

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright



The Lean Kind

Dora Marsden

Dora Marsden
The Lean Kind

Retrieved 10/22/2021 from
<https://repository.library.brown.edu/studio/item/bdr:517940/>
Originally published in *The New Freewoman* (No. 1, Vol. 1,
June 15, 1913)

theanarchistlibrary.org

This is the epoch of the gadding mind. The mind 'not at home' but given to something else, occupied with alien 'causes' is of the normal order, and as such must be held accountable for that contemning of the lonely occupant of the home—the Self—which is the characteristic of the common mind. With the lean kind—the antithesis of those 'Fat' with whom latterly we have become so familiarised—the most embarrassing notion is that of the possession of a self having wants. To be selfless is to have attained unto that condition of which leanness is the fitting outcome. Hence, the popularity of the 'Cause' which provides the Idol to 'which the desired self-sacrifice can be offered. The greater the sacrifice the Idol can accept the greater is it as a 'Cause,' whether it be liberty, equality, fraternity, honesty or what not. If ten thousand starving men, with their tens of thousands of dependants, starve in the Cause of Honesty, how great is Honesty! If a woman throws away her life for freedom, how great is freedom! And no mistake.

'Great is the Cause and small are men,' is the creed of the lean kind. Consider the Cause of Honesty—the righteous frenzy for the maintenance of the status quo in regard to property. True it is that all worshippers of honesty have no property, but what

of that: the greater the sacrifice: good is it to be a vessel of dishonour if thereby is achieved the greater glory of the Cause.

It is true one may choose one's 'Cause,' but choice appears to fall fairly uniformly into classes, and as for the lean kind, they choose honesty. 'Poor but honest,' is the lean one's epitaph. He makes it his honour to see to it that property shall remain 'just so.' He will right and die and play policeman with zeal, that property should remain just so! There have been those, however, who have maintained that 'Property was theft.' Monsieur Proudhon said so, and Monsieur Shaw supports him. 'The only true thing which has been said about property,' says Mr. Shaw. We—and the lean—beg leave to dissent, what though in dissenting, we differ. The lean scout the base notion, for where would the Cause, Honesty be if horribly it should prove true? It is therefore not true for the lean. And for us? If the pick and the shovel are the discovered gold, then property is theft. But if the shovel and pick be as a means to an end—the acquiring of gold—then theft is to property in the same relation. Theft is the time-honoured, success-crowned means to property. All the wholesale acquirements of property have come, do come, will come, in this way. Whether Saxon robs Celt, and Dane robs Saxon, and Norman robs all three: whether William Shortlegs robs the English to give property to his fellow-bandits, or bandits, grown bolder, rob the Church for themselves, or the Trust-maker robs whom he will, the process is one and the same. A constant state of *flux* (Oh, Cause of Honesty!) flux of property, from hands which yield into hands which seize! Small wonder the lean kind love not this truth, and cover their eyes with their Cause. Hands which seize are not their kind of hands; the spirit of their Cause makes the muscles relax and the grip grow feeble.

Property once seized, the seizers set about to make flux static. They declare a truce. They send forth a proclamation: '*Henceforth the possessed—we and our children—must remain possessors: and the dispossessed remain the dispossessed—for*

Mr. George Lansbury,—insisted that is on truth. The lean are spoon-fed with lies—a diet with no fattening qualities. Even Mr. Dyson’s drawings of ‘the worker’ are sentimental. None dare tell the ‘worker’ the blunt truth, that his leanness blights the landscape and that *he is responsible*. The tales of leanness’ woes are told to the discredit of fat, but they recoil in truth to the discredit of lean. It is the last resort of the downtrodden to seek comfort in the relating thereof. There is only one thing the down-trodden with retained dignity can do, and that is to Get Up. And there is only one thing for the lean and that is, to get fat, get property: and it is the one thing they will not do. The efforts to dodge the responsibility of self-defence, self-appropriation, to assume the mastership in their own person, is the unmistakable mark of the lean. The first conscious effort of mind in any prospective change of circumstance is to look for the chain and the collar and the next great Someone to whom they may belong, serve, work for. If not the slave-owner, then the employer; (employer—someone who keeps him busy!) if not the individual (employer, then the State; if not these then the Commune or the Trade Union or the Trade Guild: an ‘employed person,’ worker, for ever. Let reproaches be directed where cause lies—home—and then they may bear fruit. As Mr. Tillet might have remembered when he called upon the Deity to perform a task which he could have done for himself had he cared, what a man *wants doing*, he will do himself. And what is true in relation to the deity is true in relation to fat men. The fat man is just as ‘likely to endow the lean scolders as is the Almighty—none at all. He is satisfied in the knowledge that they can achieve their own endowment as he and his achieved theirs, by *taking* from yielding hands.

ever: these shall not raise disturbing hands against the state of things: should they, the STATE will visit upon them the penalties due. For notice: In the process of proclamation, the victors have taken the proclamation for the deed; they have not merely said ‘this state, now established, shall remain.’ they have said, without pause for breath, ‘this shall be’ and ‘this is,’ ‘The State now is and we are the State.’ And so it turns out. The dispossessed—the lean—make answer: ‘Yea—great conquerors, as you say, so it is.’ The STATE IS. Though we perish, let the State live for ever! Thus the State takes birth; the mobile takes on immobility; the Iron Mask upon which its makers write the law for the lean to keep, descends; henceforth, the lean, the law-abiding, the honest, are the pillars of the STATE, while the possessors of it are left well-established, free to pursue chance and adventure in the flux which has never ceased to flow in the secret order above the State. Hence comes high finance—a game of sport best played like cricket, with limited numbers.

