

## Woman — Comrade and Equal (November 1909)

The London *Saturday Review* in a recent issue brutally said: "Man's superiority is shown by his ability to keep woman in subjection."<sup>1</sup> Such a sentiment is enough to kindle the wrath of every man who loves his wife or reveres his mother. It is the voice of the wilderness, the snarl of the primitive. Measured by that standard, every tyrant has been a hero, and brutality is at once the acme of perfection and the glory of man.

But it is a lie and a libel. The author of it is an unnatural son striking his mother, a brutal husband glorying because he is able to fell his faithful wife to the earth, a beastly father beating his daughter with his fists and gloating as she falls because he is stronger than she.

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

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

How differently is woman regarded by the truly wise and the really great! Poala Lombroso, one of the deepest students of mind that time has ripened, says of her:

The most simple, most frivolous and thoughtless woman hides at the bottom of her soul a spark of heroism, which neither she herself nor anybody else suspects, which she never shows if her life runs a normal course, but which springs into evidence and manifests itself by actions of devotion and self-sacrifice if fate strikes her or those who she loves. Then she does not wince, she does not complain, nor give way to useless despair, but rushes into the breach. The woman who hesitates to put her feet into cold, placid water throws herself into the perils of the roaring, surging maelstrom.<sup>2</sup>

Sardou,<sup>3</sup> the analytical novelist, declares:

I consider women superior to men in almost everything. They possess intuitive faculty to an extraordinary degree, and may almost always be trusted to do the right thing in the right place. They are full of noble instincts, and, though heavily handicapped by Fate, come well out of every ordeal. You have only to turn to history to learn the truth of what I say.<sup>4</sup>

Lester F. Ward,<sup>5</sup> the economist, the subtle student of affairs, gives this testimony:

We have no conception of the real amount of talent or genius possessed by woman. It is probably not greatly inferior to that of men even now, and a few generations of enlightened opinion on the subject, if shared by both sexes, would perhaps show that the difference is qualitative only.<sup>6</sup>

I am glad to align myself with a party that declares for absolute equality between the sexes. Anything less than this is too narrow for twentieth century civilization, and too small for a man who has a right conception of manhood. I declare my faith that man, like water, cannot rise higher than his source. I am no greater than my mother. I have no rights or powers that do not belong to my sisters everywhere.

Let us grant that woman has not reached the full height which she might attain — when I think of her devotion to duty, her tender ministries, her gentle spirit that in the class and struggle of passion has made her the savior of the world, the thought, so far from making me decry womanhood,

gives me the vision of a race so superior as to cause me to wonder at its glory and beauty ineffable.

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

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

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

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<sup>1</sup> From *The Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*. Original article has not been located.

<sup>2</sup> Probably from Poala Lombroso, *Children of the Italian Poor*. New York: Tucker Publishing Co., May 1900.

<sup>3</sup> Victorien Sardou (1831-1908) was a French playwright who staged dozens of dramas over the course of a fifty year career, many of which were later adapted into films. His best-known works include *Divorçons!* (1880), *Fédora* (1882), and *La Tosca* (1887).

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in "How Sardou Wrote His Plays," *Strand Magazine* [London], vol. 37, whole no 217 (Jan. 1909) pg. 93.

<sup>5</sup> Lester F. Ward (1841-1913) was an American natural scientist and sociologist. A fierce critic of the survival of the fittest theories popularized by Herbert Spencer, Ward was elected as the first president of the American Sociological Association in 1906.

<sup>6</sup> Lester F. Ward, *Applied Sociology*. Boston: Ginn & Co., 1906; p. 232.