturing plants will break up, population will go after the fragments, and there will be seen not indeed the hard, self-sustaining, isolated pioneer communities

of early America, but thousands of small communities stretching along the lines of transportation, each producing very largely for its own needs, able to rely upon itself, and therefore able to be independent. For the same rule holds good for societies as for individuals — those may be free who are able to make their own living.

In regard to the breaking up of that vilest creation of tyranny, the standing army and navy, it is clear that so long as men desire to fight, they will have armed force in one form or another. Our fathers thought they had guarded against a standing army by providing for the voluntary militia. In our day we have lived to see this militia declared part of the regular military force of the United States, and subject to the same demands as the regulars. Within another generation we shall probably see its members in the regular pay of the general government. Since any embodiment of the fighting spirit, any military organization, inevitably follows the same line of centralization, the logic of Anarchism is that the least objectionable form of armed force is that which springs up voluntarily, like the minute men of Massachusetts, and disbands as soon as the occasion which called it into existence is past: that the really desirable thing is that all men — not Americans only — should be at peace; and that to reach this, all peaceful persons should withdraw their support from the army, and require that all who make war shall do so at their own cost and risk; that neither pay nor pensions are to be provided for those who choose to make man-killing a trade.

As to the American tradition of non-meddling, Anarchism asks that it be carried down to the individual himself. It demands no jealous barrier of isolation; it knows that such isolation is undesirable and impossible; but it teaches that by all men's strictly minding their own business, a fluid society, freely adapting itself to mutual needs, wherein all the world shall belong to all men, as much as each has need or desire, will result.

And when Modern Revolution has thus been carried to the heart of the whole world — if it ever shall be, as I hope it will — then may we hope to see a resurrection of that proud spirit of our fathers which put the simple dignity of Man above the gauds of wealth and class, and held that to, be an American was greater than to be a king.

In that day there shall be neither kings nor Americans — only Men ; over the whole earth, *Men*.

Issued By The International Anarchist Publishing Committee of
America, Chicago: Free Society Group, 1932

A New Hope

Voltairine de Cleyre

March 15th, 1893

The New Hope: Voltairine de Cleyre's Forgotten Poem

by Robert P. Helms

The celebrated anarchist, freethinker, poet, feminist, and public intellectual Voltairine de Cleyre (1866–1912) was twenty-six years old in 1893, living in West Philadelphia and at her best game as a writer and activist. She was then contributing occasional letters, articles, and a few poems to the *Boston Investigator*, which in its day (1831–1904) was a well-respected and lively forum for liberals, atheists, and dissident religionists.

Until recently there were no on-line databases for 19th century radical newspapers, and it was not so long ago that the internet didn't exist. Even now in 2013, the database where I found this old gem is for paying customers only. But even before the internet came into its own, the *Boston Investigator* was not to be found in university libraries. I remember looking for it and having other researchers ask me if I knew where it might be. Now, one can search the full text of the paper's first 64 years of publication. Thus it seems that in spite of a surge in interest in this author since Paul Avrich's biography *An American Anarchist: The Life Of Voltairine de Cleyre* (1978) and three new books by or about her in 2004–05, this poem "The New Hope" evidently has not been mentioned or reprinted in the century since the poet's death, or perhaps not since it first appeared.

I have uncovered a few other lost pieces by Voltairine de Cleyre that involved a bit of detective work, but the present discovery was merely knowing her work and searching a newly available source. Even so, I am very proud to present this forgotten poem in which the great anarchist declares her independence from superstition.

The New Hope

by V. de Cleyre

I stand in the darkness waiting
For the light of the truth to shine;
The faith that you preach has failed me,

And your God is no longer mine.
I have lifted my hands to heaven,
And besought him, with many a prayer,
To put down the evil doer
And destroy the unrighteous snare.
And still did the evil triumph,
And still was the right made wrong;
Till my trust began to waver,
Yet I prayed Him to keep it strong.
I walked in the ways appointed,
I treasured the preacher's words,
And cried, aye, cried fast to heaven,
For the armor his soldier girds.
Yes, I shut my eyes from seeing,
I bound strong chains on my soul,
That I might judge of its witness,
Might not read the damning scroll.
I said: All is well –God wills it—
His wisdom is greater than mine,
He sees with the perfect vision,
His love is the love divine;
Mine is a human standard,
His is so far above
That I cannot see, nor feel, nor know
The height of that infinite love;
Yet will I trust my infinite father,
Yet will I yield to Him
Whose glory dwells in the uttermost,
Whose brightness makes all else dim.
But tho' I prayed so loudly,
And tho' I cried very fast,
Tho' my eyes were shut, and my soul was bound,
The old faith could not last.
Still round my ears rolled the surge of life,
Still rose the awful din
Of a world crushed under and trampled down

By the feet of the strong who win.
The wild inarticulate anger
Of a mad thing driven at bay,
Lashed into pain by a million strokes,
And seeing no help, no way.
And under, and over, and through it,
A menacing undertone,
A fearful reverberation
Repeating forever my own
Sad prayer for the faith I had not,
Came the despairing cry,
"Oh God, see you not your children
That of hunger and cold they die?"
Now I know "It is finished;"
Never more shall I make moan
To your God of the stars who feels our prayers,
As our tears are felt by the stone.
What the future holds I know not,
But this faith it cannot hold,
For my thoughts are no longer the thoughts of a child,
Nor my hopes the hopes of old.
Help for Earth is not in heaven,
Nor the hope of man in God,
Nor the truth that shall deliver
To be bought with another's blood.
By our own blood we must purchase,
With our own feet the way;
When we search out the strength of our own souls
No God shall say us "nay."
Yes, I utter this profanation,
I proclaim it loud to the sky,
Man is more than the angels,
Jehovah is less than I.

Retrieved on May 25th, 2015 from
<http://www.deadanarchists.org/newhope.html>

*This poem first appeared in the Boston Investigator (Boston, MA) on
Wednesday, March 15, 1893, page 3.]*

Collected Poems

Voltairine de Cleyre

And Thou Too

The moonlight rolls down like a river,
The silence streams out like a sea;
And far where the eastern winds quiver,
My farewell goes floating to thee.

Like night, when the sunset is fading
And starbeams troop up in the skies,
Through a cold, dark and lonely forever
Gleams the light of the poet eyes.

And sometimes when I am weary,
When the path is thorny and Wild,
I'll look back to the Eyes in the twilight,
Back to the eyes that smiled.

And pray that a wreath like a rainbow
May slip from the beautiful past,
And Crown me again with the sweet, strong love
And keep me, and hold me fast.

For the way is not strown with petal soft,
It is covered with hearts that weep,
And the wounds I tread touch a deeper source
Than you think it mine to keep.

Down the years I shall move without you,
Yet ever must feel the blow
That caused me a deeper pain to give
Than you will ever know.

For the tears that dropped on my hands that night
'Neath the mystical shining moon,
Were a sacred dew, consecrated there,
On the rose-altered heart of June.

And the heart that beat against mine like a bird
That is fluttering, wounded sore,
With it's nest all broken, deserted, torn,
Will beat there forevermore.

But the world moves on, and the piteous Earth
Still groans in the monster pain;
And the star that leads me points onward yet,
Though the red drops fall like rain!

Ah, not to a blaze of light I go,
Nor shouts of a triumph train;
I go down to kiss the dregs of woe,
And drink up the Cup of Pain.

And whether a scaffold or crucifix waits
'Neath the light of my silver star,
I know and I care not: I only know
I shall pause not though it be far.

Though a crucified life or an agonized death,
Though long, or quick and sharp,
I am firmly wrought in the endless thread
Of Destiny's woof and warp.

And I do not shrink, though a wave of pain
Sobs over me now and then,
As I think of those "saddest of all sad words,"
The pitiful "might have been."

"It might have been" — it is not to be;
And the tones of your "swan's farewell"
Ring sadly, solemnly deep to me
Like the voice of a sobbing bell.

Ay, gather your petals and take them back
To the dead heart under the dew;
And crown it again with the red love bloom,
For the dead are always true.

But go not “back to the sediment”
In the slime of the moaning sea,
For a better world belongs to you,
And a better friend to me.

— *St. Johns, Michigan, 1888*

The Hurricane

"We are the birds of the coming storm." — August Spies

The tide is out, the wind blows off the shore;
Bare burn the white sands in the scorching sun;
The sea complains, but its great voice is low.

Bitter thy woes, O People,
And the burden
Hardly to be borne!
Wearily grows, O People,
All the aching
Of thy pierced heart, bruised and torn!
But yet thy time is not,
And low thy moaning.
Desert thy sands!
Not yeat is thy breath hot, Vengefully blowing;
It wafts o'er lifted hands.

The tide has turned; the vane veers slowly round;
Slow clouds are sweeping o'er the blinding light;
White crests curl on the sea — its voice grows deep.

Angry thy heart, O People!
And its bleeding
Fire-tipped with rising hate!
Thy clasped hands part, O People,
For thy praying Warmed not the desolate!
God did not hear thy moan:
Now it is swelling
To a great drowning cry;
A dark wind-cloud, a groan, Now backward veering
From that deaf sky!

The tide flows in, the wind roars from the depths,
The whirled-White sand heaps with the foam-white waves;
Thundering the sea rolls o'er its shell-crunched wall!

Strong is thy rage, O People,
In its fury
Hurling thy tyrants down!
Thow metest wage, O People.
Very swiftly,
Now that thy hate is grown:
Thy time at last is come;
Thou heapest anguish,
Where thou thyself wert bare!
No longer to thy dumb.
God clasped and kneeling.
Thou answerest thine own prayer.

— *Sea Isle City, New Jersey, August 1889*

At the Grave in Waldheim

Quiet they lie in their shrouds of rest,
Their lids kissed close 'neath the lips of peace;
Over each pulseless and painless breast
The hands lie folded and softly pressed,
As a dead dove presses a broken nest;
Ah, broken hearts were the price of these!

The lips of their anguish are cold and still,
For them are the clouds and the gloms al past;
No longer the woe of the world can thrill
The chords of those tender hearts, or fill
The silent dead- house! The "people's will"
Has snapped asunder the strings at last.

"The people's will!" Ah, in years to come,
Dearly ye'll weep that ye did not save!
Do you not hear now the muffled drum,
The trampling feet and the ceaseless hum,
Of the million marchers — trembling, dumb,
In their tread to a yawning, giant grave?

And yet, ah! yet there's a rift of white!
'Tis breaking over the martyrs' shrine!
Halt there, ye dommed ones — it scates the night,
As lightning darts from its scabbard bright
And sweeps the face of the sky with light!
"No more shall be spilled out the blood-red wine!"

These are the words it has written there,
Keen as the lance of the northern mourn;
The sword of Justice gleams in its glare,
And the arm of Justice, upraised and bare,
Is true to strike, aye, 'tis strong to dare;
It will fall where the curse of our land is born.

No more shall the necks of the nations be crused,
No more to dark Tyranny's throne bend the knee;
No more in abjection to ground to the dust!
By the brave heart-beats stilled, by the brave voices hushed,
We swear that humanity yet shall be free!

— *Pittsburg, 1889*

Ut Sementem Feceris, Ita Metes

(To the Czar, on a woman it political prisoner, being flogged to death in Siberia.)

How many drops must gather to the skies
Before the cloud-burst comes, we may not know;
How hot the fires ill under hells must glow
Ere the volcano's scalding lavas rise,
Can none say; but all wot the hour is sure!
Who dreams of vengeance has but to endure
He may not say how many blows must fall,
How many lives be broken on the wheel,
How many corpses stiffen 'neath the pall,
How many martyrs fix the blood-red seal;
But certain is the harvest time of Hate!
And when weak moans by an indignant world
Re-echoed, to a throne are backward hurled,
Who listens hears the mutterings of Fate!

Philadelphia, February, 1890.

The Dirge of the Sea

Come! Come! I have waited long!
My love is old,
My arms are strong;
I would woo thee, now,
With the wave-kiss cold
On they pallid brow;

Thou art mine, thou art mine! My very own!
Thine ears shall hear
My eternal moan;
Always near
Thou'lt feel my lips,
And the bathing tear
Where my sorrow drips.

Thou, my king forever, behold thy throne!
Reign in thy majesty, all alone.

None! None wept for thee,
Nearing the verge
Of eternity!
I, thy solemn dirge Will chant for eye
Wide as the wave-merge
Into sky.

I love thee! Thou art my chosen own!
Thy heart, like mine,
Was cold as stone,
Thine eyes could shine
Like my blue waves fair;
Thy lips, like wine,
Curved to kisses rare!!

Hard as my waves were the eyes that shone,
And the wine as deadly! Come, love, alone!
Float! Float, on the swelling wave!
Long is the hearse,
Wide the grave;
Thy pall is a curse
From the fading shore
A broken verse
From a heart wrung sore!

“Live’s stream’s wreck-strown!” Ah, like my own!
The words are low
As a dying groan;
The voice thrills so,
It might rouse thy breast
With pity’s glow,
Wert thou like the rest!
But thou, my hero, wert never known
To feel as a human; thou stoodst, alone.

Down! Down! Behold the wrecks!
I strew the deep
With these human specks!
No faith I keep With their moral trust;
See how I heap
Their crumbling dust!

I sneered in their faces, my own, my own,
As they knelt to pray
When the ships went down;
I flung my spray
In their dying eyes,
And laughed at the way
It drowned their cries!

On the shore they heard the exultant tone,
And said: "The Sea laughs." Ah, I laughed alone.

Now! Now, we twain shall go,
Love-locked,
Laughing so! The fools ye mocked
With your tender eyes,
The trusts ye rocked With your cradling lies,

E'en like these wretches, my own, my own,
Shall rot in clay
Or crumbled bone,
Thou shalt hold thy way,
Day-kissed and fair,
Where the wild waves play
In the sun-thick air!

My arms, my kiss, my tears, my moan,
Ye shall know for aye, where we wander lone.
Love! Love! Thou wert like to me!
Thy luring gaze
Rolled relentlessly!
The marsh-light blaze
To some human soul,
Down the darkn'ing maze
To Ruin's goal.

Ah, how ye crushed them, my beautiful own!
Like whistled leaves
Around thee stown,
Whirled the dead beliefs
Of each long-mourned life!
Here, no one grieves:
Neither tears nor strife

Appeal to the Sea, where its wrecks are thrown!
Thou shalt stand in their midst, and smile, alone!

Laugh! Laugh! O form of light!
Death hides
Thy faithless sight!
The flowing tides
Of thy heart are still;
Yet are wrecks thy brides,
For it is my will
That that which on earth made thy heaven,
my own,
May strew around
Thy eternal throne!
The gurgling sound
Of the dying cry,
The gushing wound
Of heart-agony,
Were thy joy in life! Now the Sea makes known
Thy realm in death! Thy heaven, alone!
Years! Years, ye shall mix with me!
Ye shall grow a part
Of the laughing Sea;
Of the moaning heart
Of the glittered wave
Of the sun-gleam's dart
In the ocean-grave.

Fair, cold, and faithless wert thou, my own!
For that I love
Thy heart of stone!
From the heights above
To the depths below,
Where dread things move,
There is naught can show
A life so trustless! Proud be thy crown!
Ruthless, like none, save the Sea, alone!

April 1891

I Am

I am! The ages on the ages roll:
And what I am, I was, and I shall be:
by slow growth filling higher Destiny,
And Widening, ever, to the widening Goal.
I am the Stone that slept; down deep in me
That old, old sleep has left its centurine trace;
I am the plant that dreamed; and lo! still see
That dream-life dwelling on the Human Face.
I slept, I dreamed, I wakened: I am Man!
The hut grows Palaces; the depths breed light;
Still *on!* *Forms* pass; but *Form* yields kinglier
Might!
The singer, dying where his song began,
In Me yet lives; and yet again shall he
Unseal the lips of greater songs To Be;
For mine the thousand tongues of *Immortality*.

January 1892

Love's Ghost

Among the leaves and the rolls of moonlight,
The moon, which weaves lace on the road-white
Among the winds, and among the flowers,
Our blithe feet wander — life is ours!

Life is ours, and life is loving;
All our powers are locked in loving;
Hearts, and eyeys, and lips are moving
With the ecstasy of loving.

Ah! the roses! they are blooming;
And the June air, throbbing, tuning,
Sings of Love's eternal summer —
Chants of Joy, life's only Comer;
And we clsp our hands together,
Singing in the war, sweet weather;
Kissing, thrilling with caressing,
All the sweet from Love's rose pressing.

Ah, so easy! — Earth is Heaven, —
Darkness, shadows, do not live;
Like the rose our hearts are given,
Like the rose whos blom is given,
To the sun-gold, and the heaven.
Not because it wills or wishes,
But because 'tis life to give.

Dreary, dreary, snow-filled darkness!
Heavy, weary, voiceless darkness!

We have drifted, drifted, drifted, you and I,
Far apart as snows and roses, sea and sky.
We have drifted, drifted, drifted, far asunder,
Any my lonely voice uplifted in sad wonder,
Heavy with its own sad calls.

All your love was of the summer;
Born to die among the roses,
Wither, scatter, like the roses,
Leaving me the gray-browed Comer,
With the ashes on his forehead,
And the winter in his hair,
With the footsteps slow and solemn
Going down the endless stair,
Joy is gone and you, my Lover,
Gone in other ways to hover;
gone among the summer places,
Gone to seek for summer faces.

Bright-faced Joy was not for me;
Born among the snows and pines,
Gray-faced Sorrow was to be
Imaged in my mournful lines.

Love, not born for cold and sorrow,
Only for the sweet sunshine,
I shall keep your face forever
Hidden in this heart of mine.
In its light, one spot will brighten,
Keeping fair the sacred tomb;
Like old moonlight it will whiten
The inviolable room;
Like the moonlight it will whiten,
Softly, all the darkened room;
And the broken stalk may put forth
Memory's ghost of Love's old bloom.

March 1892

Life or Death

A Soul, half through the Gate, said unto Life:
"What dost thou offer me?" And Life replied:
"Sorrow, unceasing struggle, disappointment;
after these
Darkness and silence." The Soul said unto Death:
"What dost thou offer me?" And Death replied:
"In the beginning what Life gives at last."
Turning to Life: "And if I live and struggle?"
"Others shall live and struggle after thee
Counting it easier where thou hast passed."
"And by their struggles?" "Easier place shall be
For others, still to rise to keener pain
Of conquering Agony!" "and what have I
To do with all these others? Who are they?"
"Yourself!" "And all who went before?" "Yourself."
"The darkness and the silence, too, have end?"
"They end in light and sound; peace ends in pain,
Death ends in Me, and thou must glide from
Self
To Self, as light to shade and shade to light again.
Choose!" The Soul, sighing, answered: "I will live."

Philadelphia, May 1892

The Toast of Despair

We have cried — and the gods are silent;
We hve trusted — and been betrayed;
We have loved — and the fruit was ashes;
We have given — the gift was weighed.

We know that the heavens are empty,
That friendship and lvoe are names;
That truth is an ashen cinder,
The end of life's burnt-out flames.

Vainly and long we have waited,
Through the night of the human roar,
For a single song on the harp of Hope,
Or a ray from a day-lit shore.

Songs aye come floating, marvelous sweet,
And bow-dyed flashes gleam;
But the sweets are Lies, and the weary feet
Run after a marsh-light beam.

In the hour of our need the song departs,
And the sea-moans of sorrow swell;
The siren mocks with a gurgling laugh
That is drowned in the deep death-knell.

The light we chased with our stumbling feet
As the goals of happier years,
Swings high and low and vanishes —
The bow-dyes were of our tears.

God is a lie, and Faith is a lie,
And a tenfold lie is Love;
Life is a problem without a why,
And never a thing to prove.

it adds, and subtracts, and multiplies,
And divides without aim or end;
Its answers all false, though false-named true —
Wife, husband, lover, friend.

We know it now, and we care no more;
What matters life or death?
We tiny insects emerge from earth,
Suffer, and yield our breath.

Like ants we crawl on our brief sand-hill,
Dreaming of “mighty things” —
Lo, they crunch, like shells in the ocean’s wrath,
In the rush of Time’s awful wings.

The sun smiles gold, and the plants white,
And a billion stars smile, still;
Yet, fierce as we, each wheels toward death,
And cannot stay his will.

The build, ye fools, your mighty things,
That time shall set at naught;
Grow warm with the song the sweet Lie sings,
And the false bow your tears have wrought.

For us, a truce to Gods, loves, and hopes,
And a pledge to fire and wave;
A swifter whirl to the dance of death,
And a loud huzza for the Grave!

Philadelphia, 1892

Mary Wollstone Craft

The dust of a hundred years
Is on thy breast,
And thy day and thy night of tears
Are centurine rest.
Thou to whom joy was dumb,
Life a broken rhyme,
Lo, thy smiling time is come,
And our weeping time.
Thou who hadst sponge and myrrh
And a bitter cross,
Smile, for the day is here
That we know our loss; —
Loss of thine undone deed,
Thy unfinished song,
Th' unspoken word for our need,
Th' unrighted wrong;
Smile, for we weep, we weep,
For the unsoothed pain,
The unbound wound burned deep,
That we might gain.
Mother of sorrowful eyes
In the dead old days,
Mother of many sighs,
Of pain-shod ways;
Mother of resolute feet
Through all the thorns,
Mother soul-strong, soul-sweet, —
Lo, after storms
Have broken and beat thy dust
For a hundred years,
Thy memory is made just,
And the just man hears.

Thy children kneel and repeat:
"Though dust be dust,
Though sod and coffin and sheet
And moth and rust
Have folded and molded and pressed,
Yet they cannot kill;
In the heart of the world at rest
She liveth still."

Philadelphia, 27th April 1893

John P. Altgeld

(After an incarceration for six long years in Joliet state prison for an act of which they were entirely innocent, namely, the throwing of the Hyamarket bomb, in Chicago, May 4th, 1886, Oscar Neebe, Michael Scwab, and Samuel Fielden, were liberated by Gov. Altgeld, who thus sacrificed his political career to an act of justice.)

There was a tableau! Liberty's clear light
Shone never on a braver scene than that,
Here was a prison, there a Man, who sat
High in the halls of State! Beyond, the might
Of Ignorance and mobs whose hireling Press
Yells at their bidding like the slaver's hounds,
Ready with coarse caprice to curse or bless,
To make or unmake rulers! — Lo, there sounds
A grating of the doors! And three poor men
Helpless and hated, having nought to give,
Come from their long-sealed tomb, look up, and
live,
And thank this Man that they are free again.
And He — to all the world this Man dares say:
"Curse as you will! I have been just this day."

Philadelphia, June 1893

In Memoriam

To General M. M. Trumbull

(No man better than General Trumbull defended my lead comrades in Chicago.)

Back to thy breast, O Mother, turns thy child,
He whom thou garmentedst in steel of truth,
And sent forth, strong in the glad heart of youth,
To sing the wakening song in ears beguiled
By tyrants' promises and flatterers' smiles;
These searched his eyes, and knew nor threats nor
wiles,
Might shake the steady stars within their blue,
Nor win one truckling word from off those lips,-
No-not for gold nor praise, nor aught men do
To dash the Sun of Honor with eclipse.
O, Mother Liberty, those eyes are dark,
And the brave lips are white and cold and dumb;
But fair in other Souls, through time to come,
Fanned by thy breath glows the Immortal Spark.

Philadelphia, May, 1894.

The Feast of Vultures

(As the three anarchists, Vaillant, Henry and Caserio, were led to their several executions, a voice from the prison cried loudly, "Vive l'anarchie!" Through watch and ward the cry escaped, and no man owned the voice, but the cry is still resounding through the world.)

A moan in the gloam in the air-peaks heard —
The Bird of Omen — the wild, fierce Bird,
Aflight
In the night,
Like a whizz of light,
Arrowy winging before the storm,
Far away flinging
The whistling, singing,
White-curdled drops, wind-blown and warm,
From its beating, flapping,
Thunderous wings;
Crashing and clapping
The split night swings,
And rocks and totters,
Bled of its levin,
Atd reels and mutters
A curse to Heaven!
Reels and mutters and rolls and dies,
With a wild light streaking its black, blind eyes.

Far, Far, Farw
Through the red, mad morn,
Like a hurtling star,
Through the air upborne,
The Herald-Singer,
The Terror-Bringer,
Speeds — and behind, through the cloud-rags torn,
Gather and wheel a million wings,
Clanging as iron where the hammer rings;
The whipped sky shivers,
The White Gate shakes,
The ripped throne quivers,
The dumb God wakes,
And feels in his heart the talon-stings.
“Ruin,!Ruin!” the Whirlwind cries,
And it leaps at his throat and tears his eyes;
“Death for death, as ye long have dealt;
The heads of your victims your heads shall pelt;
The blood ye wrung to get drunk upon,
Drink, and be poisoned! On, Herald, on!”

Behold, behold,
How a moan is grown!
A cry hurled high 'gainst a scaffold's joist!
The Voice of Defiance — the roud, wild Voice!
Whirled
Through the world,
A smoke-wreath curled
(Breath 'round hot kisses) around a fire!
See! the ground hisses
With red-streaming blood-clots of long-frozen ire,
Waked by the flying
Wild voice as it passes;
Groaning and crying,
The surge of the masses
Rolls and flashes
With thunderous roar —
Seams and lashes
The livid shore —
Seams and lashes and crunches abe beats,
And drags a ragged wall to its howling retreats!

Swift, swift, swift,
'Thwart the blood-rain's fall,
Through the fire-shot rigt
Of the broken wall,
The prophet-crying
The storm-song sighing,
Flies — and grom under Night's lifted pall,
Swarming, menace ten million darts,
Uplifting fragments of human shards!

Ah, white teeth chatter,
And dumb jaws fall,
While winged fires scatter
Till gloom gulfs all
Save the boom of the cannon that storm the forts
That the people bombard with their comrades'
hearts;
"Vengeance! Vengeance!" the voices scream,
And the vulture pinions whirl and stream!
"Knife for knife, as ye long have dealt;
The edge ye whetted for us be felt,
Ye chopper o necks, on your own, on your own!
Bare it, Coward! On, Prophet, on!"
Behold how high
Rolls a prison cry!

Philadelphia, August 1894

Anarchist martyrs Auguste Vaillant, Emile Henry and Sante Geronimo Caserio were European exemplars of "propaganda by the deed."

The Suicide's Defense

(Of all the stupidities wherewith the law-making power has oigned its own incapacity for dealing with the disorders of society, none appears so utterly stupid as the law which punishes an attempted suicide. To the question "What have you to say in your defense?" I conceive the poor wretch might reply as follows.)

To say in my defense? Defense of what?
 Defense to whom? And why defense at all?
 Have I wronged any? Let that one accuse!
 Some priest there mutters I "have outraged God"!
 Let God then try me, and let none dare judge
 Himself as fit to put Heaven's ermine on!
 Again I say, let the wronged one accuse.
 Aye, silence! There is none to answer me.
 And whom could I, a homeness, friendless tramp,
 To whom all doors are shut, all hearts are locked,
 All hands withheld — whom could I wrong, indeed
 By taking that which benefited none
 And menaced all?
 Aye, since ye will it so,
 Know then your risk. But mark, 'tis not defense,
 'Tis accusation that I hurl at you.
 See to't that ye prepare your own defense.
 My life, I say, is an eternal threat
 To you and yours; and therefore it were well
 To have foreborne your unasked services.
 And why? Because I hate you! Every drop
 of blood that circles in your plethoric veins
 Was wrung from out the gaunt and sapless trunks
 Of men like me. who in your cursed mills
 Were crushed like grapes within the wine-press
 ground.
 To us ye leave the empty skin of life;
 The heart of it, the sweet of it, ye pour
 To fete your dogs and mistresses withal!
 Your mistresses! Our daughters! Bought, for bread,
 To grace the flesh that once was father's arms!

Yes, I accuse you that ye murdered me!
Ye killed the Man — and this that speaks to you
Is but the beast that ye have made of me!
What! Is it life to creep and crawl an beg,
And slink for shelter where rats congregate?
And for one's ideal dream of a fat meal?
Is it, then, life, to group like pigs in sties,
And bury decency in common filth,
Because, forsooth, your income must be made,
Though human flesh rot in your plague-rid dens?
Is it, then, life, to wait another's nod,
For leave to turn yourself to gold for him?
Would it me life to you? And was I less
Than you? Was I not born with hopes and dreams
And pains and passions even as were you?

But these ye have denied. Ye seized the earth,
Though it was none of yours, and said: "Hereon
Shall none rest, walk or work, till first to me
Ye render tribute!" Every art of man,
Born to make light of the burdens of the world,
Ye also seized, and made a tenfold curse
To crush the man beneath the thing he made.
Houses, machines, and lands — all, all are yours;
And us you do not need. When we ask work
Ye shake your heads. Homes? — Ye vict us. Bread? —

“Here, officer, this fellow’s begging. Jail’s
the place for him!” After the stripes, what next?
Poison! — I took it! — Now you say ‘twas sin
To take this life which troubled you lo much.
Sin to escale insult, starvation, brands
Of felony, inflicted for the crime
Of asking food! Ye hypocrites! Within
Your secret hearts the sin is that I failed!
Because I failed ye judge me to the stripes.
And the hard tail denied when I was free.
So be it. But beware! — a Prison cell,s
An evil bed to grow morality!
Black swamps breed black miasms; sickly soils
Yield poison fruit; snakes warmed to life will sting.
This time I was content to go alone;
Perchance the next I shall not be so kind.

Philadelphia, September 1894

Germinal

(The last word of Angiolillo)

Germinal! — The Field of Mars is plowing,
And hard the steel that cuts, and hot the breath
Of the great Oxen, straining flanks and bowing
Beneath his goad, who guides the share of Death.

Germinal! — The Dragon's teeth are sowing,
And stern and white the sower flings the seed
He shall not gather, though full swift the growing;
Straight down Death's furrow treads, and does not
heed.

Germinal! — The Helmet Heads are springing
Far up the Field of Mars in gleaming files;
With wild war notes the bursting earth is ringing.
Within his grave the sower sleeps, and smiles.

London, October 1897

Emile Zola's novel *Germinal* (1885) was an important influence on anarchists in the nineteenth century. Michele Angiolillo was a young Italian anarchist who, as a protest against the Spanish government's practice of torturing its political opponents' shot and killed Spain's Prime Minister in August 1897.

Santa Agueda

(Where the torturer Canovas breathed his last.)

Santa Agueda, thou that wast accursed
With presence of a demon dressed in Man,
Blessed art thou, for on thy stones there ran
The vampire blood from bitter torture nursed;
Along thy streets there flashed the lightning-burst,
“Delivered!” flaming on from eye to eye,
Though lips said “killed,” and all thy gateways
hearsed
In lying black, made mourning mockery.
Blessed art thou! From thee went forth the cry,
“Vengeance yet loves, Renunciation hates,
And justice smites: *the torturer shall die;*”
Across his path the steel-nerved slayer waits
“And both shall burn together,” — one in light
Of unconsuming hell and reddened night;
And one with feet on hell and brow dawn-rayed, *pure*
white.

Philadelphia, August, 1898.

The Road Builders

("Who built the beautiful roads?" queried a friend of the present order, as we walked one day along the macadamized driveway of Fairmount Park.)

I saw them toiling in the blistering sun,
Their dull, dark faces leaning toward the stone, Their knotted
fingers grasping the rude tools,
Their rounded shoulders narrowing in their chest,
The sweat dro's dripping in great painful beads.
I saw one fall, his forehead on the rock,
The helpless hand still cluthcing at the spade,
The slack mouth full of earth.

And he was dead.
His comrades getnly turned his face, until
The fierce sun glittered hard upon his eyes,
Wide open, staring at the cruel sky.
The blood yet ran upon the jagged stone;
But it was ended. He was quite, quite dead:
Driven to death beneath the burning sun,
Driven to death upon the road he built.

He was no "hero", he; a poor, black man,
Taking "the will of God" and asking naught;
Think of him thus, when next your horse's feet
Strike out the flint spark from the gleaming road;
Think that for this, this common thing, The Road,
A human creature died; 'tis a blood gift,
To an o'erreaching world that does not thank.
Ignorant, mean and soulless was he? Well —
Still human; and you drive upon his corpse.

Philadelphia, 24 July 1900

Ave Et Vale

Comrades, what matter the watch-night tells
That a New Year comes or goes?
What to us are the crashing bells
That clang out the Century's close?

What to us is the gala dress?
The whirl of the dancing feet?
The glitter and blare in the laughing press,
And din of the merry street?

Do we not know that our brothers die
In the cold and the dark tonight?
Shelterless faces turned toward the sky
Will not see the New Year's light?

Wandering children, lonely, lost,
Drift away on the human sea,
While the price of their lives in a glass is tossed
And drunk in a revelry!

Ah, know we not in their feasting halls
Where the loud laugh echoes again,
That brick and stone in the mortared walls
Are bones of murdered men?

Slowly murdered! By day and day,
The beauty and strength are reft,
Till the Man is sapped and sucked away,
And a Human Rind is left!

A Human Rind, with old, thin hair,
And old thin voice to pray
For alms in the bitter winter air —
A knife at his heart always.

And the pure in heart are impure in flesh
For the cost of a little food:
Lo, when the Gleaner of Time shall thresh,
Let these be accounted good.

For these are they who in bitter blame
Eat the bread whose salt is sin;
Whose bosoms are burned with the scarlet shame,
Till their hearts are seared within.

The cowardly jests of a hundred years
Will be thrown where they pass tonight,
Too callous for hate, and too dry for tears,
The saddest of human blight.

Do we forget them, these broken ones,
That our watch tonight is set?
Nay, we smile in the face of the year that comes
Because we do not forget.

We do not forget the tramp on the track,
Thrust out in the wind-swept waste,
The curses of Man upon his back,
And the curse of God in his face.

The stare in the eyes of the buried man
Face down in the fallen mine;
The despair of the child whose bare feet ran
To tread out the rich man's wine;

The solemn light in the dying gaze
Of the babe at the empty breast,
The wax accusation, the somber glaze
Of its frozen and rigid rest;

They are all in the smile that we turn to the east
To welcome the Century's dawn;
They are all in our greeting to Night's high priest,
As we bid the Old Year begone.

Begone and have done, and go down and be dead
Deep drowned in your sea of tears!
We smile as you die, for we wait the red
Morn-gleam of a hundred-years

That shall see the end of the age-old wrong —
The reapers that have not sown —
The reapers of men with their sickles strong
Who gather, but have not strown.

For the earth shall be his and the fruits thereof
And to him the corn and wine,
Who labors the hills with an even love
And knows not "thine and mine.

And the silk shall be to the hand that weaves.
The pearl to him who dives,
The home to the builder; and all life's sheaves
To the builder of human lives.

And none go blind that another see.
Or die that another live;
And none insult with a charity
That is not theirs to give.

For each of his plenty shall freely share
And take at another's hand:
Equals breathing the Common Air
And toiling the Common Land.

A dream? A vision? Aye, what you will;
Let it be to you as it seems:
Of this Nightmare Real we have our fill;
Tonight is for "pleasant dreams."

Dreams that shall waken the hope that sleeps
And knock at each torpid Heart
Till it beat drum taps, and the blood that creeps
Mith a lion's spring upstart!

For who are we to be bound and drowned
In this river of human blood?
Who are we to lie in a swoon,
Half sunk in the river mud?

Are we not they who delve and blast
And hammer and build and burn/
Without us not a nail made fast!
Not a wheel in the world should turn!

Must we, the Giant, await the grace
That is dealt by the puny hand
Of him who sits in the feasting place,
While we, his Blind Jest, stand

Between the pillars? Nay, not so:
Aye, if such things were true,
Better were Ga;a again, to show
What the giant's rage may do!

Bet yet not this: it were wiser far
To enter the feasting hall
And say to the Masters, "These things are
Not for you alone, but all."

And this shall be in the Century
that opes on our efes tonight;
So here's to the struggle, if it must be,
And to him who fights the fight.

And here's to the dauntless, jubilant throat
That loud to its Comrade sings,
Till over the earth shrills the mustering note,
And the World Strike's signal rings.

Philadelphia, 1st January 1901

Marsh-Bloom

To Gaetano Bresci

Requiem, requiem, requiem,
Blood-red blossom of poison stem
Broken for Man,
Swamp-sunk leafage and dungeon-bloom,
Seeded bearer of royal doom,
What now is the ban?

What to thee is the island grave?
With desert wind and desolate wave
Will they silence Death?
Can they weight thee now with the heaviest stone?
Can they lay aught on thee with "Be alone,"
That hast conquered breath?

Lo, "it is finished" — a man for a king!
Mark you well who have done this thing:
The flower has roots;
Bitter and rank grow the things of the sea;
Ye shall know what sap ran thick in the tree
When ye pluck its fruits.

Requiem, requiem, requiem,
Sleep on, sleep on, accused of them
Who work our pain;
A wild Marsh-bloom shall blow again
From a buried root in the slime of men,
On the day of the Great Red Rain.

Philadelphia, July 1901

Italian anarchist Gaetano Bresci assassinated King Umberto in 1900

“Light Upon Waldheim”

(The figure on the monument over the grave of the Chicago martyrs in Waldheim Cemetery is a warrior woman, dropping with her left hand a crown upon the forehead of a fallen man just past his agony, and with her right drawing a dagger from her bosom.)

Light upon Waldheim! The earth is gray;
A bitter wind is driving from the north;
The stone is cold, and strange cold whispers say;
“What do ye here with Death? Go forth! Go forth!”

Is this thy word, o Mother, with stern eyes,
Crowning thy dead with stone-caressing touch?
May we not weep o’er him that martyred lies,
Slain in our name, for that he loved us much?

May we not linger till the day is broad?
Nay, none are stirring in this stinging dawn —
None but poor wretches that make no moan to
God:

What use are these, O thou with dagger drawn?

“Go forth, go forth! Stang not to weep for these,
Till, weakened with your weeping, like the snow
Ye melt, dissolving in a coward peace!”

Light upon Waldheim! Brother, let us go!

London, October 1897

Written — in — Red

*To Our Living Dead
in Mexico's Struggle*

Written in red their protest stands,
For the gods of the World to see;
On the dooming wall their bodiless hands
have blazoned "Upharsin," and flaring brands
Illumine the message: "Seize the lands!
Open the prisons and make men free!"
Flame out the living words of the dead
Written — in — red.

gods of the World! Their mouths are dumb!
Your guns have spoken and they are dust.
But the shrouded Living, whose hearts were numb,
have felt the beat of a wakening drum
Within them sounding-the Dead men's tongue —
Calling: "Smite off the ancient rust!"
Have beheld "Resurrexit," the word of the Dead,
Written — in — red.

Bear it aloft, O roaring, flame!
Skyward aloft, where all may see.
Slaves of the World! Our cause is the same;
One is the immemorial shame;
One is the struggle, and in One name —
Manhood — we battle to set men free.
"Uncurse us the Land!" burn the words of the
Dead,
Written — in — red.

Voltairine deCleyre's last poem.

Retrieved on 29 April 2010 from dwardmac.pitzer.edu

A Correction

Voltairine de Cleyre

November 1907

Owing to a perhaps natural misunderstanding, it was stated in the American report to the Amsterdam Congress that I am a worker in the cause of Anarchist Communism. The report should have said Anarchism, simply, as I am not now, and never have been at any time, a Communist. I was for several years an individualist, but becoming convinced that a number of the fundamental propositions of individualistic economy would result in the destruction of equal liberty, I relinquished those beliefs. In doing so, however, I did not accept the proposed economy of Communism, which in some respects would entail the same result, destruction of equal freedom; always, of course, in my opinion, which I very willingly admit should not be weighed by others as of equal value with the opinions of those who make economy a thorough study, but which must, nevertheless, remain supreme with me. I am an Anarchist, simply, without economic label attached.

Exquisite Rebel: The Essays of Voltairine de Cleyre—Feminist, Anarchist, Genius; published by State University of New York Press, 2005

[from the above book] This paragraph, published in *Mother Earth*, November 1907, is a brief statement of Voltairine's mature reflection of her own place in the taxonomy of anarchism. She was, as she said elsewhere, an "anarchist without adjectives." This was her way of

negotiating the differences between homegrown American individualism and the communist anarchism associated with Peter Kropotkin and, in the States, with Emma Goldman.

The Dawn-Light of Anarchy

Voltairine de Cleyre

The events of May 4, 1886 were a major influence on the oratory of Voltairine de Cleyre. Following the execution of the Haymarket Martyrs on November 11, 1887, she gave an annual address to commemorate the date of their sacrifice. The following memorial speech was first delivered in Chicago on November 11, 1901. It was subsequently published in *Free Society*, a Chicago periodical, November 24, 1901. It is reprinted, along with her other Haymarket Memorial speeches, in *The First May-day: The Haymarket Speeches 1895-1910* (Cienfuegos Press, Over-the-water, Sanday, Orkney, KW17 2BL, UK), 1980.

* * *

Let me begin my address with a confession. I make it sorrowfully and with self-disgust; but in the presence of great sacrifice we learn humility, and if my comrades could give their lives for their belief, why, let me give my pride. Yet I would not give it, for personal utterance is of trifling importance, were it not that I think at this particular season it will encourage those of our sympathizers whom the recent outburst of savagery may have disheartened, and perhaps lead some who are standing where I once stood to do as I did later.

This is my confession: Fifteen years ago last May when the echoes of the Haymarket bomb rolled through the little Michigan village where I then lived, I, like the rest of the credulous and brutal, read one lying newspaper headline, "Anarchists throw a bomb in a crowd in the Haymarket in Chicago", and immediately cried out, "They ought to be hanged!" This, though I had never believed in capital punishment for ordinary criminals. For that ignorant, outrageous, blood-thirsty sentence

I shall never forgive myself, though I know the dead men would have forgiven me, though I know those who loved them forgive me. But my own voice, as it sounded that night, will sound so in my ears till I die — a bitter reproach and shame. What had I done? Credited the first wild rumor of an event of which I knew nothing, and, in my mind, sent men to the gallows without asking one word of defense! In one wild, unbalanced moment threw away the sympathies of a lifetime, and became an executioner at heart. And what I did that night millions did, and what I said millions said. I have only one word of extenuation for myself and all those people — ignorance. I did not know what Anarchism was. I had never seen the word used save in histories, and there it was always synonymous with social confusion and murder. I believed the newspapers. I thought those men had thrown that bomb, unprovoked, into a mass of men and women, from a wicked delight in killing. And so thought all those millions of others. But out of those millions there were some few thousand — I am glad I was one of them — who did not let the matter rest there.

I know not what resurrection of human decency first stirred within me after that — whether it was an intellectual suspicion that maybe I did not know all the truth of the case and could not believe the newspapers, or whether it was the old strong undercurrent of sympathy which often prompts the heart to go out to the accused, without a reason; but this I do know, that though I was no Anarchist at the time of the execution, it was long and long before that, that I came to the conclusion that the accusation was false, the trial a farce, that there was no warrant either in justice or in law for their conviction; and that the hanging, if hanging there should be, would be the act of a society composed of people who had said what I said on the first night, and who had kept their eyes and ears fast shut ever since, determined to see nothing and to know nothing but rage and vengeance. Till the very end I hoped that mercy might intervene, though justice did not; and from the hour I knew neither would nor ever could again, I distrusted law and lawyers, judges and governors alike. And my whole being cried out to know what it was these men had stood for, and why they were hanged, seeing it was not proven they knew anything about the throwing of the bomb.

Little by little, here and there, I came to know that what they had stood for was a very high and noble ideal of human life, and what they were hanged for was preaching it to the common people — the common people who were as ready to hang them, in their ignorance, as the

court and the prosecutor were in their malice! Little by little I came to know that these were men who had a clearer vision of human right than most of their fellows; and who, being moved by deep social sympathies, wished to share their vision with their fellows, and so proclaimed it in the market-place. Little by little I realized that the misery, the pathetic submission, the awful degradation of the workers, which from the time I was old enough to begin to think had borne heavily on my heart (as they must bear upon all who have hearts to feel at all), had smitten theirs more deeply still — so deeply that they knew no rest save in seeking a way out — and that was more than I had ever had the sense to conceive. For me there had never been a hope there should be no more rich and poor; but a vague idea that there might not be so rich and so poor, if the workingmen by combining could exact a little better wages, and make their hours a little shorter. It was the message of these men (and their death swept that message far out into ears that would never have heard their living voices) that all such little dreams are folly. That not in demanding little, not in striking for an hour less, not in mountain labor to bring forth mice, can any lasting alleviation come; but in demanding much — all — in a bold self-assertion of the worker to toil any hours he finds sufficient, not that another finds for him — here is where the way out lies. That message, and the message of others, whose works, associated with theirs, their death drew to my notice, took me up, as it were, upon a mighty hill, wherefrom I saw the roofs of the workshops of the little world. I saw the machines, the things that men had made to ease their burden, the wonderful things, the iron genii; I saw them set their iron teeth in the living flesh of the men who made them; I saw the maimed and crippled stumps of men go limping away into the night that engulfs the poor, perhaps to be thrown up in the flotsam and jetsam of beggary for a time, perhaps to suicide in some dim corner where the black surge throws its slime.

I saw the rose fire of the furnace shining on the blanched face of the man who tended it, and knew surely as I knew anything in life, that never would a free man feed his blood to the fire like that.