The law of honesty is the first precept written out on the Iron Mask. Honesty is a rule of convenience whose purpose is to keep back the crowd from the excellent game of the select few. But, ‘Among yourselves, seize what you can,’ which reminds us of Mr. Cecil Chesterton. Mr. Chesterton charged the financial sportsmen with corruption, and tried to prove his charge by Law. Extraordinary forgetfulness. The law is not for those who *make* it. It is for the dispossessed only. Mr. Chesterton tried to establish a charge of dishonesty in a sphere where honesty—quite rightly—is a term of reproach. The holders of ‘un-earned increment’ are not concerned with honesty—that Cause of the Canaille—the retail-property-holder’s virtue. He might with as much relevance have charged Mr. Isaacs with doing no work! Working is a lean-man’s virtue and so is honesty, but neither are the virtues of the makers of the State. The reason Mr. Chesterton is mulcted of £10,000 is, that he used a word—corruption—which is not held in favour among the herd, who cannot be expected to understand that what is crime to

them is the sport of a higher order; to whom theft, for instance, is not *theft*. It carries no stigma as it does with the lean. The State itself has no blush when it reveals its sole *right* to our money to be its might: makes us pay up for fear of wishing that we had, later; no blush that it *steals* because it can. All of which goes to prove it is a poor job calling names and explains why we are giving our first article to the lean kind. It is to protest against the irrelevance for the Lean of the doings of the Fat. During the last few months there has appeared amongst us an artist of foremost rank, an artist who is a satirist, who has revealed the very lineaments of the soul of his 'Fat Men.' Mr. Will Dyson's cartoons, now appearing daily in the 'Herald,' are the event of recent journalism. The power and truth, the pull and thrust of arm, the clutch upon their material, the face-to-face revelation—that these things should appear now in England is almost incredible. Yet we have not so far forgotten the satiric rage of Swift to be wholly without criterion for judgment of the measure of strength with which he wields this lightning flail, and, notwithstanding their truth and stretch of arm, union of brain and soul, the quality of Swift which leaves us seared and but barely alive, is absent from Mr. Dyson's work. For all his contempt for his thick-necked breed of 'fat-men,' contempt which we believe Mr. Dyson means to be the last word with his work, this does not create the ache, the burning wound which is at the kernel of contempt, and is that which the outer rage of contempt is meant to hide. He draws 'fat men' as *though* he hated them, yet his artists' revelation is truer than his interpretation of it. He has seen the breed of Fat men, and *having* seen he cannot for the life of him *hate* them as Swift hated his Yahoos. They are all redeemed by a quality which Mr. Dyson sees revealed, but which he does not know. The last glance at the cartoons always carries a smile. With the arm to wield the superhuman rage of Swift, he does not do so. Did he. his subjects would be shattered. He appears himself to feel he may not

let himself go. There exists something he would shrink from destroying.

Mr. Dyson's choice of subjects (unless due, and one hopes to an accidental connection with a spirited journal which itself is engaged a futile 'War against Fat,') illustrates his difference in relation to Swift, as a difference in what each fears. We hate what we fear and if what is feared is not in itself hateful, the hate recoils back upon us, only in part assuaged. Dyson fears brutal, stupid *strength*. Swift feared, loathed, writhed at the bare suggestion of weakness, meekness, and what these imply. Swift was girding at the thing which is the woe of men and the tragedy of the Godhead which Arnold assures us would do all things well but sometimes fails *in strength*. Swift touches men in the quick; he reveals the shameful sore which we all walk enshrouded to hide. His Yahoo is each of us. His lay figures which bear the virtues, his Houyhnhnms have no soul to save in a bath of fire. He has not misdirected his rage. He lives with the Immortals because of his stupendous courage which dared to turn an unwinking eye upon that which other men dare approach only by stealth and with averted gaze. He saw, knew and uttered forth, what none but a giant may look upon. Dyson on the other hand, looks and sees, but his head is turned in the wrong direction. What he sees is merit smothered over with accidental demerits. The filthy vestures that meet his gaze, and which a finer breed than these thick-necked Fat would throw off in repulsion and disgust, are the outcome, not of the quality which Dyson reveals in his 'Fat,' but of the lack of this quality in the figures which crouch behind him—the lean. The vitriolic passion of repudiation which is satire, is with him never called into being. His primary occupation is with what should be his lay figures. He has directed his withering flame against his Houyhnhnms—the Fat, instead of against his Yahoos—the Lean. At present his work, while it makes the 'Daily Herald' notable, is not out of place there, but we trow a man would have a heart of flint who insisted on Yahoos with, shall we say,