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Elisée Reclus
The Anarchist
1902

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Translation by Shawn P. Wilbur.

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By definition, the anarchist is the free man, the one who has no master. The ideas that he professes are indeed his own through reasoning. His will, springing from the understanding of things, focuses on a clearly defined aim; his acts are the direct realization of his individual intent. Alongside those who devoutly repeat the words of others or the traditional saying, who make their being bend and conform to the caprice of a powerful individual, or, what is still more grave, to the oscillations of the crowd, he alone is a man, he alone is conscious of his value in the face of all these spineless and inconsistent things that dare not live their own lives.

But this anarchist who has morally rid himself of the domination of others and who is never accustomed to any of the material oppressions that usurpers impose on him, this man is still not his own master as long as he has not emancipated himself from his irrational passions. He must know himself, free himself from his own whims, from his violent impulses, from all his prehistoric animal relics, not in order to kill his instincts, but in order to make them agree harmoniously with the whole of his conduct. Liberated from other men, he must also be liberated from himself in order to see clearly where the truth sought is to be found, and how he will

guide himself toward making a movement that does not bring him closer to it, without saying a word that does not proclaim it.

If the anarchist comes to know himself, he will, as a result, know his environment, men and things. Observation and experience will have shown him that, by themselves, all his solid understanding of life and all his proud will will remain powerless if he does not associate them with other understandings, with other wills. Alone, he would be easily crushed, but, having become strong, he joins forces with other forces, constituting a society of perfect union, since all are linked by the communion of ideas, sympathy and goodwill. In this new social body, all the comrades are so many equals, giving each other the same respect and the same expressions of solidarity. From now on they are brothers, if the thousand revolts of the isolated are transformed into a collective protest and demand, which sooner or later will give us the new society, Harmony.