I saw swarthy bodies, all mangled and crushed, borne from the mouths of the mines to be stowed away in a grave hardly less narrow and dark than that in which the living form had crouched ten, twelve, fourteen hours a day; and I knew that in order that I might be warm — I, and you, and those others who never do any dirty work — those men had slaved away in those black graves, and been crushed to death at last.

I saw beside city streets great heaps of horrible colored earth, and down at the bottom of the trench from which it was thrown, so far down that nothing else was visible, bright gleaming eyes, like a wild animal's hunted into its hole. And I knew that free men never chose to labor there, with pick and shovel in that foul, sewage-soaked earth, in that narrow trench, in that deadly sewer gas ten, eight, even six hours a day. Only slaves would do it. I saw deep down in the hull of the ocean liner the men who shoveled the coal burned and seared like paper before the grate; and I knew that "the record" of the beautiful monster, and the pleasure of the ladies who laughed on the deck, were paid for with these withered bodies and souls.

I saw the scavenger carts go up and down, drawn by sad brutes, driven by sadder ones; for never a man, a man in full possession of his selfhood, would freely choose to spend all his days in the nauseating stench that forces him to swill alcohol to neutralize it.

And I saw in the lead works how men were poisoned; and in the sugar refineries how they went insane; and in the factories how they lost their decency; and in the stores how they learned to lie; and I knew it was slavery made them do all this. I knew the Anarchists were right — the whole thing must be changed, the whole thing was wrong — the whole system of production and distribution, the whole ideal of life.

And I questioned the government then; they had taught me to question it. What have you done — you the keepers of the Declaration and the Constitution — what have you done about all this? What have you done to preserve the conditions of freedom to the people?

Lied, deceived, fooled, tricked, bought and sold and got gain! You have sold away the land, that you had no right to sell. You have murdered the aboriginal people, that you might seize the land in the name of the white race, and then steal it away from them again, to be again sold by a second and a third robber. And that buying and selling of the land has driven the people off the healthy earth and away from the clean air into these rot-heaps of humanity called cities, where every filthy thing is done, and filthy labor breeds filthy bodies and filthy souls. Our boys are decayed with vice before they come to manhood; our girls — ah, well might John Harvey write:

Another begetteth a daughter white and gold,
 She looks into the meadow land water, and the world
 Knows her no more; they have sought her field and fold
 But the City, the City hath bought her,
 It hath sold
 Her piecemeal, to students, rats, and reek of the graveyard
 mold.

You have done this thing, gentlemen who engineer the government; and not only have you caused this ruin to come upon others; you yourself are rotten with debauchery. You exist for the purpose of granting privileges to whoever can pay most for you, and so limiting the freedom of men to employ themselves that they must sell themselves into this frightful slavery or become tramps, beggars, thieves, prostitutes, and murderers. And when you have done all this, what then do you do to them, these creatures of your own making? You, who have set them the example in every villainy? Do you then relent, and remembering the words of the great religious teacher to whom most of you offer lip service on the officially religious day, do you go to these poor, broken, wretched creatures and love them? Love them and help them, to teach them to be better? No: you build prisons high and strong, and there you beat, and starve, and hang, finding by the working of your system human beings so unutterably degraded that they are willing to kill whomsoever they are told to kill at so much monthly salary.

This is what the government is, has always been, the creator and defender of privilege; the organization of oppression and revenge. To hope that it can ever become anything else is the vainest of delusions. They tell you that Anarchy, the dream of social order without government, is a wild fancy. The wildest dream that ever entered the heart of man is the dream that mankind can ever help itself through an appeal to law, or to come to any order that will not result in slavery wherein there is any excuse for government.

It was for telling the people this that these five men were killed. For telling the people that the only way to get out of their misery was first to learn what their rights upon this earth were — freedom to use the land and all within it and all the tools of production — and then to stand together and take them, themselves, and not to appeal to the jugglers of the law. Abolish the law — that is abolish privilege — and crime will abolish itself.

They will tell you that these men were hanged for advocating force. What! These creatures who drill men in the science of killing, who put guns and clubs in hands they train to shoot and strike, who hail with delight the latest inventions in explosives, who exult in the machine that can kill the most with the least expenditure of energy, who declare a war of extermination upon people who do not want their civilization, who ravish, and burn, and garrote, and guillotine, and hang, and electrocute — they have the impertinence to talk about the unrighteousness of force! True, these men did advocate the right to resist invasion by force. You will find scarcely one in a thousand who does not believe in that right. The one will be either a real Christian or a non-resistant Anarchist. It will not be a believer in the State. Nor, no; it was not for advocating forcible resistance on principle, but for advocating forcible resistance to their tyrannies, and for advocating a society which would forever make an end of riches and poverty, of governors and governed.

The spirit of revenge, which is always stupid, accomplished its brutal act. Had it lifted its eyes from its work, it might have seen in the background of the scaffold that bleak November morning the dawn-light of Anarchy whiten across the world.

So it came first — a gleam of hope to the proletaire, a summons to rise and shake off his material bondage. But steadily, steadily, the light has grown, as year by year the scientist, the literary genius, the artist, and the moral teacher, have brought to it the tribute of their best work, their unpaid work, the work they did for love. Today it means not only material emancipation, too; it comes as the summing up of all those lines of thought and action which for three hundred years have been making towards freedom; it means fullness of being, the free life.

And I saw it boldly, notwithstanding the recent outburst of condemnation, notwithstanding the cry of lynch, burn, shoot, imprison, deport, and the Scarlet Letter A to be branded low down upon the forehead, and the latest excuse for that fond esthetic decoration “the button”, that for two thousand years no idea has so stirred the world as this — none which had such living power to break down the barriers of race and degree, to attract prince and proletaire, poet and mechanic, Quaker and Revolutionist. No other ideal but the free life is strong enough to touch the man whose infinite pity and understanding goes alike to the hypocrite priest and the victim of Siberian whips; the loving rebel who stepped from his title and his wealth to labor with all the laboring earth; the sweet strong singer who sang *No master, high or low*; the lover who does not measure

his love nor reckon on return; the self-centered one who “will not rule, but also will not ruled be”; the philosopher who chanted the Over-man; the devoted woman of the people; aye, and these too — these rebellious flashes from the vast cloud-hung ominous obscurity of the anonymous, these souls whom governmental and capitalistic brutality has whipped and goaded and stung to blind rage and bitterness, these mad young lions of revolt, these Winkelrieds who offer their hearts to the spears.

Direct Action

Voltairine de Cleyre

From the standpoint of one who thinks himself capable of discerning an undeviating route for human progress to pursue, if it is to be progress at all, who, having such a route on his mind's map, has endeavored to point it out to others; to make them see it as he sees it; who in so doing has chosen what appeared to him clear and simple expressions to convey his thoughts to others, — to such a one it appears matter for regret and confusion of spirit that the phrase "Direct Action" has suddenly acquired in the general mind a circumscribed meaning, not at all implied in the words themselves, and certainly never attached to it by himself or his co-thinkers.

However, this is one of the common jests which Progress plays on those who think themselves able to set metes and bounds for it. Over and over again, names, phrases, mottoes, watchwords, have been turned inside out, and upside down, and hindside before, and sideways, by occurrences out of the control of those who used the expressions in their proper sense; and still, those who sturdily held their ground, and insisted on being heard, have in the end found that the period of misunderstanding and prejudice has been but the prelude to wider inquiry and understanding.

I rather think this will be the case with the present misconception of the term Direct Action, which through the misapprehension, or else the deliberate misrepresentation, of certain journalists in Los Angeles, at the time the McNamaras pleaded guilty, suddenly acquired in the popular mind the interpretation, "Forcible Attacks on Life and Property." This was either very ignorant or very dishonest of the journalists; but it

has had the effect of making a good many people curious to know all about Direct Action.

As a matter of fact, those who are so lustily and so inordinately condemning it, will find on examination that they themselves have on many occasion practised direct action, and will do so again.

Every person who ever thought he had a right to assert, and went boldly and asserted it, himself, or jointly with others that shared his convictions, was a direct actionist. Some thirty years ago I recall that the Salvation Army was vigorously practising direct action in the maintenance of the freedom of its members to speak, assemble, and pray. Over and over they were arrested, fined, and imprisoned; but they kept right on singing, praying, and marching, till they finally compelled their persecutors to let them alone. The Industrial Workers are now conducting the same fight, and have, in a number of cases, compelled the officials to let them alone by the same direct tactics.

Every person who ever had a plan to do anything, and went and did it, or who laid his plan before others, and won their co-operation to do it with him, without going to external authorities to please do the thing for them, was a direct actionist. All co-operative experiments are essentially direct action.

Every person who ever in his life had a difference with anyone to settle, and went straight to the other persons involved to settle it, either by a peaceable plan or otherwise, was a direct actionist. Examples of such action are strikes and boycotts; many persons will recall the action of the housewives of New York who boycotted the butchers, and lowered the price of meat; at the present moment a butter boycott seems looming up, as a direct reply to the price-makers for butter.

These actions are generally not due to any one's reasoning overmuch on the respective merits of directness or indirectness, but are the spontaneous retorts of those who feel oppressed by a situation. In other words, all people are, most of the time, believers in the principle of direct action, and practices of it. However, most people are also indirect or political actionists. And they are both these things at the same time, without making much of an analysis of either. There are only a limited number of persons who eschew political action under any and all circumstances; but there is nobody, nobody at all, who has ever been so "impossible" as to eschew direct action altogether.

The majority of thinking people are really opportunist, leaning, some perhaps more to directness, some more to indirectness as a general

thing, but ready to use either means when opportunity calls for it. That is to say, there are those who hold that balloting governors into power is essentially a wrong and foolish thing; but who nevertheless under stress of special circumstances, might consider it the wisest thing to do, to vote some individual into office at that particular time. Or there are those who believe that in general the wisest way for people to get what they want is by the indirect method of voting into power some one who will make what they want legal; yet who all the same will occasionally under exceptional conditions advise a strike; and a strike, as I have said, is direct action. Or they may do as the Socialist Party agitators (who are mostly declaiming now against direct action) did last summer, when the police were holding up their meetings. They went in force to the meeting-places, prepared to speak whether-or-no, and they made the police back down. And while that was not logical on their part, thus to oppose the legal executors of the majority's will, it was a fine, successful piece of direct action.

Those who, by the essence of their belief, are committed to Direct Action only are — just who? Why, the non-resistants; precisely those who do not believe in violence at all! Now do not make the mistake of inferring that I say direct action means non-resistance; not by any means. Direct action may be the extreme of violence, or it may be as peaceful as the waters of the Brook of Shiloh that go softly. What I say is, that the real non-resistants can believe in direct action only, never in political action. For the basis of all political action is coercion; even when the State does good things, it finally rests on a club, a gun, or a prison, for its power to carry them through.

Now every school child in the United States has had the direct action of certain non-resistants brought to his notice by his school history. The case which everyone instantly recalls is that of the early Quakers who came to Massachusetts. The Puritans had accused the Quakers of "troubling the world by preaching peace to it." They refused to pay church taxes; they refused to bear arms; they refused to swear allegiance to any government. (In so doing they were direct actionists, what we may call negative direct actionists.) So the Puritans, being political actionists, passed laws to keep them out, to deport, to fine, to imprison, to mutilate, and finally, to hang them. And the Quakers just kept on coming (which was positive direct action); and history records that after the hanging of four Quakers, and the flogging of Margaret Brewster at the cart's tail through the streets of Boston, "the Puritans gave up trying

to silence the new missionaries”; that “Quaker persistence and Quaker non-resistance had won the day.”

Another example of direct action in early colonial history, but this time by no means of the peaceable sort, was the affair known as Bacon’s Rebellion. All our historians certainly defend the action of the rebels in that matter, for they were right. And yet it was a case of violent direct action against lawfully constituted authority. For the benefit of those who have forgotten the details, let me briefly remind them that the Virginia planters were in fear of a general attack by the Indians; with reason. Being political actionists, they asked, or Bacon as their leader asked, that the governor grant him a commission to raise volunteers in their own defense. The governor feared that such a company of armed men would be a threat to him; also with reason. He refused the commission. Whereupon the planters resorted to direct action. They raised volunteers without the commission, and successfully fought off the Indians. Bacon was pronounced a traitor by the governor; but the people being with him, the governor was afraid to proceed against him. In the end, however, it came so far that the rebels burned Jamestown; and but for the untimely death of Bacon, much more might have been done. Of course the reaction was very dreadful, as it usually is where a rebellion collapses or is crushed. Yet even during the brief period of success, it had corrected a good many abuses. I am quite sure that the political-action-at-all-costs advocates of those times, after the reaction came back into power, must have said: “See to what evils direct action brings us! Behold, the progress of the colony has been set back twenty-five years;” forgetting that if the colonists had not resorted to direct action, their scalps would have been taken by the Indians a year sooner, instead of a number of them being hanged by the governor a year later.

In the period of agitation and excitement preceding the revolution, there were all sorts and kinds of direct action from the most peaceable to the most violent; and I believe that almost everybody who studies United States history finds the account of these performances the most interesting part of the story, the part which dents into the memory most easily.

Among the peaceable moves made, were the non-importation agreements, the leagues for wearing homespun clothing and the “committees of correspondence.” As the inevitable growth of hostility progressed, violent direct action developed; e.g., in the matter of destroying the revenue stamps, or the action concerning the tea-ships, either by not

permitting the tea to be landed, or by putting it in damp storage, or by throwing it into the harbor, as in Boston, or by compelling a tea-ship owner to set fire to his own ship, as at Annapolis. These are all actions which our commonest textbooks record, certainly not in a condemnatory way, not even in an apologetic way, though they are all cases of direct action against legally constituted authority and property rights. If I draw attention to them, and others of like nature, it is to prove to unreflecting repeaters of words that *direct action has always been used, and has the historical sanction of the very people now reprobating it.*

George Washington is said to have been the leader of the Virginia planters' non-importation league; he would now be "enjoined," probably by a court, from forming any such league; and if he persisted, he would be fined for contempt.

When the great quarrel between the North and the South was waxing hot and hotter, it was again direct action which preceded and precipitated political action. And I may remark here that political action is never taken, nor even contemplated, until slumbering minds have first been aroused by direct acts of protest against existing conditions.

The history of the anti-slavery movement and the Civil War is one of the greatest of paradoxes, although history is a chain of paradoxes. Politically speaking, it was the slave-holding States that stood for greater political freedom, for the autonomy of the single State against the interference of the United States; politically speaking, it was the non-slave-holding States that stood for a strong centralized government, which, Secessionists said and said truly, was bound progressively to develop into more and more tyrannical forms. Which happened. From the close of the Civil War one, there has been continual encroachment of the federal power upon what was formerly the concern of the States individually. The wage-slavers, in their struggles of today, are continually thrown into conflict with that centralized power against which the slaveholder protested (with liberty on his lips by tyranny in his heart). Ethically speaking, it was the non-slave-holding States that in a general way stood for greater human liberty, while the Secessionists stood for race-slavery. In a general way only; that is, the majority of northerners, not being accustomed to the actual presence of negro slavery about them, thought it was probably a mistake; yet they were in no great ferment of anxiety to have it abolished. The Abolitionists only, and they were relatively few, were the genuine ethicals, to whom slavery itself — not secession or union — was the main question. In fact, so paramount was

it with them, that a considerable number of them were themselves for the dissolution of the union, advocating that the North take the initiative in the matter of dissolving, in order that the northern people might shake off the blame of holding negroes in chains.

Of course, there were all sorts of people with all sorts of temperaments among those who advocated the abolition of slavery. There were Quakers like Whittier (indeed it was the peace-at-all-costs Quakers who had advocated abolition even in early colonial days); there were moderate political actionists, who were for buying off the slaves, as the cheapest way; and there were extremely violent people, who believed and did all sorts of violent things.

As to what the politicians did, it is one long record of "hoe-not-to-to-it," a record of thirty years of compromising, and dickering, and trying to keep what was as it was, and to hand sops to both sides when new conditions demanded that something be done, or be pretended to be done. But "the stars in their courses fought against Sisera;" the system was breaking down from within, and the direct actionists from without as well were widening the cracks remorselessly.

Among the various expressions of direct rebellion was the organization of the "underground railroad." Most of the people who belonged to it believed in both sorts of action; but however much they theoretically subscribed to the right of the majority to enact and enforce laws, they didn't believe in it on that point. My grandfather was a member of the "underground;" many a fugitive slave he helped on his way to Canada. He was a very patient, law-abiding man in most respects, though I have often thought that he respected it because he didn't have much to do with it; always leading a pioneer life, law was generally far from him, and direct action imperative. Be that as it may, and law-respecting as he was, he had no respect whatever for slave laws, no matter if made by ten times of a majority; and he conscientiously broke every one that came in his way to be broken.

There were times when in the operation of the "underground" that violence was required, and was used. I recollect one old friend relating to me how she and her mother kept watch all night at the door, while a slave for whom a posse was searching hid in the cellar; and though they were of Quaker descent and sympathies, there was a shotgun on the table. Fortunately it did not have to be used that night.

When the fugitive slave law was passed with the help of the political actionists of the North who wanted to offer a new sop to the

slave-holders, the direct actionists took to rescuing recaptured fugitives. There was the "rescue of Shadrach," and the "rescue of Jerry," the latter rescuers being led by the famous Gerrit Smith; and a good many more successful and unsuccessful attempts. Still the politicals kept on pottering and trying to smooth things over, and the Abolitionists were denounced and decried by the ultra-law-abiding pacificators, pretty much as Wm. D. Haywood and Frank Bohn are being denounced by their own party now.

The other day I read a communication in the Chicago *Daily Socialist* from the secretary of the Louisville local Socialist Party to the national secretary, requesting that some safe and sane speaker be substituted for Bohn, who had been announced to speak there. In explaining why, Mr. Dobbs makes this quotation from Bohn's lecture: "Had the McNamaras been successful in defending the interests of the working class, they would have been right, just as John Brown would have been right, had he been successful in freeing the slaves. Ignorance was the only crime of John Brown, and ignorance was the only crime of the McNamaras."

Upon this Mr. Dobbs comments as follows: "We dispute emphatically the statements here made. The attempt to draw a parallel between the open — if mistaken — revolt of John Brown on the one hand, and the secret and murderous methods of the McNamaras on the other, is not only indicative of shallow reasoning, but highly mischievous in the logical conclusions which may be drawn from such statements."

Evidently Mr. Dobbs is very ignorant of the life and work of John Brown. John Brown was a man of violence; he would have scorned anybody's attempt to make him out anything else. And once a person is a believer in violence, it is with him only a question of the most effective way of applying it, which can be determined only by a knowledge of conditions and means at his disposal. John Brown did not shrink at all from conspiratorial methods. Those who have read the autobiography of Frederick Douglass and the Reminiscences of Lucy Colman, will recall that one of the plans laid by John Brown was to organize a chain of armed camps in the mountains of West Virginia, North Carolina, and Tennessee, send secret emissaries among the slaves inciting them to flee to these camps, and there concert such measures as times and conditions made possible for further arousing revolt among the negroes. That this plan failed was due to the weakness of the desire for liberty among the slaves themselves, more than anything else.

Later on, when the politicians in their infinite deviousness contrived a fresh proposition of how-not-to-do-it, known as the Kansas-Nebraska Act, which left the question of slavery to be determined by the settlers, the direct actionists on both sides sent bogus settlers into the territory, who proceeded to fight it out. The pro-slavery men, who got in first, made a constitution recognizing slavery and a law punishing with death any one who aided a slave to escape; but the Free Soilers, who were a little longer in arriving since they came from more distant States, made a second constitution, and refused to recognize the other party's laws at all. And John Brown was there, mixing in all the violence, conspiratorial or open; he was "a horse-thief and a murderer," in the eyes of decent, peaceable, political actionists. And there is no doubt that he stole horses, sending no notice in advance of his intention to steal them, and that he killed pro-slavery men. He struck and got away a good many times before his final attempt on Harper's Ferry. If he did not use dynamite, it was because dynamite had not yet appeared as a practical weapon. He made a great many more intentional attacks on life than the two brothers Secretary Dobbs condemns for their "murderous methods." And yet history has not failed to understand John Brown. Mankind knows that though he was a violent man, with human blood upon his hands, who was guilty of high treason and hanged for it, yet his soul was a great, strong, unselfish soul, unable to bear the frightful crime which kept 4,000,000 people like dumb beasts, and thought that making war against it was a sacred, a God-called duty, (for John Brown was a very religious man — a Presbyterian).

It is by and because of the direct acts of the forerunners of social change, whether they be of peaceful or warlike nature, that the Human Conscience, the conscience of the mass, becomes aroused to the need for change. It would be very stupid to say that no good results are ever brought about by political action; sometimes good things do come about that way. But never until individual rebellion, followed by mass rebellion, has forced it. Direct action is always the clamorer, the initiator, through which the great sum of indifferentists become aware that oppression is getting intolerable.

We have now and oppression in the land — and not only in this land, but throughout all those parts of the world which enjoy the very mixed blessings of Civilization. And just as in the question of chattel slavery, so this form of slavery has been begetting both direct action and political action. A certain percent of our population (probably a much smaller

percent than politicians are in the habit of assigning at mass meetings) is producing the material wealth upon which all the rest of us live; just as it was 4,000,000 chattel Blacks who supported all the crowd of parasites above them. These are the *land workers* and the *industrial workers*.

Through the unprophesied and unprophesiable operation of institutions which no individual of us created, but found in existence when he came here, these workers, the most absolutely necessary part of the whole social structure, without whose services none can either eat, or clothe, or shelter himself, are just the ones who get the least to eat, to wear, and to be housed withal — to say nothing of their share of the other social benefits which the rest of us are supposed to furnish, such as education and artistic gratification.

These workers have, in one form or another, mutually joined their forces to see what betterment of their condition they could get; primarily by direct action, secondarily by political action. We have had the Grange, the Farmer's Alliance, Co-operative Associations, Colonization Experiments, Knights of Labor, Trade Unions, and Industrial Workers of the World. All of them have been organized for the purpose of wringing from the masters in the economic field a little better price, a little better conditions, a little shorter hours; or on the other hand to resist a reduction in price, worse conditions, or longer hours. None of them has attempted a final solution of the social war. None of them, except the Industrial Workers, has recognized that there is a social war, inevitable so long as present legal-social conditions endure. They accepted property institutions as they found them. They were made up of average men, with average desires, and they undertook to do what appeared to them possible and very reasonable things. They were not committed to any particular political policy when they were organized, but were associated for direct action of their own initiation, either positive or defensive.

Undoubtably there were and are among all these organizations, members who looked beyond immediate demands; who did see that the continuous development of forces now in operation was bound to bring about conditions to which it is impossible that life continue to submit, and against which, therefore, it will protest, and violently protest; that it will have no choice but to do so; that it must do so or tamely die; and since it is not the nature of life to surrender without struggle, it will not tamely die. Twenty-two years ago I met Farmer's Alliance people who said so, Knights of Labor who said so, Trade Unionists who said so. They

wanted larger aims than those to which their organizations were looking; but they had to accept their fellow members as they were, and try to stir them to work for such things as it was possible to make them see. And what they could see was better prices, better wages, less dangerous or tyrannical conditions, shorter hours. At the stage of development when these movements were initiated, the land workers could not see that their struggle had anything to do with the struggle of those engaged in the manufacturing or transporting service; nor could these latter see that theirs had anything to do with the movement of the farmers. For that matter very few of them see it yet. They have yet to learn that there is one common struggle against those who have appropriated the earth, the money, and the machines.

Unfortunately the great organizations of the farmers frittered itself away in a stupid chase after political power. It was quite successful in getting the power in certain States; but the courts pronounced its laws unconstitutional, and there was the burial hole of all its political conquests. Its original program was to build its own elevators, and store the products therein, holding these from the market till they could escape the speculator. Also, to organize labor exchanges, issuing credit notes upon products deposited for exchange. Had it adhered to this program of direct mutual aid, it would, to some extent, for a time at least, have afforded an illustration of how mankind may free itself from the parasitism of the bankers and the middlemen. Of course, it would have been overthrown in the end, unless it had so revolutionized men's minds by the example as to force the overthrow of the legal monopoly of land and money; but at least it would have served a great educational purpose. As it was, it "went after the red herring" and disintegrated merely from its futility.

The Knights of Labor subsided into comparative insignificance, not because of failure to use direct action, nor because of its tampering with politics, which was small, but chiefly because it was a heterogenous mass of workers who could not associate their efforts effectively.

The Trade Unions grew strong as the Knights of Labor subsided, and have continued slowly but persistently to increase in power. It is true the increase has fluctuated; that there have been set-backs; that great single organizations have been formed and again dispersed. But on the whole trade unions have been a growing power. They have been so because, poor as they are, they have been a means whereby a certain section of the workers have been able to bring their united force to bear

directly upon their masters, and so get for themselves some portion of what they wanted — of what their conditions dictated to them they must try to get. The strike is their natural weapon, that which they themselves have forged. It is the direct blow of the strike which nine times out of ten the boss is afraid of. (Of course there are occasions when he is glad of one, but that's unusual.) And the reason he dreads a strike is not so much because he thinks he cannot win out against it, but simply and solely because he does not want an interruption of his business. The ordinary boss isn't in much dread of a "class-conscious vote;" there are plenty of shops where you can talk Socialism or any other political program all day long; but if you begin to talk Unionism you may forthwith expect to be discharged or at best warned to shut up. Why? Not because the boss is so wise as to know that political action is a swamp in which the workingman gets mired, or because he understands that political Socialism is fast becoming a middle-class movement; not at all. He thinks Socialism is a very bad thing; but it's a good way off! But he knows that if his shop is unionized, he will have trouble right away. His hands will be rebellious, he will be put to expense to improve his factory conditions, he will have to keep workingmen that he doesn't like, and in case of strike he may expect injury to his machinery or his buildings.

It is often said, and parrot-like repeated, that the bosses are "class-conscious," that they stick together for their class interest, and are willing to undergo any sort of personal loss rather than be false to those interests. It isn't so at all. The majority of business people are just like the majority of workingmen; they care a whole lot more about their individual loss or gain than about the gain or loss of their class. And it is his individual loss the boss sees, when threatened by a union.

Now everybody knows that a strike of any size means violence. No matter what any one's ethical preference for peace may be, he knows it will not be peaceful. If it's a telegraph strike, it means cutting wires and poles, and getting fake scabs in to spoil the instruments. If it is a steel rolling mill strike, it means beating up the scabs, breaking the windows, setting the gauges wrong, and ruining the expensive rollers together with tons and tons of material. IF it's a miners' strike, it means destroying tracks and bridges, and blowing up mills. If it is a garment workers' strike, it means having an unaccountable fire, getting a volley of stones through an apparently inaccessible window, or possibly a brickbat on the manufacturer's own head. If it's a street-car strike, it means tracks torn up or barricaded with the contents of ash-carts and slop-carts, with

overturned wagons or stolen fences, it means smashed or incinerated cars and turned switches. If it is a system federation strike, it means “dead” engines, wild engines, derailed freights, and stalled trains. If it is a building trades strike, it means dynamited structures. And always, everywhere, all the time, fights between strike-breakers and scabs against strikers and strike-sympathizers, between People and Police.

On the side of the bosses, it means search-lights, electric wires, stockades, bull-pens, detectives and provocative agents, violent kidnapping and deportation, and every device they can conceive for direct protection, besides the ultimate invocation of police, militia, State constabulary, and federal troops.

Everybody knows this; everybody smiles when union officials protest their organizations to be peaceable and law-abiding, because everybody knows they are lying. They know that violence is used, both secretly and openly; and they know it is used because the strikers cannot do any other way, without giving up the fight at once. Nor to they mistake those who thus resort to violence under stress for destructive miscreants who do what they do out of innate cussedness. The people in general understand that they do these things through the harsh logic of a situation which they did not create, but which forces them to these attacks in order to make good in their struggle to live or else go down the bottomless descent into poverty, that lets Death find them in the poorhouse hospital, the city street, or the river-slime. This is the awful alternative that the workers are facing; and this is what makes the most kindly disposed human beings — men who would go out of their way to help a wounded dog, or bring home a stray kitten and nurse it, or step aside to avoid walking on a worm — resort to violence against their fellow men. They know, for the facts have taught them, that this is the only way to win, if they can win at all. And it has always appeared to me one of the most utterly ludicrous, absolutely irrelevant things that a person can do or say, when approached for relief or assistance by a striker who is dealing with an immediate situation, to respond with “Vote yourself into power!” when the next election is six months, a year, or two years away.

Unfortunately the people who know best how violence is used in union warfare cannot come forward and say: “On such a day, at such a place, such and such specific action was done, and as a result such and such concession was made, or such and such boss capitulated.” To do so would imperil their liberty and their power to go on fighting. Therefore

those that know best must keep silent and sneer in their sleeves, while those that know little prate. Events, not tongues, must make their position clear.

And there has been a very great deal of prating these last few weeks. Speakers and writers, honestly convinced I believe that political action and political action only can win the workers' battle, have been denouncing what they are pleased to call "direct action" (what they really mean is conspiratorial violence) as the author of mischief incalculable. One Oscar Ameringer, as an example, recently said at a meeting in Chicago that the Haymarket bomb of '86 had set back the eight-hour movement twenty-five years, arguing that the movement would have succeeded but for the bomb. It's a great mistake. No one can exactly measure in years or months the effect of a forward push or a reaction. No one can demonstrate that the eight-hour movement could have been won twenty-five years ago. We know that the eight-hour day was put on the statute books of Illinois in 1871 by political action, and has remained a dead letter. That the direct action of the workers could have won it, then, cannot be proved; but it can be shown that many more potent factors than the Haymarket bomb worked against it. On the other hand, if the reactive influence of the bomb was really so powerful, we should naturally expect labor and union conditions to be worse in Chicago than in the cities where no such thing happened. On the contrary, bad as they are, the general conditions of labor are better in Chicago than in most other large cities, and the power of the unions is more developed there than in any other American city except San Francisco. So if we are to conclude anything for the influence of the Haymarket bomb, keep these facts in mind. Personally I do not think its influence on the labor movement, as such, was so very great.

It will be the same with the present furore about violence. Nothing fundamental has been altered. Two men have been imprisoned for what they did (twenty-four years ago they were hanged for what they did not do); some few more may yet be imprisoned. But the forces of life will continue to revolt against their economic chains. There will be no cessation in that revolt, no matter what ticket men vote or fail to vote, until the chains are broken.

How will the chains be broken?

Political actionists tell us it will be only by means of working-class party action at the polls; by voting themselves into possession of the sources of life and the tools; by voting that those who now command forests,

mines, ranches, waterways, mills, and factories, and likewise command the military power to defend them, shall hand over their dominion to the people.

And meanwhile?

Meanwhile, be peaceable, industrious, law-abiding, patient, and frugal (as Madero told the Mexican peons to be, after he sold them to Wall Street)! Even if some of you are disenfranchised, don't rise up even against that, for it might "set back the party."

Well, I have already stated that some good is occasionally accomplished by political action — not necessarily working-class party action either. But I am abundantly convinced that the occasional good accomplished is more than counterbalanced by the evil; just as I am convinced that though there are occasional evils resulting through direct action, they are more than counterbalanced by the good.

Nearly all the laws which were originally framed with the intention of benefitting the workers, have either turned into weapons in their enemies' hands, or become dead letters unless the workers through their organizations have directly enforced their observance. So that in the end, it is direct action that has to be relied on anyway. As an example of getting the tarred end of a law, glance at the anti-trust law, which was supposed to benefit the people in general and the working class in particular. About two weeks since, some 250 union leaders were cited to answer to the charge of being trust formers, as the answer of the Illinois Central to its strikers.

But the evil of pinning faith to indirect action is far greater than any such minor results. The main evil is that it destroys initiative, quenches the individual rebellious spirit, teaches people to rely on someone else to do for them what they should do for themselves; finally renders organic the anomalous idea that by massing supineness together until a majority is acquired, then through the peculiar magic of that majority, this supineness is to be transformed into energy. That is, people who have lost the habit of striking for themselves as individuals, who have submitted to every injustice while waiting for the majority to grow, are going to become metamorphosed into human high-explosives by a mere process of packing!

I quite agree that the sources of life, and all the natural wealth of the earth, and the tools necessary to co-operative production, must become freely accessible to all. It is a positive certainty to me that unionism must widen and deepen its purposes, or it will go under; and I feel sure that the

logic of the situation will gradually force them to see it. They must learn that the workers' problem can never be solved by beating up scabs, so long as their own policy of limiting their membership by high initiation fees and other restrictions helps to make scabs. They must learn that the course of growth is not so much along the line of higher wages, but shorter hours, which will enable them to increase membership, to take in everybody who is willing to come into the union. They must learn that if they want to win battles, all allied workers must act together, act quickly (serving no notice on bosses), and retain their freedom to do so at all times. And finally they must learn that even then (when they have a complete organization) they can win nothing permanent unless they strike for everything — not for a wage, not for a minor improvement, but for the whole natural wealth of the earth. And proceed to the direct expropriation of it all!

They must learn that their power does not lie in their voting strength, that their power lies in their ability to stop production. It is a great mistake to suppose that the wage-earners constitute a majority of the voters. Wage-earners are here today and there tomorrow, and that hinders a large number from voting; a great percentage of them in this country are foreigners without a voting right. The most patent proof that Socialist leaders know this is so, is that they are compromising their propaganda at every point to win the support of the business class, the small investor. Their campaign papers proclaimed that their interviewers had been assured by Wall Street bond purchasers that they would be just as ready to buy Los Angeles bonds from a socialist as a capitalist administrator; that the present Milwaukee administration has been a boon to the small investor; their reading notices assure their readers in this city that we need not go to the great department stores to buy — buy rather of So-and-so on Milwaukee Avenue, who will satisfy us quite as well as a "big business" institution. In short, they are making every desperate effort to win the support and to prolong the life of that middle-class which socialist economy says must be ground to pieces, because they know they cannot get a majority without them.

The most that a working-class party could do, even if its politicians remained honest, would be to form a strong faction in the legislatures which might, by combining its vote with one side or another, win certain political or economic palliatives.

But what the working-class can do, when once they grow into a solidified organization, is to show the possessing class, through a sudden

cessation of all work, that the whole social structure rests on them; that the possessions of the others are absolutely worthless to them without the workers' activity; that such protests, such strikes, are inherent in the system of property and will continually recur until the whole thing is abolished — and having shown that effectively, proceed to expropriate.

"But the military power," says the political actionist; "we must get political power, or the military will be used against us!"

Against a real General Strike, the military can do nothing. Oh, true, if you have a Socialist Briand in power, he may declare the workers "public officials" and try to make them serve against themselves! But against the solid wall of an immobile working-mass, even a Briand would be broken.

Meanwhile, until this international awakening, the war will go on as it had been going, in spite of all the hysteria which well-meaning people who do not understand life and its necessities may manifest; in spite of all the shivering that timid leaders have done; in spite of all the reactionary revenges that may be taken; in spite of all the capital that politicians make out of the situation. It will go on because Life cries to live, and Property denies its freedom to live; and Life will not submit.

And should not submit.

It will go on until that day when a self-freed Humanity is able to chant Swinburne's Hymn of Man:

"Glory to Man in the highest,
For Man is the master of Things."

The Dominant Idea

Voltairine de Cleyre

1910

On everything that lives, if one looks searchingly, is limned the shadow line of an idea — an idea, dead or living, sometimes stronger when dead, with rigid, unswerving lines that mark the living embodiment with the stern immobile cast of the non-living. Daily we move among these unyielding shadows, less pierceable, more enduring than granite, with the blackness of ages in them, dominating living, changing bodies, with dead, unchanging souls. And we meet, also, living souls dominating dying bodies — living ideas regnant over decay and death. Do not imagine that I speak of human life alone. The stamp of persistent or of shifting Will is visible in the grass-blade rooted in its clod of earth, as in the gossamer web of being that floats and swims far over our heads in the free world of air.

Regnant ideas, everywhere! Did you ever see a dead vine bloom? I have seen it. Last summer I trained some morning-glory vines up over a second-story balcony; and every day they blew and curled in the wind, their white, purple-dashed faces winking at the sun, radiant with climbing life. Higher every day the green heads crept, carrying their train of spreading fans waving before the sun-seeking blossoms. Then all at once some mischance happened, — some cut worm or some mischievous child tore one vine off below, the finest and most ambitious one, of course. In a few hours the leaves hung limp, the sappy stem wilted and began to wither; in a day it was dead, — all but the top, which still clung longingly to its support, with bright head lifted. I mourned a little for the buds that could never open now, and tied that proud vine

whose work in the world was lost. But the next night there was a storm, a heavy, driving storm, with beating rain and blinding lightning. I rose to watch the flashes, and lo! the wonder of the world! In the blackness of the mid-NIGHT, in the fury of wind and rain, the dead vine had flowered. Five white, moon-faced blossoms blew gaily round the skeleton vine, shining back triumphant at the red lightning. I gazed at them in dumb wonder. Dear, dead vine, whose will had been so strong to bloom, that in the hour of its sudden cut-off from the feeding earth, it sent the last sap to its blossoms; and, not waiting for the morning, brought them forth in storm and flash, as white night-glories, which should have been the children of the sun.

In the daylight we all came to look at the wonder, marveling much, and saying, "Surely these must be the last." But every day for three days the dead vine bloomed; and even a week after, when every leaf was dry and brown, and so thin you could see through it, one last bud, dwarfed, weak, a very baby of a blossom, but still white and delicate, with five purple flecks, like those on the live vine beside it, opened and waved at the stars, and waited for the early sun. Over death and decay the Dominant Idea smiled: the vine was in the world to bloom, to bear white trumpet blossoms dashed with purple; and it held its will beyond death.

Our modern teaching is, that ideas are but attendant phenomena, impotent to determine the actions or relations of life, as the image in the glass which should say to the body it reflects: "*I shall shape thee.*" In truth we know that directly the body goes from before the mirror, the transient image is nothingness; but the real body has its being to live, and will live it, heedless of vanished phantoms of itself, in response to the ever-shifting pressure of things without it.

It is thus that the so-called Materialist Conception of History, the modern Socialists, and a positive majority of Anarchists would have us look upon the world of ideas, — shifting, unreal reflections, having naught to do in the determination of Man's life, but so many mirror appearances of certain material relations, wholly powerless to act upon the course of material things. Mind to them is in itself a blank mirror, though in fact never wholly blank, because always facing the reality of the material and bound to reflect some shadow. To-day I am somebody, tomorrow somebody else, if the scenes have shifted; my Ego is a gibbering phantom, pirouetting in the glass, gesticulating, transforming, hourly or momentarily, gleaming with the phosphor light of a deceptive unreal-

ity, melting like the mist upon the hills. Rocks, fields, woods, streams, houses, goods, flesh, blood, bone, sinew, — these are realities, with definite parts to play, with essential characters that abide under all changes; but my Ego does not abide; it is manufactured afresh with every change of these.

I think this unqualified determinism of the material is a great and lamentable error in our modern progressive movement; and while I believe it was a wholesome antidote to the long-continued blunder of Middle Age theology, viz., that Mind was an utterly irresponsible entity making laws of its own after the manner of an Absolute Emperor, without logic, sequence, or relation, ruler over matter, and its own supreme determinant, not excepting God (who was himself the same sort of a mind writ large) — while I do believe that the modern re-conception of Materialism has done a wholesome thing in pricking the bubble of such conceit and restoring man and his “soul” to its “place in nature,” I nevertheless believe that to this also there is a limit; and that the absolute sway of Matter is quite as mischievous an error as the unrelated nature of Mind; even that in its direct action upon personal conduct, it has the more ill effect of the two. For if the doctrine of free-will has raised up fanatics and persecutors, who, assuming that men may be good under all conditions if they merely wish to be so, have sought to persuade other men’s wills with threats, fines, imprisonments, torture, the spike, the wheel, the axe, the fagot, in order to make them good and save them against their obdurate wills; if the doctrine of Spiritualism, the soul supreme, has done this, the doctrine of Materialistic Determinism has produced shifting, self-excusing, worthless, parasitical characters, who are *this* now and *that* at some other time, and anything and nothing upon principle. “My conditions have made me so,” they cry, and there is no more to be said; poor mirror-ghosts! how could they help it! To be sure, the influence of such a character rarely reaches so far as that of the principled persecutor; but for every one of the latter, there are a hundred of these easy, doughy characters, who will fit any baking tin, to whom determinist self-excusing appeals; so the balance of evil between the two doctrines is *about* maintained.

What we need is a true appraisalment of the power and rôle of the Idea. I do not think I am able to give such a true appraisalment, I do not think that any one — even *much* greater intellects than mine — will be able to do it for a long time to come. But I am at least able to suggest it, to show its necessity, to give a rude approximation of it.

And first, against the accepted formula of modern Materialism, "Men are what circumstances make them," I set the opposing declaration, "Circumstances are what men make them"; and I contend that both these things are true up to the point where the combating powers are equalized, or one is overthrown. In other words, my conception of mind, or character, is not that it is a powerless reflection of a momentary condition of stuff and form, but an active modifying agent, reacting on its environment and transforming circumstances, sometimes slightly, sometimes greatly, sometimes, though not often, entirely.

All over the kingdom of life, I have said, one may see dominant ideas working, if one but trains his eyes to look for them and recognize them. In the human world there have been many dominant ideas. I cannot conceive that ever, at any time, the struggle of the body before dissolution can have been aught but agony. If the reasoning that insecurity of conditions, the expectation of suffering, are circumstances which make the soul of man uneasy, shrinking, timid, what answer will you give to the challenge of old Ragnar Lodbrog, to that triumphant death-song hurled out, not by one cast to his death in the heat of battle, but under slow prison torture, bitten by serpents, and yet singing: "The goddesses of death invite me away — now end I my song. The hours of my life are run out. I shall smile when I die"? Nor can it be said that this is an exceptional instance, not to be accounted for by the usual operation of general law, for old King Lodbrog the Skald did only what his fathers did, and his sons and his friends and his enemies, through long generations; they set the force of a dominant idea, the idea of the super ascendant ego, against the force of torture and of death, ending life as they wished to end it, with a smile on their lips. But a few years ago, did we not read how the helpless Kaffirs, victimized by the English for the contumacy of the Boers, having been forced to dig the trenches wherein for pleasant sport they were to be shot, were lined up on the edge, and seeing death facing them, began to chant barbaric strains of triumph, smiling as they fell? Let us admit that such exultant defiance was owing to ignorance, to primitive beliefs in gods and hereafters; but let us admit also that it shows the power of an idea dominant.

Everywhere in the shells of dead societies, as in the shells of the sea-slime, we shall see the force of purposive action, of intent *within* holding its purpose against obstacles *without*.

I think there is no one in the world who can look upon the steadfast, far-staring face of an Egyptian carving, or read a description of Egypt's

monuments, or gaze upon the mummied clay of its old dead men, without feeling that the dominant idea of that people in that age was to be enduring and to work enduring things, with the immobility of their great still sky upon them and the stare of the desert in them. One must feel that whatever other ideas animated them, and expressed themselves in their lives, this was the dominant idea. *That which was* must remain, no matter at what cost, even if it were to break the ever-lasting hills: an idea which made the live humanity beneath it, born and nurtured in the corns of caste, groan and writhe and gnaw its bandages, till in the fullness of time it passed away: and still the granite mould of it stares with empty eyes out across the world, the stern old memory of the *Thing-that-was*.

I think no one can look upon the marbles wherein Greek genius wrought the figuring of its soul without feeling an apprehension that the things are going to leap and fly; that in a moment one is like to be set upon by heroes with spears in their hands, by serpents that will coil around him; to be trodden by horses that may trample and flee; to be smitten by these gods that have as little of the idea of stone in them as a dragon-fly, one instant poised upon a wind-swayed petal edge. I think no one can look upon them without realizing at once that those figures came out of the boil of life; they seem like rising bubbles about to float into the air, but beneath them other bubbles rising, and others, and others, — there will be no end of it. When one's eyes are upon one group, one feels that behind one, perhaps, a figure is tiptoeing to seize the darts of the air and hurl them on one's head; one must keep whirling to face the miracle that appears about to be wrought — stone leaping! And this though nearly every one is minus some of the glory the old Greek wrought into it so long ago; even the broken stumps of arms and legs live. And the dominant idea is Activity, and the beauty and strength of it. Change, swift, ever-circling Change! The making of things and the casting of them away, as children cast away their toys, not interested that these shall endure, so that they themselves realize incessant activity. Full of creative power what matter if the creature perished. So there was an endless procession of changing shapes in their schools, their philosophies their dramas, their poems, till at last it wore itself to death. And the marvel passed away from the world. But still their marbles live to show what manner of thoughts dominated them.

And if we wish to, know what master-thought ruled the lives of men when the mediæval period had had time to ripen it, one has only at

this day to stray into some quaint, out-of-the-way English village, where a strong old towered Church yet stands in the midst of little straw-thatched cottages, like a brooding mother-hen surrounded by her chickens. Everywhere the greatening of God and the lessening of Man: the Church so looming, the home so little. The search for the spirit, for the *enduring* thing (not the poor endurance of granite which in the ages crumbles, but the eternal), the eternal, — and contempt for the body which perishes, manifest in studied uncleanliness, in mortifications of the flesh, as if the spirit should have spat its scorn upon it.

Such was the dominant idea of that middle age which has been too much cursed by modernists. For the men who built the castles and the cathedrals, were men of mighty works, though they made no books, and though their souls spread crippled wings, because of their very endeavors to soar too high. The spirit of voluntary subordination for the accomplishment of a great work, which proclaimed the aspiration of the common soul, — that was the spirit wrought into the cathedral stones; and it is not wholly to be condemned.

In waking dream, when the shadow-shapes of world-ideas swim before the vision, one sees the Middle-Age Soul an ill-contorted, half-formless thing, with dragon wings and a great, dark, tense face, strained sunward with blind eyes.

If now we look around us to see what idea dominates our own civilization, I do not know that it is even as attractive as this piteous monster of the old darkness. The relativity of things has altered: Man has risen and God has descended. The modern village has better homes and less pretentious churches. Also, the conception of dirt and disease as much-sought afflictions, the patient suffering of which is a meet offering to win God's pardon, has given place to the emphatic promulgation of cleanliness. We have Public School nurses notifying parents that "pediculosis capitis" is a very contagious and unpleasant disease; we have cancer associations gathering up such cancers as have attached themselves to impecunious persons, and carefully experimenting with a view to cleaning them out of the human race; we have tuberculosis societies attempting the Herculean labor of clearing the Aegean stables of our modern factories of the deadly bacillus, and they have got as far as spittoons with water in them in some factories; and others, and others, which while not yet overwhelmingly successful in their avowed purposes are evidence sufficient that humanity no longer seeks dirt as a means of grace. We laugh at those old superstitions and talk

much about exact experimental knowledge. We endeavor to galvanize the Greek corpse, and pretend that we enjoy physical culture. We dabble in many things; but the one great real idea of our age, not copied from any other, not pretended, not raised to life by any conjuration, is the Much Making of Things, — not the making of beautiful things, not the joy of spending living energy in creative work; rather the shameless, merciless driving and over-driving, wasting and draining of the last lit of energy, only to produce heaps and heaps of things, — things ugly, things harmful, things useless, and at the best largely unnecessary. To what end are they produced? Mostly the producer does not know; still less does he care. But he is possessed with the idea that he must do it, every one is doing it, and every year the making of things goes on more and faster; there are mountain ranges of things made and making, and still men go about desperately seeking to increase the list of created things, to start fresh heaps and to add to the existing heaps. And with what agony of body, under what stress and strain of danger and fear of danger, with what mutilations and maimings and lamings they struggle on, dashing themselves out against these rocks of wealth! Verily, if the vision of the Mediæval Soul is painful in its blind staring and pathetic striving, grotesque in its senseless tortures, the Soul of the Modern is most amazing with its restless, nervous eyes, ever searching the corners of the universe, its restless, nervous hands ever reaching and grasping for some useless toil.

And certainly the presence of things in abundance, things empty and things vulgar and things absurd, as well as things convenient and useful, has produced the desire for the possession of things, the exaltation of the possession of things. Go through the business street of any city, where the tilted edges of the strata of things are exposed to gaze, and look at the faces of the people as they pass, — not at the hungry and smitten ones who fringe the sidewalks and plain dolefully for alms, but at the crowd, — and see what idea is written on their faces. On those of the women, from the ladies of the horse-shows to the shop girls out of the factory, there is a sickening vanity, a consciousness of their clothes, as of some jackdaw in borrowed feathers. Look for the pride and glory of the free, strong, beautiful body, lithe-moving and powerful. You will not see it. You will see mincing steps, bodies tilted to show the cut of a skirt, simpering, smirking faces, with eyes cast about seeking admiration for the gigantic bow of ribbon in the overdressed hair. In the caustic words of an acquaintance, to whom I once said, as we walked, “Look at the

amount of vanity on all these women's faces," "No: look at the little bit of womanhood showing out of all that vanity!"

And on the faces of the men, coarseness! Coarse desires for coarse things, and lots of them: the stamp is set so unmistakably that "the wayfarer though a fool need not err therein." Even the frightful anxiety and restlessness begotten of the creation of all this, is less distasteful than the abominable expression of lust for the things created.

Such is the dominant idea of the western world, at least in these our days. You may see it wherever you look, impressed plainly on things and on men; very like if you look in the glass, you will see it there. And if some archaeologist of a long future shall some day unbury the bones of our civilization, where ashes or flood shall have entombed it, he will see this frightful idea stamped on the factory walls he shall uncover, with their rows and rows of square light-holes, their tons upon tons of toothed steel, grinning out of the skull of this our life; its acres of silk and velvet, its square miles of tinsel and shoddy. No glorious marbles of nymphs and fawns, whose dead images are yet so sweet that one might wish to kiss them still; no majestic figures of winged horses, with men's faces and lions' paws casting their colossal symbolism in a mighty spell forward upon Time, as those old stone chimeras of Babylon yet do; but meaningless iron giants, of wheels and teeth, whose secret is forgotten, but whose business was to grind men tip, and spit them out as housefuls of woven stuffs, bazaars of trash, wherethrough other men might wade. The statues he shall find will bear no trace of mythic dream or mystic symbol; they will be statues of merchants and ironmasters and militia-men, in tailored coats and pantaloons and proper hats and shoes.

But the dominant idea of the age and land does not necessarily mean the dominant idea of any single life. I doubt not that in those long gone days, far away by the banks of the still Nile, in the abiding shadow of the pyramids, under the heavy burden of other men's stolidity, there went to and fro restless, active, rebel souls who hated all that the ancient society stood for, and with burning hearts sought to overthrow it.

I am sure that in the midst of all the agile Greek intellect created, there were those who went about with downbent eyes, caring nothing for it all, seeking some higher revelation, willing to abandon the joys of life, so that they drew near to some distant, unknown perfection their fellows knew not of. I am certain that in the dark ages, when most men prayed and cowered, and beat and bruised themselves, and sought afflictions, like that St. Teresa who still, "Let me suffer, or die," there were

some, many, who looked on the world as a chance jest, who despised or pitied their ignorant comrades, and tried to compel the answers of the universe to their questionings, by the patient, quiet searching which came to be Modern Science. I am sure there were hundreds thousands of them, of whom we have never heard.

And now, to-day, though the Society about us is dominated by Thing-Worship, and will stand so marked for all time, that is no reason any single soul should be. Because the one thing seemingly worth doing to my neighbor, to all my neighbors, is to pursue dollars, that is no reason I should pursue dollars. Because my neighbors conceive they need an inordinate heap of carpets, furniture, clocks, china, glass, tapestries, mirrors, clothes, jewels and servants to care for them, and detectives to, keep an eye on the servants, judges to try the thieves, and politicians to appoint the judges, jails to punish the culprits, and wardens to watch in the jails, and tax collectors to gather support for the wardens, and fees for the tax collectors, and strong houses to hold the fees, so that none but the guardians thereof can make off with them, — and therefore, to keep this host of parasites, need other men to work for them, and make the fees; because my neighbors want all this, is that any reason I should devote myself to such abarren folly? and bow my neck to serve to keep up the gaudy show?

Must we, because the Middle Age was dark and blind and brutal, throw away the one good thing it wrought into the fibre of Man, that the inside of a human being was worth more than the outside? that to conceive a higher thing than oneself and live toward that is the only way of living worthily? The goal strived for should, and must, be a very different one from that which led the mediæval fanatics to despise the body and belabor it with hourly crucifixions. But one can recognize the claims and the importance of the body without therefore sacrificing truth, honor, simplicity, and faith, to the vulgar gauds of body-service, whose very decorations debase the thing they might be supposed to exalt.

I have said before that the doctrine that men are nothing and circumstances all, has been, and is, the bane of our modern social reform movements.

Our youth, themselves animated by the spirit of the old teachers who believed in the supremacy of ideas, even in the very hour of throwing away that teaching, look with burning eyes to the social East, and believe that wonders of revolution are soon to be accomplished. In their enthusiasm they foreread the gospel of Circumstances to mean that

very soon the pressure of material development must break down the social system — they give the rotten thing but a few years to last; and then, they themselves shall witness the transformation, partake in its joys. The few years pass away and nothing happens; enthusiasm cools. Behold these same idealists then, successful business men, professionals, property owners, money leaders, creeping into the social ranks they once despised, pitifully, contemptibly, at the skirts of some impecunious personage to whom they have lent money, or done some professional service gratis; behold them lying, cheating, tricking, flattering, buying and selling themselves for any frippery, any cheap little pretense. The Dominant Social Idea has seized them, their lives are swallowed up in it; and when you ask the reason why, they tell you that Circumstances compelled them so to do. If you quote their lies to them, they smile with calm complacency, assure you that when Circumstances demand lies, lies are a great deal better than truth; that tricks are sometimes more effective than honest dealing; that flattering and duping do not matter, if the end to be attained is desirable; and that under existing "Circumstances" life isn't possible without all this; that it is going to be possible whenever Circumstances have made truth-telling easier than lying, but till then a man must look out for himself, by all means. And so the cancer goes on rotting away the moral fibre, and the man becomes a lump, a squash, a piece of slippery slime taking all shapes and losing all shapes, according to what particular hole or corner he wishes to glide into, — a disgusting embodiment of the moral bankruptcy begotten by Thing-Worship.

Had he been dominated by a less material conception of life, had his will not been rotted by the intellectual reasoning of it out of its existence, by its acceptance of its own nothingness, the unselfish aspirations of his earlier years would have grown and strengthened by exercise and habit; and his protest against the time might have been enduringly written, and to some purpose.

Will it be said that the Pilgrim fathers did not hew, out of the New England ice and granite, the idea which gathered them together out of their scattered and obscure English villages, and drove them in their frail ships aver the Atlantic in midwinter, to cut their way against all opposing forces? Were they not common men, subject to the operation of common law? Will it be said that Circumstances aided them? When death, disease, hunger, and cold had done their worst, not one of those

remaining was willing by an *easy lie* to return to material comfort and the possibility of long days.

Had our modern social revolutionists the vigorous and undaunted conception of their own powers that these had, our social movements would not be such pitiful abortions, — core-rotten even before the outward flecks appear.

“Give a labor leader a political job, and the system becomes all right,” laugh our enemies; and they point mockingly to Terence Powderly acid his like; and they quote John Burns, who as soon as *he* went into Parliament declared: “The time of the agitator is past; the time of the legislator has come.” “Let an Anarchist marry an heiress, and the country is safe,” they sneer: — and they have the right to sneer. But would they have that right, could they have it, if our lives were not in the first instance dominated by more insistent desires than those we would fain have others think we hold most dear?

It is the old story: “Aim at the stars, and you may hit the top of the gatepost; but aim at the ground, and you will hit the ground.”

It is not to be supposed that any one will attain to the full realization of what he purposes, even when those purposes do not involve united action with others; he *will* fall short; he will in some measure be overcome by contending or inert opposition. But something he will attain, if he continues to aim high.

What, then, would I have? you ask. I would have men invest themselves with the dignity of an aim higher than the chase for wealth; choose a thing to do in life outside of the making of things, and keep it in mind, — not for a day, nor a year, but for a life-time. And then keep faith with themselves! Not be a light-o'-love, to-day professing this and to-morrow that, and easily reading oneself out of both whenever it becomes convenient; not advocating a thing to-day and to-morrow kissing its enemies' sleeve, with that weak, coward cry in the mouth, “Circumstances make me.” Take a good look into yourself, and if you love Things and the power and the plenitude of Things better than you love your own dignity, human dignity, Oh, say so, say so! Say it to yourself, and abide by it. But do not blow hot and cold in one breath. Do not try to be a social reformer and a respected possessor of Things at the same time. Do not preach the straight and narrow way while going joyously upon the wide one. *Preach the wide one*, or do not preach at all; but do not fool yourself by saying you would like to help usher in a free society, but you cannot sacrifice an armchair for it. Say honestly, “I love arm-chairs

better than free men, and pursue them because I choose; not because circumstances make me. I love hats, large, large hats, with many feathers and great bows; and I would rather have those hats than trouble myself about social dreams that will never be accomplished in my day. The world worships hats, and I wish to worship with them."

But if you choose the liberty and pride and strength of the single soul, and the free fraternization of men, as the purpose which your life is to make manifest then do not sell it for tinsel. Think that your soul is strong and will hold its way; and slowly, through bitter struggle perhaps the strength will grow. And the foregoing of possessions for which others barter the last possibility of freedom will become easy.

At the end of life you may close your eyes saying: "I have not been dominated by the Dominant Idea of my Age; I have chosen mine own allegiance, and served it. I have proved by a lifetime that there is that in man which saves him from the absolute tyranny of Circumstance, which in the end conquers and remoulds Circumstance, the immortal fire of Individual Will, which is the salvation of the Future."

Let us have Men, Men who will say a word to their souls and keep it — keep it not when it is easy, but keep it when it is hard — keep it when the storm roars and there is a white-streaked sky and blue thunder before, and one's eyes are blinded and one's ears deafened with the war of opposing things; and keep it under the long leaden sky and the gray dreariness that never lifts. Hold unto the last: that is what it means to have a Dominant Idea, which Circumstance cannot break. And such men make and unmake Circumstance.

Retrieved on March 24th, 2009 from dwardmac.pitzer.edu

Mother Earth Publishing Association. 210 East 18th Street. New York.
1910.

The Economic Relations of Sex

Voltairine de Cleyre

1891

To the Editor of The Open Court:

Possessed of rather more than ordinary interest in the sex question, and agreeing with Professor Cope that any proposition for the amelioration of the condition of women should be discussed and decided by women, I am moved to certain remarks suggested by his article on "The Material Relations of Sex" in the first number of *The Monist*.

All through its perusal I was impressed by his unconscious recognition of an underlying question, which, apart from woman's inferiority, determines the relations of the sexes. This is plainly apparent in the paragraph alluding to the communistic system of wealth production and distribution, in which he admits the possibility of promiscuous sex-relations. While I agree with Professor Cope that to institute communism would be a decided blow at progress, since progress consists in a constant widening of individual liberty while communism invokes authoritarian direction, nevertheless, I hold that in acknowledging the possibility of variety in sex relations under the communistic regime, he has admitted that the present social arrangement of sex is the necessary outgrowth of our economic conditions.

Postulating the fact of woman's mental and physical inferiority, our writer sees no possible ultimatum for her but the service of maternity and child-bearing in return for "protection and support" from some man, or set of men called a "state." This brings us at once to two vital questions:

Is woman's inferiority the cause, or the effect, of her economic subjection?

Is economic independence for woman a possible ideal?

I think it can be clearly proven that the mental constitution of woman, like that of man, has never failed to rise where restrictions upon equal freedom have been torn down. Whenever woman has had the same opportunity as man, results have proven that her capacities for development are as unlimited as his. It may be objected that I am instancing exceptional cases instead of dealing with types. My reply is that only in exceptional cases have women enjoyed the same opportunities as men. Yet these cases are sufficiently numerous to warrant the conclusion that nature affords no insuperable obstacle to sex-equality in brain; and that inferiority in the typical woman must be regarded as the result of her dependent economic condition, created by the artificial restrictions of man.

Concerning the physical disability of the sex, it is more difficult to show the beneficent results of liberty, since even the most advanced of women are so hampered by body-dwarfing, dress, and custom that we have scarcely sufficient data for opinion concerning her possibilities of physical development. Such as we have would indicate that much of her present incompetence during periods of gestation and nursing, is incidental to the present defective social arrangement which condemns woman to the wasteful drudgery of individual housekeeping, and all the slavish work of the much lauded family-life.

However, even physical inferiority need not prove the eternal barrier to economic independence which Professor Cope would make of it. To-day industrial progress demands not so much physical strength as skill. Undoubtedly the elephant has physical strength superior to man, yet that he is no competitor against man I need waste no space to prove. Likewise the Hercules of ages past would have no place in competitive industry to-day simply because he would not be adapted to his environment. Granting the present physical disability of woman, it by no means follows that, with equal opportunity, she would be unable to compete with man in the fields of productive industry. Indeed one general complaint of the workingmen is that they are competing, and, by the law of the survival of the fittest, have already driven men out of several branches of employment, such as textile fabrics, shoe-making, etc. No great amount of strength is required, but skill and patience; and it is the

universal testimony of the overseers that women are equally skilful and more reliable.

There is a class of economic reformers called anarchists, who contend that with opportunity to exploit nature thrown free to the human race, the hours of labor would be so reduced as to enable one to produce sufficient to satisfy all his needs by three hours work per day. This with our present machinery, the possibilities of further reduction being left to further developments. They also contend that such freedom must necessarily result in constant labor-demand, thus securing the laborer against the present nightmare of involuntary idleness. Under such conditions, bearing in mind that the ever increasing displacement of physical strength by machinery, keeps reducing the physical burden of productive labor, woman's economic independence becomes a realisable ideal, and the whole matter of sex association changes. When woman comprehends her independence, marriage will no longer be a matter of "protection and support," which Professor Cope declares is the basis of monogamic wifedom. It will become a matter of mutual co-operation, based, let us hope on something higher than the sale of the powers of motherhood, and demanding the same standard for man as for woman.

Whether monogamy or variety will then obtain depends on which of these systems produces the higher type of humanity. At present it is impossible to decide, since without the independence of woman there can be no equality, and without equality no true adjustment of sex relations.

Voltairine de Cleyre.

Retrieved on December 22, 2011 from libertarian-labyrinth.org

From *The Open Court*. V, 11 (1891), 193. 2801-2802.

Economics of Dyer D. Lum

Voltairine de Cleyre

1893

If Dyer D. Lum were living I doubt whether the articles of Mr. Black, recently copied by the *Twentieth Century* from the "Australian Workman," would elicit anything further from him than a hearty laugh. Mr. Lum had a very keen appreciation of the ludicrous and the richness of being classed in company with Victor Yarros as a Communist would have touched what he called his "Sense of tickleety" sufficiently to have compensated him for being subjected to the treatment of such a reviewer. He can, indeed, well afford to be accounted as "lacking in understanding" by this "turgid and tangled" gentleman from New South Wales. It is better to be praised by such a critic's damnation than damned by his praise.

Mr. Yarros is able to speak for himself, and, if he deem it worth while, will no doubt do so in terms which may clarify Mr. Black's mind. I do not pretend to more than average discernment, nor do I think more is necessary, to understand Yarros as holding to the completest individualism consonant with equal freedom, both as a political and an economic principle.

There is a difference between Yarros and Lum however, as will be found by contrasting the latter's "Economics of Anarchy" with the former's writings in "Liberty." And as there are, no doubt, many readers of the *Twentieth Century* who have never seen the book from which Mr. Black quotes, I shall venture to point out wherein the difference lies; not so much for the purpose of clearing Mr. Lum from the charge of incon-

sistency as showing Mr. Black's inability to distinguish between a vital issue and a divergence reconcileable with a common starting point.

But first, a brief explanation concerning the style of "Economics of Anarchy." It is, admittedly, not an A, B, C book. The language is heavy, and to a reader like Mr. Black may very probably appear as if "plainer to the writer than to the reader." (I have a suspicion, indeed, that all writings are so.) Be that as it may, in the case of Lum's work the causes were two. In the first place, financial limits made it impossible for him to treat of the subject at length, as much had to be packed into as small a compass as possible. The chapters on land and capital were necessarily crowded into a few pages, and every sentence was "boiled down" till it was thick. The author was compelled to depend on the reader for dilutions.

In the second place, Mr. Lum was, on serious subjects, always a concise writer. A lifelong student, he was as familiar with jawbreaking terminologies as most of us are with the multiplication table. And as one technical term often expresses precisely what half a dozen other words fail to convey with exactness, he naturally chose the former. I distinctly remember his reply to me when I complained that working people could not understand him: "I can't talk philosophy in unphilosophic language—" (a brilliant but shallow orator) "tries to do it and succeeds—by making an ass of himself." So much for the alleged turgidity.

In the sentence "Any attempt to institute artificial regulations over production, to limit the free scope of individual action by the organization of groups in which self-elected needs rather than deeds become the governing principle of distribution, is a violation of logical deductions from liberty," to which sentence Mr. Black objects, that it "begins by attacking 'artificial regulation over production,' and concludes by showing that he was really tilting at regulated distribution," our critic seems not to understand that the second violation is not given as a sequence of the first, but that either of the things, both of which are in the programme of government Communism, and the latter in some phases of so-called free Communism, are violations of liberty. Equal freedom! This is the foundation rock of the Individualists! And the sentence quoted might have been written by any one of them. But Lum preferred the word mutualism to individualism, because he recognized the progress of society not only towards freedom, but towards solidarity. And in Mr. Black's second quotation, while registering his protest against the authoritative "central bureau" of Socialism, which would create solidarity from the top

down, he explains how such solidarity might grow from the bottom up, after the natural process of growth.

And herein lay the principal difference between Lum and the other Individualists, that in discussing economy he laid more stress upon the positive side, gave more weight to the facts presented by Communists than they. Unless I am very much misinformed the so-called "Boston Anarchists" consider the present immense massing of workmen together in shops and factories (a characteristic feature of our present conditions constantly emphasized by Socialists) as an outgrowth of the introduction of steam power and its complicated machinery; that the whole system is therefore liable to be again revolutionized the moment steam is superseded by some superior agent, say electricity, which can be utilized by the workman at home or in small shops, where the slavery of the large factory can give place to the independence of the individual. That all forms of production are passing phases dependent upon circumstances which it is impossible to foresee; and hence wisdom in the matter will content itself by saying *laissez faire*.

Lum, however, believed that the factory represented not only power and machinery but division of labor and as division of labor appears as a continuous process in all organic life, from protista up, he could hardly conceive a reversal of the law in the case of the social organism. For this reason he laid emphasis upon the coming solidification of industry; and because he did was accused, on the one side, of truckling to Communists, and on the other was claimed as a Communist after his death by the very man who did his best to manoeuvre him out of the editorship of the "Alarm" while living, because of his Individualism—John Most. Possibly Mr. Black may consider this corroborative of his classification of Lum as a Communist; I do not, however, credit Most with stupidity.

With the Mostian exposition of Communism, which sixteen days before his death he declared "logically leads to and rests upon authority," Lum made no compromise. But between his mutualism and the Communism of Krapotkin the difference is not one of irreconcilable basis, but chiefly one of faith. That there is a distinct difference between government and social administration, that the former tends always to crystallize existing forms, thus fastening on the living the slavery of the dead, while the latter gives free play to all the plastic elements of society, constantly adapting and readapting itself to changing demands, is something Mr. Black evidently does not see, but which Mr. Lum did. Hence his "boards of administration," chosen by "natural selection," not ma-

jority vote, having jurisdiction only over affiliated industries, in no wise meddling with affairs they do not understand, and in no wise enforcing their decisions, even within their limits, by legal penalties. Krapotkin's illustrations in his "Anarchist Communism are very much in point.

In conclusion, my intention has been to show Mr Black's incompetency to criticise Mr. Lum. That he is equally incompetent to criticise the other Anarchists quoted could be easily demonstrated.

Retrieved on May 26, 2012 from libertarian-labyrinth.org

From *Twentieth Century*. December 7, 1893

The Economic Tendency of Freethought

Voltairine de Cleyre

Freethought in America was an anti-clerical, anti-Christian movement which sought to separate the church and state in order to leave religious matters to the conscience and reasoning ability of the individual involved. Voltairine de Cleyre (1866–1912) was prominent both as a feminist and as a freethinker. The following article, reprinted from Benjamin Tucker's periodical *Liberty*, was originally delivered by de Cleyre as a lecture before the Boston Secular Society. It is an excellent example of the interrelationship between the individualist-feminist view of the church and of the state. In her essay "Sex Slavery," de Cleyre reiterated this two-pronged attack. She wrote: "Let every woman ask herself, 'Why am I the Slave of Man?' ... There are two reasons why, and these are ultimately reducible to a single principle — the authoritarian supreme power GOD-idea, and its two instruments: the Church — that is, the priests — and the State — that is, the legislators."

Wendy McElroy

Freedom, Feminism and the State

The Economic Tendency of Freethought

Friends, — on page 286, Belford-Clarke edition, of the “Rights of Man,” the words which I propose as a text for this discourse may be found. Alluding to the change in the condition of France brought about by the Revolution of '93, Thomas Paine says:

“The mind of the nation had changed beforehand, and a new order of things had naturally followed a new order of thoughts.”

Two hundred and eighty-nine years ago, a man, a student, a scholar, a thinker, a philosopher, was roasted alive for the love of God and the preservation of the authority of the Church; and as the hungry flames curled round the crisping flesh of martyred Bruno, licking his blood with their wolfish tongues, they shadowed forth the immense vista of “a new order of things”: they lit the battle-ground where Freedom fought her first successful revolt against authority.

That battle-ground was eminently one of thought. Religious freedom was the rankling question of the day. “Liberty of conscience! Liberty of conscience! Non-interference between worshipper and worshipped!” That was the voice that cried out of dungeons and dark places, from under the very foot of prince and ecclesiastic. And why? Because the authoritative despotisms of that day were universally ecclesiastic despotisms; because Church aggression was grinding every human right beneath its heel, and every other minor oppressor was but a tool in the hands of the priesthood; because Tyranny was growing towards its ideal and crushing out of existence the very citadel of Liberty, — individuality of thought; Ecclesiasticism had a corner on ideas.

But individuality is a thing that cannot be killed. Quietly it may be, but just as certainly, silently, perhaps, as the growth of a blade of grass, it offers its perpetual and unconquerable protest against the dictates of Authority. And this silent, unconquerable, menacing thing, that balked God, provoked him to the use of rack, thumb-screw, stock, hanging, drowning, burning, and other instruments of “infinite mercy,” in the seventeenth century fought a successful battle against that authority which sought to control this fortress of freedom. It established its right to be. It overthrew that portion of government which attempted to guide the brains of men. It “broke the corner.” It declared and maintained the anarchy, or non-rulership, of thought.

Now you who so fear the word an-arche, remember! the whole combat of the seventeenth century, of which you are justly proud, and to which you never tire of referring, was waged for the sole purpose of realizing anarchism in the realm of thought.

It was not an easy struggle, — this battle of the quiet thinkers against those who held all the power, and all the force of numbers, and all of the strength of tortures! It was not easy for them to speak out of the midst of faggot flames, "We believe differently, and we have the right". But on their side stood Truth! And there lies more inequality between her and Error, more strength for Truth, more weakness for Falsehood, than all the fearful disparity of power that lies between the despot and the victim. So theirs was the success. So they paved the way for the grand political combat of the eighteenth century.

Mark you! The seventeenth century made the eighteenth possible, for it was the "new order of thoughts," which gave birth to a "new order of things". Only by deposing priests, only by rooting out their authority, did it become logical to attack the tyranny of kings: for, under the old regime, kingcraft had ever been the tool of priestcraft, and in the order of things but a secondary consideration. But with the downfall of the latter, kingcraft rose into prominence as the pre-eminent despot, and against the pre-eminent despot revolt always arises.

The leaders of that revolt were naturally those who carried the logic of their freethought into the camp of the dominant oppressor; who thought, spoke, wrote freely of the political fetich, as their predecessors had of the religious mockery; who did not waste their time hugging themselves in the camps of dead enemies, but accepted the live issue of the day, pursued the victories of Religion's martyrs, and carried on the war of Liberty in those lines most necessary to the people at the time and place. The result was the overthrow of the principle of kingcraft. (Not that all kingdoms have been overthrown, but find me one in a hundred of the inhabitants of a kingdom who will not laugh at the farce of the "divine appointment" of monarchs.) So wrought the new order of thoughts.

I do not suppose for a moment that Giordano Bruno or Martin Luther foresaw the immense scope taken in by their doctrine of individual judgment. From the experience of men up to that date it was simply impossible that they could foresee its tremendous influence upon the action of the eighteenth century, much less upon the nineteenth. Neither was it possible that those bold writers who attacked the folly of "hereditary government" should calculate the effects which certainly followed as

their thoughts took form and shape in the social body. Neither do I believe it possible that any brain that lives can detail the working of a thought into the future, or push its logic to an ultimate. But that many who think, or think they think, do not carry their syllogisms even to the first general conclusion, I am also forced to believe. If they did, the free-thinkers of today would not be digging, mole-like, through the substratum of dead issues; they would not waste their energies gathering the ashes of fires burnt out two centuries ago; they would not lance their shafts at that which is already bleeding at the arteries; they would not range battalions of brains against a crippled ghost that is “laying” itself as fast as it decently can, while a monster neither ghostly nor yet like the rugged Russian bear, the armed rhinoceros, or the Hyrcan tiger, but rather like a terrible anaconda, steel-muscled and iron-jawed, is winding its horrible folds around the human bodies of the world, and breathing its devouring breath into the faces of children. If they did, they would understand that the paramount question of the day is not political, is not religious, but is economic. That the crying-out demand of today is for a circle of principles that shall forever make it impossible for one man to control another by controlling the means of his existence. They would realize that, unless the freethought movement has a practical utility in rendering the life of man more bearable, unless it contains a principle which, worked out, will free him from the all-oppressive tyrant, it is just as complete and empty a mockery as the Christian miracle or Pagan myth. Eminently is this the age of utility; and the freethinker who goes to the Hovel of Poverty with metaphysical speculations as to the continuity of life, the transformation of matter, etc.; who should say, “My dear friend, your Christian brother is mistaken; you are not doomed to an eternal hell; your condition here is your misfortune and can’t be helped, but when you are dead, there’s an end of it,” is of as little use in the world as the most irrational religionist. To him would the hovel justly reply: “Unless you can show me something in freethought which commends itself to the needs of the race, something which will adjust my wrongs, ‘put down the mighty from his seat,’ then go sit with priest and king, and wrangle out your metaphysical opinions with those who mocked our misery before.”

The question is, does freethought contain such a principle? And right here permit me to introduce a sort of supplementary text, taken, I think, from a recent letter of Cardinal Manning, but if not Cardinal Manning,

then some other of the various dunce-capped gentlemen who recently "biled" over the Bruno monument.

Says the Cardinal: "Freethought leads to Atheism, to the destruction of social and civil order, and to the overthrow of government." I accept the gentleman's statement; I credit him with much intellectual acumen for perceiving that which many freethinkers have failed to perceive: accepting it, I shall do my best to prove it, and then endeavor to show that this very iconoclastic principle is the salvation of the economic slave and the destruction of the economic tyrant.

First: does freethought lead to Atheism?

Freethought, broadly defined, is the right to believe as the evidence, coming in contact with the mind, forces it to believe. This implies the admission of any and all evidence bearing upon any subject which may come up for discussion. Among the subjects that come up for discussion, the moment so much is admitted, is the existence of a God.

Now, the idea of God is, in the first place, an exceeding contradiction. The sign God, so Deists tell us, was invented to express the inexpressible, the incomprehensible and infinite! Then they immediately set about defining it. These definitions prove to be about as self-contradictory and generally conflicting as the original absurdity. But there is a particular set of attributes which form a sort of common ground for all these definitions. They tell us that God is possessed of supreme wisdom, supreme justice, and supreme power. In all the catalogue of creeds, I never yet heard of one that had not for its nucleus unlimited potency.

Now, let us take the deist upon his own ground and prove to him either that his God is limited as to wisdom, or limited as to justice, or limited as to power, or else there is no such thing as justice.

First, then, God, being all-just, wishes to do justice; being all-wise, knows what justice is; being all-powerful, can do justice. Why then injustice? Either your God can do justice and won't or doesn't know what justice is, or he can not do it. The immediate reply is: "What appears to be injustice in our eyes, in the sight of omniscience may be justice. God's ways are not our ways."

Oh, but if he is the all-wise pattern, they should be; what is good enough for God ought to be good enough for man; but what is too mean for man won't do in a God. Else there is no such thing as justice or injustice, and every murder, every robbery, every lie, every crime in the

calendar is right and upon that one premise of supreme authority you upset every fact in existence.

What right have you to condemn a murderer if you assume him necessary to "God's plan"? What logic can command the return of stolen property, or the branding of a thief, if the Almighty decreed it? Yet here, again, the Deist finds himself in a dilemma, for to suppose crime necessary to God's purpose is to impeach his wisdom or deny his omnipotence by limiting him as to means. The whole matter, then, hinges upon the one attribute of authority of the central idea of God.

But, you say, what has all this to do with the economic tendency of freethought? Everything. For upon that one idea of supreme authority is based every tyranny that was ever formulated. Why? Because, if God is, no human being no thing that lives, ever had a right! He simply had a privilege, bestowed, granted, conferred, gifted to him, for such a length of time as God sees fit.

This is the logic of my textator, the logic of Catholicism, the only logic of Authoritarianism. The Catholic Church says: "You who are blind, be grateful that you can hear: God could have made you deaf as well. You who are starving, be thankful that you can breathe; God could deprive you of air as well as food. You who are sick, be grateful that you are not dead: God is very merciful to let you live at all. Under all times and circumstances take what you can get, and be thankful." These are the beneficences, the privileges, given by Authority.

Note the difference between a right and a privilege. A right, in the abstract, is a fact; it is not a thing to be given, established, or conferred; it is. Of the exercise of a right power may deprive me; of the right itself, never. Privilege, in the abstract, does not exist; there is no such thing. Rights recognized, privilege is destroyed.

But, in the practical, the moment you admit a supreme authority, you have denied rights. Practically the supremacy has all the rights, and no matter what the human race possesses, it does so merely at the caprice of that authority. The exercise of the respiratory function is not a right, but a privilege granted by God; the use of the soil is not a right, but a gracious allowance of Deity; the possession of product as the result of labor is not a right, but a boon bestowed. And the thievery of pure air, the withholding of land from use, the robbery of toil, are not wrongs (for if you have no rights, you cannot be wronged), but benign blessings bestowed by "the Giver of all Good" upon the air-thief, the landlord, and the labor-robber.

Hence the freethinker who recognizes the science of astronomy, the science of mathematics, and the equally positive and exact science of justice, is logically forced to the denial of supreme authority. For no human being who observes and reflects can admit a supreme tyrant and preserve his self-respect. No human mind can accept the dogma of divine despotism and the doctrine of eternal justice at the same time; they contradict each other, and it takes two brains to hold them. The cardinal is right: freethought does logically lead to atheism, if by atheism he means the denial of supreme authority.

I will now take his third statement, leaving the second for the present; freethought, he says, leads to the overthrow of government. I am sensible that the majority of you will be ready to indignantly deny the cardinal's asseveration; I know that the most of my professedly atheistic friends shrink sensitively from the slightest allusion that sounds like an attack on government; I am aware that there are many of you who could eagerly take this platform to speak upon "the glorious rights and privileges of American citizenship"; to expatiate upon that "noble bulwark of our liberties — the constitution"; to defend "that peaceful weapon of redress, the ballot"; to soar off rhapsodically about that "starry banner that floats 'over the land of the free and the home of the brave.'" We are so free! and so brave! We don't hang Brunos at the stake any more for holding heretical opinions on religious subjects. No! But we imprison men for discussing the social question, and we hang men for discussing the economic question! We are so very free and so very brave in this country! "Ah"! we say in our nineteenth century freedom (?) and bravery (?), "it was a weak God, a poor God, a miserable, quaking God, whose authority had to be preserved by the tortuous death of a creature!" Aye! the religious question is dead, and the stake is no longer fashionable. But is it a strong State, a brave State, a conscience-proud State, whose authority demands the death of five creatures? Is the scaffold better than the faggot? Is it a very free mind which will read that infamous editorial in the Chicago "Herald": "It is not necessary to hold that Parsons was legally, rightfully, or wisely hanged: he was mightily hanged. The State, the sovereign, need give no reasons; the State need abide by no law; the State is the law!" — to read that and applaud, and set the Cain-like curse upon your forehead and the red "damned spot" upon your hand? Do you know what you do? — Craven, you worship the fiend, Authority, again! True, you have not the ghosts, the incantations, the paraphernalia and mummary of the Church. No: but you have the

“precedents,” the “be it enacteds,” the red-tape, the official uniforms of the State; and you are just as bad a slave to statecraft as your Irish Catholic neighbor is to popecraft. Your Government becomes your God, from whom you accept privileges, and in whose hands all rights are vested. Once more the individual has no rights; once more intangible, irresponsible authority assumes the power of deciding what is right and what is wrong. Once more the race must labor under just such restricted conditions as the law — the voice of the Authority, the governmental-ist’s bible-shall dictate. Once more it says: “You who have not meat, be grateful that you have bread; many are not allowed even so much. You who work sixteen hours a day, be glad it is not twenty; many have not the privilege to work. You who have not fuel, be thankful that you have shelter; many walk the street! And you, street-walkers, be grateful that there are well-lighted dens of the city; in the country you might die upon the roadside. Goaded human race! Be thankful for your goad. Be submissive to the Lord, and kiss the hand that lashes you!” Once more misery is the diet of the many, while the few receive, in addition to their rights, those rights of their fellows which government has wrested from them. Once more the hypothesis is that the Government, or Authority, or God in his other form, owns all the rights, and grants privileges according to its sweet will.

The freethinker who should determine to question it would naturally suppose that one difficulty in the old investigation was removed. He would say, “at least this thing Government possesses the advantage of being of the earth, — earthy. This is something I can get hold of, argue, reason, discuss with. God was an indefinable, arbitrary, irresponsible something in the clouds, to whom I could not approach nearer than to his agent, the priest. But this dictator surely I shall be able to meet it on something like possible ground.” Vain delusion! Government is as unreal, as intangible, as unapproachable as God. Try it, if you don’t believe it. Seek through the legislative halls of America and find, if you can, the Government. In the end you will be doomed to confer with the agent, as before. Why, you have the statutes! Yes, but the statutes are not the government; where is the power that made the statutes? Oh, the legislators! Yes, but the legislator, per se, has no more power to make a law for me than I for him. I want the power that gave him the power. I shall talk with him; I go to the White House; I say: “Mr. Harrison, are you the government?” “No, madam, I am its representative.” “Well, where is the principal?—Who is the government?” “The people of the United

States." "The whole people?" "The whole people." "You, then, are the representative of the people of the United States. May I see your certificate of authorization?" "Well, no; I have none. I was elected." "Elected by whom? the whole people?" "Oh, no. By some of the people, — some of the voters." (Mr. Harrison being a pious Presbyterian, he would probably add: "The majority vote of the whole was for another man, but I had the largest electoral vote.") "Then you are the representative of the electoral college, not of the whole people, nor the majority of the people, nor even a majority of the voters. But suppose the largest number of ballots cast had been for you: you would represent the majority of the voters, I suppose. But the majority, sir, is not a tangible thing; it is an unknown quantity. An agent is usually held accountable to his principals. If you do not know the individuals who voted for you, then you do not know for whom you are acting, nor to whom you are accountable. If any body of persons has delegated to you any authority, the disposal of any right or part of a right (supposing a right to be transferable), you must have received it from the individuals composing that body; and you must have some means of learning who those individuals are, or you cannot know for whom you act, and you are utterly irresponsible as an agent.

"Furthermore, such a body of voters can not give into your charge any rights but their own; by no possible jugglery of logic can they delegate the exercise of any function which they themselves do not control. If any individual on earth has a right to delegate his powers to whomsoever he chooses, then every other individual has an equal right; and if each has an equal right, then none can choose an agent for another, without that other's consent. Therefore, if the power of government resides in the whole people, and out of that whole all but one elected you as their agent, you would still have no authority whatever to act for the one. The individuals composing the minority who did not appoint you have just the same rights and powers as those composing the majority who did; and if they prefer not to delegate them at all, then neither you, nor any one, has any authority whatever to coerce them into accepting you, or any one, as their agent — for upon your own basis the coercive authority resides, not in the majority, not in any proportion of the people, but in the whole people."

Hence "the overthrow of government" as a coercive power, thereby denying God in another form.

Upon this overthrow follows, the Cardinal says, the disruption of social and civil order!

Oh! it is amusing to hear those fellows rave about social order! I could laugh to watch them as they repeat the cry, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" "Down on your knees and adore this beautiful statue of Order," but that I see this hideous, brainless, disproportion idol come rolled on the wheels of Juggernaut over the weak and the helpless, the sorrowful and the despairing. Hate burns, then, where laughter dies.

Social Order! Not long ago I saw a letter from a young girl to a friend; a young girl whose health had been broken behind a counter, where she stood eleven and twelve hours a day, six days in the week, for the magnificent sum of \$5. The letter said: "Can't you help me to a position? My friends want me to marry a man I do not like, because he has money. Can't you help me? I can sew, or keep books. I will even try clerking again rather than that!" Social Order! When the choice for a young girl lies between living by inches and dying by yards at manual labor, or becoming the legal property of a man she does not like because he has money!

Walk up Fifth Avenue in New York some hot summer day, among the magnificent houses of the rich; hear your footsteps echo for blocks with the emptiness of it! Look at places going to waste, space, furniture, draperies, elegance, — all useless. Then take a car down town; go among the homes of the producers of that idle splendor; find six families living in a five-room house, — the sixth dwelling in the cellar. Space is not wasted here, — these human vermin rub each other's elbows in the stifling narrows; furniture is not wasted, — these sit upon the floor; no echoing emptiness, no idle glories! No — but wasting, strangling, choking, vicious human life! Dearth of vitality there — dearth of space for it here! This is social order!

Next winter, when the 'annual output' of coal has been mined, when the workmen are clenching their hard fists with impotent anger, when the coal in the ground lies useless, hark to the cry that will rise from the freezing western prairies, while the shortened commodity goes up, up, up, eight, nine, ten, eleven dollars a ton; and while the syndicate's pockets are filling, the grave-yards fill, and fill. Moralize on the preservation of social order!

Go back to President Grant's administration, — that very "pure republican" administration; — see the settlers of the Mussel Slough compelled to pay thirty-five, forty dollars an acre for the land reclaimed from almost

worthlessness by hard labor, — and to whom? To a corporation of men who never saw it! whose “grant” lay a hundred miles away, but who, for reasons of their own, saw fit to hire the “servants of the people” to change it so. See those who refused to pay it shot down by order of “the State”; watch their blood smoke upward to the heavens, sealing the red seal of justice against their murderers; and then — watch a policeman arrest a shoeless tramp for stealing a pair of boots. Say to your self, this is civil order and must be preserved. Go talk with political leaders, big or little, on methods of “making the slate,” and “railroading” it through the ward caucus or the national convention. Muse on that “peaceful weapon of redress,” the ballot. Consider the condition of the average “American sovereign” and of his “official servant,” and prate then of civil order.

Subvert the social and civil order! Aye, I would destroy, to the last vestige, this mockery of order, this travesty upon justice! Break up the home? Yes, every home that rests on slavery! Every marriage that represents the sale and transfer of the individuality of one of its parties to the other! Every institution, social or civil, that stands between man and his right; every tie that renders one a master, another a serf; every law, every statute, every be-it-enacted that represents tyranny; everything you call American privilege that can only exist at the expense of international right. Now cry out, “Nihilist — disintegrationist!” Say that I would isolate humanity, reduce society to its elemental state, make men savage! It is not true. But rather than see this devastating, cankering, enslaving system you call social order go on, rather than help to keep alive the accursed institutions of Authority, I would help to reduce every fabric in the social structure to its native element.

But is it true that freedom means disintegration? Only to that which is bad. Only to that which ought to disintegrate.

What is the history of free thought?

Is it not so, that since we have Anarchy there, since all the children of the brain are legitimate, that there has been less waste of intellectual energy, more cooperation in the scientific world, truer economy in utilizing the mentalities of men, than there ever was, or ever could be, under authoritative dominion of the church? Is it not true that with the liberty of thought, Truth has been able to prove herself without the aid of force? Does not error die from want of vitality when there is no force to keep it alive? Is it not true that natural attractions have led men into associative groups, who can best follow their chosen paths of thought, and give the benefit of their studies to mankind with better economy

than if some coercive power had said, “You think in this line — you in that”; or what the majority had by ballot decided it was best to think about?

I think it is true. Follow your logic out; can you not see that true economy lies in Liberty, — whether it be in thought or action? It is not slavery that has made men unite for cooperative effort. It is not slavery that produced the means of transportation, communication, production, and exchange, and all the thousand and one economic, or what ought to be economic, contrivances of civilization. No — nor is it government. It is Self-interest. And would not self-interest exist if that institution which stands between man and his right to the free use of the soil were annihilated? Could you not see the use of a bank if the power which renders it possible for the national banks to control land, production and everything else, were broken down?

Do you suppose the producers of the east and west couldn’t see the advantage of a railroad, if the authority which makes a systematizer like Gould or Vanderbilt a curse were swept away? Do you imagine that government has a corner on ideas, now that the Church is overthrown; and that the people could not learn the principles of economy, if this intangible giant which has robbed and slaughtered them, wasted their resources and distributed opportunities so unjustly, were destroyed? I don’t think so. I believe that legislators as a rule have been monuments of asinine stupidity, whose principal business has been to hinder those who were not stupid, and get paid for doing it. I believe that the so-called brainy financial men would rather buy the legislators than be the legislators; and the real thinkers, the genuine improvers of society, have as little to do with law and politics as they conveniently can.

I believe that “Liberty is the mother, not the daughter, of Order.”

“But,” some one will say, “what of the criminals? Suppose a man steals.” In the first place, a man won’t steal, ordinarily, unless that which he steals is something he can not as easily get without stealing; in liberty the cost of stealing would involve greater difficulties than producing, and consequently he would not be apt to steal. But suppose a man steals. Today you go to a representative of that power which has robbed you of the earth, of the right of free contract of the means of exchange, taxes you for everything you eat or wear (the meanest form of robbery), — you go to him for redress from a thief! It is about as logical as the Christian lady whose husband had been “removed” by Divine Providence, and who thereupon prayed to said Providence to “comfort the widow

and the fatherless." In freedom we would not institute a wholesale robber to protect us from petty larceny. Each associative group would probably adopt its own methods of resisting aggression, that being the only crime. For myself, I think criminals should be treated as sick people.

"But suppose you have murderers, brutes, all sorts of criminals. Are you not afraid to lose the restraining influence of the law?" First, I think it can be shown that the law makes ten criminals where it restrains one. On that basis it would not, as a matter of policy merely, be an economical institution. Second, this is not a question of expediency, but of right. In antebellum days the proposition was not, Are the blacks good enough to be free? but, Have they the right? So today the question is not, Will outrages result from freeing humanity? but, Has it the right to life, the means of life, the opportunities of happiness?

In the transition epoch, surely crimes will come. Did the seed of tyranny ever bear good fruit? And can you expect Liberty to undo in a moment what Oppression has been doing for ages? Criminals are the crop of depots, as much a necessary expression of the evil in society as an ulcer is of disease in the blood; and so long as the taint of the poison remains, so long there will be crimes.

"For it must needs that offences come, but woe to him through whom the offence cometh." The crimes of the future are the harvests sown of the ruling classes of the present. Woe to the tyrant who shall cause the offense!

Sometimes I dream of this social change. I get a streak of faith in Evolution, and the good in man. I paint a gradual slipping out of the now, to that beautiful then, where there are neither kings, presidents, landlords, national bankers, stockbrokers, railroad magnates, patentright monopolists, or tax and title collectors; where there are no over-stocked markets or hungry children, idle counters and naked creatures, splendor and misery, waste and need. I am told this is farfetched idealism, to paint this happy, povertyless, crimeless, diseaseless world; I have been told I "ought to be behind the bars" for it.

Remarks of that kind rather destroy the white streak of faith. I lose confidence in the slipping process, and am forced to believe that the rulers of the earth are sowing a fearful wind, to reap a most terrible whirlwind. When I look at this poor, bleeding, wounded World, this world that has suffered so long, struggled so much, been scourged so fiercely, thorn-pierced so deeply, crucified so cruelly, I can only shake my head and remember:

The giant is blind, but he's thinking: and his locks are growing, fast.

Events Are the True Schoolmasters

Voltairine de Cleyre

January 1907

I count it as one of the best fortunes of my life that in my early days as an anarchist it was my privilege to know Dyer D. Lum. These thirteen years he is in his grave, and yet whenever editors and contributors of anarchist journals fall to denouncing the actions of the unwise, the ebullitions of the mass, I hear his voice, as yesterday, saying in his short, brusque way: "Events are the true schoolmasters."

There was in his day, as there is now, a certain percentage of propagandists who think that they possess the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth (a perhaps enviable condition of mind, but certainly an intolerant one). They appear to think that by the application of certain abstract principles they have been able to chalk-line the course of progress, and that if it be strictly adhered to an unquestionable triumph of these principles lies straight ahead. They are essentially reasonable, cool persons, somewhat over-impressed with their lack of sentimentality, having definite "plans of campaign" in their heads. The trouble is that when the plan is put in action, it meets with the difficulties the mathematical builders of Laputa met when they put up a wall. The planners never look to right or left of the chalk-line to measure the quantities with which they are dealing, or get a relative estimate of their own forces compared with the forces they are endeavoring to guide so straightly. All at once some one of these unreckoned, undisciplined forces flies right across the well-laid-out path; helter-skelter, topsy-turvy goes all

the patient work, and the “plan of campaign” is smitten in the house of its friends. Do the campaigners give a look around, now, and take in the situation? Do they begin to recognize that their little labored ant-track was just a bit of a groove bearing relation to the path of progress, about as the rut of a toy cart-wheel to the whole road; that the road is by no means straight, but full of hills and holes and curves and angles according to the obstacles met and the powers of the moving quantity? Not they! The plan is all right; so much the worse for the campaign if it disregards the chalk! The planners adjust their blinkers, give a look in their pocket-mirrors that they may behold “the face of Anarchy” undegenerate, lift up their voices, call for clean water, and wash their hands, publicly, clean—very clean. They have nothing in common with these monsters of the depths which the Frankenstein of the State creates for its own undoing. Take notice, Frankenstein; if you lack epithets to vilify them we, the plumb-line anarchists, will supplement your stock. Nothing in common with these unregulated, undisciplined minds which are devoid of logic and filled only with unreasoning sentiments and the desire for foolish and inconsequent talk. Take notice, Prosecutor; if you lack condemnatory arguments we will furnish them. “Our ways are ways of pleasantness, and all our paths are paths of peace.”

What a very pretty thing progress would be if all her ways were likewise; all will admit that unconditionally. However, progress has to do with all mankind, not alone with the calm, the wise, and the patient. There is youth in the world, and youth is generally neither calm nor patient; it does not like to sit in the rear rows and listen to mature considerations rendered in the tone of a stock-market quotation concerning questions that are burning up its heart, itself silent; if it did, it might learn to be wise and calm,—and also ashy and inert. There is feeling in the world, and a very great quantity of it; and those who do the suffering and the sympathizing may be expected to say and to do many things not within the limits of logic. Sometimes these deeds take violent forms, sometimes they take merely foolish forms; but “Events are the true schoolmasters,” and in the twenty years that have elapsed since 1886, we have seen the wisdom of the wise confounded more than once, and the action of the resolute, the desperate and the foolish break the line of the opposition and make room for wider action and farther-reaching effort.

Through witnessing these unexpected acts and their still more unanticipated results, I have gradually worked my way to the conviction that,

while I cannot see the logic of forcible physical resistance (entailing perpetual retaliations until one of the offended finally refuses to retaliate), there are others who have reached the opposite conclusions, who will act according to their convictions, and who are quite as much part and parcel of the movement towards human liberty as those who preach peace at all costs; that my part as a social student and lover of freedom is to get as wide an outlook as I can, endeavor to appreciate the relative values of contending and interplaying forces, try to detect among the counter-movements the net results, the general forward impulse cutting new barriers, and to move with it, quite confident that there is room and enough for me to hold my individual course within that broad sweep. If someone cuts my course, why, then, I suppose I am cutting his at the same time. No doubt the believers in forcible resistance feel that those of us who eschew force and preach peace are on the wrong track; no doubt the censorious among them think we are a nuisance, a drawback, a damage to the movement, in fact, no anarchists at all. But let us neither read out nor be read out. The ideal of society without government allures us all; we believe in its possibility and that makes us anarchists. But since its realization is in the future, and since the future holds unknown factors, it is nearly certain that the free society of the unborn will realize itself according to no man's present forecast, whether individualist, communist, mutualist, collectivist, or what-not. Such forecasts are useful as centerizing points of striving only. Vast and vague the ideal persists, and a great social drift is setting towards it; somewhat of conscious anarchism therein, but infinitely more of the unconscious anarchism which is in all men. As well "put a bit in the jaws of the sea," as try to control the movements of that great tide. Then why exercise ourselves because someone conceived a different plan of free association from ours? Why, since no one can know a perfect method, nor even act always according to the best method he himself conceives, why fly to the defense of progress and protect destiny? It is a little too much like a Christian Inquisitor protecting the Almighty against heretics.

I believe that if those who feel called upon to act as guardians of the anarchist movement once realized how little it is in need of their guardianship, what a trifle each individual contribution is, even theirs, they would be content to fight the battle with the enemy as it develops (not as they preconceive it ought to develop); and not think it necessary to turn about and add their stripes to those who will be quite sufficiently

beaten by the State, merely because such have not waged war as per the cold-blood, wisdom and experience of the gray heads of others.

Mother Earth Vol I, No. 11, January 1907; republished in Exquisite Rebel: The Essays of Voltairine de Cleyre—Feminist, Anarchist, Genius by State University of New York Press

Francisco Ferrer

Voltairine de Cleyre

In all unsuccessful social upheavals there are two terrors: the Red — that is, the people, the mob; the White — that is, the reprisal.

When a year ago to-day the lightning of the White Terror shot out of that nethermost blackness of Social Depth, the Spanish Torture House, and laid in the ditch of Montjuich a human being who but a moment before had been the personification of manhood, in the flower of life, in the strength and pride of a balanced intellect, full of the purpose of a great and growing undertaking, — that of the Modern Schools, — humanity at large received a blow in the face which it could not understand.

Stunned, bewildered, shocked, it recoiled and stood gaping with astonishment. How to explain it? The average individual — certainly the average individual in America — could not believe it possible that any group of persons calling themselves a government, let it be of the worst and most despotic, could slay a man for being a teacher, a teacher of modern sciences, a builder of hygienic schools, a publisher of text-books. No: they could not believe it. Their minds staggered back and shook refusal. It was not so; it could not be so. The man was shot, — that was sure. He was dead, and there was no raising him out of the ditch to question him. The Spanish government had certainly proceeded in an unjustifiable manner in court-martialing him and sentencing him without giving him a chance at defense. But surely he had been guilty of something; surely he must have rioted, or instigated riot, or done some desperate act of rebellion; for never could it be that in the twentieth century a country of Europe could kill a peaceful man whose aim in life was to educate children in geography, arithmetic, geology, physics, chemistry, singing, and languages.

No: it was not possible! — And, for all that, it was possible; it was done, on the 13th of October, one year ago to-day, in the face of Europe, standing with tied hands to look on at the murder.

And from that day on, controversy between the awakened who understood, the reactionists who likewise understood, and their followers on both sides who have half understood, has surged up and down and left confusion pretty badly confounded in the mind of him who did not understand, but sought to.

The men who did him to death, and the institutions they represent have done all in their power to create the impression that Ferrer was a believer in violence, a teacher of the principles of violence, a doer of acts of violence, and an instigator of widespread violence perpetrated by a mass of people. In support of the first they have published reports purporting to be his own writings, have pretended to reproduce seditious pictures from the walls of his class-rooms, have declared that he was seen mingling with the rebels during the Catalonian uprising of last year, and that upon trial he was found guilty of having conceived and launched the Spanish rebellion against the Moroccan war. And that his death was a just act of reprisal.

On the other hand, we have had a storm of indignant voices clamoring in his defense, alternately admitting and denying him to be a revolutionist, alternately contending that his schools taught social rebellion and that they taught nothing but pure science; we have had workmen demonstrating and professors and litterateurs protesting on very opposite grounds; and almost none were able to give definite information for the faith that was in them.

And indeed it has been very difficult to obtain exact information, and still is so. After a year's lapse, it is yet not easy to get the facts disentangled from the fancies, — the truths from the lies, and above all from the half-lies.

And even when we have the truths as to the facts, it is still difficult to value them, because of American' ignorance of Spanish ignorance. Please understand the phrase. America has not too much to boast of in the way of its learning; but yet it has that much of common knowledge and common education that it does not enter into our minds to conceive of a population 68% of which are unable to read and write, and a good share of the remaining 32% can only read, not write; neither does it at all enter our heads to think that of this 32% of the better informed, the

most powerful contingent is composed of those whose distinct, avowed, and deliberate purpose it is to keep the ignorant ignorant.

Whatever may be the sins of Government in this country, or of the Churches — and there are plenty of such sins — at least they have not (save in the case of negro slaves) constituted themselves a conspiratorial force to keep out enlightenment, — to prevent the people from learning to read and write, or to acquire whatever scientific knowledge their economic circumstances permitted them to. What the unconscious conspiracy of economic circumstance has done, and what conscious manipulations the Government school is guilty of, to render higher education a privilege of the rich and a maintainer of injustice is another matter. But it cannot be charged that the rulers of America seek to render the people illiterate. People, therefore, who have grown up in a general atmosphere of thought which regards the government as a provider of education, even as a compeller of education, do not, unless their attention is drawn to the facts, conceive of a state of society in which government is a hostile force, opposed to the enlightenment of the people, — its politicians exercising all their ingenuity to sidetrack the demand of the people for schools. How much less do they conceive the hostile force and power of a Church, having behind it an unbroken descent from feudal ages, whose direct interest it is to maintain a closed monopoly of learning, and to keep out of general circulation all scientific information which would tend to destroy the superstitions whereby it thrives.

I say that the American people in general are not informed as to these conditions, and therefore the phenomenon of a teacher killed for instituting and maintaining schools staggers their belief. And when they read the assertions of those who defend the murder, that it was because his schools were instigating the overthrow of social order in Spain, they naturally exclaim: "Ah, that explains it! The man taught sedition, rebellion, riot, in his schools! That is the reason."

Now the truth is, that what Ferrer was teaching in his schools was really instigating the overthrow of the social order of Spain; furthermore it was not only instigating it, but it was making it as certain as the still coming of the daylight out of the night of the east. But not by the teaching of riot; of the use of dagger, bomb, or knife; but by the teaching of the same sciences which are taught in our public schools, through a generally diffused knowledge of which the power of Spain's despotic Church must crumble away. Likewise it was laying the primary founda-

tion for the overthrow of such portions of the State organization as exist by reason of the general ignorance of the people.

The Social Order of Spain ought to be overthrown; must be overthrown, will be overthrown; and Ferrer was doing a mighty work in that direction. The men who killed him knew and understood it well. And they consciously killed him for what he really did; but they have let the outside world suppose they did it, for what he did not do. Knowing there are no words so hated by all governments as "sedition and rebellion," knowing that such words will make the most radical of governments align itself with the most despotic at once, knowing there is nothing which so offends the majority of conservative and peace-loving people everywhere as the idea of violence unordered by authority, they have wilfully created the impression that Ferrer's schools were places where children and youths were taught to handle weapons, and to make ready for armed attacks on the government.

They have, as I said before, created this impression in various ways; they have pointed to the fact that the man who in 1906 made the attack on Alfonso's life, had acted as a translator of books used by Ferrer in his schools; they have scattered over Europe and America pictures purporting to be reproductions of drawings in prominent wall-spaces in his schools, recommending the violent overthrow of the government.

As to the first of these accusations, I shall consider it later in the lecture; but as to the last, it should be enough to remind any person with an ordinary amount of reflection, that the schools were public places open to any one, as our schools are; and that if any such pictures had existed, they would have been sufficient cause for shutting up the schools and incarcerating the founder within a day after their appearance on the walls. The Spanish Government has that much sense of how to preserve its own existence, that it would not allow such pictures to hang in a public place for one day. Nor would books preaching sedition have been permitted to be published or circulated. — All this is foolish dust sought to be thrown in foolish eyes.

No; the real offense was the real thing that he did. And in order to appreciate its enormity, from the Spanish ruling force's standpoint, let us now consider what that ruling force is, what are the economic and educational conditions of the Spanish people, why and how Ferrer founded the Modern Schools, and what were the subjects taught therein.

Up to the year 1857 there existed no legal provision for general elementary education in Spain. In that year, owing to the liberals having

gotten into power in Madrid, after a bitter contest aroused partially by the general political events of Europe, a law making elementary education compulsory was passed. This was two years before Ferrer's birth.

Now it is one thing for a political party, temporarily in possession of power, to pass a law. It is quite another thing to make that law effective, even when wealth and general sentiment are behind it. But when joined to the fact that there is a strong opposition is added the fact that this opposition is in possession of the greatest wealth of the country, that the people to be benefited are often quite as bitterly opposed to their own enlightenment as those who profit by their ignorance, and that those who do ardently desire their own uplift are extremely poor, the difficulty of practicalizing this educational law is partially appreciated.

Ferrer's own boyhood life is an illustration of how much benefit the children of the peasantry reaped from the educational law. His parents were vine dressers; they were eminently orthodox and believed what their priest (who was probably the only man in the little village of Alella able to read) told them: that the Liberals were the emissaries of Satan and that whatever they did was utterly evil. They wanted no such evil thing as popular education about, and would not that their children should have it. Accordingly, even at 13 years of age, the boy was without education, — a circumstance which in after years made him more anxious that others should not suffer as he had.

It is self-understood that if it was difficult to found schools in the cities where there existed a degree of popular clamor for them, it was next to impossible in the rural districts where people like Ferrer's parents were the typical inhabitants. The best result obtained by this law in the 20 years from 1857 to 1877 was that, out of 16,000,000 people, 4,000,000 were then able to read and write, — 75% remaining illiterate. At the end of 1907 the proportion was altered to 6,000,000 literate out of 18,500,000 population, which may be considered as a fairly correct approximate of the present condition.

One of the very great accounting causes for this situation is the extreme poverty of the mass of the populace. In many districts of Spain a laborer's wages are less than \$1.00 a week, and nowhere do they equal the poorest workman's wages in America. Of course, it is understood that the cost of living is likewise low; but imagine it as low as you please, it is still evident that the income of the workers is too small to permit them to save anything, even from the most frugal living. The dire struggle to secure food, clothing and shelter is such that little en-

ergy is left wherewith to aspire to anything, to demand anything, either for themselves or their children. Unless, therefore, the government provided the buildings, the books, and appliances, and paid the teachers' salaries, it is easy to see that the people most in need of education are least able, and least likely, to provide it for themselves. Furthermore the government itself, unless it can tax the wealthier classes for it, cannot out of such an impoverished source wring sufficient means to provide adequate schools and school equipments.

Now, the wealthiest classes are just the religious orders. According to the statement of Monsignor Jose Valeda de Gunjado, these orders own two-thirds of the money of the country and one-third of the wealth in property. These orders are utterly opposed to all education except such as they themselves furnish — a lamentable travesty on learning.

As a writer who has investigated these conditions personally, observes, in reply to the question, "Does not the Church provide numbers of schools, day and night, at its own expense?" — It does, — unhappily for Spain. It provides schools whose principal aim is to strengthen superstition, follow a mediaeval curriculum, *keep out* scientific light, — and prevent other and better schools from being established.

A Spanish educational journal (*La Escuela Espanola*), not Ferrer's journal, declared in 1907 that these schools were largely "without light or ventilation, dens of death, ignorance, and bad training." It was estimated that 50,000 children died every year in consequence of the mischievous character of the school rooms. And even to schools like these, there were half a million children in Spain who could gain no admittance.

As to the teachers, they are allowed a salary ranging from \$50.00 to \$100.00 a year; but this is provided, not by the State, but through voluntary donations from the parents. So that a teacher, in addition to his legitimate functions, must perform those of collector of his own salary.

Now conceive that he is endeavoring to collect it from parents whose wages amount to two or three dollars a week; and you will not be surprised at the case reported by a Madrid paper in 1903 of a master's having canvassed a district to find how many parents would contribute if he opened a school. Out of one hundred families, three promised their support!

Is it any wonder that the law of compulsory education is a mockery? How could it be anything else?

Now let us look at the products of this popular ignorance, and we shall presently understand why the Church fosters it, why it fights education;

and also why the Catalanian insurrection of 1909, which began as a strike of workers in protest against the Moroccan war, ended in mob attacks upon convents, monasteries, and churches.

I have already quoted the statement of a high Spanish prelate that the religious orders of Spain own two-thirds of the money of Spain, and one-third of the wealth in property. Whether this estimate is precisely correct or not, it is sufficiently near correctness to make us aware that at least a great portion of the wealth of the country has passed into their hands, — a state not widely differing from that existing in France prior to the great Revolution. Before the insurrection of last year, the city of Barcelona alone had 165 convents, many of which were exceedingly rich. The province of Catalonia maintained 2,300 of these institutions. Aside from these religious orders with their accumulations of wealth, the Church itself, the united body of priests not in orders, is immensely wealthy. Conceive that in the Cathedral at Toledo there is an image of the Virgin whose wardrobe alone would be sufficient to build hundreds of schools. Imagine that this doll, which is supposed to symbolize the forlorn young woman who in her pain and sorrow and need was driven to seek shelter in a stable, whose life was ever lowly, and who is called the Mother of Sorrows, — imagine that this image of her has become a vulgar coquette sporting a robe where into are sown 85,000 pearls, besides as many more sapphires, amethysts, and diamonds!

Oh, what a decoration for the mother of the Carpenter of Nazareth! What a vision for the dying eyes on the Cross to look forward to! What an outcome of the gospel of salvation free to the poor and lowly, taught by the poorest and the lowliest, — that the humble keeper of the humble household of the despised little village of Judea should be imaged forth as a Queen of Gauds, bedizened with a crown worth \$25,000 and bracelets valued at \$10,000 more. The Virgin Mary, the Daughter of the Stable, transformed into a diamond merchant's showcase!

And this in the midst of men and women working for just enough to keep the skin upon the bone; in the midst of children who are denied the primary necessities of childhood.

Now I ask you, when the fury of these people burst, as under the provocation they received it was inevitable that it should burst, was it any wonder that it manifested itself in mob violence against the institutions which mock their suffering by this useless, senseless, criminal waste of wealth in the face of utter need?

Will some one now whisper in our ears that there are women in America who decorate themselves with more jewels than the Virgin of Toledo, and throw away the price of a school on a useless decoration in a single night; while within a radius of five miles from them there are also uneducated children, for whom our School Boards can provide no place?

Yes, it is so; let them remember the mobs of Barcelona!

And let me remember I am talking about Spain!

The question naturally intrudes, How does the Church, how do the religious orders manage to accumulate such wealth? Remember first that they are old, and of unbroken continuance for hundreds of years. That various forms of acquisition, in operation for centuries, would produce immense accumulations, even supposing nothing but legitimate purchases and gifts. But when we consider the actual means whereby money is daily absorbed from the people by these institutions we receive a shock which sets all our notions of the triumph of Modern Science topsy-turvy.

It is almost impossible to realize, and yet it is true, that the Spanish Church still deals in that infamous "graft" against which Martin Luther hurled the splendid force of his wrath four hundred years ago. The Church of Spain still sells indulgences. Every Catholic bookstore, and every priest, has them for sale. They are called "bulas." Their prices range from about 15 to 25 cents, and they constitute an elastic excuse for doing pretty much what the possessor pleases to do, providing it is not a capital crime, for a definitely named period.

Probably there is no one in America so little able to believe this condition to exist, as the ordinary well-informed Roman Catholic. I have myself listened to priests of the Roman faith giving the conditions on which pardon for venal offenses might be obtained; and they had nothing to do with money. They consisted in saying a certain number of prayers at stated periods, with specified intent. While that may be a very illogical way of putting things together that have no connection, there is nothing in it to offend one's ideas of honesty. The enlightened conscience of an entire mass of people has demanded that a spiritual offense be dealt with by spiritual means. It would revolt at the idea that such grace could be written out on paper and sold either to the highest bidder or for a fixed price.

But now conceive what happens where a people are illiterate, regarding written documents with that superstitious awe which those who cannot read always have for the mysterious language of learning; regarding

them besides with the combination of fear and reverence which the ignorant believer entertains for the visible sign of Supernatural Power, the Power which holds over him the threat of eternal punishment, — and you will have what goes on in Spain. Add to this that such a condition of fear and gullibility on the side of the people, is the great opportunity of the religious “grafter.” Whatever number of honest, self-sacrificing, devoted people may be attracted to the service of the Church, there will certainly be found also, the cheat, the impostor, the searcher for ease and power.

These indulgences, which for 15 or 25 cents pardon the buyer for his past sins, but are good only till he sins again, constitute a species of permission to do what otherwise is forbidden; the most expensive one, the 25c-one, is practically a license to hold stolen property up to a certain amount.

Both rich and poor buy these things, the rich of course paying a good deal more than the stipulated sum. But it hardly requires the statement that an immense number of the very poor buy them also. And from this horrible traffic the Church of Spain annually draws millions.

There are other sources of income such as the sale of scapulars, agnus-deis, charms, and other pieces of trumpery, which goes on all over the Catholic world also, but naturally to no such extent as in Spain, Portugal, and Italy, where popular ignorance may be again measured by the materialism of its religion.

Now, is it reasonable to suppose that the individuals who are thriving upon these sales, want a condition of popular enlightenment? Do they not know how all this traffic would crumble like the ash of a burnt-out fire, once the blaze of science were to flame through Spain? *They EDUCATE!* Yes; they educate the people to believe in these barbaric relics of a dead time, — *for their own material interest*. Spain and Portugal are the last resort of the mediaeval church; the monasticism and the Jesuitry which have been expelled from other European countries, and compelled to withdraw from Cuba and the Philippines, have concentrated there; and there they are making their last fight. There they will go down into their eternal grave; but not till Science has invaded the dark corners of the popular intellect.

The political condition is parallel with the religious condition of the people, with the exception that the State is poor while the Church is rich.

There are some elements in the government which are opposed to the Church religiously, which nevertheless do not wish to see its power as an institution upset, because they foresee that the same people who would overthrow the Church, would later overthrow them. These, too, wish to see the people kept ignorant.

Nevertheless, there have been numerous political rebellions in Spain, having for their object the establishment of a republic.

In 1868 there occurred such a rebellion, under the leadership of Ruiz Zorilla. At that time, Ferrer was not quite 20 years old. He had acquired an education by his own efforts. He was a declared Republican, as it seems that every young, ardent, bright-minded youth, seeing what the condition of his country was, and wishing for its betterment, would be. Zorilla was for a short time Minister of Public Instruction, under the new government, and very zealous for popular education.

Naturally he became an object of admiration and imitation to Ferrer.

In the early eighties, after various fluctuations of political power, Zorilla, who had been absent from Spain, returned to it, and began the labor of converting the soldiers to republicanism. Ferrer was then a director of railways, and of much service to Zorilla in the practical work of organization. In 1885 this movement culminated in an abortive revolution, wherein both Ferrer and Zorilla took active part, and were accordingly compelled to take refuge in France upon the failure of the insurrection.

It is therefore certain that from his entrance into public agitation till the year 1885, Ferrer was an active revolutionary republican, believing in the overthrow of Spanish tyranny by violence.

There is no question that at that time he said and wrote things which, whether we shall consider them justifiable or not, were openly in favor of forcible rebellion. Such utterances charged against him at the alleged trial in 1909, which were really his, were quotations from this period. Remember he was then 26 years old. When the trial occurred, he was 50 years old. What had been his mental evolution during those 24 years?

In Paris, where, with the exception of a short intermission in 1889 when he visited Spain, he remained for about fifteen years, he naturally drifted into a method of making a living quite common to educated exiles in a foreign land; viz., giving private lessons in his native language. But while this is with most a mere temporary makeshift, which they change for something else as soon as they are able, to Ferrer it revealed what his real business in life should be; he found teaching to be his gen-

uine vocation; so much so that he took part in several movements for popular education in Paris, giving much free service.

This participation in the labor of training the mind, which is always a slow and patient matter, began to have its effect on his conceptions of political change. Slowly the idea of a Spain regenerated through the storm blasts of revolution, mightily and suddenly, faded out of his belief, being replaced, probably almost insensibly, by the idea that a thorough educational enlightenment must precede political transformation, if that transformation were to be permanent. This conviction he voiced with strange power and beauty of expression, when he said to his old revolutionary Republican friend, Alfred Naquet: "Time respects those works alone which Time itself has helped to build."

Naquet himself, old and sinking man as he is, is at this day and hour heart and soul for forcible revolution; admitting all the evils which it engenders and all the dangers of miscarriage which accompany it, he still believes, to quote his own words, that "Revolutions are not only the marvelous accoucheurs of societies; they are also fecundating forces. They fructify men's intelligences; and if they determine the final realization of matured evolutions, they also become, through their action on human minds, points of departure for newer evolutions." Yet he, who thus sings the paean of the uprisen people, with a fire of youth and an ardor of love that sound like the singing of some strong young blacksmith marching at the head of an insurgent column, rather than the quavering voice of an old spent man; he, who was the warm personal friend of Ferrer for many years, and who would surely have wished that his ideal love should also have been his friend's love, he expressly declares that Ferrer was of those who feel themselves drawn to the field of preparative labor, making sure the ground over which the Revolution may march to enduring results.

This then was the ripened condition of his mind, especially after the death of Zorilla, and all his subsequent life and labor is explicable only with this understanding of his mental attitude.

In the confusion of deafening voices, it has been declared that not only did he not take part in last year's manifestations, nor instigate them; but that he in fact had become a Tolstoyan, a non-resistant.

This is not true: he undoubtedly understood that the introduction of popular education into Spain means revolt, sooner or later. And he would certainly have been glad to see a successful revolt overthrow the monarchy at Madrid. He did not wish the people to be submissive;

it is one of the fundamental teachings of the schools he founded that the assertive spirit of the child is to be encouraged; that its will is not to be broken; that the sin of other schools is the forcing of obedience. He hoped to help to form a young Spain which would not submit; which would resist, resist consciously, intelligently, steadily. He did not wish to enlighten people merely to render them more sensitive to their pains and deprivations, but that they might so use their enlightenment as to rid themselves of the system of exploitation by Church and State which is responsible for their miseries. By what means they would choose to free themselves, he did not make his affair.

How and when were these schools founded? It was during his long sojourn in Paris, that he had as a private pupil in Spanish, a middle-aged, wealthy, unmarried, Catholic lady. After much conflict over religion between teacher and pupil, the latter modified her orthodoxy greatly; and especially after her journeys to Spain, where she herself saw the condition of public instruction.

Eventually she became interested in Ferrer's conceptions of education, and his desire to establish schools in his own country. And when she died in 1900 (she was then somewhat over 50 years old) she devised a certain part of her property to Ferrer, to be used as he saw fit, feeling assured no doubt that he would see fit to use it not for his personal advantage, but for the purpose so dear to his heart. Which he did.

The bequest amounted to about \$150,000; and the first expenditure was for the establishment of the Modern School of Barcelona, in the year 1901.

It should be said that this was not the first of the Modern School movement in Spain; for previous to that, and for several years, there had sprung up, in various parts of the country, a spontaneous movement towards self-education; a very heroic effort, in a way, considering that the teachers were generally workingmen who had spent their day in the shops, and were using the remainder of their exhausted strength to enlighten their fellow-workers and the children. These were largely night-schools. As there were no means behind these efforts, the buildings in which they were held were of course unsuitable; there was no proper plan of work; no sufficient equipment, and little co-ordination of labor. A considerable percentage of these schools were already on the decline, when Ferrer, equipped with his splendid organizing ability,

his teacher's experience, and Mlle. Meunier's endowment, opened the Barcelona School, having as pupils eighteen boys and twelve girls.

So proper to the demand was this effort, that at the end of four years' earnest activity, fifty schools had been established, ten in Barcelona, and forty in the provinces.

In 1906, that is, after five years' work, a banquet was held on Good Friday, at which 1,700 pupils were present.

From 30 to 1,700, — that is something. And a banquet in Catholic Spain on Good Friday! A banquet of children who have bade good-bye to the salvation of the soul by the punishment of the stomach! We here may laugh; but in Spain it was a triumph and a menace, which both sides understood.

I have said that Ferrer brought to his work splendid organizing ability. This he speedily put to purpose by enlisting the co-operation of a number of the greatest scientists of Europe in the preparation of text-books embodying the discoveries of science, couched in language comprehensible to young minds.

So far, I am sorry to say, I have not succeeded in getting copies of these manuals; the Spanish government confiscated most of them, and has probably destroyed them. Still there are some uncaptured sets (one is already in the British Museum) and I make no doubt that within a year or so we shall have translations of most of them.

There were thirty of these manuals all told, comprising the work of the three sections, primary, intermediate, and superior, into which the pupils were divided.

From what I have been able to find out about these books, I believe the most interesting of them all would be the First Reading Book. It was prepared by Dr. Odon de Buen, and is said to be at the same time "a speller, a grammar and an illustrated manual of evolution," "the majestic story of the evolution of the cosmos from the atom to the thinking being, related in a language simple, comprehensible to the child."

20,000 copies of this book were rapidly sold.

Imagine what that meant to Catholic schools! That the babies of Spain should learn nothing about eternal punishment for their deadly sins, and *should* learn that they are one in a long line of unfolding life that started in the lowly sea-slime!

The books on geography, physics, and minerology were written in like manner and with like intent by the same author; on anthropology, Dr. Enguerrand wrote, and on evolution, Dr. Letourneau of Paris.

Among the very suggestive works was one on "The Universal Substance," a collaborate production of Albert Bloch and Paraf Javal, in which the mysteries of existence are resolved into their chemical equivalents, so that the foundations for magic and miracle are unceremoniously cleared out of the intellectual field.

This book was prepared at Ferrer's special request, as an antidote to ancestral leanings, inherited superstitions, the various outside influences counteracting the influences of the school.

The methods of instruction were modeled after earlier attempts in France, and were based on the general idea that physical and intellectual education must continually supplement each other. That no one is really educated, so long as his knowledge is merely the recollection of what he has read or seen in a book. Accordingly a lesson often consisted of a visit to a factory, a workshop, a studio, or a laboratory, where things were explained and illustrated; or in a class journey to the hills, or the sea, or the open country, where the geological or topographical conditions were studied, or botanical specimens collected and individual observation encouraged.

Very often even book classes were held out of doors, and the children insensibly put in touch with the great pervading influences of nature, a touch too often lost, or never felt at all, in our city environments.

How different was all this from the incomprehensible theology of the Catholic schools to be learned and believed but not understood, the impractical rehearsing of strings of words characteristic of mediaeval survivals! No wonder the Modern Schools grew and grew, and the hatred of the priests waxed hotter and hotter.

Their opportunity came; indeed, they did not wait long.

In the year 1906, on the 31st day of May, not so very long after that Good Friday banquet, occurred the event which they seized upon to crush the Modern School and its founder.

I am not here to speak either for or against Mateo Morral. He was a wealthy young man, of much energy and considerable learning. He had helped to enrich the library of the Modern School and being an excellent linguist, he had offered to make translations of text-books. Ferrer had accepted the offer. That is all Morral had to do with the Modern School.

But on the day of royal festivities, Morral had it in his head to throw a bomb where it would do some royal hurt. He missed his calculations, and the hurt intended did not take place; but after a short interval, finding himself about to be captured, he killed himself.

Think of him as you please: think that he was a madman who did a madman's act; think that he was a generous enthusiast who in an outburst of long chafing indignation at his country's condition wanted to strike a blow at a tyrannical monarchy, and was willing to give his own life in exchange for the tyrant's; or better than this, reserve your judgment, and say that you know not the man nor his personal condition, nor the special external conditions that prompted him; and that without such knowledge he cannot be judged. But whatever you think of Moral, pray why was Ferrer arrested and the Modern School of Barcelona closed? Why was he thrown in prison and kept there for more than a year? Why was it sought to railroad him before a Court Martial, and that attempt failing, the civil trial postponed for all that time?

WHY? WHY?

Because Ferrer taught science to the children of Spain, — and for no other thing. His enemies would have killed him then; but having been compelled to yield an open trial, by the outcry of Europe, they were also compelled to release him. But I imagine I hear, yea hear, the resolute mutter behind the closed walls of the monasteries, the day Ferrer went free. "Go, then; we shall get you again. And then — "

And then they would do what three years later they did, — *damn him to the ditch of MONTJUICH*.

Yea, they shut their lips together like the thin lips of Fate and — waited. The hatred of an order has something superb in it, — it hates so relentlessly, so constantly, so transcendently; its personnel changes, its hate never alters; it wears one priest's face or another's; itself is identical, inexorable; it pursues to the end.

Did Ferrer know this? Undoubtedly in a general way he did. And yet he was so far from conceiving its appalling remorselessness, that even when he found himself in prison again, and utterly in their power, he could not believe that he would not be freed.

What was this opportunity for which the Jesuitry of Spain waited with such terrible security? The Catalonian uprising. How did they know it would come? As any sane man, not over-optimistic, knows that uprising must come in Spain. Ferrer hoped to sap away the foundations of tyranny through peaceful enlightenment. He was right. But they are also right who say that there are other forces hurling towards those foundations; the greatest of these, — *Starvation*.

Now it was plain and simple Starvation that rose to rend its starvers when the Catalonian women rose in mobs to cry against the command

that was taking away their fathers and sons to their death in Morocco. The Spanish people did not want the Moroccan war; the Government, in the interest of a number of capitalists, did; but like all governments and all capitalists, it wanted workingmen to do the dying. And they did not want to die, and leave their wives and children to die too. So they rebelled. At first it was the conscious, orderly protest of organized workingmen. But Starvation no more respects the commands of workingmen's unions, than the commands of governments, and other orderly bodies. It has nothing to lose: and it gets away, in its fury, from all management; and it riots.

Where Churches and Monasteries are offensively rich and at ease in the face of Hunger, Hunger takes its revenge. It has long fangs, it rends, and tears, and tramples — the innocent with the guilty — always. It is very horrible! But remember, — remember how much more horrible is the long, slow systematic crushing, wasting, drying of men upon their bones, which year after year, century after century, has begotten the Monster, Hunger. Remember the 50,000 innocent children annually slaughtered, the blinded and the crippled children, maimed and forsaken by social power; and behind the smoke and flame of the burning convents of July, 1909, see the staring of those sightless eyes.

Ferrer instigate that mad frenzy! Oh, no; it was a mightier than Ferrer!

"Our Lady of Pain" — Our Lady of Hunger — Our Lady with uncut nails and wolf-like teeth — Our Lady who bears the Man-flesh in her body that cannon are to tear — Our Lady the Workingwoman of Spain, ahungered. She incarnated the Red Terror.

And the enemies of Ferrer in 1906, as in 1909, knew that such things would come; and they bided their time.

It is one of those pathetic things which destiny deals, that it was only for love's sake — and most for the love of a little child — who died moreover — that the uprising found Ferrer in Spain at all. He had been in England, investigating schools and methods there from April until the middle of June. Word came that his sister-in-law and his niece were ill, so the 19th of June found him at the little girl's bedside. He intended soon after to go to Paris, but delayed to make some inquiries for a friend concerning the proceedings of the Electrical Society of Barcelona. So the storm caught him as it caught thousands of others.

He went about the business of his publishing house as usual, making the observations of an interested spectator of events. To his friend Naquet he sent a postal card on the 26th of July, in which he spoke of

the heroism of the women, the lack of co-ordination in the people's movements, and the total absence of leaders, as a curious phenomenon. Hearing soon after that he was to be arrested, he secluded himself for five weeks. The "White Terror" was in full sway; 3,000 men, women, and children had been arrested, incarcerated, inhumanly treated. Then the Chief Prosecutor issued the statement that Ferrer was "the director of the revolutionary movement."

Too indignant to listen to the appeals of his friends, he started to Barcelona to give himself up and demand trial. He was arrested on the way.

And they court-martialed him.

The proceedings were utterly infamous. No chance to confront witnesses against him; no opportunity to bring witnesses; not even the books accused of sedition allowed to offer their mute testimony in their own defense; no opportunity given to his defender to prepare; letters sent from England and France to prove what had been the doomed man's purposes and occupations during his stay there, "lost in transit"; the old articles of twenty-four years before, made to appear as if recent utterances; forgeries imposed and with all this, nothing but hearsay evidence even from his accusers; and yet — he was sentenced to death.

Sentenced to death and shot.

And all Modern Schools closed, and his property sequestered.

And the Virgin of Toledo may wear her gorgeous robes in peace, since the shadow of the darkness has stolen back over the circle of light he lit.

Only, — somewhere, somewhere, down in the obscurity — hovers the menacing figure of her rival, "Our Lady of Pain." She is still now, — but she is not dead. And if all things be taken from her, and the light not allowed to come to her, nor to her children, — then — some day — she will set her own lights in the darkness.

Ferrer Ferrer is with the immortals. His work is spreading over the world; it will yet return, and rid Spain of its tyrants.

A Glance at Communism

Voltairine de Cleyre

9 February 1893

“Cast thy bread upon the waters,
Find it after many days.”

Two years ago, in a little uptown parlor, the home of a Philadelphia weaver, a group of inquirers after truth were wont to assemble bi-weekly for the discussion of “Communism vs. Individualism.” There were generally present some fifteen Communists and five or six Individualists. Let it be here admitted that while all were earnestly seeking truth, each side was pretty thoroughly convinced that the other was searching in the wrong direction, and as near as I am able to ascertain we are all of the same opinion still. However, in the course of a year some crumbs of the bread floated into sight in the shape of a dialogue presenting the substance of those discussions, which appeared in the TWENTIETH CENTURY. Many more days again passed, and now a new fragment, in the shape of a criticism of the dialogue by M. Zametkin in the “People” of July 17, drifts in with the tide.

In attempting a brief reply to this criticism I do not presume to answer for my co-writer, Miss Slobodinsky. Being an Individualist of the ex-quoted stamp myself, I am in nowise authorized to speak for the “school.” That is the advantage I possess over my critic. Individualism (without quotes) may very comfortably be interpreted as a general name for persons bound to agree upon only one thing, which is that they are not bound to agree on anything else. But when one adds Communist one begins to represent a creed common to a good many others; and

if one doesn't represent it correctly, one must immediately recant or—be excommunicated. I suspect the arguments presented by “the imaginary Communist,” which were really a condensation of those given by fifteen actual Communists in the discussions before mentioned, would be deemed heretical by M, Zametkin (in which case he must take to quotation marks), for it is well known that Communism itself has two individuals within its folds known as the State Communist and the Free Communist. Now, my friends, of whom the imaginary Communist was a composite, and who will be much surprised to learn on good Communist authority that they are only straw men, belong to the latter variety sometimes called Anarchist-Communists. An Anarchist-Communist is a person who is a man first and a Communist afterward. He generally gets into a great many irreconcilable situations at once, believes that property and competition must die yet admits he has no authority to kill them, contends for equality and in the same breath denies its possibility, hates charity and yet wishes to make society one vast Sheltering Arms, and, in short, very generally rides two horses going in opposite directions at the same time. He is not usually amenable to logic; but he has a heart forty or fifty times too large for nineteenth century environments, and in my opinion is worth just that many cold logicians who examine society as a naturalist does a beetle, and impale it on their syllogisms in the same manner as the Emperor Domitian impaled flies on a bodkin for his own amusement. Besides, a free Communist when driven into a corner always holds to freedom first. The State Communist, on the other hand, is logical. He believes in authority, and says so. He ridicules a freedom for the individual which he believes inimical to the interests of the majority. He cries: “Down with property and competition,” and means it. For the one he prescribes “take it” and for the other “suppress it.” That is very frank.

Now to the “one point” of criticism, viz: the ill-adjustment of supply to demand in the case of free competition, resulting in a deficiency once in a thousand cases, and over-production the rest of the time—either of which is bad economy. Communism, I infer, would create a general supervisory board, with branch offices everywhere, which should proceed with a general kind of census-taking regarding the demand for every possible product of manufacture, of agriculture, of lumber, of minerals, for every improvement in education, amusement or religion. “Madam, about how many balls do your boys lose annually over the neighbors' fence? How many buttons do your little girls tear off their frocks? Sir,

how many bottles of beer do you stow away in your cellar weekly for Sunday use? Miss, have you a lover? If so, how often do you write him, and how many sheets of paper do you use for each letter? How many gallons of oil do you use in the parlor lamp when you sit up late? This is not intended as personal, but merely to obtain correct statistics upon which to base next year's output of balls, buttons, beer, paper, oil, etc. Mr. Storekeeper, show me your books, that the government may make sure you sell no more than the prescribed quantity.' Mr. Gatekeeper, how many people were admitted to the Zoological Garden last week? Two thousand? At the present ratio of increase the government will supply a new animal in six months. Mr. Preacher, your audiences are decreasing. We must inquire into the matter. If the demand is not sufficient, we must abolish you." Just what means would be taken by the Commune in case of a natural deficiency, as, for instance, the partial failure of the West Pennsylvania gas wells, to compel the obstreperous element to yield the "prescribed quantity," I can only conjecture. It might officially order an invention to take the place of the required commodity. Failing this, I do not know what plan would be adopted to preserve the equivalence of labor costs in exchange and have everybody satisfied. Omniscience, however, might provide a way. The competitive law is that the price of a shortened commodity goes up. Free competition would prevent artificial shortening; but if nature went into the business the commodity would certainly exact a premium in exchange, until some substitute had diminished the demand for it. "Ah," cries Communism, "injustice." To whom? "The fellows who were robbed in exchange." And you, what will you do? Exchange labor equivalents to the first comers, and let the rest go without? But what then becomes of the equal right of the others, who may have been very anxious to give more? In this last case where is the injustice? As our critic observes, however, deficiency is not the greatest trouble, especially natural deficiency. The main thing is, must we be licensed, protected, regulated, labeled, taxed, confiscated, spied upon, and generally meddled with, in order that correct statistics may be obtained and a "quantity prescribed;" or may we trust to the producers to look out for their own interests sufficiently to avoid under-stocked and overstocked markets? Whether we may expect provision and order from those concerned, or be condemned to accept a governmental bill of fare from those not concerned. For my part, sooner than have a meddlesome bureaucracy sniffing around in my kitchen, my laundry, my dining-room, my study, to find out what I eat, what I wear, how my table

is set, how many times I wash myself, how many books I have, whether my pictures are “moral” or “immoral,” what I waste, etc., ad nauseam, after the manner of ancient Peru and Egypt, I had rather a few thousand cabbages should rot, even if they happened to be my cabbages.

It is possible I might learn something from that.

Philadelphia, Pa.

Retrieved on 24 June 2017 from
[https://contrun.libertarian-labyrinth.org/
voltairine-de-cleyre-two-articles-on-communism/](https://contrun.libertarian-labyrinth.org/voltairine-de-cleyre-two-articles-on-communism/)

The Gods and the People

Voltairine de Cleyre

1897

What have you done, O skies,
That the millions should kneel to you?
Why should they lift wet eyes,
Grateful with human dew?

Why should they clasp their hands,
And bow at thy shrines, O heaven,
Thanking thy high commands
For the mercies that thou hast given?

What have those mercies been,
O thou who art called the Good?
Who trod through a world of sin,
And stood where the felon stood

What is that wondrous peace
Vouchsafed to the child of dust
For whom all doubt shall cease
In the light of thy perfect trust?

How hast Thou heard their prayers
Smoking up from the bleeding sod,
Who, crushed by their weight of cares,
Cried up to thee, Most High God

* * *

Where the swamps of Humanity sicken
Read the answer in dumb, white scars!
You, Skies, gave the sore and the stricken
The light of your far-off stars!

The children who plead are driven,
Shelterless, through the street,
Receiving the Mercy of heaven
Hard-frozen in glittering Sleet!

The women who prayed for pity,
Who called on the saving Name,
Through the walks of your merciless city,
Are crying the rent, of shame!

The starving, who gazed till the plenty
In which they might not share
Have died in their hunger, rent by
The anguish of unheard prayer!

The weary who plead for remission,
For a moment only release,
Have sunk, with unheeded petition —
This the Christ-pledged Peace.

These are the mercies of heaven,

These are the answer of God
To the prayers of the agony-shriven,
From the paths where the millions plod!
The Silent scorn of the sightless!
The callous ear of the deaf!
The wrath of Might to the mightless!
The shroud and the mourning sheaf!
Light — to behold their squalor!
Breath — to draw in life's pain!
Voices to plead and call for
Heaven's help — hearts tip bleed — in vain!

* * *

What have you done, O Church,
That the weary should bless your name?
Should come with faith's holy torch
To light up your altered fane?
Why should they kiss the folds
Of The garment of your High Priest?
Or bow to the chalice that holds
The wine of your Sacred Feast?
Have you blown out the breath of their sighs?
Have you strengthened the weak, the ill?
Have you wiped the dark tears from their eyes,
And bade their sobbing be still?
Have you touched, have you known, have you felt,
Have you bent and softly smiled
In the face of the woman who dealt
In lewdness — to feed her child?

Have you heard the cry in the night
Going up from the outraged heart,
Masked from the social sight
By the cloak that but angered the smart?

Have you heard the children's moan,
By the light of the skies denied? —
Answer, O Walls of Stone,
In the name of your Crucified!

* * *

Out of the clay of their heart-break,
From the red dew of its sod,
You have mortared your bricks for Christ's sake
And reared a palace to God

Your painters have dipped their brushes
In the tears and the blood of the race
Whom, living, your dark frown crushes
And limned — a dead Saviour's face!

Ye have seized, in the name of God, the
Child's crust from famine's dole;
You have taken the price of its body
And sung a mass for its soul!

You have smiled on the man, who, deceiving,
Paid exemption to ease your wrath!
You have cursed the poor fool who believed him,
Though her body lay prone in your path!

You have laid the seal on the lip!

You have bade us to be content!
To bow 'neath our master's whip,
And give thanks for the scourge — "heaven sent."

These, O Church are your thanks:
These are the fruits without flaw,
That flow from the chosen ranks
Who keep in your perfect law!

Doors hard locked on the homeless,
Stained glass windows for bread!
On the living, the law of dumbness,
And the law of need, for the dead!

Better the dead, who, not needing,
Go down to the vaults of the earth,
Than the living whose hearts lie bleeding,
Crushed by you at their very birth!

* * *

What have you done, O State,
That the toilers should shout your ways?
Should light up the fires of their hate
If a "traitor" should dare dispraise?

How do you guard the trust
That the people repose in you?
Do you keep to the law of the just,
And hold to the changeless true?

What do you mean when you say
"The home of the free and brave?"
How free are your people, pray?
Have you no such thing as a slave?

What are the lauded “rights,”
Broad-sealed by your Sovereign Grace?
What are the love-feeding sights
You yield to your subject race?

* * *

The rights? — Ah! the right to toil,
That another, idle, may reap;
The right to make fruitful the soil,
And a meagre pittance to keep.

The right of a woman to own
Her body spotlessly pure,
And starve in the street — alone!
The right of the wronged — to endure!

The right of the slave — to its yoke,
The right of the hungry — to pray,
The right, of the toiler — to vote
For the master who buys his day!

You have sold the sun and the air,
You have dealt in the price of blood,
You have taken the lion’s share
While the lion is fierce for food!

You have laid the load of the strong
On the helpless, the young, the weak!
You have trod out the purple of wrong; —
Beware where its wrath shall wreak!

“Let the voice of the People be heard!

O — " You strangled it with your rope,
Denied the last dying word
While your Trap and your Gallows spoke!
But a thousand voices rise
Where the words of the martyr fell;
The seed springs fast to the Skies
Watered deep from that bloody well!

* * *

Hark! Low down you will hear
The storm in the underground!
Listen, tyrants, and fear!
Quake at that muffled sound
"Heavens that mocked our dust,
Smile on, in your pitiless blue!
Silent as you are to us,
So silent are we to you!
"Churches that scourged our brains,
Priests that locked fast our hands!
We planted the torch in Your chains:
Now gather the burning brands!
"States, that have given us law,
When we asked for the right to earn bread —
The Sword that Damocles saw
By a hair swings over your head!
What ye have sown ye shall reap:
Teardrops, and Blood, and Hate,
Gaunt gather before your Seat
And knock at your palace gate!

“There are murderers on your thrones,
There are thieves in your Justice halls!
White Leprosy cancers their stones,
And gnaws at their worm-eaten walls!

“And the Hand of Belshazzar’s Feast
Writes over, in flaming light,
‘Thought’s kingdom no more to the Priest;
Nor the law of Right to the Might.’”

Retrieved on March 24th, 2009 from dwardmac.pitzer.edu

Issued by “Liberty” Press, Printed and Published by James Tochattl.
London: 1897.

In Defense of Emma Goldmann and the Right of Expropriation

Voltairine de Cleyre

1894

"A starving man has a natural right to his neighbor's bread".

Cardinal Manning.

"I have no idea of petitioning for rights. Whatever the rights of the people are, they have a right to them, and none have a right to either withhold or grant them".

Paine's "Rights of Man".

"Ask for work; if they do not give you work ask for bread; if they do not give you work or bread then take bread".

Emma Goldmann.

A Lecture. Delivered in New York, Dec. 16. 1894.

The light is pleasant, is it not my friends? It is good to look into each other's faces, to see the hands that clasp our own, to read the eyes that search our thoughts, to know what manner of lips give utterance to our pleasant greetings. It is good to be able to wink defiance at the Night, the cold, unseeing Night. How weird, how gruesome, how chilly it would be if I stood here in blackness, a shadow addressing shadows, in a house of blindness! Yet each would know that he was not alone; yet might we stretch hands and touch each other, and feel the warmth of human presence near. Yet might a sympathetic voice ring thro' the darkness, quickening the dragging moments. — The lonely prisoners in the cells of Blackwell's Island have neither light nor sound! The short day hurries across the sky, the short day still more shortened in the gloomy walls. The long chill night creeps up so early, weaving its sombre curtain before the imprisoned eyes. And thro' the curtain comes no sympathizing voice, beyond the curtain lies the prison silence, beyond that the cheerless, uncommunicating land, and still beyond the icy, fretting river, black and menacing, ready to drown. A wall of night, a wall of stone, a wall of water! Thus has the great State of New York answered EMMA GOLDMANN; thus have the classes replied to the masses; thus do the rich respond to the poor; thus does the Institution of Property give its ultimatum to Hunger!

“Give us work” said EMMA GOLDMANN; “if you do not give us work, then give us bread; if you do not give us either work or bread then we shall take bread.” — It wasn’t a very wise remark to make to the State of New York, that is — Wealth and its watch-dogs, the Police. But I fear me much that the apostles of liberty, the fore-runners of revolt, have never been very wise. There is a record of a seditious person, who once upon a time went about with a few despised followers in Palestine, taking corn out of other people’s corn-fields; (on the Sabbath day, too). That same person, when he wished to ride into Jerusalem told his disciples to go forward to where they would find a young colt tied, to unloose it and bring it to him, and if any one interfered or said anything to them, were to say: “My master hath need of it”. That same person said: “Give to him that asketh of thee, and from him that taketh away thy goods ask them not back again”. That same person once stood before the hungry multitudes of Galilee and taught them, saying: “The Scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat; therefore whatever they bid you observe, that observe and do. But do not ye after their works, for they say, and do not. For they bind heavy burdens, and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. But all their works they do to be seen of men; they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments: and love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi’.” And turning to the scribes and the pharisees, he continued: “Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows’ houses, and for a presence make long prayers: therefore shall ye receive the greater damnation. Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint, and anise, and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, and mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done and not left the other undone. Ye blind guides, that strain at a gnat and swallow a camel! Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and plaster, but within they are full of extortion and excess. Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but within are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness. Even so ye outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity. Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because ye build the tombs of the prophets and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous;

and say, 'if we had been in the days of our fathers we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets'. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets. Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers! Ye serpents! Ye generations of vipers! How can ye escape the damnation of hell!"

Yes; these are the words of the outlaw who is alleged to form the foundation stone of modern civilization, to the authorities of his day. Hypocrites, extortionists, doers of iniquity, robbers of the poor, blood-partakers, serpents, vipers, fit for hell!

It wasn't a very wise speech, from beginning to end. Perhaps he knew it when he stood before Pilate to receive his sentence, when he bore his heavy crucifix up Calvary, when nailed upon it, stretched in agony, he cried: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me!"

No, it wasn't wise — but it was very grand.

This grand, foolish person, this beggar-tramp, this thief who justified the action of hunger, this man who set the right of Property beneath his foot, this Individual who defied the State, do you know why he was so feared and hated, and punished? Because, as it is said in the record, "the common people heard him gladly"; and the accusation before Pontius Pilate was, "we found this fellow perverting the whole nation. He stirreth up the people, teaching throughout all Jewry".

Ah, the dreaded "common people"!

When Cardinal Manning wrote: "Necessity knows no law, and a starving man has a natural right to his neighbor's bread", who thought of arresting Cardinal Manning? His was a carefully written article in the FORTNIGHTLY REVIEW. Who read it? Not the people who needed bread. Without food in their stomachs, they had no fifty cents to spend for a magazine. It was not the voice of the people themselves asserting rights. No one for one instant imagined that Cardinal Manning put himself at the head of ten thousand hungry men to loot the bakeries of London. It was a piece of ethical hair-splitting to be discussed in after-dinner speeches by the wine-muddled gentlemen who think themselves most competent to consider such subjects when their dress-coats are spoiled by the vomit of gluttony and drunkenness. But when EMMA GOLDMANN stood in Union Square and said, "if they do not give you work or bread then take bread", the common people heard her gladly and as of old the wandering carpenter of Nazareth addressed his own class, teaching throughout all Jewry, stirring up the people against the authorities, so the dressmaker of New York addressing the unemployed working-people

of New York, was the menace of the depths of society, crying in its own tongue. The authorities heard and were afraid: therefore the triple wall.

It is the old, old story. When Thomas Paine, one hundred years ago, published the first part of "The Rights of Man", the part in which he discusses principles only, the edition was a high-priced one, reaching comparatively few readers. It created only a literary furore. When the second part appeared, the part in which he treats of the application of principles, in which he declares that "men should not petition rights but take them", it came out in a cheap form, so that one hundred thousand copies were sold in a few weeks. That brought down the prosecution of the government. It had reached the people that might act, and prosecution followed prosecution till Botany Bay was full of the best men of England. Thus were the limitations of speech and press declared, and thus will they ever be declared so long as there are antagonistic interests in human society.

Understand me clearly. I believe that the term "constitutional right of free speech" is a meaningless phrase, for this reason: the constitution of the United States, and the Declaration of Independence, and particularly the latter, were, in their day, progressive expressions of progressive ideals. But they are, throughout, characterized by the metaphysical philosophy which dominated the thought of the last century. They speak of "inherent rights", "inalienable rights", "natural rights", etc: They declare that men are equal because of a supposed, mysterious wetness, existing somehow apart from matter. I do not say this to disparage those grand men who dared to put themselves against the authorities of the monarchy, and to conceive a better ideal of society, one which they certainly thought would secure equal rights to men; because I realize fully that no one can live very far in advance of the time-spirit, and I am positive in my own mind that, unless some cataclysm destroys the human race before the end of the twentieth century the experience of the next hundred years will explode many of our own theories. But the experience of this age has proven that metaphysical quantities do not exist apart from materials, and hence humanity can not be made equal by declarations on paper. Unless the material conditions for equality exist, it is worse than mockery to pronounce men equal. And unless there is equality (and by equality I mean equal chances for every one to make the most of himself) unless, I say, these equal chances exist, freedom, either of thought, speech, or action, is equally a mockery.

I once read that one million angels could dance at the same time on the point of a needle; possibly one million angels might be able to get a decent night's lodging by virtue of their constitutional rights; one single tramp couldn't. And whenever the tongues of the non-possessing class threaten the possessors, whenever the disinherited menace the privileged, that moment you will find that the constitution isn't made for you. Therefore I think anarchists make a mistake when they contend for their constitutional rights. As a prominent lawyer, Mr. Thomas Earle White of Phila., himself an anarchist, said to me not long since: "What are you going to do about it? Go into the courts, and fight for your legal rights? Anarchists haven't got any." "Well", says the governmentalist, "you can't consistently claim any. You don't believe in constitutions and laws." Exactly so; and if any one will right my constitutional wrongs I will willingly make him a present of my constitutional rights. At the same time I am perfectly sure no one will ever make this exchange; nor will any help ever come to the wronged class from the outside. Salvation on the vicarious plan isn't worth despising. Redress of wrongs will not come by petitioning "the powers that be". "He has rights who dare maintain them." "The Lord helps them who help themselves." (And when one is able to help himself, I don't think he is apt to trouble the Lord much for his assistance.) As long as the working-people fold hands and pray the gods in Washington to give them work, so long they will not get it. So long as they tramp the streets, whose stones they lay, whose filth they clean, whose sewers they dig, yet upon which they must not stand too long lest the policeman bid them "move on"; as long as they go from factory to factory, begging for the opportunity to be a slave, receiving the insults of bosses and foremen, getting the old "no", the old shake of the head, in these factories they built, whose machines they wrought; so long as they consent to herd like cattle, in the cities, driven year after year, more and more, off the mortgaged land, the land they cleared, fertilized, cultivated, rendered of value; so long as they stand shivering, gazing thro' plate glass windows at overcoats, which they made, but cannot buy, starving in the midst of food they produced but cannot have; so long as they continue to do these things vaguely relying upon some power outside themselves, be it god, or priest, or politician, or employer, or charitable society, to remedy matters, so long deliverance will be delayed. When they conceive the possibility of a complete international federation of labor, whose constituent groups shall take possession of land, mines, factories, all the instruments of production,

issue their own certificates of exchange, and, in short, conduct their own industry without regulative interference from law-makers or employers, then we may hope for the only help which counts for aught — Self-Help; the only condition which can guarantee free speech, (and no paper guarantee needed).

But meanwhile, while we are waiting, for there is yet much grist of the middle class to be ground between the upper and nether millwheels of economic evolution; while we await the formation of the international labor trust; while we watch for the day when there are enough of people with nothing in their stomachs and desperation in their heads, to go about the work of expropriation; what shall those do who are starving now?

That is the question which EMMA GOLDMANN had to face; and she answered it by saying: "Ask, and if you do not receive, take, — take bread".

I do not give you that advice. Not because I do not think that bread belongs to you; not because I do not think you would be morally right in taking it; not that I am not more shocked and horrified and embittered by the report of one human being starving in the heart of plenty than by all the Pittsburgs, and Chicagoes, and Homesteads, and Tennessees, and Coeur d'Alenes, and Buffaloes, and Barcelonas, and Parises not that I do not think one little bit of sensitive human flesh is worth all the property rights in N. Y. city; not that I think the world will ever be saved by the sheep's virtue of going patiently to the shambles; not that I do not believe the expropriation of the possessing classes inevitable, and that that expropriation will begin by just such acts' EMMA GOLDMANN advised, viz: the taking possession of wealth already produced; not that I think you owe any consideration to the conspirators of Wall Street, or those who profit by their operations, as such nor ever will till they are reduced to the level of human beings having equal chances with you to earn their share of social wealth, and no more, not that I would have you forget the consideration they have shown to you; that they have advised lead for strikers, strychnine for tramps, bread and water as good enough for working people; not that I cannot hear yet in my ears the words of one who said to me of the Studebaker Wagon Works' strikers, "if I had my way I'd mow them down with gatling guns"; not that I would have you forget the electric wire of Ft. Frick, nor the Pinkertons, nor the militia, nor the prosecutions for murder and treason; not that I would have you forget the 4th of May, when your constitutional right of free

speech was vindicated, nor the 11th of Nov. when it was assassinated; not that I would have you forget the single dinner at Delmonico's which Ward McAllister tells us cost ten thousand collars! Would I have you forget that the wine in the glasses was your children's blood? It must be a rare drink — children blood! I have read of the wonderful sparkle on costly champagne; — I have never seen it. If I did I think it would look to me like mother tears over the little, white, wasted forms of dead babies; — dead — because — there was no milk in their breasts! Yes, I want you to remember that these rich are blood-drinkers, tearers of human flesh, gnawers of human bones! Yes, if I had the power I would burn your wrongs upon your hearts in characters that should glow like live coals in the night!

I have not a tongue of fire as EMMA GOLDMANN has; I cannot "stir the people"; I must speak in my own cold, calculated way. (Perhaps that is the reason I am let to speak at all.) But if I had the power my will is good enough. You know how Shakespeare's Marc Antony addressed the populace of Rome:

"I am no orator, as Brutus is,
But as you know me all, a plain blunt man
That love my friend. And that they know full well
That gave me public leave to speak of him.
For I have neither wit, nor words, nor worth,
Action, nor utterance, nor the power of speech
To stir men's blood. I only speak right on.
I tell you that which you yourselves do know,
Show you sweet Caesar's wounds, poor, poor dumb mouths,
And bid them speak for me. But were I Brutus
And Brutus Antony, there were an Antony
Would ruffle up your spirits, and put a tongue
In every wound of Caesar's, that should move
The stones of Rome to rise and mutiny."

If, therefore, I do not give you the advice which EMMA GOLDMANN gave, let not the authorities suppose it is because I have any more respect for their constitution and their law than she has, or that I regard them as having any rights in the matter.

No. My reasons for not giving that advice are two. First, if I were giving advice at all, I would say: "My friends, that bread belongs to you. It is you who toiled and sweat in the sun to sow and reap the wheat; it is you who stood by the thresher, and breathed the chaff-filled atmosphere in the mills, while it was ground to flour; it is you who went into the eternal night of the mine and risked drowning, fire-damp, explosion, and cave-in, to get the fuel for the fire that baked it; it is you who stood in the hell-like heat, and struck the blows that forged the iron for the ovens wherein it is baked; it is you who stand all night in the terrible cellar shops, and tend the machines that knead the flour into dough; it is you, you, you, farmer, miner, mechanic, who make the bread; but you haven't the power to take it. At every transformation wrought by toil some one who didn't toil has taken part from you; and now he has it all, and you haven't the power to take it back! You are told you have the power because you have the numbers. Never make so silly a blunder as to suppose that power resides in numbers. One good, level-headed policeman with a club, is worth ten excited, unarmed men; one detachment of well-drilled militia has a power equal to that of the greatest mob that could be raised in New York City. Do you know I admire compact, concentrated power. Let me give you an illustration. Out in a little town in Illinois there is a certain capitalist, and if ever a human creature sweat and ground the grist of gold from the muscle of man, it is he. Well, once upon a time, his workmen, (not his slaves, his workmen,) were on strike; and fifteen hundred muscular Polacks armed with stones, brickbats, red hot pokers, anti other such crude weapons as a mob generally collects, went up to his house for the purpose of smashing the windows, and so forth; possibly to do as those people in Italy did the other day with the sheriff who attempted to collect the milk tax. He alone, one man, met them on the steps of his porch, and for two mortal hoers, by threats, promised, cajoleries, held those fifteen hundred Poles at bay. And finally they went away, without smashing a pane of glass or harming a hair of his head. Now that was power! And you can't help but admire it, no matter if it was your enemy who displayed it; and you must admit that so long as numbers can be overcome by such relative quantity, power does not reside in numbers. Therefore, if I were giving advice, I would not say,

“take bread”, but take counsel with yourselves how to get the power to take bread.

There is no doubt but that power is latently in you; there is little doubt it can be developed; there is no doubt the authorities know this, and fear it, and are ready to exert as much force as is necessary to repress any signs of its development. And this is the explanation of EMMA GOLDMANN’S imprisonment. The authorities do not fear you as you are, they only fear what you may become. The dangerous thing was “the voice crying in the wilderness” foretelling the power which was to come after it. You should have seen how they feared it in Phila. They got out a whole platoon of police and detectives, and executed a military maneuver to catch the little woman who had been running around under their noses for three days. And when she walked up to them, why then, they surrounded and captured her, and guarded the city hall where they kept her over night, and put a detective in the next cell to make notes. Why so much fear? Did they shrink from the stab of the dressmakers needle? Or did they dread some stronger weapon?

Ah! — the accusation before the New York Pontius Pilate was: “she stirreth up the people”. And Pilate sentenced her to the full limit of the law, because, he said, “you are more than ordinarily intelligent”. Why is intelligence dealt thus hardly with? Because it is the beginning of power. Strive, then, for power.

My second reason for not repeating EMMA GOLDMANN’S words is, that I, as an anarchist, have no right to advise another to do anything involving a risk to himself; nor would I give a fillip for an action done by the advice of some one else, unless it is accompanied by a well-argued, well-settled conviction on the part of the person acting, that it really is the best thing to do. Anarchism, to me, means not only the denial of authority, not only a new economy, but a revision of the principles of morality. It means the development of the individual as well as the assertion of the individual. IT means self-responsibility, and not leader worship. I say it is your business to decide whether you will starve and freeze in sight of food and clothing, outside of jail, or commit some overt act against the institution of property and take your place beside TIMMERMANN and GOLDMANN. And in saying this I mean to cast no reflection whatever upon Miss Goldman for doing otherwise. She and I hold many differing views on both Economy and Morals; and that she is honest in hers she has proven better than I have proven mine. Miss Goldman is a communist; I am an individualist. She wishes to destroy the right of

property, I wish to assert it. I make my war upon privilege and authority, whereby the right of property, the true right in that which is proper to the individual, is annihilated. She believes that co-operation would entirely supplant competition; I hold that competition in one form or another will always exist, and that it is highly desirable it should. But whether she or I be right, or both of us be wrong, of one thing I am sure; the spirit which animates EMMA GOLDMAN is the only one which will emancipate the slave from his slavery, the tyrant from his tyranny — the spirit which is willing to dare and suffer.

That which dwells in the frail body in the prison-room to-night is not the New York dressmaker alone. Transport yourselves there in thought a moment; look steadily into those fair, blue eyes, upon the sun-brown hair, the sea-shell face, the restless hands, the woman's figure, look steadily till these fade from sight, as things will fade when gazed long upon, look steadily till in place of the person, the individual of time and place, you see that which transcends time and place, and flits from house to house of Life, mocking at Death. Swinburne in his magnificent "Before a Crucifix" says:

"With iron for thy linen bands,
And unclean cloths for winding-sheet,
They bind the people's nail-pierced hands,
They hide the people's nail-pierced feet:
And what man, or what angel known
Shall roll back the sepulchral stone?"

Perhaps in the presence of this untrammelled spirit we shall feel that something has rolled back the sepulchral stone; and up from the cold wind of the grave is borne the breath that animated ANAXAGORAS, SOCRATES, CHRIST, HYPATIA, JOHN HUSS, BRUNO, ROBERT EMMET, JOHN BROWN, SOPHIA PEROVSKAYA, PARSONS, FISCHER, ENGEL, SPIES, LINGG, BERKMANN, PALLAS; and all those, known and unknown, who have died by tree, and axe, and fagot, or dragged out forgotten lives in dungeons, derided, hated, tortured by men. Perhaps we shall know ourselves face to face with that which leaps from the throat of the strangled when the rope chokes, which smokes up from the blood of the murdered when the axe falls; that which has been forever hunted, fettered,

imprisoned, exiled, executed, and never conquered. Lo, from its many incarnations it comes forth again, the immortal Race-Christ of the Ages! The gloomy walls are glorified thereby, the prisoner is transfigured: And we say, reverently we say:

“O sacred Head, O desecrate,
O labor-wounded feet and hands,
O blood poured forth in pledge to fate
Of nameless lives in divers lands!
O slain, and spent, and sacrificed
People! The gray-grown, speechless Christ.”

Retrieved on March 24th, 2009 from dwardmac.pitzer.edu

This pamphlet is reproduced from the original, including errors. “Goldman” is spelled with two Ns throughout (but Emma Goldman did use the two-N spelling early in her career, so this may not be a mistake on de Cleyre’s part), and the speech was actually delivered on Dec. 16, 1893, not 1894 (Avrich, Paul (1978), pp. 85–86). Published in Philadelphia (3515 Wallace Street.)

McKinley's Assassination from the Anarchist Standpoint

Voltairine de Cleyre

Six years have passed since William McKinley met his doom at Buffalo and the return stroke of justice took the life of his slayer, Leon Czolgosz. The wild rage that stormed through the brains of the people, following that revolver shot, turning them into temporary madmen, incapable of seeing, hearing, or thinking correctly, has spent itself. Figures are beginning to appear in their true relative proportions, and there is some likelihood that sane words will be sanely listened to. Instead of the wild and savage threats, "Brand the Anarchists with hot iron," "Boil in oil," "Hang to the first lamp-post," "Scourge and shackle," "Deport to a desert island," which were the stock phrases during the first few weeks following the tragedy, and were but the froth of the upheaved primitive barbarity of civilized men, torn loose and raging like an unreasoning beast, we now hear an occasional serious inquiry: "But what have the Anarchists to say about it? Was Czolgosz really an Anarchist? Did he say he was? And what has Anarchism to do with assassination altogether?"

To those who wish to know what the Anarchists have to say, these words are addressed. We have to say that not Anarchism, but the state of society which creates men of power and greed and the victims of power and greed, is responsible for the death of both McKinley and Czolgosz. Anarchism has this much to do with assassination, that as it teaches the possibility of a society in which the needs of life may be fully supplied for all, and in which the opportunities for complete development of mind and body shall be the heritage of all; as it teaches that the present unjust organization of the production and distribution

of wealth must finally be completely destroyed, and replaced by a system which will insure to each the liberty to work, without first seeking a master to whom he must surrender a tithe of his product, which will guarantee his liberty of access to the sources and means of production; as it teaches that all this is possible without the exhaustion of body and mind which is hourly wrecking the brain and brawn of the nations in the present struggle of the workers to achieve a competence, it follows that Anarchism does create rebels. Out of the blindly submissive, it makes the discontented; out of the unconsciously dissatisfied, it makes the consciously dissatisfied. Every movement for the social betterment of the peoples, from time immemorial, has done the same. And since among the ranks of dissatisfied people are to be found all manner of temperaments and degrees of mental development—just as are found among the satisfied also—it follows that there are occasionally those who translate their dissatisfaction into a definite act of reprisal against the society which is crushing them and their fellows. Assassination of persons representing the ruling power is such an act of reprisal. There have been Christian assassins, Republican assassins, Socialist assassins, and Anarchist assassins; in no case was the act of assassination an expression of any of these religious or political creeds, but of temperamental reaction against the injustice created by the prevailing system of the time (excluding, of course, such acts as were merely the result of personal ambition or derangement). Moreover, Anarchism less than any of these can have anything to do in determining a specific action, since, in the nature of its teaching, every Anarchist must act purely on his own initiative and responsibility; there are no secret societies nor executive boards of any description among Anarchists. But that among a mass of people who realize fully what a slaughter-house capitalism has made of the world, how even little children are daily and hourly crippled, starved, doomed to the slow death of poisoned air, to ruined eyesight, wasted limbs, and polluted blood; how through the sapping of the present generation's strength the unborn are condemned to a rotten birthright, all that riches may be heaped where they are not needed; who realize that all this is as unnecessary and stupid as it is wicked and revolting; that among these there should be some who rise up and strike back, whether wisely or unwisely, effectively or ineffectively, is no matter for wonder; the wonder is there are not more. The hells of capitalism create the desperate; the desperate act,—desperately!

And in so far as Anarchism seeks to arouse the consciousness of oppression, the desire for a better society, and a sense of the necessity for unceasing warfare against capitalism and the State, the authors of all this unrecognized but Nemesis-bearing crime, in so far it is responsible and does not shirk its responsibility: "For it is impossible but that offences come; but woe unto them through whom they come."

Many offences had come through the acts of William McKinley. Upon his hand was the "damned spot" of official murder, the blood of the Filipinos, whom he, in pursuance of the capitalist policy of Imperialism, had sentenced to death. Upon his head falls the curse of all the workers against whom, time and time again, he threw the strength of his official power. Without doubt he was in private life a good and kindly man; it is even probable he saw no wrong in the terrible deeds he had commanded done. Perhaps he was able to reconcile his Christian belief, "Do good to them that hate you," with the slaughters he ordered; perhaps he murdered the Filipinos "to do them good"; the capitalist mind is capable of such contortions. But whatever his private life, he was the representative of wealth and greed and power; in accepting the position he accepted the rewards and the dangers, just as a miner, who goes down in the mine for \$2.50 a day or less, accepts the danger of the firedamp. McKinley's rewards were greater and his risks less; moreover, he didn't need the job to keep bread in his mouth; but he, too, met an explosive force—the force of a desperate man's will. And he died; not as a martyr, but as a gambler who had won a high stake and was struck down by the man who had lost the game: for that is what capitalism has made of human well-being— a gambler's stake, no more.

Who was this man? No one knows. A child of the great darkness, a spectre out of the abyss! Was he an Anarchist? We do not know. None of the Anarchists knew him, save as a man with whom some few of them had exchanged a few minutes' conversation, in which he said that he had been a Socialist, but was then dissatisfied with the Socialist movement. The police said he was an Anarchist; the police said he attributed his act to the influence of a lecture of Emma Goldman. But the police have lied before, and, like the celebrated Orchard, they need "corroborative evidence." All that we really know of Czolgosz is his revolver shot and his dying words: "I killed the President because he was the enemy of the people, the good, working people." All between is blank. What he really said, if he said anything, remains in the secret papers of the Buffalo Police Department and the Auburn prison. If we are to judge in-

ferentially, considering his absolutely indifferent behavior at his “trial,” he never said anything at all. He was utterly at their mercy, and had they been able to twist or torture any word of his into a “conspiracy,” they would have done it. Hence it is most probable he said nothing.

Was he a normal or an abnormal being? In full possession of his senses, or of a disturbed or weak mentality? Again we do not know. All manner of fables arose immediately after his act as to his boyhood’s career; people knew him in his childhood as evil, stupid, cruel; even some knew him who had heard him talk about assassinating the President years before; other legends contradicted these; all were equally unreliable. His indifference at the “trial” may have been that of a strong man enduring a farce, or of a clouded and nonrealizing mind. His last words were the words of a naive and devoted soul, a soul quite young, quite unselfish, and quite forlorn. If martyrdom is insisted upon, which was the martyr, the man who had had the good of life, who was past middle years, who had received reward and distinction to satiety, who had ordered others killed without once jeopardizing his own life, and to whom death came more easily than to millions who die of long want and slow tortures of disease, or this young strong soul which struck its own blow and paid with its own life, so capable of the utterest devotion, so embittered and ruined in its youth, so hopeless, so wasted, so cast out of the heart of pity, so altogether alone in its last agony? This was the greater tragedy—a tragedy bound to be repeated over and over, until “the good working people” (in truth they are not so good) learn that the earth is theirs and the fullness thereof, and that there is no need for any one to enslave himself to another. This Anarchism teaches, and this the future will realize, though many martyrdoms lie between.

Retrieved on May 26, 2012 from libertarian-labyrinth.org

From *Mother Earth* 2, no. 8 (October 1907): 303–306.

Sex Slavery

Voltairine de Cleyre

Night in a prison cell! A chair, a bed, a small washstand, four blank walls, ghastly in the dim light from the corridor without, a narrow window, barred and sunken in the stone, a grated door! Beyond its hideous iron latticework, within the ghastly walls, — a man! An old man, gray-haired and wrinkled, lame and suffering. There he sits, in his great loneliness, shut in front all the earth. There he walks, to and fro, within his measured space, apart from all he loves! 'There, for every night in five long years to come, he will walk alone, while the white age-flakes drop upon his head, while the last years of the winter of life gather and pass, and his body draws near the ashes. Every night, for five long years to come, he will sit alone, this chattel slave, whose hard toll is taken by the State, — and without recompense save that the Southern planter gave his Negroes, — every night he will sit there so within those four white walls. Every night, for five long years to come, a suffering woman will lie upon her bed, longing, longing for the end of those three thousand days; longing for the kind face, the patient hand, that in so many years had never failed her. Every night, for five long years to come, the proud spirit must rebel, the loving heart must bleed, the broken home must be desecrated. As I am speaking now, as you are listening, there within the cell of that accursed penitentiary whose stones have soaked up the sufferings of so many victims, murdered, as truly as any outside their walls, by that slow rot which eats away existence. inch-meal, — as I am speaking now, as you are listening, *there sits Moses Harman!*

Why? Why, when murder now is stalking in your streets, when dens of infamy are so thick within your city that competition has forced down the price of prostitution to the level of the wages Of Your starving shirt mak-

ers; when robbers sit in State and national Senate and House, when the boasted “bulwark of our liberties,” the elective franchise, has become a U. S. dice-box, wherewith great gamblers play away your liberties; when debauchees of the worst type hold all your public offices and dine off the food of fools who support them, why, then, sits Moses Harman there within his prison cell? If he is so *great* a criminal, why is he not with the rest of the spawn of crime, dining at Delmonico’s or enjoying a trip to Europe? If he is so bad a man, why in the name of wonder did he ever get in the penitentiary?

Ah, no; it is not because he has done any evil thing; but because he, a pure enthusiast, searching, searching always for the cause of misery of the kind which he loved with that broad love of which only the pure soul is capable, searched for the data of evil. And searching so he found the vestibule of life to be a prison cell; the hohest and purest part of the temple of the body, if indeed one part can be hoher or purer than another, the altar where the most devotional love in truth should be laid, he found this altar ravished, despoiled, trampled upon. He found little babies, helpless, voiceless little things, generated in lust, cursed with impure moral natures, cursed, prenatally, with the germs of disease, forced into the world to struggle and to suffer, to hate themselves, to hate their mothers for bearing them, to hate society and to be hated by it in return, — a bane upon self and race, draining the lees of crime. And he said, this felon with the stripes upon his body, “Let the mothers of the race go free! Let the little children be pure love children, born of the mutual desire for parentage. Let the manacles be broken from the shackled slave, that no more slaves be born, no more tyrants conceived.”

He looked, this obscenist looked with clear eyes into this ill-got thing you call morality, sealed with the seal of marriage, and saw in it the consummation of immorality, impurity, and injustice. He beheld every married woman what she is, a bonded slave, who takes her master’s name, her master’s bread, her master’s commands, and serves her master’s passion; who passes through the ordeal of pregnancy and the throes of travail at *his* dictation, not at her desire; who can control no property, not even her own body, without his consent, and from whose straining arms the children she bears may be torn at his pleasure, or willed away while they are yet unborn. It is said the English language has a sweeter word than any other, — *home*. But Moses Harman looked beneath the word and saw the fact, — a prison more horrible than that where he is

sitting now, whose corridors radiate over all the earth, and with so many cells, that none may count them.

Yes, our masters! The earth is a prison, the marriage-bed is a cell, women are the prisoners, and you are the keepers!

He saw, this corruptionist, how in those cells are perpetrated such outrages as are enough to make the cold sweat stand upon the forehead, and the nails clench, and the teeth set, and the lips grow white in agony and hatred. And he saw too how from those cells might none come forth to break her fetters, how no slave dare cry out, how all these murders are done quietly, beneath the shelter-shadow of home, and sanctified by the angelic benediction of a piece of paper, within the silence-shade of a marriage certificate, Adultery and Rape stalk freely and at case.

Yes, for that is adultery where woman submits herself sexually to man, without desire on her part, for the sake of “keeping him virtuous,” “keeping him at home,” the women say. (Well, if a man did not love me and respect himself enough to be “virtuous” without prostituting me, — he might go, and welcome. He has no virtue to keep.) And that is rape, where a man forces himself sexually upon a woman whether he is licensed by the marriage law to do it or not. And that is the vilest of all tyranny where a man compels the woman he says he loves, to endure the agony of bearing children that she does not want, and for whom, as is the rule rather than the exception, they cannot properly provide. It is worse than any other human oppression; it is fairly *God-like*! To the sexual tyrant there is no parallel upon earth; one must go to the skies to find a fiend who thrusts life upon his children only to starve and curse and outcast and damn them! And only through the marriage law is such tyranny possible. The man who deceives a woman outside of marriage (and mind you, such a man will deceive in marriage too) may deny his own child, if he is mean enough. *He* cannot tear it from her arms — he cannot touch it! The girl he wronged, thanks to your very pure and tender morality standard, may die in the street for want of food. He cannot force his hated presence upon her again. But his wife, gentlemen, his wife, the woman he respects so much that he consents to let her merge her individuality into his, lose her identity and become his chattel, his wife he may not only force unwelcome children upon, outrage at his own good pleasure, and keep as a general cheap and convenient piece of furniture, but if she does not get a divorce (and she cannot for such cause) he can follow her wherever she goes, come into her house, eat her food, force her into the cell, *kill* her by virtue of his sexual author-

ity! And she has no redress unless he is indiscreet enough to abuse her in some less brutal but unlicensed manner. I know a case in your city where a woman was followed so for ten years by her husband. I believe he finally developed grace enough to die: please applaud him for the only decent thing he ever did.

Oh, is it not rare, all this talk about the preservation of morality by marriage law! O splendid carefulness to preserve that which you have not got! O height and depth of purity, which fears so much that the children will not know who their fathers are, because, forsooth, they must rely upon their mother's word instead of the hired certification of some priest of the Church, or the Law! I wonder if the children would be improved to know what their fathers have done. I would rather, much rather, not know who my father was than know he had been a tyrant to my mother. I would rather, much rather, be illegitimate according to the statutes of men, than illegitimate according to the unchanging law of Nature. For what is it to be legitimate, born "according to law"? It is to be, nine cases out of ten, the child of a man who acknowledges his fatherhood simply because he is forced to do so, and whose conception of virtue is realized by the statement that 11 a woman's duty is to keep her husband at home;" to be the child of a woman who cares more for, the benediction of Mrs. Grundy than the simple honor of her lover's word, and conceives prostitution to be purity and duty when exacted of her by her husband. It is to have Tyranny as your progenitor, and slavery as your prenatal cradle. It is to run the risk of unwelcome birth, "legal" constitutional weakness, morals corrupted before birth, possibly a murder instinct, the inheritance of excessive sexuality or no sexuality, either of which is disease. it is to have the value of a piece of paper, a rag from the tattered garments of the "Social Contract," set above health, beauty, talent 01' goodness; for I never yet had difficulty in obtaining the admission that illegitimate children are nearly always prettier and brighter than others, even from conservative women. And how supremely disgusting it is to see them look from their own puny, sickly, lust-born children, Upon whom he the chain-traces of their own terrible servitude, look from these to some healthy, beautiful "natural" child, and say, "What a pity its *mother* wasn't virtuous!" Never a word about *their* children's fathers' virtue, they know too much! Virtue! Disease, stupidity, criminality! What an *obscene* thing "virtue" is!

What is it to be illegitimate? To be despised, or pitied, by those whose spite or whose pity isn't worth the breath it takes to return it. To be, pos-

sibly, the child of some man contemptible enough to deceive a woman; the child of some woman whose chief crime was belief in the man she loved. To be free from the prenatal curse of a stave mother, to come into the world without the permission of any law-making set of tyrants who assume to corner the earth, and say what terms the unborn must make for the privilege of coming into existence. This is legitimacy and illegitimacy! Choose.

The man who walks to and fro in his cell in Lansing penitentiary tonight, this vicious man, said: "The mothers of the race are lifting their dumb eyes to me, their scaled lips to me, their agonizing hearts to me. They are seeking, seeking for a voice! The unborn in their helplessness, are pleading from their prisons, pleading for a voice! The criminals, with the unseen ban upon their souls, that has pushed them, Pushed them to the vortex, out of their whirling hells, are looking, waiting for a voice! *I will be their voice.* I will unmask the outrages of the marriage-bed. I will make known how criminals are born. I will make one outcry that shall be heard, and let what will be, *be!*" He cried out through the letter of Dr. Markland, that a young mother lacerated by unskillful surgery in the birth of her babe, but recovering from a subsequent successful operation, had been stabbed, remorselessly, cruelly, brutally stabbed, not with a knife, but with the procreative organ of her husband, stabbed to the doors of death, and yet there was no redress!

And because he called a spade a spade, because he named that organ by its own name, so given in Webster's dictionary and in every medical journal in the country, because of this Moses Harman walks to and fro in his cell tonight. He gave a concrete example of the effect of sex slavery, and for it he is imprisoned. It remains for us now to carry on the battle, and lift the standard where they struck him down, to scatter broadcast the knowledge of this crime of society against a man and the reason for it; to inquire into this vast system of licensed crime, its cause and its effect, broadly upon the race. 'The cause! Let Woman ask herself, "Why am I the slave of Man? Why is my brain said not to be the equal of his brain? Why is my work not paid equally with his? Why must my body be controlled by my husband? Why may he take my labor in the household, giving me in exchange what he deems fit? Why may he take my children from me? Will them away while yet unborn?" Let every woman ask.

There are two reasons why, and these ultimately reducible to a single principle: the authoritarian, supreme power, *God*-idea, and its two

instruments, the Church — that is, the priests, — and the State — that is, the legislators).

From the birth of the Church, out of the womb of Fear and the fatherhood of Ignorance, it has taught the inferiority of woman. In one form or another through the various mythical legends of the various mythical creeds, runs the undercurrent of the belief in the fall of man through the persuasion of woman, her subjective condition as punishment, her natural vileness, total depravity, etc.; and from the days of Adam until now the Christian Church, with which we live specially to deal, has made Woman the excuse, the scapegoat for the evil deeds of man. So thoroughly has this idea permeated Society that number", of those who have utterly repudiated the Church, are nevertheless soaked in this stupefying narcotic to true morality. So pickled is the male creation with the vinegar of Authoritarianism, that even those who have gone further and repudiated the State still cling to the god, Society as it is, still hug the old theological idea that they are to be "heads of the family" — to that wonderful formula "of simple proportion" that "Man is the head of the Woman even as Christ is the head of the Church." No longer than a week since, an Anarchist (?) said to me, "I will be boss in my own house" — a "Communist-Anarchist," if you please, who doesn't believe in "my house." About a year ago a noted libertarian speaker said, in my presence, that his sister, who possessed a fine voice and had joined a concert troupe, should "stay at home with her children; that is *her place*." The old Church idea! This man was a Socialist, and since an Anarchist; yet his highest idea for woman was serfhood to husband and children, in the present mockery called "home." Stay at home! Stay at home! Be patient, obedient, submissive! Darn our socks, mend our shirts, wash our dishes, get our meals, wait on us and *mind the children!* Your fine voices are not to delight the public nor yourselves; your inventive genius is not to work, your fine art taste is not to be Cultivated, your business facilities are not to be developed; you made the great mistake of being born with them, suffer for your folly! You are *women*, therefore housekeepers, servants, waiters, and child's nurses!

At Macon, in the sixth century, says August Bebel, the fathers of the Church met and proposed the decision of the question, "has Woman a soul?" Having ascertained that the permission to own a nonentity wasn't going to injure any of their parsnips, a small majority vote decided the momentous question in our favor. Now, holy fathers, it was a tolerably good scheme on your part to offer the reward of your pitiable "salva-

tion or damnation" (odds in favor of the latter) as a bait for the hook of earthly submission; it wasn't a bad sop in those days of faith and ignorance. But fortunately fourteen hundred years have made it stale. You, tyrant radicals (?), have no heaven to offer, — you have no delightful chimeras in the form of "imerit cards;" you have (save the mark) the respect, the good offices, the smiles — of a slave-holder! 'This in return for our chains! Thanks!

The question of souls is old — we demand our bodies, now. We are tired of promises, God is deaf, and his church is our worst enemy. Against it we bring the charge of being the moral (or immoral) force which hes behind the tyranny of the State. And the State has divided the loaves and fishes with the Church, the magistrates, like the priests take marriage fees; the two fetters of Authority have gone into partnership in the business of granting patentrights to parents for the privilege of reproducing themselves, and the State cries as the Church cried of old, and cries now: "See how we protect women!" The State has done more. It has often been said to me, by women with decent masters, who had no idea of the outrages practiced on their less fortunate sisters, "Why don't the wives leave?"

Why don't you run, when your feet are chained together? Why don't you cry out when a gag is on your lips? Why don't you raise your hands above your head when they are pinned fast to your sides? Why don't you spend thousands of dollars when you haven't a cent in your pocket? Why don't you go to the seashore or the mountains, you fools scorching with city heat? If there is one thing more than another in this whole accursed tissue of false society, which makes me angry, it is the asinine stupidity which with the true phlegm of impenetrable dullness says, "Why don't the women leave!" Will you tell me where they will go and what they shall do? When the State, the legislators, has given to itself, the politicians, the utter and absolute control of the opportunity to live; when, through this precious monopoly, already the market of labor is so overstocked that workmen and workwomen are cutting each others' throats for the dear privilege of serving their lords; when girls are shipped from Boston to the south and north, shipped in carloads, like cattle, to fill the dives of New Orleans or the lumber-camp hells of my own state (Michigan), when seeing and hearing these things reported every day, the proper prudes exclaim, "Why don't the women leave?," they simply beggar the language of contempt.

When America passed the fugitive slave law compelling men to catch their fellows more brutally than runaway dogs, Canada, aristocratic, un-republican Canada, still stretched her arms to those who might reach tier. But there is no refuge upon earth for the enslaved sex. Right where we are, there we must dig our trenches, and win or die.

This, then, is the tyranny of the State; it denies, to both woman and man, the right to earn a living, and rants it as a privilege to a favored few who for that favor must pay ninety per cent toll to the granters of it. These two things, the mind domination of the Church, and the body domination of the State are the causes of sex slavery.

First of all, it has introduced into the world the constructed crime of obscenity: it has set up such a peculiar standard of morals that to speak the names of the sexual organs is to commit the most brutal outrage. It reminds me that in your city you have a street called "Callowhill." Once it was called Gallows' Hill, for the elevation to which it leads, now known as "Cherry Hill," has been the last touching place on earth for the feet of many a victim murdered by the Law. But the sound of the word became too harsh; so they softened it, though the murders are still done, and the black shadow of the Gallows still hangs on the City of Brotherly Love. Obscenity has done the same; it has placed virtue in the shell of an idea, and labeled all "good" which dwells within the sanction of Law and respectable (?) custom; and all bad which contravenes the usage of the shell. It has lowered the dignity of the human body, below the level of all other animals. Who thinks a dog is impure or obscene because its body is not covered with suffocating and annoying clothes? What would you think of the meanness of a man who would put a skirt upon his, horse and compel it to walk or run with such a thing impeding its limbs? Why, the "Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals" would arrest him, take the beast from him, and he would be sent to a lunatic asylum for treatment on the score of an *impure* mind. And yet, gentlemen, you expect your wives, the creatures you say you respect and love, to wear the longest skirts and the highest necked clothing, in order to conceal the *obscene human body*. There is no society for the prevention of cruelty to women. And you, yourselves, though a little better, look at the heat you wear in this roasting weather! How you curse your poor body with the wool you steal from the sheep! How you punish yourselves to sit in a crowded house with coats and vests on, because dead Mme. Grundy is shocked at the "vulgarity" of shirt sleeves, or the naked arm!

Look how the ideal of beauty has been marred by this obscenity notion. Divest yourselves of prejudice for once. Look at some fashion-slaved woman her waist surrounded by a high-board fence called a corset, her shoulders and hips angular from the pressure above and below, her feet narrowest where they should be widest, the body fettered by her everlasting prison skirt, her hair fastened tight enough to make her head ache and surmounted by a thing of neither sense nor beauty, called a hat, ten to one a hump upon her back like a dromedary, — look at her, and then imagine such a thing as that carved in marble! Fancy a statue in Fairmount Park with a corset and bustle on. Picture to yourselves the image of the *equestrienne*. We are permitted to ride, providing we sit in a position ruinous to the horse; providing we wear a riding-habit long enough to hide the obscene human foot, weighed down by ten pounds of gravel to cheat the wind in its free blowing, so running the risk of disabling ourselves completely should accident throw us from the saddle. Think how we swim! We must even wear clothing in the water, and run the gauntlet of derision, if we dare battle in the surf minus stockings! Imagine a fish trying to make headway with a water-soaked flannel garment upon it. Nor are you yet content. The vile standard of obscenity even kills the little babies with clothes. The human race is murdered, horribly, “in the name of” Dress.

And in the name Of Purity what lies are told! What queer morality it has engendered. For fear of it you dare not tell your own children the truth about their birth; the most sacred of all functions, the creation of a human being, is a subject for the most miserable falsehood. When they come to you with a simple, straightforward question, which they have a right to ask, you say, “Don’t ask such questions,” or tell some silly hollowlog story; or you explain the incomprehensibility by another — God! You say “God made you.” You know you are lying when you say it. You know, or you ought to know, that the source of inquiry will not be dammed up so. You know that what you Could explain purely, reverently, rightly (if you have any purity in you), will be learned through many blind gropings, and that around it will be cast the shadowthought of wrong, embryo’d by your denial and nurtured by this social opinion everywhere prevalent. If you do not know this, then you are blind to facts and deaf to Experience.

Think of the double social standard the enslavement of our sex has evolved. Women considering themselves very pure and very moral, will sneer at the street-walker, yet admit to their homes the very men who

victimized the street-walker. Men, at their best, will pity the prostitute, while they themselves are the worst kind of prostitutes. Pity yourselves, gentlemen — you need it!

How many times do you see where a man or woman has shot another through jealousy! The standard of purity has decided that it is right, “it shows spirit,” “it is justifiable” to murder a human being for doing exactly what you did yourself, love the same woman or same man! Morality! Honor! Virtue! Passing from the moral to the physical phase, take the statistics of any insane asylum, and you will find that, out of the different classes, unmarried women furnish the largest one. To preserve your Cruel, Vicious, indecent standard of purity (?) you drive your daughters insane, while your wives are killed with excess. Such is marriage. Don’t take my word for it; go through the report of any asylum or the annals of any graveyard.

Look how your children grow up. Taught from their earliest infancy to curb their love natures — restrained at every turn! Your blasting lies would even blacken a child’s kiss. Little girls must not be tomboyish, must not go barefoot, must not climb trees, must not learn to swim, must not do anything they desire to do which Madame Grundy has decreed “improper.” Little boys are laughed at as effeminate, silly girl-boys if they want to make patchwork or play with a doll. Then when they grow up, “Oh! Men dont care for home or children as women do!” Why should they, when the deliberate effort of your life has been to crush that nature out of them. “Women can’t rough it like men.” Train any animal, or any plant, as you train your girls, and it wont be able to rough it either. Now *will* somebody tell me why either sex should hold a corner on athletic sports? Why any child should not have free use of its limbs?

These are the effects of your purity standard, your marriage law. This is your work — look at it! Half your children dying under five years of age, your girls insane, your married women walking corpses, your men so bad that they themselves often admit that *Prostitution holds against PURITY a bond of indebtedness*. This is the beautiful effect of your god, Marriage, before which Natural Desire must abase and belie itself. Be proud of it!

Now for the remedy. It is in one word, the only word that ever brought equity anywhere — LIBERTY! Centuries upon centuries of liberty is the only thing that will cause the disintegration and decay of these pestiferous ideas. Liberty was all that calmed the bloodwaves of religious

persecution! You cannot cure serfhood by any other substitution. Not for you to say "in this way shall the race love." Let the race alone.

Will there not be atrocious crimes? Certainly. He is a fool who says there will not be. But you can't stop them by committing the arch-crime and setting a block between the spokes of Progress-wheels. You will never get right until you start right.

As for the final outcome, it matters not one iota. I have my ideal, and it is very pure, and very sacred to me. But yours, equally sacred, may be different and we may both be wrong. But certain am I that with free contract, that form of sexual association will survive which is best adapted to time and place, thus producing the highest evolution of the type. Whether that shall be monogamy, variety, or promiscuity matters naught to us; it is the business of the future, to which we dare not dictate.

For freedom spoke Moses Harman, and for this he received the felon's brand. For this he sits in his cell to-night. Whether it is possible that his sentence be shortened, we do not know. We can only try. Those who would help us try, let me ask to put your signatures to this simple request for pardon addressed to Benjamin Harrison. To those who desire more fully to inform themselves before signing, I say: Your conscientiousness is praiseworthy — come to me at the close of the meeting and I will quote the exact language of the Markland letter. To those extreme Anarchists who cannot bend their dignity to ask pardon for an offense not committed, and of an authority they cannot recognize, let me say: Moses Harman's back is bent, low bent, by the brute force of the Law, and though I would never ask anyone to bow for himself, I can ask it, and easily ask it, for him who fights the slave's battle. Your dignity is criminal; every hour behind the bars is a seal to your partnership with Comstock. No one can hate petitions worse than I, and no one has less faith in them than I. But for my champion I am willing to try any means that invades no other's right, even though I have little hope in it.

If, beyond these, there are those here to-night who have ever forced sexual servitude from a wife, those who have prostituted themselves in the name of Virtue, those who have brought diseased, immoral or unwelcome children to the light, without the means of provision for them, and yet will go from this ball and say, "Moses Harman is an unclean man — a man rewarded by just punishment," then to *you* I say, and may the words ring deep within your ears UNTIL YOU DIE: Go on! Drive your sheep to the shambles! Crush that old, sick, crippled man beneath

your juggernaut! In the name of Virtue, Purity and Morality, do it! In the names of God, Home, and Heaven, do it! In the name of the Nazarene who preached the golden rule, do it! In the names of Justice, Principle, and Honor, do it! In the names of Bravery and Magnanimity put yourself on the side of the robber in the government halls, the murderer in the political convention, the libertine in public places, the whole brute force of the police, the constabulary, the court, and the penitentiary, to persecute one poor old man who stood alone against your licensed crime! Do it. And if Moses Harman dies within your “Kansas Hell,” be satisfied *when you have murdered him!* Kill him! And you hasten the day when the future shall bury you ten thousand fathoms deep beneath its curses. Kill him! And the stripes upon his prison clothes shall lash you like the knout! Kill him! And the insane shall glitter hate at you with their wild eyes, the unborn babes shall cry their blood upon you, and the graves that you have filled in the name of Marriage, shall yield food for a race that will pillory you, until the memory of your atrocity has become a nameless ghost, flitting with the shades of Torquemada, Calvin and Jehovah over the horizon of the World!

Would you smile to see him dead? Would you say, “We are rid of this obscenist?” Fools! The corpse would laugh at you from its cold eyelids! The motionless lips would mock, and the solemn hands, the pulseless, folded hands, in their quietness would write the last indictment, which neither time nor you can efface. Kill him! And you write his glory and your shame! Moses Harman in his felon stripes stands far above you now, and Moses Harman *dead* will live on, immortal in the race he died to free! Kill him!

Some Nihilists I Have Met

Voltairine de Cleyre

October 1893

An introduction

by Robert P. Helms, Philadelphia, May 2013

Voltairine de Cleyre (1866-1912) has drawn plenty of well-deserved attention in recent years by historians of anarchism, of feminism, sex radicalism, and atheism. My research for a book on the early anarchists of Philadelphia has caused me to understand ever more clearly why, during her life, she was considered an intellectual of very high stature, why she was respected by social reformers of many varieties for her body-and-soul dedication to helping and educating the poor, and why she was loved or even revered by fellow anarchists.

I spotted a magazine review in the *Brooklyn Eagle* of Sept. 26, 1893 (p. 4). The October issue of the short-lived *Worthington's Illustrated Monthly Magazine* was described in summary form, and mid-way through, it read, "'Some Nihilists I have Met' is an interesting paper by Voltairine de Cleyre, who exhibits a specimen of that sort of fanaticism even in America." The title gave me a healthy jolt, since I've never seen it in these many years of dissecting de Cleyre's remarkable life. No library has a complete set of *Worthington's* eighteen issues, but the one containing the article survives, in only one original copy, at the Connecticut Historical Society. The journal ran from January 1893 until June 1894, published by A. D. Worthington & Company of Hartford.

Nihilism is defined in *Le Petit Larousse* as "a revolutionary tendency of the Russian intelligentsia of the 1860s, characterized by the rejection of the values of the preceding generation." The logic of the term itself is that a nihilist reduces all non-empirical or prejudicial notions to nothing (*nihil*). It developed into a broad culture, originally from Ivan Turgenev's novel *Fathers and Sons* (1862) and the utopian novel *What Is To Be Done?* by Nikolai Chernyshevsky (1863), but the idea and use of the term lasted long after these seminal works. Historian Steven Cassedy summarizes Turgenev's version as "rigidly materialistic in its denial of free will and any spiritualistic dimension to human life," strictly scientific, and "egoistic in its rejection of any kind of a priori moral obligation." In Chernyshevsky it was a lifestyle and an attitude. Nihilism meant "ostentatious awkwardness, a studied indifference to attire and grooming, and a taste for shocking living arrangements." One reason why Nihilism had so profound an impact on Russian history is that no entitlement of nobility or royalty was recognized, including their right to live after

causing widespread sorrow and death in the general population. Some nihilists went so far as killing Czar Alexander II by blowing his royal legs off with a dynamite bomb, thrown by Ignattii Grinevitskii on March 1, 1881.

In her story, Voltairine takes care to fictionalize her characters so that no real nihilist known to her in Philadelphia could be identified. However, certain traits hint toward comrades from whom she may have derived the characters. In 1893 she knew members of the Knights of Freedom, a controversial anarchist group involved in the labor movement and very militant atheism. Although in the present article de Cleyre mentions no Jews, all or most examples from her life and a large segment of all the nihilists were Jewish. The personalities we know of were young, barely born in the early days of Nihilism. By the time she wrote this, Russian anarchism and Nihilism had become very closely associated, and the terms were sometimes used interchangeably.

One nihilist in Voltairine's circle was Natasha Notkin, a very close associate who became a pharmacist at the beginning of the 20th Century. Born in Russia in 1870, Notkin identified specifically as a Nihilist, having arrived in the United States when she was fifteen. Sometimes called the "soul" of the city's movement, she was revered by comrades for her sober-minded organizing work, and we have evidence of her activism from around 1892 until 1917. Natasha was noted for her self-sacrificing dedication, being "married to the movement." She never made public speeches, but she was co-founder of two important lecture clubs (Ladies' Liberal League and Social Science Club), she served as treasurer for many fundraising drives, and she would organize large, elaborate fundraiser balls, including the annual Russian Tea Party. She also served as the local agent for the key anarchist newspapers *Free Society* and *Mother Earth*, and paid for articles to be translated from European anarchist journals. Natasha Notkin was no publicity-seeker: although she was a publicly known, widely respected leader among the anarchists of a large city for some 25 years, we have only one image of her face (a quick sketch made by a mainstream paper's illustrator), and all of the quotes we have of her own words would fill up less than a single page. A young John Cournos remembered visiting her apartment, where the other visitors were "all sprawling about the floor of the sitting room, the men with their arms about the women." He found this shocking at the time. Notkin was already dead by 1930, but we know neither

where she died, nor the cause of her death, nor what was done with her remains.

The best biographical source on Voltairine is Paul Avrich, *An American Anarchist: The Life of Voltairine de Cleyre* (1978). For Nihilism and related ideas, see Steven Cassedy, *To The Other Shore: The Russian Jewish Intellectuals Who Came to America* (1997); Franco Venturi, *Roots of Revolution: a History of the Populist and Socialists Movements in Nineteenth Century Russia* (1960); and Paul Avrich, *The Russian Anarchists* (1967).

This is the second reappearance of "Some Nihilists I Have Met." The first, with an earlier version of my introduction, appeared in *Social Anarchism* (Baltimore MD), Issue 37, in January 2005.

Some Nihilists I Have Met

by Voltairine de Cleyre

The word nihilist is so generally associated with darkness, secrecy, dynamite, assassination and blood, that had someone whispered five minutes before the encounter, "You are about to meet a Russian nihilist," I should, no doubt, have hastily retreated to the shelter of law-abiding domiciles, far from the dirty, tortuous, downtown quarter, where, amidst a labyrinth of alleys and deceitful little streets that mockingly led against walls, and then turned back into one another, I found myself one snowy afternoon, picking my way somewhat disgustedly with no very clear idea concerning my exact whereabouts.

One thing, however, was sure, I had been appointed on a committee to secure musical talent for a concert shortly to be given by a certain society, the proceeds of which were to be used for the purchase of turkeys for people who otherwise could not properly celebrate the Christmas feast. Having learned through devious channels of a new violin-wonder whose services were to be had for a reasonable consideration, I had at length obtained his address and gone in pursuit of him. It was indeed a pursuit. For half an hour I chased skulking lamp-posts, that on being captured mockingly stood forth without the shadow of a letter on them; signs that had grown so old in wind and weather as to be illegible; a few brick corners that seemed to say, "Here we are, and we don't need a name to tell you -we're plain enough without it," as indeed they

were among such heaps of dirt and ruin; and finally, people who smiled vaguely, and answered me in a foreign language. At length I stopped perfectly still, leaned against a wall and said, "What next?"

My mouth and ears seemed to be two personalities, the latter being very much surprised to hear the English language in this town of "skis" and "ovitches," and the former very defiant and determined. It said slowly, "I shan't give up now; I surely will find Mr. W_____y." I lifted my eyes with a sigh and lo! strange mockery of this cynical quarter, there, precisely opposite, on a black sign with staring gilt letters was the very name which had so persistently and so successfully eluded me: "H. W_____y, violinist, concerts, lessons."

I went up the two white steps, the sepulchral steps which can never be omitted from the meanest tenement of old Philadelphia, and rapped loudly and long. A woman with bright red cheeks and a mass of curly auburn hair bushing astonishingly about her head, admitted me.

"Mr. W_____y was in. Walk up." Bless him for being 'in," I thought, as I climbed the steep, dark stairs; "my luck must have turned at last." The woman had left me to guide myself, only directing me to the first door on the left. As I stepped into the upper hall I heard a low cry, something neither human nor inhuman, that made me catch my breath. There were two or three wails, and then a sob was broken short; then the cries began in a lower key. I felt as if a cold wind had suddenly blown over me a frozen me to the floor. This, then, was the wonderful violin, this thing which cried and moaned just inside the room. I must have stood ten minutes listening when I felt some one behind me, and turned to hear the woman say, "Just rap, he's only playing by himself."

"Does he often do it -play like that?" I whispered under my breath.

She smiled; "All the time. The worst is, he gets up in the night. You'd think dead folks were crying in the room. Some people believe dead folks do play music, but I don't," she added, knocking on the door.

The wailing ceased as if the thing that cried had been startled and fled. Directly the door was opened and I was invited to enter. The room was neither small nor large, but oh! so bare! There was only a bed without pillows, a chair, a trunk, a table contrived from a dry-goods box, a stand piled high with books -over which lay the violin -and a music rack, back of which, on the floor, lay a mass of music. No heat, and the temperature dangerously near the freezing point. What wonder the violin wailed!

I see the whole picture now as it was photographed upon my memory by the cloudy, snow-luminous light that came through the curtain-

less windows, striking the staring walls and dark wood floor, and the tall figure in the center holding the magical bow. Certainly it was a homely face, one of the homeliest I have ever seen, in spite of the fine, Beethoven-like forehead that relieved it from any charge of stupidity.

Yet this very ugliness was curiously attractive. The square, prominent jaw with the wide, thin-lipped mouth was a character study; those small, light-intent eyes fascinated; and the Tartar nose, utterly ugly, somehow impressed one as having an individuality of its own that might, on occasion, express itself.

"I interrupted you," said I, by way of beginning "-it's too bad. I was luxuriating in the misery of those notes for nearly a quarter of an hour in the hall."

He flushed slightly; "You should have knocked; I was merely passing time."

"Was it an improvisation?" I inquired, curious to know what human heart had first cried so brokenly.

"Oh, no," he answered, "it is a composition, the plea of a nihilist, a Siberian exile, to his jailer. There are words."

"Ah," I said, with interest, "do such compositions circulate generally, then?"

A real laugh went over the ugly mouth, and yet a laugh with more of sarcasm than pleasure in it.

"Certainly not. It is a prison offense to sing them. All the same there are means."

"But," I suggested, "are they not dangerous? Were you not afraid to become implicated with the nihilists?"

He drew himself up proudly. "I myself was one."

"What," I exclaimed, "you! A man with a soul for such music, can you believe in killing people? Do you think the czar should be assassinated?"

The same sarcastic smile crossed his mouth. "Why should he not be assassinated? Thousands of people die every year merely for his pleasure. Is he any better than other murderers?"

"What do you mean by saying that thousands of people die for his pleasure? He does not kill anybody."

"I mean that the poor are taxed so high to pay for his palaces, that they die in their huts. Yes, I would be very glad to hear that the czar was killed, but not because I think it would help anyone living."

"Why then?" I queried, interested in the play of the ugly features.

"Why? Because it would be a crash that would make the people think. They do not think, they are asleep. Their bodies work, but their brains have never yet awakened. Another czar would come, and he, too, would have to be killed, until the people learn that it not to trade masters, but to have no masters they must work."

"But," I persisted, "why not in some other way? Why kill to teach them that?" He sighed and a sad light came into his eyes.

"You have no idea," he said, "there is tyranny in America, but it is nothing to Russia. The nihilists are not people who love fighting and killing; but it is the only thing left them. We are not allowed to read, or write, or print, or agitate. We must keep our ideas until we choke with them, even if we wade in misery to the eyes. For trying to help, the noblest and the best have been sent to Siberia. We must kill."

"How trying to help?" I said, "Surely not for relieving distress with—"

"Charity?" he broke in bitterly. "No, not that. But for trying to show that it is the injustice of the government which puts them so they need charity. For trying to tell them that if they straighten up, the czar can no more put his yoke on their necks. For that, not for charity." He picked up the violin, struck a few notes with his fingers, and added, "The Americans don't understand us."

"Excuse me," I said humbly, "I presume that this is true. I have never met a nihilist before."

"No?" and this time the smile was full of amusement. "I must have frightened you, then."

"Oh, no," I said, lying with much courtesy. "I have been very much interested, so much that I have neglected my errand." And I proceeded to engage his services, which was soon done, though inwardly I reflected that for a man in such quarters his price was rather high.

It was darkening, but the snow still gave a luminous whiteness to the dusk as he accompanied me to the door, saying: "Well, I hope you are not afraid of me. You would like us better if you knew us better. You ought to read Bakounine —do you read Shelley? He is the greatest English poet, but almost no one understands him. He lived five hundred years too soon. Will you shake hands? I never killed anyone. Thank you. I shall be exactly on time at the concert."

And he was. The virtues of the Russian character, like its vices, are mathematically calculable; every act answers the question why. Hence punctuality is assured.

This happened several years ago; Since then I have met so many nihilists whom the persecution of the Jews has driven out of Russia within the last ten years, and found them and found them all so much like other people that the word has lost all its terrors. Just now there comes before my eyes the quiet face of the little woman with large blue eyes, who sat in my study one morning, and in the most placid voice related how, as a child, she had carried messages across the city from one of the dreaded terrorists to another, without molestation, because, as she said in her queer English, "the police would not expect a child;" and again, when the officers had searched the house, she had lain with the prohibited books under her pillow, "because even they are polite, more or less, and will not come into a girl's room if she is in bed, unless they expect her very much."

This she had done because of a much-loved brother, an ardent nihilist, and quite without the knowledge of her father, himself a public official.

Not long ago she returned to Russia, and I sometimes wonder if, escaping the famine and plague, she may yet travel the long way to the Siberian prisons.

Of these so much has lately been written, of their loneliness, their deprivations, their inaccessibility, that one would say the word despair must finally be written on the heart of him who enters there.

Yet I have met one who escaped even from there; one who had scaled the fearful walls of the Russian prison, crossed the lonely deserts of snow, through the passes of the Altai mountains, and finally reached Japan from which he sailed to America. One would naturally expect something bold, daring, shrewd, or strongly self-assertive in the person of the man who had accomplished such miracles. But none of these are evident in this short stoutish, sandy-complexioned, curly-haired fellow, with the prominent nose and jaw of the Slavic races. Very quiet, very much averse to talking even with his friends, but absolutely impenetrable to strangers, and much given to pessimistic contemplation. I should not be surprised to learn that he had committed suicide, for he is woefully disappointed in America, being wholly unfit for its sharp commercial push and scramble.

Not so with my young friend, the medical student, a person of surprisingly quick intellect and disputatious inclinations. After delivering her letter of introduction to me one summer afternoon, she commenced an attack on an inoffensive Y. M. C. A. member who chanced to be present, and speedily drove him into a corner concerning the existence of God.

She next disposed of the marriage problem, Henry George's land-tax scheme, the advisability of eating meat, of women wearing short hair and a pantaloonly substitute for skirts, each in "one round." The expression is apropos; mentally speaking, she has on boxing gloves all the time, and is ready to spar on any known subject with the greatest mental athlete. She has a romantic history. The child of orthodox Jewish parents who forbade her all education, she naturally rebelled, and, to escape them, married at the age of eighteen a young nihilist, passionately devoted to her, but whose affection she but faintly reciprocated.

The marriage, however, was a compromise with authority to make her way to America, a female minor being subject to her father, if unmarried, and to her husband, if married.

Neither her husband nor herself believed in the binding efficacy of any ceremony, however; and after two years of wedlock she concluded to take up life alone. She had been swept into the storm of struggle between living with a husband she did not love, for his sake, or obeying her desire to live alone and be free.

I fancy it was a little hard to give up the woman he so dearly loved, though he did not believe in perfect liberty.

However, he did it with tolerable grace, and they greet one another as mere comrades now. He still retains his nihilistic enthusiasm, ingrained in all his life. But she has left it behind as a cast-off shell; indeed, she has a faculty of casting her coat of ideas quite regularly, withal remaining a very attractive and interesting person, in spite of inconsistency.

One thing, however, is very shocking to American feelings among all these people -an utter absence of filial affection. And yet, it is mathematically calculable; given the facts of utter rigidity, conservatism, and intolerance on the part of the parents, a tendency to curb every aspiration towards change, a resolution to put the garb of the seventeenth century on the back of the nineteenth, and, as a result, "it is impossible that we should love our parents," they say. At first they regard as hypocrisy all evidences of attachment between American parents and children. After time, however, larger influences of a freer life unconsciously mould them over, and now among all those who have come into the circle of my acquaintance I remember very few who, from ardent state-haters, furious social reformers ready to compel the world into a social paradise laid out on paper, even at the point of a bayonet, have not now become ambitious, make-the-most-of-it people, arrived at the conclusion that if the world is bound to perdition it will go in spite

of them, and, if salvation is in store, it will save itself according to some gigantic evolution, whose form is yet dimly seen by the human mites whose lives are weaving into it.

At present, I remember one face only, a wild, burning face, utterly unsubduable, which stands out in never-surrender prominence.

I saw it in an artist's gallery in the West, where this strange personage was posing as a study of a bandit.

Imagine a small, lithe figure, sinuous as a serpent, a pointed face lighted with tremendous lights of fire, and sunset, and running water gleams, in the depths of eyes now somber, now glowing under heavy brows; long, loose-curling hair falling to the shoulders, a picturesque dress of white-embroidered blouse, dark pantaloons and silken sash, and a voice quick and vibrant as the motion of a cobra's tongue.

We entered into a conversation concerning a total vegetarian diet; and, to my astonishment, this singular being declared that for eight years he had eaten nothing but raw food, vegetables, and fruit, and for the last two years fruit alone.

He had been living near to Nature indeed; in the summer he slept upon the ground, in the winter, in a blanket on the floor; had done so for seventeen years. On questioning what had led him to so strange a life, he answered, "Because I want to be free. I saw that men were slaves of their own artificial needs, out of which have grown so many oppressive laws, systems of production, and so forth. I did not wish to work for any one else, nor to slave nine or ten hours a day to gratify a need which is only imaginary. The chief causes of this foolish industry are the need for food and clothing. Civilization, so called, seems to have a rage for every possible compound, healthy or unhealthy, beautiful or ugly, so that these increase the necessity for toil. I said to myself, I will learn to live on little, to overcome the need for so many changes of clothing, and I shall be free. I have done so. I can live very comfortably on eight cents a day, and I do not starve on five. Then you see I love what is beautiful. A fruit dinner is beautiful to look at. Mr. C. (the artist) would even like to paint it. But suppose he paints a carnivorous dinner, is there anything about it? No woman need slave over the stove to prepare my meal, and there need be no dishes to wash afterward. Oh, one escapes a great deal of slavery. One's blood is never overheated, nor subject to internal changes; winter and summer I dress the same and am never too hot or too cold. I have my time to see, to study, to think. When I do work it is because I wish."

"But suppose everyone should do so?" I said at last, "What would life amount to? What would be accomplished?"

He laughed musically, and stepping to the window, pointed to the street below, where the workmen were going home, swinging their empty dinner pails.

"There they are," he said, "look at them. What are they living for? To build a city. Look at it, look at those bricks, these cobble-stones, those wagons, and the dirt everywhere. Down there it is dark already. Do you see anything beautiful anywhere? What is the use to build such a thing? Better to put a bomb under it all and blow it up."

"Look at them," he continued rapidly, "all running, running here and there, and swallowing mouthfuls of filthy air at every breath. That is what they call business -having an aim in life! The animals are wiser."

"Why do you stay in the city?" I inquired.

"I intend to leave within two weeks," he answered. "I wish to dispose of my library first. Another of the evils of civilization -books. It is a good chance, though, for anyone who wants them."

Having something of a relish for book sales, and being, moreover, curious to see what manner of place my new specimen inhabited, I took the opportunity to say I would examine the books.

A short walk, which took away my breath, since I was obliged to trot half the time in order to keep up with the swift glide of my companion, brought us up next door to a police station.

We entered a small, dark room lined with glass jars filled with various liquids arranged on shelves, and, near the floor, little closets with mysterious locks. "My laboratory," he said with a wave of his hand "-bargained for. The books are upstairs."

He ushered me into one of the fairest rooms, draped in white; paintings and sculpture adorned the walls and niches; there were a few pieces of elegant furniture, and on one side, some five hundred books in a neat case.

The whole was pervaded with a scent of roses. "How beautiful!" I exclaimed involuntarily.

"Not at all," he answered. "Only a makeshift. When I get my home in the woods it will be beautiful, but art is not possible in a city."

"But what good will it do for you to go off alone?" I said; "You certainly have beautiful ideals, but if you isolate yourself, how will it help humanity?"

He snapped his fingers. "Always that," he answered; "I reform myself; that is the beginning of reform, self. When I have accomplished it perhaps I shall return and teach others." He glided around the room and added, "Yes, anyway I shall come back some day. The Americans are a lot of cowards, but some day they will talk justice, too. When it begins—perhaps here in New York, in Chicago, or Philadelphia—no matter where, there will be work to do and I shall be there!"

His five white teeth jutted savagely over the lower lip.

"Well, do you wish any of my books?" I had chosen a few, and, finding no further excuse for remaining, reluctantly turned to go. As we were passing through the "laboratory," my strange acquaintance asked, "Do you want to see water burn?" and taking some metallic substance from a jar he threw it into a small dish of water. A brilliant blaze shot up and burned for several minutes. In its glare the wizard face laughed silently; "See," he said, "how I could burn the Pacific Ocean."

"Wouldn't that be a big contract?" I returned.

"There are other things I would prefer to burn. Well, good bye. We shall not meet again."

And we did not.

Mr. C. afterward told me he had left San Francisco, to no one knew where. He had, however, a different theory to explain his bandit's misanthropy.

He was in love once, C. explained, and wanted the girl to go and live with him on uncooked food. She declined, and he has foresworn civilization ever since.

"Ah, the usual woman in the case." And I went away musing on the freaks of passion, my thoughts returning often to the wizard face with its prophetic, silent laugh lit by the burning water.

Retrieved on May 25th, 2015 from
<http://www.deadanarchists.org/nihilists.html>

*From Worthington's Illustrated Monthly Magazine (Hartford CT),
October 1893*

The Eleventh of November, 1887

Voltairine de Cleyre

11 November 1901

Let me begin my address with a confession. I make it sorrowfully and with self-disgust; but in the presence of great sacrifice we learn humility, and if my comrades could give their lives for their belief, why, let me give my pride. Yet I would not give it, for personal utterance is of trifling importance, were it not that I think at this particular season it will encourage those of our sympathizers whom the recent outburst of savagery may have disheartened, and perhaps lead some who are standing where I once stood to do as I did later.

This is my confession: Fifteen years ago last May when the echoes of the Haymarket bomb rolled through the little Michigan village where I then lived, I, like the rest of the credulous and brutal, read one lying newspaper headline, "Anarchists throw a bomb in a crowd in the Haymarket in Chicago," and immediately cried out, "They ought to be hung."—This, though I had never believed in capital punishment for ordinary criminals. For that ignorant, outrageous, blood-thirsty sentence I shall never forgive myself, though I know the dead men would have forgiven me, though I know those who loved them forgive me. But my own voice, as it sounded that night, will sound so in my ears till I die,—a bitter reproach and shame. What had I done? Credited the first wild rumor of an event of which I knew nothing, and, in my mind, sent men to the gallows without asking one word of defense! In one wild, unbalanced moment threw away the sympathies of a lifetime, and became

an executioner at heart. And what I did that night millions did, and what I said millions said. I have only one word of extenuation for myself and all those people—ignorance. I did not know what Anarchism was. I had never seen it used save in histories, and there it was always synonymous with social confusion and murder. I believed the newspapers. I thought these men had thrown that bomb, unprovoked, into a mass of men and women, from a wicked delight in killing. And so thought all those millions of others. But out of those millions there were some few thousand—I am glad I was one of them—who did not let the matter rest there.

I know not what resurrection of human decency first stirred within me after that,—whether it was an intellectual suspicion that may be I did not know all the truth of the case and could not believe the newspapers, or whether it was the old strong undercurrent of sympathy which often prompts the heart to go out to the accused, without a reason; but this I do know that though I was no Anarchist at the time of the execution, it was long and long before that, that I came to the conclusion that the accusation was false, the trial a farce, that there was no warrant either in justice or in law for their conviction; and that the hanging, if hanging there should be, would be the act of a society composed of people who had said what I said on the first night, and who had kept their eyes and ears fast shut ever since, determined to see nothing and to know nothing but rage and vengeance. Till the very end I hoped that mercy might intervene, though justice did not; and from the hour I knew neither would nor ever could again, I distrusted law and lawyers, judges and governors alike. And my whole being cried out to know what it was these men had stood for, and why they were hanged, seeing it was not proven they knew anything about the throwing of the bomb.

Little by little, here and there, I came to know that what they had stood for was a very high and noble ideal of human life, and what they were hanged for was preaching it to the common people,—the common people who were as ready to hang them, in their ignorance, as the court and the prosecutor were in their malice! Little by little I came to know that these were men who had a clearer vision of human right than most of their fellows; and who, being moved by deep social sympathies, wished to share their vision with their fellows, and so proclaimed it in the market-place. Little by little I realized that the misery, the pathetic submission, the awful degradation of the workers, which from the time I was old enough to begin to think had borne heavily upon my heart, (as they

must bear upon all who have hearts to feel at all), had smitten theirs more deeply still,—so deeply that they knew no rest save in seeking a way out,—and that was more than I had ever had the sense to conceive. For me there had never been a hope there should be no more rich and poor; but a vague idea that there might not be so rich and so poor, if the workingmen by combining could exact a little better wages, and make their hours a little shorter. It was the message of these men, (and their death swept that message far out into cars that would never have heard their living voices), that all such little dreams are folly. That not in demanding little, not in striking for an hour less, not in mountain labor to bring forth mice, can any lasting alleviation come; but in demanding, much,—all,—in a bold self-assertion of the worker to toil any hours he finds sufficient, not that another finds for him,—here is where the way out lies. That message, and the message of others, whose works, associated with theirs, their death drew to my notice, took me up, as it were, upon a mighty hill, wherefrom I saw the roofs of the workshops of the little world. I saw the machines, the things that men had made to ease their burden, the wonderful things, the iron genii, I saw them set their iron teeth in the living flesh of the men who made them; I saw the maimed and crippled stumps of men go limping away into the night that engulfs the poor, perhaps to be thrown up in the flotsam and jetsam of beggary for a time, perhaps to suicide in some dim corner where the black surge throws its slime.

I saw the rose fire of the furnace shining on the blanched face of the man who tended it, and knew surely as I knew anything in life, that never would a free man feed his blood to the fire like that.

I saw swart bodies, all mangled and crushed, borne from the mouths of the mines to be stowed away in a grave hardly less narrow and dark than that in which the living form had crouched ten, twelve, fourteen hours a day; and I knew that in order that I might be warm—I, and you, and those others who never do any dirty work—those men had slaved away in those black graves, and been crushed to death at last.

I saw beside city streets great heaps of horrible colored earth, and down at the bottom of the trench from which it was thrown, so far down that nothing else was visible, bright gleaming eyes, like a wild animal's hunted into its hole. And I knew that free men never chose to labor there, with pick and shovel in that foul, sewage-soaked earth, in that narrow trench, in that deadly sewer gas ten, eight, even six hours a day. Only slaves would do it.

I saw deep down in the hull of the ocean liner the men who shoveled the coal—burned and seared like paper before the grate; and I knew that “the record” of the beautiful monster, and the pleasure of the ladies who laughed on the deck, were paid for with these withered bodies and souls.

I saw the scavenger carts go up and down, drawn by sad brutes driven by sadder ones; for never a man, a man in full possession of his selfhood, would freely choose to spend all his days in the nauseating stench that forces him to swill alcohol to neutralize it.

And I saw in the lead works how men were poisoned, and in the sugar refineries how they went insane; and in the factories how they lost their decency; and in the stores how they learned to lie; and I knew it was slavery made them do all this. I knew the Anarchists were right,—the whole thing must be changed, the whole thing was wrong,—the whole system of production and distribution, the whole ideal of life.

And I questioned the government then; they had taught me to question it. What have you done—you the keepers of the Declaration and the Constitution—what have you done about all this? What have you done to preserve the conditions of freedom to the people?

Lied, deceived, fooled, tricked, bought and sold and got gain! You have sold away the land, that you had no right to sell. You have murdered the aboriginal people, that you might seize the land in the name of the white race, and then steal it away from them again, to be again sold by a second and a third robber. And that buying and selling of the land has driven the people off the healthy earth and away from the clean air into these rot-heaps of humanity called cities, where every filthy thing is done, and filthy labor breeds filthy bodies and filthy souls. Our boys are decayed with vice before they come to manhood; our girls—ah, well might John Harvey write:

“Another begetteth a daughter white and gold,
She looks into the meadow land water, and the world
Knows her no more; they have sought her field and fold
But the City, the City hath bought her,
It hath sold
Her piecemeal, to students, rats, and reek of the graveyard
mould.”

You have done this thing, gentlemen who engineer the government; and not only have you caused this ruin to come upon others; you yourselves are rotten with this debauchery. You exist for the purpose of

granting privileges to whoever can pay most for you, and so limiting the freedom of men to employ themselves that they must sell themselves into this frightful slavery or become tramps, beggars, thieves, prostitutes, and murderers. And when you have done all this, what then do you do to them, these creatures of your own making? You, who have set them the example in every villainy? Do you then relent, and remembering the words of the great religious teacher to whom most of you offer lip service on the officially religious day, do you go to these poor, broken, wretched creatures and love them? Love them and help them, to teach them to be better? No: you build prisons high and strong, and there you beat, and starve, and hang, finding by the working of your system human beings so unutterably degraded that they are willing to kill whomsoever they are told to kill at so much monthly salary.

This is what the government is, has always been, the creator and defender of privilege; the organization of oppression and revenge. To hope that it can ever become anything else is the vainest of delusions. They tell you that Anarchy, the dream of social order without government, is a wild fancy. The wildest dream that ever entered the heart of man is the dream that mankind can ever help itself through an appeal to law, or to come to any order that will not result in slavery wherein there is any excuse for government.

It was for telling the people this that these five men were killed. For telling the people that the only way to get out of their misery was first to learn what their rights upon this earth were;—freedom to use the land and all within it and all the tools of production—and then to stand all together and take them, themselves, and not to appeal to the jugglers of the law. Abolish the law—that is abolish privilege,—and crime will abolish itself.

They will tell you these men were hanged for advocating force. What! These creatures who drill men in the science of killing, who put guns and clubs in hands they train to shoot and strike, who hail with delight the latest inventions in explosives, who exult in the machine that can kill the most with the least expenditure of energy, who declare a war of extermination upon people who do not want their civilization, who ravish, and burn, and garotte and guillotine, and hang, and electrocute, they have the impertinence to talk about the unrighteousness of force! True, these men did advocate the right to resist invasion by force. You will find scarcely one in a thousand who does not believe in that right. The one will be either a real Christian or a non-resistant Anarchist. It will

not be a believer in the State. No, no; it was not for advocating forcible resistance on principle, but for advocating forcible resistance to their tyrannies, and for advocating a society which would forever make an end of riches and poverty, of governors and governed.

The spirit of revenge, which is always stupid, accomplished its brutal act. Had it lifted its eyes from its work, it might have seen in the background of the scaffold that bleak November morning the dawn-light of Anarchy whiten across the world.

So it came first,—a gleam of hope to the proletaire, a summons to rise and shake off his material bondage. But steadily, steadily the light has grown, as year by year the scientist, the literary genius, the artist, and the moral teacher, have brought to it the tribute of their best work, their unpaid work, the work they did for love. To-day it means not only material emancipation, too; it comes as the summing up of all those lines of thought and action which for three hundred years have been making towards freedom; it means fullness of being, the free life.

And I say it boldly, notwithstanding the recent outburst of condemnation, notwithstanding the cry of lynch, burn, shoot, imprison, deport, and the Scarlet Letter A to be branded low down upon the forehead, and the latest excuse for that fond esthetic decoration “the button,” that for two thousand years no idea has so stirred the world as this,—none which had such living power to break down barriers of race and degree, to attract prince and proletaire, poet and mechanic, Quaker and Revolutionist. No other ideal but the free life is strong enough to touch the man whose infinite pity and understanding goes alike to the hypocrite priest and the victim of Siberian whips; the loving rebel who stepped from his title and his wealth to labor with all the laboring earth; the sweet strong singer who sang

“No Master, high or low”;

the lover who does not measure his love nor reckon on return; the self-centered one who “will not rule, but also will not ruled be”; the philosopher who chanted the Over-man; the devoted woman of the people; ay, and these too,—these rebellious flashes from the vast cloud-hung ominous obscurity of the anonymous, these souls whom governmental and capitalistic brutality has whipped and goaded and stung to blind rage and bitterness, these mad young lions of revolt, these Winkelrieds who offer their hearts to the spears.

Exquisite Rebel: The Essays of Voltairine de Cleyre—Feminist, Anarchist, Genius; published by State University of New York Press, 2005

This Haymarket address was delivered in Chicago, the scene of the Haymarket affair, on 11 November 1901 and published in *Free Society* on 24 November. Here she confesses something forgivable to us but not to her: that when she first heard of the Haymarket riot, she exclaimed that the anarchists should be hanged. She herself read much of her life's work as an attempt to transcend that moment of brutal emotion. The address also contains one of her most direct defenses of her anarchism. "The recent outburst of savagery" refers to the repression that followed the McKinley assassination. "Winkelried" is Arnold von Winkelried, fourteenth-century Swiss hero who advanced alone against the forces of Austria.

The Making of an Anarchist

Voltairine de Cleyre

1903

"Here was one guard, and here was the other at this end; I was here opposite the gate. You know those problems in geometry of the hare and the hounds - they never run straight, but always in a curve, so, see? And the guard was no smarter than the dogs; if he had run straight to the gate he would have caught me."

It was Peter Kropotkin¹ telling of his escape from the Petro-Paulovsky fortress². Three crumbs on the table marked the relative position of the outwitted guards and the fugitive prisoner; the speaker had broken them from the bread on which he was lunching and dropped them on the table with an amused smile. The suggested triangle had been the starting-point of the life-long exile of the greatest man, save Tolstoy³ alone, that Russia has produced: from that moment began the many foreign wanderings and the taking of the simple, love-given title "Comrade," for which he had abandoned the "Prince," which he despises.

¹ Peter Alekseevich Kropotkin (1842-1921). Geographer and geologist, became acquainted with the anarchist movement while living for a period in the Swiss Jura, among the watchmakers. He is the main exponent of communitarian anarchism.

² Petro-Paulovsky fortress. Kropotkin was held in the fortress, transformed in a prison, from 1874 to 1876. He made a daring escape from the military hospital where he was recovered. This episode is recounted in *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* (1899)

³ Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910). One of the major Russian writers. His Christian philosophy was based on non-violence and on the anarchist rejection of state power.

We were three together in the plain little home of a London working-man - Will Wess⁴, a one-time shoemaker - Kropotkin, and I. We had our "tea" in homely English fashion, with thin slices of buttered bread; and we talked of things nearest our hearts, which, whenever two or three Anarchists are gathered together, means present evidences of the growth of liberty and what our comrades are doing in all lands. And as what they do and say often leads them into prisons, the talk had naturally fallen upon Kropotkin's experience and his daring escape, for which the Russian government is chagrined unto this day.

Presently the old man glanced at the time and jumped briskly to his feet: "I am late. Good-bye, Voltairine; good-bye, Will. Is this the way to the kitchen? I must say good-by to Mrs. Turner and Lizzie."⁵ And out to the kitchen he went, unwilling, late though he was, to leave without a hand-clasp to those who had so much as washed a dish for him. Such is Kropotkin, a man whose personality is felt more than any other in the Anarchist movement - at once the gentlest, the most kindly, and the most invincible of men. Communist as well as Anarchist, his very heart-beats are rhythmic with the great common pulse of work and life.

Communist am not I, though my father was, and his father before him during the stirring times of '48⁶, which is probably the remote reason for my opposition to things as they are: at bottom convictions are mostly temperamental. And if I sought to explain myself on other grounds, I should be a bewildering error in logic; for by early influences and education I should have been a nun, and spent my life glorifying Authority in its most concentrated form, as some of my schoolmates are doing at this hour within the mission houses of the Order of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary. But the old ancestral spirit of rebellion asserted itself while I was yet fourteen, a schoolgirl at the Convent of Our Lady of Lake Huron, at Sarnis, Ontario⁷. How I pity myself now, when I remember it, poor lonesome little soul, battling solitary in the murk of religious su-

⁴ William Wess. Anarchist participant in the Hackney Branch (London) of the Socialist League and member of the Freedom group who published a journal of the same name.

⁵ Mrs. Turner is Mary Turner, the wife of the anarchist John Turner and Lizzie is his sister. Lizzie was married to the Scottish anarchist Thomas Bell and later moved to America.

⁶ 1848. This is the year of social and political unrest throughout Europe.

⁷ Convent of Our Lady of Lake Huron, at Sarnis, Ontario. In this convent Voltairine de Cleyre attended primary school.

perstition, unable to believe and yet in hourly fear of damnation, hot, savage, and eternal, if I do not instantly confess and profess! How well I recall the bitter energy with which I repelled my teacher's enjoiner, when I told her that I did not wish to apologize for an adjudged fault, as I could not see that I had been wrong, and would not *feel* my words. "It is not necessary," said she, "that we should feel what we say, but it is always necessary that we obey our superiors." "I will not lie." I answered hotly, and at the same time trembled lest my disobedience had finally consigned me to torment!

I struggled my way out at last, and was a freethinker when I left the institution, three years later, though I had never seen a book or heard a word to help me in my loneliness. It had been like the Valley of the Shadow of Death, and there are white scars on my soul yet, where Ignorance and Superstition burnt me with their hell-fire in those stifling days. Am I blasphemous? It is their word, not mine. Beside that battle of my young days all others have been easy, for whatever was without, within my own Will was supreme. It has owed no allegiance, and never shall; it has moved steadily in one direction, the knowledge and the assertion of its own liberty, with all the responsibility falling thereon.

This, I am sure, is the ultimate reason for my acceptance of Anarchism, though the specific occasion which ripened tendencies to definition was the affair of 1886-87, when five innocent men were hanged in Chicago for the act of one guilty who still remains unknown⁸. Till then I believed in the essential justice of the American law and trial by jury. After that I never could. The infamy of that trial has passed into history, and the question it awakened as to the possibility of justice under law has passed into clamorous crying across the world. With this question fighting for a hearing at a time when, young and ardent, all questions were pressing with a force which later life would in vain hear again, I chanced to attend a Paine Memorial Convention in an out-of-the-way

⁸ The affair of 1886-87. The reference is to the confrontation between the police and labor protestors that took place on the 4th of May in Haymarket Square (Chicago) following the killing, the previous day, by the police, of 6 people during a strike. In Haymarket Square the police tried to disperse the peaceful demonstration when somebody threw a bomb that killed 7 policemen. At that point the police fired on the crowd killing probably 20 workers. In the following weeks, August Spies and seven other anarchists were convicted of murder. Spies, Fischer, Engel and Parsons proclaimed their innocence but were hanged on November 11, 1887. Since 1890 the first of May commemorates the workers killed in Haymarket Square.

corner of the earth among the mountains and the snow-drifts of Pennsylvania. I was a freethought lecturer at the time, and had spoken in the afternoon on the lifework of Paine⁹; in the evening I sat in the audience to hear Clarence Darrow¹⁰ deliver an address on Socialism. It was my first introduction to any plan for bettering the condition of the working-classes which furnished some explanation of the course of economic development, and I ran to it as one who has been turning about in darkness runs to the light. I smile now at how quickly I adopted the label "Socialist" and how quickly I cast it aside. Let no one follow my example; but I was young. Six weeks later I was punished for my rashness, when I attempted to argue for my faith with a little Russian Jew, named Mozersky, at a debating club in Pittsburgh. He was an Anarchist, and a bit of a Socrates¹¹. He questioned me into all kinds of holes, from which I extricated myself most awkwardly, only to flounder into others he had smilingly dug while I was getting out of the first ones. The necessity of a better foundation became apparent: hence began a course of study in the principles of sociology and of modern Socialism and Anarchism as presented in their regular journals. It was Benjamin Tucker's *Liberty*¹², the exponent of Individualist Anarchism, which finally convinced me that "Liberty is not the Daughter but the Mother of Order."¹³ And though I no longer hold the particular economic gospel advocated by Tucker, the doctrine of Anarchism itself, as then conceived, has but broadened, deepened, and intensified itself with years.

To those unfamiliar with the movement, the various terms are confusing. Anarchism is, in truth, a sort of Protestantism, whose adherents are a unit in the great essential belief that all forms of external authority

⁹ Thomas Paine (1737-1809). Born in England, Tomas Paine became an advocate of American independence, exposing his ideas in a passionate pamphlet *Common Sense* that was published in January 1776, six months before the Declaration of Independence.

¹⁰ Clarence Seward Darrow (1857-1938). A lawyer who was sympathetic to the cause of the labor movement and of the downtrodden.

¹¹ Socrates. The Greek philosopher practiced a method of debating known as *maieutic*, by which the truth is drawn out of the individual through a process of questioning leading to personal discovery

¹² Benjamin Tucker (1854-1939). One of the major exponents of individual anarchism through the editing and publishing of the journal *Liberty* between 1881 and 1908.

¹³ *Liberty is not the Daughter but the Mother of Order*. Position held by Proudhon and Tucker.

must disappear to be replaced by self-control only, but variously divided in our conception of the form of future society. Individualism supposes private property to be the cornerstone of personal freedom; asserts that such property should consist in the absolute possession of one's own product and of such share of the natural heritage of all as one may actually use. Communist-Anarchism, on the other hand, declares that such property is both unrealizable and undesirable; that the common possession and use of all the natural sources and means of social production can alone guarantee the individual against a recurrence of inequality and its attendants, government and slavery. My personal conviction is that both forms of society, as well as many intermediations, would, in the absence of government, be tried in various localities, according to the instincts and material condition of the people, but that well founded objections may be offered to both. Liberty and experiment alone can determine the best forms of society. Therefore I no longer label myself otherwise than as "Anarchist" simply.

I would not, however, have the world think that I am an "Anarchist by trade." Outsiders have some very curious notions about us, one of them being that Anarchists never work. On the contrary, Anarchists are nearly always poor, and it is only the rich who live without work. Not only this, but it is our belief that every healthy human being will, by the laws of his own activity, choose to work, though certainly not as now, for at present there is little opportunity for one to find his true vocation. Thus I, who in freedom would have selected otherwise, am a teacher of language. Some twelve years since, being in Philadelphia and without employment, I accepted the proposition of a small group of Russian Jewish factory workers to form an evening class in the common English branches. I know well enough that behind the desire to help me to make a living lay the wish that I might thus take part in the propaganda of our common cause. But the incidental became once more the principal, and a teacher of working men and women I have remained from that day. In those twelve years that I have lived and loved and worked with foreign Jews I have taught over a thousand, and found them as a rule, the brightest, the most persistent and sacrificing students, and in youth dreamers of social ideals. While the "intelligent American" has been cursing him as the "ignorant foreigner," while the short-sighted working man has been making life for the "sheeny" as intolerable as possible, silent and patient the despised man has worked his way against it all. I have myself seen such genuine heroism in the cause of education practiced by girls

and boys, and even by men and women with families, as would pass the limits of belief to the ordinary mind. Cold, starvation, self-isolation, all endured for years in order to obtain the means for study; and, worse than all, exhaustion of body even to emaciation - this is common. Yet in the midst of all this, so fervent is the social imagination of the young that most of them find time besides to visit the various clubs and societies where radical thought is discussed, and sooner or later ally themselves either with the Socialist Sections, the Liberal Leagues, the Single Tax Clubs, or the Anarchist Groups. The greatest Socialist daily in America is the Jewish *Vorwaerts*¹⁴, and the most active and competent practical workers are Jews. So they are among the Anarchists.

I am no propagandist at all costs, or I would leave the story here; but the truth compels me to add that as the years pass and the gradual filtration and absorption of American commercial life goes on, my students become successful professionals, the golden mist of enthusiasm vanishes, and the old teacher must turn for comradeship to the new youth, who still press forward with burning eyes, seeing what is lost forever to those whom common success has satisfied and stupefied. It brings tears sometimes, but as Kropotkin says, "Let them go; we have had the best of them." After all, who are the really old? Those who wear out in faith and energy, and take to easy chairs and soft living; not Kropotkin, with his sixty years upon him, who has bright eyes and the eager interest of a little child; not fiery John Most¹⁵, "the old warhorse of the revolution," unbroken after his ten years of imprisonment in Europe and America; not grey-haired Louise Michel¹⁶, with the aurora of the morning still shining in her keen look which peers from behind the barred memories of New Caledonia; not Dyer D. Lum¹⁷, who still smiles

¹⁴ Jewish Vorwaerts. The socialist *Jewish Daily Forward* was a newspaper that started publications in 1897 with Abraham Cahan as editor.

¹⁵ John Most (1846-1906). Highly influential anarchist born in Germany from where he moved to America in 1882 where he became editor of the German-language anarchist paper *Freiheit*.

¹⁶ Louise Michel (1830-1905). Anarchist who was sent by the French state to the penal colony of New Caledonia after the defeat of the Paris Commune. In 1891 she organized an international school in London.

¹⁷ Dyer D. Lum (1840-1893). An anarchist close friend of Voltairine. He committed suicide in 1893. In her eulogy, Voltairine calls him "the brightest scholar, the profoundest thinker of the American Revolutionary movement."

in his grave, I think; nor Tucker, nor Turner¹⁸, nor Theresa Clairmont¹⁹, nor Jean Grave²⁰ - not these. I have met them all, and felt the springing life pulsating through heart and hand, joyous, ardent, leaping into action. Not such are the old, but your young heart that goes bankrupt in social hope, dry-rotting in this stale and purposeless society. Would you always be young? Then be an Anarchist, and live with the faith of hope, though you be old.

I doubt if any other hope has the power to keep the fire alight as I saw it in 1897, when we met the Spanish exiles released from the fortress of Montjuich²¹. Comparatively few persons in America ever knew the story of that torture, though we distributed fifty thousand copies of the letters smuggled from the prison, and some few newspapers did reprint them. They were the letters of men incarcerated on mere suspicion for the crime of an unknown person, and subjected to tortures the bare mention of which makes one shudder. Their nails were torn out, their heads compressed in metal caps, the most sensitive portions of the body twisted between guitar strings, their flesh burned with red hot irons; they had been fed on salt codfish after days of starvation, and refused water; Juan Ollé, a boy nineteen years old, had gone mad; another had confessed to something he had never done and knew nothing of. This is no horrible imagination. I who write have myself shaken some of those scarred hands. Indiscriminately, four hundred people of all sorts of beliefs - Republicans, trade unionists, Socialists, Free Masons, as well as Anarchists - had been cast into dungeons and tortured in the infamous "zero." Is it a wonder that most of them came out Anarchists? There were twenty-eight in the first lot that we met at Euston Station that August afternoon, homeless wanderers in the whirlpool of London, re-

¹⁸ John Turner, anarchist, friend of Kropotkin.

¹⁹ Theresa Clairmont (Teresa Claramunt) (1862-1931). She was deported abroad in 1896 by the Spanish state for anarchist activities. Returning to Spain in 1898 she took part in the launching of the anarchist paper *El Productor* in 1901.

²⁰ Jean Grave (1854-1939). The author of *La société mourante et l'anarchie* which Voltairine de Cleyre translated into English. In 1895 he began publishing the magazine "Les temps nouveaux" to which Kropotkin also sent contributions.

²¹ Montjuich. The Montjuich prison outside Barcelona is where anarchists, republicans, socialist, trade unionists and free masons (400 hundred in all) were kept and tortured by the Spanish guards, being accused, without proofs, of having planted a bomb during a Corpus Christi parade on June, 7, 1896. Eventually they were released without trail and asked to leave the country within 48 hours, as recounted by Voltairine who met a group of them arriving in London.

leased without trial after months of imprisonment, and ordered to leave Spain in forty-eight hours! They had left it, singing their prison songs; and still across their dark and sorrowful eyes one could see the eternal Maytime bloom. They drifted away to South America chiefly, where four or five new Anarchist papers have since arisen, and several colonizing experiments along Anarchist lines are being tried. So tyranny defeats itself, and the exile becomes the seed-sower of the revolution.

And not only to the heretofore unaroused does he bring awakening, but the entire character of the world movement is modified by this circulation of the comrades of all nations among themselves. Originally the American movement, the native creation which arose with Josiah Warren²² in 1829, was purely individualist; the student of economy will easily understand the material and historical cause for such development. But within the last twenty years the communist idea has made great progress owing primarily to that concentration in capitalist production which has driven the American workingmen to grasp at the idea of solidarity, and, secondly, the expulsion of active communist propagandists from Europe. Again, another change has come within the last ten years. Till then the application of the idea was chiefly narrowed to industrial matters, and the economic schools mutually denounced each other; today a large and genial tolerance is growing. The young generation recognizes the immense sweep of the idea through all the realms of art, science, literature, education, sex relations, and personal morality, as well as social economy, and welcomes the accession to the ranks of those who struggle to realize the free life, no matter in what field. For this is what Anarchism finally means, the whole unchaining of life after two thousand years of Christian asceticism and hypocrisy.

Apart from the question of ideals, there is the question of method. "How do you propose to get all this?" is the question most frequently asked us. The same modification has taken place here. Formerly there were "Quakers" and "Revolutionists"; so there are still. But while they neither thought well of the other, now both have learned that each has his own use in the great play of world forces. No man is in himself a unit, and in every soul Jove still makes war on Christ. Nevertheless, the spirit of Peace grows; and while it would be idle to say that Anarchists in general believe that any of the great industrial problems will be solved

²² Josiah Warren (1798-1874), musician, inventor and anarchist philosopher and social activist, set up several experimental communities in the USA.

without the use of force it would be equally idle to suppose that they consider force itself a desirable thing, or that it furnishes a final solution to any problem. From peaceful experiment alone can come final solution, and that the advocates of force know and believe as well as the Tolstoyans. Only they think that the present tyrannies provoke resistance. The spread of Tolstoy's "War and Peace" and "The Slavery of Our Times," and the growth of numerous Tolstoy clubs having for their purpose the dissemination of the literature of non-resistance, is an evidence that many receive the idea that it is easier to conquer war with peace. I am one of these. I can see no end of retaliation unless someone ceases to retaliate. But let no one mistake this for servile submission or meek abnegation; my right shall be asserted no matter at what cost to me, and none shall trench upon it without my protest.

Good-natured satirists often remark that "the best way to cure an Anarchist is to give him a fortune." Substituting "corrupt" for "cure," I would subscribe to this; and believing myself to be no better than the rest of men, I earnestly hope that as so far it has been my lot to work, and work hard, and for no fortune, so I may continue to the end; for let me keep the intensity of my soul, with all the limitations of my material conditions, rather than become the spineless and ideal-less creation of material needs. My reward is that I live with the young; I keep step with my comrades; I shall die in the harness with my face to the east - the East and the Light.

Retrieved on September 29, 2018 from
<https://www.panarchy.org/voltairine/anarchist.html>

Originally published in "Selected Works of Voltairine de Cleyre" edited by Alex Berkman and published by Mother Earth Publishing in 1914. It has also been published by Revisionist Press, New York. | In this essay, Voltairine de Cleyre (1866-1912) recounts her life and her introduction to socialist and anarchist ideas. It is a lively tale of one of the most sincere and honest personalities in the history of anarchism.

The Mexican Revolution

Voltairine de Cleyre

29 October 1911

THAT a nation of people considering themselves enlightened, informed, alert to the interests of the hour, should be so generally and so profoundly ignorant of a revolution taking place in their backyard, so to speak, as the people of the United States are ignorant of the present revolution in Mexico, can be due only to profoundly and generally acting causes. That people of revolutionary principles and sympathies should be so, is inexcusable.

It is as one of such principles and sympathies that I address you, as one interested in every move the people make to throw off their chains, no matter where, no matter how, though naturally my interest is greatest where the move is such as appears to me to be most in consonance with the general course of progress, where the tyranny attacked is what appears to me the most fundamental, where the method followed is to my thinking most direct and unmistakable. And I add that those of you who have such principles and sympathies are in the logic of your own being bound, first, to inform yourselves concerning so great a matter as the revolt of millions of people what they are struggling for, what they are struggling against, and how the struggle stands from day to day, if possible; if not, from week to week, or month to month, as best you can; and second, to spread this knowledge among others, and endeavor to do what little you can to awaken the consciousness and sympathy of others.

One of the great reasons why the mass of the American people know nothing of the Revolution in Mexico, is, that they have altogether a

wrong conception of what “revolution” means. Thus ninety-nine out of a hundred persons to whom you broach the subject will say, “Why, I thought that ended long ago. That ended last May”; and this week the press, even the *Daily Socialist*, reports, “A new revolution in Mexico.” It isn’t a *new* revolution at all; it is the same revolution, which did not begin with the armed rebellion of last May, which has been going on steadily ever since then, and before then, and is bound to go on for a long time to come, if the other nations keep their hands off and the Mexican people are allowed to work out their own destiny.

What is a revolution? and what is *this* revolution?

A revolution means some great and subversive change in the social institutions of a people, whether sexual, religious, political, or economic. The movement of the Reformation was a great religious revolution; a profound alteration in human thought a refashioning of the human mind. The general movement towards political change in Europe and America about the close of the eighteenth century, was a revolution. The American and the French revolutions were only prominent individual incidents in it, culminations of the teachings of the *Rights of Man*.

The present unrest of the world in its economic relations, as manifested from day to day in the opposing combinations of men and money, in strikes and bread-riots, in literature and movements of all kinds demanding a readjustment of the whole or of parts of our wealth-owning and wealth-distributing system, this unrest is the revolution of our time, the *economic revolution*, which is seeking social change, and will go on until it is accomplished. We are in it; at any moment of our lives it may invade our own homes with its stern demand for self-sacrifice and suffering. Its more violent manifestations are in Liverpool and London to-day, in Barcelona and Vienna to-morrow, in New York and Chicago the day after. Humanity is a seething, heaving mass of unease, tumbling like surge over a slipping, sliding, shifting bottom; and there will never be any ease until a rock bottom of economic justice is reached.

The Mexican revolution is one of the prominent manifestations of this world-wide economic revolt. It possibly holds as important a place in the present disruption and reconstruction of economic institutions, as the great revolution of France held in the eighteenth century movement. It did not begin with the odious government of Diaz nor end with his downfall, any more than the revolution in France began with the coronation of Louis XVI, or ended with his beheading. It began in the bitter and outraged hearts of the peasants, who for generations have suffered

under a ready-made system of exploitation, imported and foisted upon them, by which they have been dispossessed of their homes, compelled to become slave-tenants of those who robbed them ; and under Diaz, in case of rebellion to be deported to a distant province, a killing climate, and hellish labor. It will end only when that bitterness is assuaged by very great alteration in the land-holding system, or until the people have been absolutely crushed into subjection by a strong military power, whether that power be a native or a foreign one.

Now the political overthrow of last May, which was followed by the substitution of one political manager for another, did not at all touch the economic situation. It promised, of course; politicians always promise. It promised to consider measures for altering conditions; in the meantime, proprietors are assured that the new government intends to respect the rights of landlords and capitalists, and exhorts the workers to be patient and—*frugal!*

Frugal! Yes, that was the exhortation in Madero's paper to men who, when they are able to get work, make twenty-five cents a day. A man owning 5,000,000 acres of land exhorts the disinherited workers of Mexico to be frugal!

The idea that such a condition can be dealt with by the immemorial remedy offered by tyrants to slaves, is like the idea of sweeping out the sea with a broom. And unless that frugality, or in other words, starvation, is forced upon the people by more bayonets and more strategy than appear to be at the government's command, the Mexican revolution will go on to the solution of Mexico's land question with a rapidity and directness of purpose not witnessed in any previous upheaval.

For it must be understood that the main revolt is a revolt against the system of land tenure. The industrial revolution of the cities, while it is far from being silent, is not to compare with the agrarian revolt.

Let us understand why. Mexico consists of twenty-seven states, two territories and a federal district about the capital city. Its population totals about 15,000,000. Of these, 4,000,000 are of unmixed Indian descent, people somewhat similar in character to the Pueblos of our own southwestern states, primitively agricultural for an immemorial period, communistic in many of their social customs, and like all Indians, invincible haters of authority. These Indians are scattered throughout the rural districts of Mexico, one particularly well-known and much talked of tribe, the Yaquis, having had its fatherland in the rich northern state of Sonora, a very valuable agricultural country.

The Indian population—especially the Yaquis and the Moquis—have always disputed the usurpations of the invaders' government, from the days of the early conquest until now, and will undoubtedly continue to dispute them as long as there is an Indian left, or until their right to use the soil out of which they sprang *without paying tribute in any shape* is freely recognized.

The communistic customs of these people are very interesting, and very instructive too; they have gone on practising them all these hundreds of years, in spite of the foreign civilization that was being grafted upon Mexico (grafted in all senses of the word); and it was not until forty years ago (indeed the worst of it not till twenty-five years ago), that the increasing power of the government made it possible to destroy this ancient life of the people.

By them, the woods, the waters, and the lands were held in common. Any one might cut wood from the forest to build his cabin, make use of the rivers to irrigate his field or garden patch (and this is a right whose acknowledgment none but those who know the aridity of the southwest can fully appreciate the imperative necessity for). Tillable lands were allotted by mutual agreement before sowing, and reverted to the tribe after harvesting, for reallocation. Pasturage, the right to collect fuel, were for all. The habits of mutual aid which always arise among sparsely settled communities were instinctive with them. Neighbor assisted neighbor to build his cabin, to plough his ground, to gather and store this crop.

No legal machinery existed—no tax-gatherer, no justice, no jailer. All that they had to do with the hated foreign civilization was to pay the periodical rent-collector, and to get out of the way of the recruiting officer when he came around. Those two personages they regarded with spite and dread; but as the major portion of their lives was not in immediate contact with them, they could still keep on in their old way of life in the main.

With the development of the Diaz regime, which came into power in 1876 (and when I say the Diaz regime I do not especially mean the man Diaz, for I think he has been both overcursed and overpraised, but the whole force which has steadily developed centralized power from then on, and the whole policy of "civilizing Mexico," which was the Diaz boast), with its development, I say, this Indian life has been broken up, violated with as ruthless a hand as ever tore up a people by the roots and cast them out as weeds to wither in the sun.

Historians relate with horror the iron deeds of William the Conqueror, who in the eleventh century created the New Forest by laying waste the farms of England, destroying the homes of the people to make room for the deer. But his edicts were mercy compared with the action of the Mexican government toward the Indians. In order to introduce "progressive civilization" the Diaz regime granted away immense concessions of land, to native and foreign capitalists—chiefly foreign, indeed, though there were enough of native sharks as well. Mostly these concessions were granted to capitalistic combinations, which were to build railroads (and in some cases did so in a most uncalled for and uneconomic way), "develop" mineral resources, or establish "modern industries."

The government took no note of the ancient tribal rights or customs, and those who received the concessions proceeded to enforce their property rights. They introduced the unheard of crime of "trespass." They forbade the cutting of a tree, the breaking of a branch, the gathering of the fallen wood in the forests. They claimed the watercourses, forbidding their free use to the people; and it was as if one had forbidden to us the rains of heaven. The unoccupied land was theirs; no hand might drive a plow into the soil without first obtaining permission from a distant master—a permission granted on the condition that the product be the landlord's, a small, pitifully small, wage, the worker's.

Nor was this enough: in 1894 was passed "The Law of Unappropriated Lands." By that law, not only were the great stretches of vacant, in the old time *common*, land appropriated, but the occupied lands themselves *to which the occupants could not show a legal title* were to be "denounced"; that is, the educated and the powerful, who were able to keep up with the doings of the government, went to the courts and said that there was no legal title to such and such land, and put in a claim for it. And the usual hocus-pocus of legality being complied with (the actual occupant of the land being all the time blissfully unconscious of the law, in the innocence of his barbarism supposing that the working of the ground by his generations of forbears was title all-sufficient) one fine day the sheriff comes upon this hapless dweller on the heath and drives him from his ancient habitat to wander an outcast.

Such are the blessings of education. Mankind invents a written sign to aid its intercommunication; and forthwith all manner of miracles are wrought with the sign. Even such a miracle as that a part of the solid earth passes under the mastery of an impotent sheet of paper; and a distant bit of animated flesh which never even saw the ground, acquires

the power to expel hundreds, thousands, of like bits of flesh, though they grew upon that ground as the trees grow, labored it with their hands, and fertilized it with their bones for a thousand years.

*

"This law of unappropriated lands," says William Archer, "has covered the country with Naboth's Vineyards." I think it would require a Biblical prophet to describe the "abomination of desolation" it has made.

It was to become lords of this desolation that the men who play the game landlords who are at the same time governors and magistrates, enterprising capitalists seeking investments connived at the iniquities of the Diaz regime; I will go further and say devised them.

The Madero family alone owns some 8,000 square miles of territory; more than the entire state of New Jersey. The Terrazas family, in the state of Chihuahua, owns 25,000 square miles; rather more than the entire state of West Virginia, nearly one-half the size of Illinois. What was the plantation owning of our southern states in chattel slavery days, compared with this? And the peon's share for his toil upon these great estates is hardly more than was the chattel slave's wretched housing, wretched food, and wretched clothing.

It is to slaves like these that Madero appeals to be "frugal."

It is of men who have thus been disinherited that our complacent fellow-citizens of Anglo-Saxon origin, say: "Mexicans! What do you know about Mexicans? Their whole idea of life is to lean up against a fence and smoke cigarettes." And pray, what idea of life should a people have whose means of life in their own way have been taken from them? Should they be so mighty anxious to convert their strength into wealth for some other man to loll in?

It reminds me very much of the answer given by a negro employee on the works at Fortress Monroe to a companion of mine who questioned him good-humoredly on his easy idleness when the foreman's back was turned. "Ah ain't goin' to do no white man's work, fo' Ah don' get no white man's pay."

But for the Yaquis, there was worse than this. Not only were their lands seized, but they were ordered, a few years since, to be deported to Yucatan. Now Sonora, as I said, is a northern state, and Yucatan one of the southernmost. Yucatan hemp is famous, and so is Yucatan fever, and Yucatan slavery on the hemp plantations. It was to that fever and that slavery that the Yaquis were deported, in droves of hundreds at a time, men, women and children droves like cattle droves, driven and

beaten like cattle. They died there, like flies, as it was meant they should. Sonora was desolated of her rebellious people, and the land became "pacific" in the hands of the new landowners. Too pacific in spots. They had not left people enough to reap the harvests.

Then the government suspended the deportation act, but with the provision that for every crime committed by a Yaqui, five hundred of his people be deported. This statement is made in Madero's own book.

Now what in all conscience would any one with decent human feeling expect a Yaqui to do? Fight! As long as there was powder and bullet to be begged, borrowed, or stolen; as long as there is a garden to plunder, or a hole in the hills to hide in!

When the revolution burst out, the Yaquis and other Indian peoples, said to the revolutionists: "Promise us our lands back, and we will fight with you." And they are keeping their word, magnificently. All during the summer they have kept up the warfare. Early in September, the Chihuahua papers reported a band of 1,000 Yaquis in Sonora about to attack El Anil; a week later 500 Yaquis had seized the former quarters of the federal troops at Pitahaya. This week it is reported that federal troops are dispatched to Ponoitlan, a town in Jalisco, to quell the Indians who have risen in revolt again because their delusion that the Maderist government was to re-store their land has been dispelled. 'Like reports from Sinaloa. In the terrible state of Yucatan, the Mayas are in active rebellion; the reports say that "the authorities and leading citizens of various towns have been seized by the malcontents and put in prison." What is more interesting is, that the peons have seized not only "the leading citizens," but still more to the purpose have seized the plantations, parceled them, and are already gathering the crops for themselves.

Of course, it is not the pure Indians alone who form the peon class of Mexico. Rather more than double the number of Indians are mixed breeds; that is, about 8,000,000, leaving less than 3,000,000 of pure white stock. The mestiza, or mixed breed population, have followed the communistic instincts and customs of their Indian forbears; while from the Latin side of their make-up, they have certain tendencies which work well together with their Indian hatred of authority.

The mestiza, as well as the Indians, are mostly ignorant in book-knowledge, only about sixteen per cent, of the whole population of Mexico being able to read and write. It was not within the program of the "civilizing" regime to spend money in putting the weapon of learning

in the people's hands. But to conclude that people are necessarily unintelligent because they are illiterate, is in itself a rather unintelligent proceeding.

Moreover, a people habituated to the communal customs of an ancient agricultural life do not need books or papers to tell them that the soil is the source of wealth, and they must "get back to the land," even if their intelligence is limited.

Accordingly, they have got back to the land. In the state of Morelos, which is a small, south-central state, but a very important one being next to the Federal District, and by consequence to the city of Mexico there has been a remarkable land revolution. General Zapata, whose name has figured elusively in newspaper reports now as having made peace with Madero, then as breaking faith, next wounded and killed, and again resurrected and in hiding, then anew on the warpath and proclaimed by the provisional government the arch-rebel who must surrender unconditionally and be tried by court-martial; who has seized the strategic points on both the railroads running through Morelos, and who just a few days ago broke into the federal district, sacked a town, fought successfully at two or three points, with the federals, blew out two railroad bridges and so frightened the deputies in Mexico City that they are clamoring for all kinds of action ; this Zapata, the fires of whose military camps are springing up now in Guerrero, Oaxaca and Puebla as well, is an Indian with a long score to pay, and all an Indian's satisfaction in paying it. He appears to be a fighter of the style of our revolutionary Marion and Sumter; the country in which he is operating is mountainous, and guerilla bands are exceedingly difficult of capture; even when they are defeated, they have usually succeeded in inflicting more damage than they have received, and they always get away.

Zapata has divided up the great estates of Morelos from end to end, telling the peasants to take possession. They have done so. They are in possession, and have already harvested their crops. Morelos has a population of some 212,000.

In Puebla reports in September told us that eighty leading citizens had waited on the governor to protest against the taking possession of the land by the peasantry. The troops were deserting, taking horses and arms with them. It is they no doubt who are now fighting with Zapata. In Chihuahua, one of the largest states, prisons have been thrown open and the prisoners recruited as rebels; a great hacienda was attacked and the horses run off, whereupon the peons rose and joined the at-

tacking party. In Sinaloa, a rich northern state famous in the southwestern United States some years ago as the field of a great co-operative experiment in which Mr. C. B. Hoffman, one of the former editors of *The Chicago Daily Socialist*, was a leading spirit this week's paper reports that the former revolutionary general, Juan Banderas, is heading an insurrection second in importance only to that led by Zapata.

In the southern border state of Chiapas, the taxes in many places could not be collected. Last week news items said that the present government had sent General Paz there, with federal troops, to remedy that state of affairs. In Tabasco, the peons refused to harvest the crops for their masters; let us hope they have imitated their brothers in Morelos and gathered them for themselves.

The Maderists have announced that a stiff repressive campaign will be inaugurated at once; if we are to believe the papers, we are to believe Madero guilty of the imbecility of saying, "Five days after my inauguration the rebellion will be crushed." Just why the crushing has to wait till five days after the inauguration does not appear. I conceive there must have been some snickering among the reactionary deputies if such an announcement was really made; and some astonished query among his followers.

What are we to conclude from all these reports? That the Mexican people are satisfied? That it's all good and settled? What should we think if we read that the people, not of Lower but of Upper, California had turned out the ranch owners, had started to gather in the field products for themselves and that the Secretary of War had sent United States troops to attack some thousands of armed men (Zapata has had 3,000 under arms the whole summer and that force is now greatly increased) who were defending that expropriation? if we read that in the state of Illinois the farmers had driven off the tax collector? that the coast states were talking of secession and forming an independent combination? that in Pennsylvania a division of the federal army was to be dispatched to overpower a rebel force of fifteen hundred armed men doing guerilla work from the mountains? that the prison doors of Maryland, within hailing distance of Washington City, were being thrown open by armed revoltees? Should we call it a condition of peace? Regard it a proof that the people were appeased? We would not: we would say that revolution was in full swing. And the reason you have thought it was all over in Mexico, from last May till now, is that the Chicago press, like the eastern, northern, and central press in general, has said nothing about this

steady march of revolt. Even *The Socialist* has been silent. Now that the flame has shot up more spectacularly for the moment, they call it “a new revolution.”

That the papers pursue this course is partly due to the generally acting causes that produce our northern indifference, which I shall presently try to explain, and partly to the settled policy of capitalized interest in controlling its mouthpieces in such a manner as to give their present henchmen, the Maderists, a chance to pull their chestnuts out of the fire. They invested some \$10,000,000 in this bunch, in the hope that they may be able to accomplish the double feat of keeping capitalist possessions intact and at the same time pacifying the people with specious promises. They want to lend them all the countenance they can, till the experiment is well tried; so they deliberately suppress revolutionary news.

Among the later items of interest reported by the *Los Angeles Times* are those which announce an influx of ex-officials and many-millioned landlords of Mexico, who are hereafter to be residents of Los Angeles. What is the meaning of it? Simply that life in Mexico is not such a safe and comfortable proposition as it was, and that for the present they prefer to get such income as their agents can collect without themselves running the risk of actual residence.

Of course it is understood that some of this notable efflux (the supporters of Reyes, for example, who have their own little rebellions in Tabasco and San Luis Potosi this week) are political reactionists, scheming to get back the political loaves and fishes into their own hands. But most are simply those who know that their property right is safe enough to be respected by the Maderist government, but that the said government is not strong enough to put down the innumerable manifestations of popular hatred which are likely to terminate fatally to themselves if they remain there.

Nor is all of this fighting revolutionary; not by any means. Some is reactionary, some probably the satisfaction of personal grudge, much, no doubt, the expression of general turbulency of a very unconscious nature. But granting all that may be thrown in the balance, the main thing, the mighty thing, the regenerative revolution is the reappropriation of the land by the peasants. Thousands upon thousands of them are doing it.

Ignorant peasants: peasants who know nothing about the jargon of land reformers or of Socialists. Yes: that's just the glory of it! Just the

fact that it is done by ignorant people; that is, people ignorant of book theories; but not ignorant, not so ignorant by half, of life on the land, as the theory-spinners of the cities. Their minds are simple and direct; they act accordingly. For them, there is one way to "get back to the land"; i. e., to ignore the machinery of paper land-holding (in many instances they have burned the records of the title-deeds) and proceed to plough the ground, to sow and plant and gather, and keep the product themselves.

Economists, of course, will say that these ignorant people, with their primitive institutions and methods, will not develop the agricultural resources of Mexico, and that they must give way before those who will so develop its resources; that such is the law of human development.

In the first place, the abominable political combination, which gave away, as recklessly as a handful of soap-bubbles, the agricultural resources of Mexico gave them away to the millionaire speculators who were to develop the country were the educated men of Mexico. And this is what they saw fit to do with their higher intelligence and education. So the ignorant may well distrust the good intentions of educated men who talk about improvements in land development.

In the second place, capitalistic land-ownership, so far from developing the land in such a manner as to support a denser population, has depopulated whole districts, immense districts.

In the third place, what the economists do not say is, that the only justification for intense cultivation of the land is, that the product of such cultivation may build up the bodies of men (by consequence their souls) to richer and fuller manhood. It is not merely to pile up figures of so many million bushels of wheat and corn produced in a season; but that this wheat and corn shall first go into the stomachs of those who planted it and in abundance; to build up the brawn and sinew of the arms that work the ground, not meanly maintaining them in a half-starved condition. And second, to build up the strength of the rest of the nation who are willing to give needed labor in exchange. But never to increase the fortunes of idlers who dissipate it. This is the purpose, and the only purpose, of tilling soil; and the working of it for any other purpose is waste, waste both of land and of men.

In the fourth place, no change ever was, or ever can be, worked out in any society, except by the mass of the people. Theories may be propounded by educated people, and set down in books, and discussed in libraries, sitting-rooms and lecture-halls; but they will remain barren, unless the people in mass work them out. If the change proposed is

such that it is not adaptable to the minds of the people for whose ills it is supposed to be a remedy, then it will remain what it was, a barren theory.

Now the conditions in Mexico have been and are so desperate that some change is imperative. The action of the peasants proves it. Even if a strong military dictator shall arise, he will have to allow some provision going towards peasant proprietorship. These unlettered, but determined, people must be dealt with now; there is no such thing as "waiting till they are educated up to it." Therefore the wisdom of the economists is wisdom out of place rather, relative unwisdom. The people never can be educated, if their conditions are to remain what they were under the Diaz regime. Bodies and minds are both too impoverished to be able to profit by a spread of theoretical education, even if it did not require unavailable money and indefinite time to prepare such a spread. Whatever economic change is wrought, then, must be such as the people in their present state of comprehension can understand and make use of. And we see by the reports what they understand. They understand they have a right upon the soil, a right to use it for themselves, a right to drive off the invader who has robbed them, to destroy landmarks and title-deeds, to ignore the tax-gatherer and his demands.

And however primitive their agricultural methods may be, one thing is sure; that they are more economical than any system which heaps up fortunes by destroying men.

Moreover, who is to say how they may develop their methods once they have a free opportunity to do so? It is a common belief of the Anglo-Saxon that the Indian is essentially lazy. The reasons for his thinking so are two: under the various tyrannies and robberies which white men in general, and Anglo-Saxons in particular (they have even gone beyond the Spaniard) have inflicted upon Indians, there is no possible reason why an Indian should want to work, save the idiotic one that work in itself is a virtuous and exalted thing, even if by it the worker increases the power of his tyrant. As William Archer says: "If there are men, and this is not denied, who work for no wage, and with no prospect or hope of any reward, it would be curious to know by what motive other than the lash or the fear of the lash, they are induced to go forth to their labor in the morning." The second reason is, that an Indian really has a different idea of what he is alive for than an Anglo-Saxon has. And so have the Latin peoples. This different idea is what I meant when I said that the mestiza have certain tendencies inherited from the Latin side

of their make-up which work well together with their Indian hatred of authority. The Indian likes to live; to be his own master; to work when he pleases and stop when he pleases. He does not crave many things, but he craves the enjoyment of the things that he has. He feels himself more a part of nature than a white man does. All his legends are of wanderings with nature, of forests, fields, streams, plants, animals. He wants to live with the same liberty as the other children of earth. His philosophy of work is, Work so as to live care-free. This is not laziness; this is sense to the person who has that sort of make-up.

Your Latin, on the other hand, also wants to live; and having artistic impulses in him, his idea of living is very much in gratifying them. He likes music and song and dance, picture-making, carving, and decorating. He doesn't like to be forced to create his fancies in a hurry; he likes to fashion them, and admire them, and improve and refashion them, and admire again; and all for the fun of it. If he is ordered to create a certain design or a number of objects at a fixed price in a given time, he loses his inspiration ; the play becomes work, and hateful work. So he, too, does not want to work, except what is requisite to maintain himself in a position to do those things that he likes better.

Your Anglo-Saxon's idea of life, however, is to create the useful and the profitable whether he has any use or profit out of it or not and to keep busy, busy; to bestir himself "like the Devil in a holy water font." Like all other people, he makes a special virtue of his own natural tendencies, and wants all the world to "get busy"; it doesn't so much matter to what end this business is to be conducted, provided the individual scrabbles. Whenever a true Anglo-Saxon seeks to enjoy himself, he makes work out of that too, after the manner of a certain venerable English shop-keeper who in company with his son visited the Louvre. Being tired out with walking from room to room, consulting his catalogue, and reading artists' names, he dropped down to rest; but after a few moments rose resolutely and faced the next room, saying, "Well, Alfred, we'd better be getting through our work."

There is much question as to the origin of the various instincts. Most people have the impression that the chief source of variation lies in the difference in the amount of sunlight received in the native countries inhabited of the various races. Whatever the origin is, these are the broadly marked tendencies of the people. And "Business" seems bent not only upon fulfilling its own fore-ordained destiny, but upon making all the others fulfill it too. Which is both unjust and stupid. There is room

enough in the world for the races to try out their several tendencies and make their independent contributions to the achievements of humanity, without imposing them on those who revolt at them.

Granting that the population of Mexico, if freed from this foreign “busy” idea which the government imported from the north and imposed on them with such severity in the last forty years, would not immediately adopt improved methods of cultivation, even when they should have free opportunity to do so, still we have no reason to conclude that they would not adopt so much of it as would fit their idea of what a man is alive for; and if that actually proved good, it would introduce still further development. So that there would be a natural, and therefore solid, economic growth which would stick; while a forced development of it through the devastation of the people is no true growth. The only way to make it go, is to kill out the Indians altogether, and transport the “busy” crowd there, and then keep on transporting for several generations, to fill up the ravages the climate will make on such an imported population.

The Indian population of our states was in fact dealt with in this murderous manner. I do not know how grateful the reflection may be to those who materially profited by its extermination; but no one who looks forward to the final unification and liberation of man, to the incorporation of the several goodnesses of the various races in the one universal race, can ever read those pages of our history without burning shame and fathomless regret.

I have spoken of the meaning of revolution in general; of the meaning of the Mexican revolution chiefly an agrarian one; of its present condition. I think it should be apparent to you that in spite of the electoral victory of the now ruling power, it has not put an end even to the armed rebellion, and cannot, until it proposes some plan of land restoration; and that it not only has no inward disposition to do, but probably would not dare to do, in view of the fact that immense capital financed it into power.

As to what amount of popular sentiment was actually voiced in the election, it is impossible to say. The dailies informed us that in the Federal District where there are 1,000,000 voters, the actual vote was less than 450,000. They offered no explanation. It is impossible to explain it on the ground that we explain a light vote in our own communities, that the people are indifferent to public questions; for the people of Mexico are not now indifferent, whatever else they may be. Two explanations

are possible: the first, and most probable, that of governmental intimidation; the second, that the people are convinced of the uselessness of voting as a means of settling their troubles. In the less thickly populated agricultural states, this is very largely the case; they are relying upon direct revolutionary action. But although there was guerrilla warfare in the Federal District, even before the election, I find it unlikely that more than half the voting population there abstained from voting out of conviction, though I should be glad to be able to believe they did.

However, Madero and his aids are in, as was expected; the question is, how will they stay in? As Diaz did, and in no other way if they succeed in developing Diaz's sometime ability; which so far they are wide from having done, though they are resorting to the most vindictive and spiteful tactics in their persecution of the genuine revolutionists, wherever such come near their clutch.

To this whole turbulent situation three outcomes are possible:

1. A military dictator must arise, with sense enough to make some substantial concessions, and ability enough to pursue the crushing policy ably; or

2. The United States must intervene in the interests of American capitalists and landholders, in case the peasant revolt is not put down by the Maderist power. And that will be the worst thing that can possibly happen, and against which every worker in the United States should protest with all his might; or

3. The Mexican peasantry will be successful, and freedom in land become an actual fact. And that means the death-knell of great landholding in this country also, for what people is going to see its neighbor enjoy so great a triumph, and sit on tamely itself under landlordism?

Whatever the outcome be, one thing is certain: it is a great movement, which all the people of the world should be eagerly watching. Yet as I said at the beginning, the majority of our population know no more about it than of a revolt on the planet Jupiter. First because they are so, so, busy; they scarcely have time to look over the baseball score and the wrestling match; how could they read up on a revolution! Second, they are supremely egotistic and concerned in their own big country with its big deeds such as divorce scandals, vice-grafting, and auto races. Third, they do not read Spanish, and they have an ancient hostility to all that smells Spanish. Fourth, from our cradles we were told that whatever happened in Mexico was a joke. Revolutions, or rather rebellions, came and went, about like April showers, and they never meant anything se-

rious. And in this indeed there was only too much truth it was usually an excuse for one place-hunter to get another one's scalp. And lastly, as I have said, the majority of our people do not know that a revolution means a fundamental change in social life, and not a spectacular display of armies.

It is not much a few can do to remove this mountain of indifference; but to me it seems that every reformer, of whatever school, should wish to watch this movement with the most intense interest, as a practical manifestation of a wakening of the land-workers themselves to the recognition of what all schools of revolutionary economics admit to be the primal necessity the social repossession of the land.

And whether they be victorious or defeated, I, for one, bow my head to those heroic strugglers, no matter how ignorant they are, who have raised the cry Land and Liberty, and planted the blood-red banner on the burning soil of Mexico.

They Who Marry Do III

Voltairine de Cleyre

1907

Let me make myself understood on two points, now, so that when discussion arises later, words may not be wasted in considering things not in question:

First — How shall we measure doing well or doing ill;

Second — What I mean by marriage.

So much as I have been able to put together the pieces of the universe in my small head, there is no absolute right or wrong; there is only a relativity, depending on the consciously though very slowly altering condition of a social race in respect to the rest of the world. Right and wrong are social conceptions: mind, I do not say *human* conceptions. The names “right” and “wrong,” truly, are of human invention only; but the conception “right” and “wrong,” dimly or clearly, has been wrought out with more or less effectiveness by all intelligent social beings. And the definition of Right, as sealed and approved by the successful conduct of social beings, is: That mode of behavior which best serves the growing need of that society.

As to what that need is, certainly it has been in the past, and for the most part indicated by the unconscious response of the structure (social or individual) to the pressure of its environment. Up till a few years since I believed with Huxley, Von Hartman, and my teacher Lum, that it was wholly so determined; that consciousness might discern, and obey or oppose, but had no voice in deciding the course of social development: if it decided to oppose, it did so to its own ruin, not to the modification of the unconsciously determined ideal.

Of late years I have been approaching the conclusion that consciousness has a continuously increasing part in the decision of social problems; that while it is a minor voice, and must be for a long time to come, it is, nevertheless, the dawning power which threatens to overhurl old processes and old laws, and supplant them by other powers and other ideals. I know no more fascinating speculation than this, of the role of consciousness in present and future evolution. However, it is not our present speculation. I speak of it only because in determining what constitutes well-being at present, I shall maintain that the old ideal has been considerably modified by unconscious reaction against the superfluities produced by unconscious striving towards a certain end.

The question now becomes: What is the growing ideal of human society, unconsciously indicated and unconsciously discerned and illuminated?

By all the readings of progress, this indication appears to be the free individual; a society whose economic, political, social and sexual organization shall secure and constantly increase the scope of being to its several units; whose solidarity and continuity depend upon the free attraction of its component parts, and in no wise upon compulsory forms. Unless we are agreed that this is the discernable goal of our present social striving, there is no hope that we shall agree in the rest of the argument. For it would be vastly easy to prove that if the maintenance of the old divisions of society into classes, each with specialized services to perform — the priesthood, the military, the wage earner, the capitalist, the domestic servant, the breeder, etc. — is in accord with the growing force of society, then marriage is the thing, and they who marry do well.

But this is the point at which I stand, and from which I shall measure well and ill-doing; viz.: that the aim of social striving now is the free individual, implying all the conditions necessary to that freedom.

Now the second thing: What shall we understand as marriage?

Some fifteen or eighteen years ago, when I had not been out of the convent long enough to forget its teachings, nor lived and experienced enough to work out my own definitions, I considered that marriage was "a sacrament of the Church" or it was "civil ceremony performed by the State," by which a man and a woman were united for life, or until the divorce court separated them. With all the energy of a neophyte freethinker, I attacked religious marriage as an unwarranted interference on the part of the priest with the affairs of individuals, condemned

the “until death do us part” promise as one of the immoralities which made a person a slave through all his future to his present feelings, and urged the miserable vulgarity of both the religious and civil ceremony, by which the intimate personal relations of two individuals are made topic of comment and jest by the public.

By all this I still hold. Nothing is more disgustingly vulgar to me than the so-called sacrament of marriage; outraging of all delicacy in the trumpeting of private matters in the general ear. Need I recall, for example, the unprinted and unprintable floating literature concerning the marriage of Alice Roosevelt, when the so-called “American princess” was targeted by every lewd jester in the country, because, forsooth, the whole world had to be informed of her forthcoming union with Mr. Longworth! But it is neither the religious nor the civil ceremony that I refer to now, when I say that “those who marry do ill.” The ceremony is only a form, a ghost, a meatless shell. By marriage I mean the real thing, the permanent relation of a man and a woman, sexual and economical, whereby the present home and family life is maintained. It is of no importance to me whether this is a polygamous, polyandric or monogamous marriage, nor whether it is blessed by a priest, permitted by a magistrate, contracted publicly or privately, or not contracted at all. It is the permanent dependent relationship which, I affirm, is detrimental to the growth of individual character, and to which I am unequivocally opposed. Now my opponents know where to find me.

In the old days to which I have alluded, I contended, warmly and sincerely, for the exclusive union of one man and one woman as long as they were held together by love, and for the dissolution of the arrangement upon the desire of either. We talked in those days most enthusiastically about the bond of love, and it only. Nowadays I would say that I prefer to see a marriage based purely on business considerations, than a marriage based on love. That is not because I am in the least concerned with the success of the marriage, but because I am concerned with the success of love. And I believe that the easiest, surest and most applicable method of killing love is marriage — marriage as I have defined it. I believe that the only way to preserve love in anything like the ecstatic condition which renders it worthy of a distinctive name — otherwise it is either lust or simply friendship — is to maintain the distances. Never allow love to be vulgarized by the indecencies of continuous close communion. Better to be in familiar contempt of your enemy than the one you love.

I presume that some who are unacquainted with my opposition to legal and social forms, are ready to exclaim: "Do you want to do away with the relation of the sexes altogether, and cover the earth with monks and nuns?" By no means. While I am not over and above anxious about the repopulation of the earth, and should not shed any tears if I knew that the last man had already been born, I am not advocating sexual total abstinence. If the advocates of marriage had merely to prove the case against complete sexual abstinence, their task would be easy. The statistics of insanity, and in general all manner of aberrations, would alone constitute a big item in the charge. No: I do not believe that the highest human being is the unsexed one, or the one who extirpates his passions by violence, whether religious or scientific violence. I would have people regard all their normal instincts in a normal way, neither gluttonizing nor starving them, neither exalting them beyond their true service nor denouncing them as the servitors of evil, both of which mankind are wont to do in considering the sexual passion. In short, I would have men and women so arrange their lives that they shall always, at all times, be free beings in this regard as in all others. The limit of abstinence or indulgence can be fixed by the individual alone, what is normal for one being excess for another, and what is excess at one period of life being normal at another. And as to the effects of such normal gratification of such normal appetite upon population, I would have them conscientiously controlled, as they can be, are to some extent now, and will be more and more through the progress of knowledge. The birth rate of France and of native-born Americans gives evidence of such conscious control.

"But," say the advocates of marriage, "what is there in marriage to interfere with the free development of the individual? What does the free development of the individual mean, if not the expression of manhood and womanhood? And what is more essential to either than parentage and the rearing of young? And is not the fact that the latter requires a period of from fifteen to twenty years, the essential need which determines the permanent home?" It is the scientific advocate of marriage that talks this way. The religious man bases his talk on the will of God, or some other such metaphysical matter. I do not concern myself with him; I concern myself only those who contend that as Man is the latest link in evolution, the same racial necessities which determine the social and sexual relations of allied races will be found shaping and determining these relations in Man; and that, as we find among the higher animals

that the period of rearing the young to the point of caring for themselves usually determines the period of conjugality, it must be concluded that the greater attainments of Man, which have so greatly lengthened the educational period of youth, must likewise have fixed the permanent family relation as the ideal condition for humanity. This is but the conscious extension of what unconsciousness, or perhaps semi-conscious adaptation, had already determined for the higher animals, and in savage races to an extent. If people are reasonable, sensible, self-controlled (as to other people they will keep themselves anyway, no matter how things are arranged), does not the marriage state secure this great fundamental purpose of the primal social function, which is at the same time an imperative demand of individual development, better than any other arrangement? With all its failures, is it not the best that has been tried, or with our present light has been conceived?

In endeavoring to prove the opposite of this contention, I shall not go to the failures to prove my point. It is not my purpose to show that a vast number of marriages do not succeed; the divorce court records do that. But as one swallow doesn't make a summer, nor a flock of swallows either, so divorces do not in themselves prove that marriage in itself is a bad thing, only that a goodly number of individuals make mistakes. This is, indeed, an unanswerable argument against the indissolubility of marriage, but not against marriage itself. I will go to the successful marriages — the marriages in which whatever the friction, man and wife have spent a great deal of agreeable time together; in which the family has been provided for by honest work decently paid (as the wage-system goes), of the father, and preserved within the home by the saving labor and attention of the mother; the children given a reasonable education and started in life on their own account, and the old folks left to finish up life together, each resting secure in the knowledge that he has a tried friend until death severs the bond. This, I conceive, is the best form that marriage can present, and I opine it is oftener dreamed of than realized. But sometimes it is realized. Yet from the viewpoint that the object of life should be the development of individuality, such have lived less successfully than many who have not lived so happily.

And to the first great point — the point that physical parentage is one of the fundamental necessities of self-expression: here, I think, is where the factor of consciousness is in process of overturning the methods of life. Life, working unconsciously, blindly sought to preserve itself by generation, by manifold generation. The mind is simply staggered by the

productivity of a single stalk of wheat, or of a fish, or of a queen bee, or of a man. One is smitten the appalling waste of generative effort; numbed with helpless pity for the little things, the infinitude of little lives, that must come forth and suffer and die of starvation, of exposure, as a prey to other creatures, and all to no end but that out of the multitude a few may survive and continue the type! Man, at war with nature and not yet master of the situation, obeyed the same instinct, and by prolific parentage maintained his war. To the Hebrew patriarch as to the American pioneer, a large family meant strength, the wealth of brawn and sinew to continue the conquest of forest and field. It was the only resource against annihilation. Therefor, the instinct towards physical creation was one of the most imperative determinants of action.

Now the law of all instinct is, that it survives long after the necessity which created it has ceased to exist, and acts mischievously. The usual method of reckoning with such a survival since such and such a thing exists, it is an essential part of the structure, not obliged to account for itself and bound to be gratified. I am perfectly certain, however, that the more conscious consciousness becomes, or in other words, the more we become aware of the conditions of life and our relations therein, their new demands and the best way of fulfilling them, the more speedily will instincts no longer demanded be dissolved from the structure.

How stands the war upon nature now? Why, so — that short of a planetary catastrophe, we are certain of the conquest? Consciousness! The alert brain! The dominant will! Invention, discovery, mastery of hidden forces. We are no longer compelled to use the blind method of limitless propagation to equip the race with hunters and trappers and fishers and sheep-keepers and soil-tillers and breeders. Therefor, the original necessity which gave rise to the instinct of prolific parentage is gone; the instinct itself is bound to die, and is dying, but will die faster as men grasp more and more of the whole situation. In proportion as the parenthood of the brain becomes more and more prolific, as ideas spread, multiply, and conquer, the necessity for great physical production declines. This is my first contention. Hence the development of individuality does no longer *necessarily* imply numerous children, nor indeed, *necessarily* any children at all. That is not to say that no one will want children, nor to prophecy race suicide. It is simply to say that there will be fewer born, with better chances of surviving, developing, and achieving. Indeed, with all its clash of tendencies, the consciousness of our present society is having his driven home to it.

Supposing that the majority will still desire, or let me go further and say *do* still desire, this limited parentage, the question now becomes: Is this the overshadowing need in the development of the individual, or are there other needs equally imperative? If there are other needs equally imperative, must not these be taken equally into account in deciding the best manner of conducting one's life? If there are not other needs equally imperative, is it not still an open question whether the married state is the best means of securing it? In answering these questions, I think it will again be safe to separate into a majority and a minority. There will be a minority to whom the rearing of children will be the great dominant necessity of their being, and a majority to whom this will be one of their necessities. Now what are the other necessities? The other physical and mental appetites! The desire for food and raiment and housing after the individual's own taste; the desire for sexual association, not for reproduction; the artistic desires; the desire to know, with its thousand ramifications, which may carry the soul from the depths of the concrete to the heights of the abstract; the desire to do, that is, to imprint one's will upon the social structure, whether as a mechanical contriver, a force harnesser, a combiner, a dream translator, — whatever may be the particular mode of the personal organization.

The desire for food, shelter, and raiment, it should at all times lie within the individual's power to furnish for himself. But the method of home-keeping is such that after the relation has been maintained for a few years, the interdependence of one on the other has become so great that each is somewhat helpless when circumstance destroys the combination, the man less so, the woman wretchedly so. She has done one thing in a secluded sphere, and while she may have learned to do that thing well (which is not certain, the method of training is not at all satisfactory), it is not a thing which has equipped her with the confidence necessary to go about making an independent living. She is timid above all, incompetent to deal with the conditions of struggle. The world of production has swept past her; she knows nothing of it. On the other hand, what sort of an occupation is it for her to take domestic service under some other woman's rule? The conditions and pay of domestic service are such that every independent spirit would prefer to slave in a factory, where at least the slavery ends with the working hours. As for men, only a few days since a staunch free unionist told me, apparently without shame, that were it not for his wife he would be a tramp and a drunkard, simply because he is unable to keep a home;

and in his eyes the chief merit of the arrangement is that his stomach is properly cared for. This is a degree of helplessness which I should have thought he would have shrunk from admitting, but is nevertheless probably true. Now this is one of the greatest objections to the married condition, as it is to any other condition which produces like results. In choosing one's economic position in society, one should always bear in mind that it should be such as should leave the individual uncrippled — an all-round person, with both productive and preservative capacities, a being pivoted within.

Concerning the sexual appetite, irrespective of reproduction, the advocates of marriage claim, and with some reason, that it tends to preserve normal appetite and satisfaction, and is both a physical and moral safeguard against excesses, with their attendant results, disease. That it does not do so entirely, we have ample and painful proof continuously before our eyes. As to what it may accomplish, it is almost impossible to find out the truth; for religious asceticism has so built the feeling of shame into the human mind, on the subject of sex, that the first instinct, when it is brought under discussion, seems to be to lie about it. This is especially the case with women. The majority of women usually wish to create the impression that they are devoid of sexual desires, and think they have paid the highest compliment to themselves when they say, "Personally, I am very cold; I have never experienced such an attraction." Sometimes this is true, but oftener it is a lie -a lie born of centuries of the pernicious teachings of the Church. A roundly developed person will understand that she pays no honor to herself by denying herself fullness of being, whether to herself or of herself; though, without doubt, where such a deficiency really exists, it may give room for an extra growth of some other qualities, perhaps of higher value. In general, however, notwithstanding women's lies, there is no such deficiency. In general, young, healthy beings of both sexes desire such relations. What then? Is marriage the best answer to the need? Suppose they marry, say at twenty years, or thereabouts, which will be admitted as the time when sexual appetite is most active; the consequence is (I am just now leaving children out of account) that the two are thrown too much and too constantly in contact, and speedily exhaust the delight of each other's presence. Then irritations begin. The familiarities of life in common breed contempt. What was once a rare joy becomes a matter of course, and loses all its delicacy. Very often it becomes a physical torture to one (usually the woman), while it still retains some pleasure to

the other, for the reason that bodies, like souls, do most seldom, almost never, parallel each other's development. And this lack of parallelism is the greatest argument to be produced against marriage. No matter how perfectly adapted to each other two people may be at any given time, it is not the slightest evidence that they will continue to be so. And no period of life is more deceptive as to what future development may be than the age I have just been speaking of, the age when physical desires and attractions being strongest, they obscure or hold in abeyance the other elements of being.

The terrible tragedies of sexual antipathy, mostly for shame's sake, will never be revealed. But they have filled the Earth with murder. And even in those homes where harmony has been maintained, and all is apparently peaceful, it is mainly so through the resignation and self-suppression of either the man or the woman. One has consented to be largely effaced, for the preservation of the family and social respect.

But awful as these things are, these physical degradations, they are not so terrible as the ruined souls. When the period of physical predominance is past, and soul-tendencies begin more and more strongly to assert themselves, how dreadful is the recognition that one is bound by common parentage to one to remain in the constant company of one from whom one finds oneself going farther and farther away in thought every day. — "Not a day," exclaim the advocates of "free unions." I find such exclamation worse folly than the talk of "holy matrimony" believers. The bonds are there, the bonds of life in common, the love of the home built by joint labor, the habit of association and dependence; they are very real chains, binding both, and not to be thrown off lightly. Not in a day or a month, but only after long hesitation, struggle, and grievous, grievous pain, can the wrench of separation come. Oftener it does not come at all.

A chapter from the lives of two men recently deceased will illustrate my meaning. Ernest Crosby, wedded, and I assume happily, to a lady of conservative thought and feeling, himself the conservative, came into his soul's own at the age of thirty-eight, while occupying the position of Judge of the International Court at Cairo. From then on, the whole radical world knows Ernest Crosby's work. Yet what a position was his compelled by honor to continue the functions of a social life which he disliked! To quote the words of his friend, Leonard Abbot, "a prisoner in his palatial home, waited on by servants and lackeys. Yet to the end he remained enslaved by his possessions." Had Crosby not been bound,

had not union and family relations with one who holds very different views of life in faith and honor held him, should we not have had a different life-sum? Like his great teacher, Tolstoy, likewise made absurd, his life contradicted by his works, because of his union with a woman who has not developed along parallel lines.

The second case, Hugh O. Pentecost. From the year 1887 on, whatever were his special tendencies, Pentecost was in the main a sympathizer with the struggle of labor, an opposer of oppression, persecution and prosecution in all forms. Yet through the influence of his family relations, because he felt in honor bound to provide greater material comfort and a better standing in society than the position of a radical speaker could give, he consented at one time to be the puppet of those he had most strenuously condemned, to become a district attorney, a prosecutor. And worse than that, to paint himself as a misled baby for having done the best act of his life, to protest against the execution of the Chicago Anarchists. That this influence was brought to bear upon him, I know from his own lips; a repetition, in a small way, of the treason of Benedict Arnold, who for his Tory wife's sake laid everlasting infamy upon himself. I do not say there was no self-excusing in this, no Eve-did-tempt-me taint, but surely it had its influence. I speak of these two men because these instances are well known; but everyone knows of such instances among more obscure persons, and often where the woman is the one whose higher nature is degraded by the bond between herself and her husband.

And this is one side of the story. What of the other side? What of the conservative one who finds himself bound to one who outrages every principle in his or hers? People will not, and cannot, think and feel the same at the same moments, throughout any considerable period of life; and therefor, their moments of union should be rare and of no binding nature.

I return to the subject of children. Since this also is a normal desire, can it not be gratified without the sacrifice of individual freedom required by marriage? I see no reason why it cannot. I believe that children may be as well brought up in an individual home, or in a communal home, as in a dual home; and that impressions of life will be far pleasanter if received in an atmosphere of freedom and independent strength than in an atmosphere of secret repression and discontent. I have no very satisfactory solutions to offer to the various questions presented by the child-problem; but neither do the advocates of marriage. Certain to me

it is, that no one of the demands of life should ever be answered in a manner to preclude future free development. I have seen no great success from the old method of raising children under the indissoluble marriage yoke of the parents. (Our conservative parents probably consider their radical children great failures, though it probably does not occur to them that their system is in any way at fault.) Neither have I observed a gain in the child of the free union. Neither have I observed that the individually raised child is any more likely to be a success or a failure. Up to the present, no one has given a scientific answer to the child problem. Those papers which make a specialty of it, such as *Lucifer*, are full of guesses and theories and suggested experiments; but no infallible principals for the guidance of intentional or actual parents have as yet been worked out. Therefor, I see no reason why the rest of life should be sacrificed to an uncertainty.

That love and respect may last, I would have unions rare and impermanent. That life may grow, I would have men and women remain separate personalities. Have no common possessions with your lover more than you might freely have with one not your lover. Because I believe that marriage stales love, brings respect into contempt, outrages all the privacies and limits the growth of both parties, I believe that "they who marry do ill."

Retrieved on March 24th, 2009 from dwardmac.pitzer.edu

A lecture presenting the negative side of the question, whose positive was argued under the heading "They who marry do well," by Dr. Henrietta P. Westbrook. Both lectures delivered before the Radical Liberal League, Philadelphia, April 28, 1907.

Why I Am an Anarchist

Voltairine de Cleyre

1897

It was suggested to me by those who were the means of securing me this opportunity of addressing you, that probably the most easy and natural way for me to explain Anarchism would be for me to give the reasons why I myself am an Anarchist. I am not sure that they were altogether right in the matter, because in giving the reasons why I am an Anarchist, I may perhaps infuse too much of my own personality into the subject, giving reasons sufficient unto myself, but which cool reflection might convince me were not particularly striking as reasons why other people should be Anarchists, which is, after all, the object of public speaking on this question.

Nevertheless, I have been guided by their judgment, thinking they are perhaps right in this, that one is apt to put much more feeling and freedom into personal reasons than in pure generalizations.

The question "Why I am an Anarchist" I could very summarily answer with "because I cannot help it," I cannot be dishonest with myself; the conditions of life press upon me; I must do something with my brain. I cannot be content to regard the world as a mere jumble of happenings for me to wander my way through, as I would through the mazes of a department store, with no other thought than getting through it and getting out. Neither can I be contented to take anyone's dictum on the subject; the thinking machine will not be quiet. It will not be satisfied with century-old repetitions; it perceives that new occasions bring new duties; that things have changed, and an answer that fitted a question

asked four thousand, two thousand, even one thousand years ago, will not fit any more. It wants something for today.

People of the mentally satisfied order, who are able to roost on one intellectual perch all their days, have never understood this characteristic of the mentally active. It was said of the Anarchists that they were peace-disturbers, wild, violent ignoramuses, who were jealous of the successful in life and fit only for prison or an asylum. They did not understand, for their sluggish temperaments did not assist them to perceive, that the peace was disturbed by certain elements, which men of greater mental activity had sought to seize and analyze. With habitual mental phlegm they took cause for effect, and mistook Anarchists, Socialists and economic reformers in general for the creators of that by which they were created.

The assumption that Anarchists were one and all ignoramuses was quite as gratuitously made. For years it was not considered worth while to find out whether they might not be mistaken. We who have been some years in the movement have watched the gradual change of impression in this respect, not over-patiently it is true; we are not in general a patient sort — till we have at length seen the public recognition of the fact that while many professed Anarchists are uneducated, some even unintelligent (though their number is few), the major portion are people of fair education and intense mental activity, going around setting interrogation points after things; and some, even, such as Elisée and Elie and Paul Reclus, Peter Kropotkin, Edward Carpenter, or the late Prof. Daniel G. Brinton, of the University of Pennsylvania, men of scientific pre-eminence.

Mental activity alone, however, would not be sufficient; for minds may be active in many directions, and the course of the activity depends upon other elements in their composition.

The second reason, therefore, why I am an Anarchist, is because of the possession of a very large proportion of sentiment.

In this statement I may very likely not be recommending myself to my fellow Anarchists, who would perhaps prefer that I proceeded immediately to reasons. I am willing, however, to court their censure, because I think it has been the great mistake of our people, especially of our American Anarchists represented by Benj. R. Tucker, to disclaim sentiment. Humanity in the mass is nine parts feeling to one part thought; the so-called “philosophic Anarchists” have prided themselves on the exaggeration of the little tenth, and have chosen to speak rather con-

temptuously of the “submerged” nine parts. Those who have studied the psychology of man, however, realize this: that our feelings are the filtered and tested results of past efforts on the part of the intellect to compass the adaptation of the individual to its surroundings. The unconscious man is the vast reservoir which receives the final product of the efforts of the conscious — that brilliant, gleaming, illuminate point at which mental activity centers, but which, after all, is so small a part of the human being. So that if we are to despise feeling we must equally despise logical conviction, since the former is but the preservation of past struggles of the latter.

Now my feelings have ever revolted against repression in all forms, even when my intellect, instructed by my conservative teachers, told me repression was right. Even when my thinking part declared it was nobody’s fault that one man had so much he could neither swallow it down nor wear it out, while another had so little he must die of cold and hunger, my feelings would not be satisfied. They raised an unending protest against the heavenly administration that managed earth so badly. They could never be reconciled to the idea that any human being could be in existence merely through the benevolent toleration of another human being. The feeling always was that society ought to be in such a form that any one who was willing to work ought to be able to live in plenty, and nobody ought to have such “an awful lot” more than anybody else. Moreover, the instinct of liberty naturally revolted not only at economic servitude, but at the outcome of it, class-lines. Born of working parents (I am glad to be able to say it), brought up in one of those small villages where class differences are less felt than in cities, there was, nevertheless, a very keen perception that certain persons were considered better worth attentions, distinctions, and rewards than others, and that these certain persons were the daughters and sons of the well-to-do. Without any belief whatever that the possession of wealth to the exclusion of others was wrong, there was yet an instinctive decision that there was much injustice in educational opportunities being given to those who could scarcely make use of them, simply because their parents were wealthy; to quote the language of a little friend of mine, there was an inward protest against “the people with five hundred dollar brains getting five thousand dollar educations,” while the bright children of the poor had to be taken out of school and put to work. And so with other material concerns.

Beyond these, there was a wild craving after freedom from conventional dress, speech, and custom; an indignation at the repression of one's real sentiments and the repetition of formal hypocrisies, which constitute the bulk of ordinary social intercourse; a consciousness that what are termed "the amenities" were for the most part gone through with as irksome forms, representing no real heartiness. Dress, too, — there was such an ever-present feeling that these ugly shapes with which we distort our bodies were forced upon us by a stupid notion that we must conform to the anonymous everybody who wears a stock-collar in mid-summer and goes *dé-colleté* at Christmas, puts a bunch on its sleeves to-day and a hump on its back to-morrow, dresses its slim tall gentlemen in claw-hammers this season, and its fat little gentlemen in Prince Alberts the next, — in short, affords no opportunity for the individuality of the person to express itself in outward taste or selection of forms.

An eager wish, too, for something better in education than the set program of the grade-work, every child's head measured by every other child's head, regimentation, rule, arithmetic, forever and ever; nothing to develop originality of work among teachers; the perpetual dead level; the eternal average. Parallel with all these, there was a constant seeking for something new and fresh in literature, and unspeakable ennui at the presentation and re-presentation of the same old ideal in the novel, the play, the narrative, the history. A general disgust for the poor but virtuous fair-haired lady with blue eyes, who adored a dark-haired gentleman with black eyes and much money, and to whom, after many struggles with the jealous rival, she was happily married; a desire that there should be persons who should have some other purpose in appearing before us than to exhibit their lovesickness, people with some other motive in walking through a book than to get married at the end. A similar feeling in taking up an account of travels; a desire that the narrator would find something better worth recounting than his own astonishment at some particular form of dress he had never happened to see before, or a dish he had never eaten in his own country; a desire that he would tell us of the conditions, the aspirations, the activities of those strange peoples. Again the same unrest in reading a history, an overpowering sentiment of revolt at the spun-out details of the actions of generals, the movements of armies, the thronement and dethronement of kings, the intrigues of courtiers, the gracing or disgracing of favorites, the place-hunting of republics, the count of elections, the numbering of

administrations! A never-ending query, "What were the common people doing all this time? What did they do who did not go to war? How did they associate, how did they feel, how did they dream? What had they, who paid for all these things, to say, to sing, to act?"

And when I found a novel like the "Story of An African Farm," a drama like the "Enemy of the People" or "Ghosts," a history like Green's "History of the People of England," I experienced a sensation of exaltation at leaping out from the old forms, the old prohibitions, the old narrowness of models and schools, at coming into the presence of something broad and growing.

So it was with contemplation of sculpture or drawing, — a steady dissatisfaction with the conventional poses, the conventional subjects, the fig-leaved embodiments of artistic cowardice; underneath was always the demand for freedom of movement, fertility of subject, and ease and *non-shame*. Above all, a disgust with the subordinated cramped circle prescribed for women in daily life, whether in the field of material production, or in domestic arrangement, or in educational work; or in the ideals held up to her in all these various screens whereon the ideal reflects itself; a bitter, passionate sense of personal injustice in this respect; an anger at the institutions set up by men, ostensibly to preserve female purity, really working out to make her a baby, an irresponsible doll of a creature into to be trusted outside her "doll's house." A sense of burning disgust that a mere legal form should be considered as the sanction for all manner of bestialities; that a woman should have no right to escape from the coarseness of a husband, or conversely, without calling down the attention, the scandal, the scorn of society. That in spite of all the hardship and torture of existence men and women should go on obeying the old Israelitish command, "Increase and multiply," merely because they have society's permission to do so, without regard to the slaveries to be inflicted upon the unfortunate creatures of their passions.

All these feelings, these intense sympathies with suffering, these cravings for something earnest, purposeful, these longings to break away from old standards, jumbled about in the ego, produced a shocking war; they determined the bent to which mental activity turned; they demanded an answer, — an answer that should co-ordinate them all, give them direction, be the silver cord running through this mass of disorderly, half-articulate contentions of the soul.

The province for the operation of conscious reasoning was now outlined; all the mental energies were set to the finding of an ideal which would justify these clamors, allay these bitternesses. And first for the great question question which over-rides all others, the question of bread. It was easy to see that any proposition to remedy the sorrows of poverty along old lines could only be successful for a locality or a season, since they must depend upon the personal good-nature of individual employers, or the leniency of a creditor. The power to labor at will would be forever locked within the hands of a limited number.

The problem is not how to find a way to relieve temporary distress, not to make people dependent upon the kindness of others, but to allow every one to be able to stand upon his own feet.

A study into history, — that is a history of the movements of people, — revealed that, while the struggles of the past have chiefly been political in their formulated objects, and have resulted principally in the disestablishment of one form of political administration by another, the causes of discontent have been chiefly economic — too great disparity in possessions between class and class. Even those uprisings centred around some religious leader were, in the last analysis, a revolt of the peasant against an oppressive landlord and tithe-taker — the Church.

It is extremely hard for an American, who has been nursed in the traditions of the revolution, to realize the fact that that revolution must be classed precisely with others, and its value weighed and measured by its results, just as they are. I am an American myself, and was at one time as firmly attached to those traditions as anyone can be; I believed that if there were any way to remedy the question of poverty the Constitution must necessarily afford the means to do it. It required long thought and many a dubious struggle between prejudice and reason before I was able to arrive at the conclusion that the political victory of America had been a barren thing: that a declaration of equal rights on paper, while an advance in human evolution in so far that at least it crystallized a vague ideal, was after all but an irony in the face of facts; that what people wanted to make them really free was the *right to things*; that a “free country” in which all the productive tenures were already appropriated was not free at all; that any man who must wait the complicated working of a mass of unseen powers before he may engage in the productive labor necessary to get his food is the last thing but a free man; that those who do command these various resources and powers, and therefore the motions of their fellow-men, command likewise the

manner of their voting, and that hence the reputed great safeguard of individual liberties, the ballot box, become but an added instrument of oppression in the hands of the possessor; finally, that the principle of majority rule itself, even granting it could ever be practicalized — which it could not on any large scale: it is always a real minority that governs in place of the nominal majority — but even granting it realizable, the thing itself is essentially pernicious; that the only desirable condition of society is one in which no one is compelled to accept an arrangement to which he has not consented.

Since it was a settled thing that to be free one must have liberty of access to the sources and means of production, the question arose, just what are those sources and means, and how shall the common man, whose right to them is now denied, come at them. And here I found a mass of propositions, by one school or another; all however agreed upon one point, viz.: that the land and all that was in it was the natural heritage of all, and none had a right to pre-empt it, and parcel it out to their heirs, administrators, executors, and assigns. But the practical question of how the land could be worked, how homes could be built upon it, factories, etc., brought out a number of conflicting propositions. First, there were the Socialists (that is the branch of Socialism dominant in this country) claiming that the land should become the property of the State, its apportionment to be decided by committees representing the majority of any particular community directly concerned in such apportionment, the right to reapportion, however, remaining perpetually under the control of the State, and no one to receive any more advantage from an extra-fine locality than others, since the surplus in production of one spot over another would accrue to the State, and be expended in public benefits. To accomplish this, the Socialist proposed to use the political machinery now in existence — a machinery which he assures us is in every respect the political reflex of the economic of capitalism; his plan is the old, familiar one of voting your own men in; and when a sufficient number are in, then by legal enactment to dispossess the possessors, confiscate estates, and declare them the property of all.

Examination of this program, however, satisfied me that neither in the end nor the accomplishment was it desirable. For as to the end, it appeared perfectly clear that the individual would still be under the necessity of getting somebody's permission to go to work; that he would be subject to the decisions of a mass of managers, to regulations and regimentations without end. That while, indeed, it was possible he might

have more of material comforts, still he would be getting them from a bountiful dispenser, who assumed the knowledge of how to deal them out, and when, and where. He would still be working, not at what he chose himself, but at what others decided was the most necessary labor for society. And as to the manner of bringing into power this new dispenser of opportunities, the apparent ease of it disappeared upon examination. It sounds exceedingly simple — and Socialists are considered practical people because of that apparent simplicity — to say vote your men in and let them legalize expropriation. But ignoring the fact of the long process of securing a legislative majority, and the precarious holding when it is secured; ignoring the fact that meanwhile your men must either remain honest figure-heads or become compromising dealers with other politicians; ignoring the fact that officials once in office are exceedingly liable to insensible conversions (being like the boy, “anything to get that’ere pup”); supposing all this overcome, Socialists and all legislative reformers are bound to be brought face to face with this, — that in accepting the present constitutional methods, they will sooner or later come against the judicial power, as reforms of a far less sweeping character have very often done in the past. Now the judges, if they act strictly according to their constitutional powers, have no right to say on the bench whether in their personal opinion the enactment is good or bad; they have only to pass upon its constitutionality; and certainly a general enactment for the confiscation of land-holdings to the State would without doubt be pronounced unconstitutional. Then what is the end of all the practical, legal, constitutional effort? That you are left precisely where you were.

Another school of land reformers presented itself; an ingenious affair, by which property in land is to be preserved in name, and abolished in reality. It is based on the theory of economic rent; — not the ordinary, everyday rent we are all uncomfortably conscious of, once a month or so, but a rent arising from the diverse nature of localities. Starting with the proposition that land values are created by the community, not by the individual, the logic goes as follows. The advantages created by all must not be monopolized by one; but as one certain spot can be devoted to one use only at a given time, then the person or business thereon located should pay to the State the difference between what he can get out of a good locality and a poor locality, the amount to be expended in public improvements. This plan of taxation, it was claimed, would compel speculators in land either to allow their idle lands to fall

into the hands of the State, which would then be put up at public auction and knocked down to the highest bidder, or they would fall to and improve them, which would mean employment to the idle, enlivening of the market, stimulation of trade, etc. Out of much discussion among themselves, it resulted that they were convinced that the great unoccupied agricultural lands would become comparatively free, the scramble coming in over the rental of mines, water-powers, and — above all — corner lots in cities.

I did some considerable thinking over this proposition, and came to the conclusion it wouldn't do. First, because it did not offer any chance to the man who could actually bid noting for the land, which was the very man I was after helping. Second, because the theory of economic rent itself seemed to me full of holes; for, while it is undeniable that some locations are superior to others for one purpose or another, still the discovery of the superiority of that location has generally been due to an individual. The location unfit for a brickyard may be very suitable for a celery plantation; but it takes the man with the discerning eye to see it; therefore this economic rent appeared to me to be a very fluctuating affair, dependent quite as much on the individual as on the presence of the community; and for a fluctuating thing of that sort it appeared quite plain that the community would lose more by maintaining all the officials and offices of a State to collect it, than it would to let the economic rent go. Third, this public disposing of the land was still in the hands of officials, and I failed to understand why officials would be any less apt to favor their friends and cheat the general public then than now.

Lastly and mostly, the consideration of the statement that those who possessed large landholdings would be compelled to relinquish or improve them; and that this improvement would stimulate business and give employment to the idle, brought me to the realization that the land question could never be settled by itself; that it involved the settling of the problem of how the man who did not work directly upon the earth, but who transformed the raw material into the manufactured product, should get the fruit of his toil. There was nothing in this Single Tax arrangement for him but the same old program of selling himself to an employer. This was to be the relief afforded to the fellow who had no money to bid for the land. New factories would open, men would be in demand, wages would rise! Beautiful program. But the stubborn fact always came up that no man would employ another to work for him unless he could get more for his product than he had to pay for it, and

that being the case, the inevitable course of exchange and re-exchange would be that the man *having received less than the full amount*, could buy back less than the full amount, so that eventually the unsold products must again accumulate in the capitalist's hands; again the period of non-employment arrives, and my landless worker is no better off than he was before the Single Tax went into operation. I perceived, therefore, that some settlement of the whole labor question was needed which would not split up the people again into land possessors and employed wage-earners. Furthermore, my soul was infinitely sickened by the everlasting discussion about the rent of the corner lot. I conceived that the reason there was such a scramble over the corner lot was because the people were jammed together in the cities, for want of the power to spread out over the country. It des not lie in me to believe that millions of people pack themselves like sardines, worry themselves into dens out of which they must emerge "walking backward," so to speak, for want of pace to turn around, poison themselves with foul, smoke-laden, fever-impregnated air, condemn themselves to stone and brick above and below and around, if they just didn't *have* to.

How, then, to make it possible for the man who has nothing but his hands to get back upon the earth the earth and make use of his opportunity? There came a class of reformers who said, "Lo, now, the thing all lies in the money question! The land being free wouldn't make a grain of difference to the worker, unless he had the power to capitalize his credit and thus get the where-with to make use of the land. See, the trouble lies here: the possessors of one particular form of wealth, gold and silver, have the sole power to furnish the money used to effect exchanges. Let us abolish this gold and silver notion; let all forms of wealth be offered as security, and notes issued on such as are accepted, by a mutual bank, and then we shall have money enough to transact all our business without paying interest for the borrowed use of an expensive medium which had far better be used in the arts. And then the man who goes upon the land can buy the tools to work it."

This sounded pretty plausible; but still I came back to the old question, how will the man who has nothing but his individual credit to offer, who has no wealth of any kind, how is he to be benefited by this bank?

And again about the tools: it is well enough to talk of his buying hand tools, or small machinery which can be moved about; but what about the gigantic machinery necessary to the operation of a mine, or a mill?

It requires many to work it. If one owns it, will he not make the others pay tribute for using it?

And so, at last, after many years of looking to this remedy and to that, I came to these conclusions:—

That the way to get freedom to use the land is by no tampering and in-direction, but plainly by the going out and settling thereon, and using it; remembering always that every newcomer has as good a right to come and labor upon it, become one of the working community, as the first initiators of the movement. That in the arrangement and determination of the uses of locations, each community should be absolutely free to make its own regulations. That there should be no such nonsensical thing as an imaginary line drawn along the ground, within which boundary persons having no interests whatever in common and living hundreds of miles apart, occupied in different pursuits, living according to different customs, should be obliged to conform to interfering regulations made by one another; and while this stupid division binds together those in no way helped but troubled thereby, on the other hand cuts right through the middle of a community united by proximity, occupation, home, and social sympathies.

Second:— I concluded that as to the question of exchange and money, it was so exceedingly bewildering, so impossible of settlement among the professors themselves, as to the nature of value, and the representation of value, and the unit of value, and the numberless multiplications and divisions of the subject, that the best thing ordinary workingmen or women could do was to organize their industry so as to get rid of money altogether. I figured it this way: I'm not any more a fool than the rest of ordinary humanity; I've figured and figured away on this thing for years, and directly I thought myself middling straight, there came another money reformer and showed me the hole in that scheme, till, at last, it appears that between "bills of credit," and "labor notes" and "time checks," and "mutual bank issues," and "the invariable unit of value," none of them have any sense. How many thousands of years is it going to get this sort of thing into people's heads by mere preaching of theories. Let it be this way: Let there be an end of the special monopoly on securities for money issues. Let every community go ahead and try some member's money scheme if it wants; — let every individual try it if he pleases. But better for the working people let them all go. Let them produce together, co-operatively rather than as employer and employed; let them fraternize group by group, let each use what he needs

of his own product, and deposit the rest in the storage-houses, and let those others who need goods have them as occasion arises.

With our present crippled production, with less than half the people working, with all the conservatism of vested interest operating to prevent improvements in methods being adopted, we have more than enough to supply all the wants of the people if we could only get it distributed. There is, then, no fixed estimate to be put upon possibilities. If one man working now can produce ten times as much as he can by the most generous use dispose of for himself, what shall be said of the capacities of the free worker of the future? And why, then, all this calculating worry about the exact exchange of equivalents? If there is enough and to waste, why fret for fear some one will get a little more than he gives? We do not worry for fear some one will drink a little more water than we do, except it is in a case of shipwreck; because we know there is quite enough to go around. And since all these measures for adjusting equivalent values have only resulted in establishing a perpetual means whereby the furnisher of money succeeds in abstracting a percentage of the product, would it not be better to risk the occasional loss in exchange of things, rather than to have this false adjuster of differences perpetually paying itself for a very doubtful service?

Third:— On the question of machinery I stopped for some time; it was easy enough to reason that the land which was produced by nobody belonged to nobody; comparatively easy to conclude that with abundance of product no money was needed. But the problem of machinery required a great deal of pro-ing and con-ing; it finally settled down so: Every machine of any complexity is the accumulation of the inventive genius of the ages; no one man conceived it; no one man can make it; no one man therefore has a right to the exclusive possession of the social inheritance from the dead; that which requires social genius to conceive and social action to operate, should be free of access to all those desiring to use it.

Fourth:— In the contemplation of the results to follow from the freeing of the land, the conclusion was inevitable that many small communities would grow out of the breaking up of the large communities; that people would realize then that the vast mass of this dragging products up and down the world, which is the great triumph of commercialism, is economic insanity; illustration: Paris butter carted to London, and London butter to Paris! A friend of mine in Philadelphia makes shoes; the factory adjoins the home property of a certain Senator whose wife orders

her shoes off a Chicago firm; this firm orders of the self-same factory, which ships the order to Chicago. Chicago ships them back to the Senator's wife; while any workman in the factory might have thrown them over her backyard fence! That, therefore, all this complicated system of freight transportation would disappear, and a far greater approach to simplicity be attained; and hence all the international bureaus of regulation, aimed at by the Socialists, would become as unnecessary as they are obnoxious. I conceived, in short, that, instead of the workingman's planting his feet in the mud of the bottomless abyss of poverty, and seeing the trains of the earth go past his tantalized eyes, he carrying the whole thing as Atlas did the world, would calmly set his world down, climb up on it, and go gleefully spinning around it himself, becoming world-citizens indeed. Man, the emperor of products, not products the enslaver of man, became my dream.

At this point I broke off to inquire how much government was left; land titles all gone, stocks and bonds and guarantees of ownership in means of production gone too, what was left of the State? Nothing of its existence in relation to the worker: nothing but its regulation of morals.

I had meanwhile come to the conclusion that the assumptions as to woman's inferiority were all humbug; that given freedom of opportunity, women were just as responsive as men, just as capable of making their own way, producing as much for the social good as men. I observed that women who were financially independent at present, took very little to the notion that a marriage ceremony was sacred, unless it symbolized the inward reality of psychological and physiological mateship; that most of the who were unfortunate enough to make an original mistake, or to grow apart later, were quite able to take their freedom from a mischievous bond without appealing to the law. Hence, I concluded that the State had nothing left to do here; for it has never attempted to do more than solve the material difficulties, in a miserable, brutal way; and these economic independence would solve for itself. As to the heartaches and bitterness attendant upon disappointments of this nature in themselves, apart from third-party considerations, — they are entirely a matter of individual temperaments, not to be assuaged by any State or social system.

The offices of the State were now reduced to the disposition of criminals. An inquiry into the criminal question made plain that the great mass of crimes are crimes against property; even those crimes arising from jealousy are property crimes resulting from the notion of a right of

property in flesh. Allowing property to be eradicated, both in practice and spirit, no crimes are left but such as are the acts of the mentally sick — cases of atavism, which might well be expected occasionally, for centuries to come, as the result of all the repression poor humanity has experienced these thousands of years. An enlightened people, a people living in something like sane and healthy conditions, would consider these criminals as subjects of scientific study and treatment; would not retaliate and exhibit themselves as more brutal than the criminal, as is the custom to-day, but would “use all gently.”

The State had now disappeared from my conception of society; there remained only the application of Anarchism to those vague yearnings for the outpouring of new ideals in education, in literature, in art, in customs, social converse, and in ethical concepts. And now the way became easy; for all this talking up and down the question of wealth was foreign to my taste. But education! As long ago as I could remember I has dreamed of an education which should be a getting at the secrets of nature, not as reported through another’s eyes, but just the thing itself; I had dreamed of a teacher who should go out and attract his pupils around him as the Greeks did of old, and then go trooping out into the world, free monarchs, learning everywhere — learning nature, learning man, learning to know life in all its forms, and not to hug one little narrow spot and declare it the finest one on earth for the patriotic reason that they live there, And here I picked up Wm. Morris’ “News from Nowhere,” and found the same thing. And there were the new school artists in France and Germany, the literateurs, the scientists, the inventors, the poets, all breaking way from ancient forms. And there were Emerson and Channing and Thoreau in ethics, preaching the supremacy of individual conscience over the law, — indeed, all that mighty trend of Protestantism and Democracy, which every once in a while lifts up its head above the judgments of the commonplace in some single powerful personality. That indeed is the triumphant word of Anarchism: it comes as the logical conclusion of three hundred years of revolt against external temporal and spiritual authority — the word which has no compromise to offer, which holds before us the unswerving ideal of the Free Man.

Mother Earth 3 (March 1908).

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright



Voltairine de Cleyre
Collected Works of Voltairine de Cleyre
Compiled on 09.14.2019; Original works date from late 19th to early
20th centuries.

The Anarchist Library
Compiled by D.H. Lewis

theanarchistlibrary.org