

The Slave Woman

René Chaughi

1901

Since humanity has existed, the woman has been slave of the man.

Still three-quarters of monkey, armed with fangs and claws, covered with hair, jaws protruding and forehead depressed, it was natural that our prehistoric ancestors behave like wild beasts. They did not miss it. The females were for them nothing but prey, which they fought over with flint strokes, and I imagine they neglected to ask these frightened companions for their consent. Conquered in a fierce struggle, they had to repay in work the food granted by the master, and any labor that did not please him, it was on his serf that he imposed it. Among most of today's primitive peoples, woman is considered and treated as a beast of burden. Her fate is not very diferente among us.

The ancestral man seized his wife by violence; we seize ours by ruse: a ruse which consists in leaving them in the ignorance of everything about marriage and life, and then asking them for a fallacious consent. The ancestral man considered his partner as his thing, we regard her as our property; he had the right of life and death over her, so do we. We terrorize the young girl with implacable conventions made by us for our benefit; we terrorize the wife with bloodthirsty laws made by us for our benefit. It is still the regime of kidnapping and violence honored by our simian ancestors.

And yet our jaws have shrunk, our claws have flattened into fingernails, our skull has enlarged. Since we are involved in thinking and reasoning, it would be advisable to match our actions with our reason, and to abandon the habits that come to us from the days when we had fangs and claws. Our whole social life, our sexual life in particular, is built on the traditions of wild beasts. It must stop.

Good souls think that it is right for a woman to be kept in an inferior condition, because she is weaker. Logic of beasts, always. If the words right and duty were not meaningless, it would be fair to say, on the contrary, that we must impose more duties on the strong and grant more rights to the weak. The weakness of women is, however, quite relative: some women are more robust than some men. In many animal species, the female is just as strong as the male, and even more terrible in combat. Weakness is therefore not a necessary correspondence of maternal function. If the woman today is a little more delicate than her partner, this is perhaps only the result of a long division of labor between them, he warring and hunting, she looking after the home and the little ones. Moreover, muscular strength is no longer of any importance in contemporary social life; it cannot therefore be a ground of inequality. More and more, it is the nervous energy that

takes precedence, the thinking and willing brain. If a woman's nervous system was not capable of developing as much thought and will as that of man, would it follow that she should be held in tutelage? Not at all. Like all living beings, woman has possibilities within her. Let her bring them to light and develop them as she pleases. She alone is the judge of what she can and must do.

It was always the same. The nobles did not want the bourgeois to emancipate themselves: they believed themselves to be superior to them. The bourgeois do not want the artisans to free themselves: they also believe themselves to be superior. The military want to be superior to civilians and the priests to the laity. Civilized people look down on savages, without realizing that the distance between them (for how many minutes?) is only an accident of general evolution. Each people believe to be more sensical than the rest of humans. The man's belief in his superiority over woman has no more serious motives. It is a mixture of egocentric error and the desire for domination.

Mainly desire for domination. Reading the Code, we see that it is men who made the laws. The way in which legislators speak of the rights and duties of each of the two spouses, the very different way in which they regard the adultery of one and the other, the way in which they treat the single mother and the illegitimate child, are truly lovely things. There emanates such a naive egoism, that it almost disarms. The legal power of the husband is almost limitless, that of the wife is zero. She belongs to him; but not him to her. It depends on the whims of this man whether this woman is happy or unhappy forever. The law that delivered her does not defend her. In fact, woman, as in prehistoric ages, is regarded, not as a person, but as property. For love to be born and last, between this master and this servant, very exceptional circumstances are needed. Most of the time, there is no love; there is an exchange of two momentary desires, or even worse: brutality on the one hand, submission on the other. In marriage, property is rape.

To escape this humiliating state of possessed thing, woman increasingly seeks to move away from male tutelage and to live off her own work. But there again, she finds herself in front of her arrogant boss who, for the price of crushing toil, offers her starvation wages. Always the strong enslaving the weak, always the old simian tradition.

In order not to die, many women seek refuge in prostitution. If only they were sure, in doing so, to avoid the charcoal stove or the jump into the river?

Whenever a woman seeks to emancipate herself, and wants, from thing that she was, to become a person, the man puts all his efforts to prevent it. He does not want her to develop her faculties, to become his equal. The deputies do not want elector and eligible women; magistrates do not want women lawyers; doctors do not want women professor. In the school of fine arts, the male students shout down the female students. Well, despite rebuffs and difficulties of all kinds, many women do science, letters and the arts, and sometimes better than men.

There is no hiding it: deep down, the man despises the woman, and this politeness which he affects towards her, is nothing but an abominable hypocrisy intended to mask the condition of slave in which he maintains her harshly. Beneath the ceremonial varnish, he is still the ferocious, cowardly master.

This disdain is reflected even in the language. To signify all the beings of our species, we say: *man, men, humanity*. The woman is included therein as an accessory; we do not do her the honor to name her.

By claiming to have excluded women from social life for the sake of the delicacy of their body, man is lying. For if it had been so, man would have taken for himself all the painful or disgusting

work, and that's not how it is, and he would have left all the sedentary work to her, first of all the studying. Now, this is what man did not want. From the beginning of societies, he has made every effort to prevent women from learning. Why? Because an educated slave becomes a bad slave.

The education of the young girl is the education of a servant. One is concerned, not with developing her skills, but only with training her for a master. She is taught only what is needed so as not to make too many orthographic errors and not to appear too stupid in a conversation; one agrees to *adorn* her mind with some *decorative* arts, one concedes to her the piano strumming, because that is not very dangerous for the male prerogatives. But we are careful not to introduce her to the sciences, which would open her eyes to the religious and social lies, basis of her servitude; we don't want her to be interested in public life, to look at society face to face, and to learn about the institutions of ideas, which could well be of revolt.

One cloisters her in the house, between the saucepans and the crochet work. One stupefies her intelligence with silly readings; one degrades her character with the habit of obedience. To obey! this is what, from an early age, we try to make her see as the great affair of her whole life. At the same time, we deviate her moral sense with exhortations that are supposedly virtuous, but in reality degrading. The young girl is made to believe that there is shame in loving a young man loyally and in being a mother otherwise than following an established ceremony; on the other hand she is made to believe that there is no shame in selling herself to an old man, following the ceremonial. By hiding the truth from her, by regulating her readings, one offends her: one insults her by supposing that, left to herself, she would be incapable of restraint; one considers her, with Christianity, as an impure being. Degraded in her body and—what is worse—in her brain, the woman is the prey of all the superstitions, of all the prejudices.

Well! we want for women, as for men, a resolutely scientific education. The sciences, and especially the natural sciences, are essential for women. First, to cleanse her brain once and for all of all the religious stupidities that clutter it up. Then, because if the woman's main goal is to give birth and to bring up, she must know what an organism is, what life, love and death are. How can she claim to be treating a child if she ignores anatomy, physiology, medicine? I would like all young girls—all young men too—to do a two or three year internship in hospital, and learn, in addition to the art of healing, respect for human pain. It would be better than piano lessons for some, and than the barracks for others.

A slave for centuries and centuries, woman has retained the habits of a slave, the thoughts of a slave, the tastes of a slave. Observe her: in the most honest you will find traces of venality, if only to her husband. At the offer of a new dress, of any gift, she becomes more tender, which is shameful. Like all slaves, she applauds success, prefers mediocrity that comes in light to merit that remains in the shadows; she has an unhealthy need to appear, to attract attention, an evil desire to dominate, to humiliate. Like the savages, she loves gilding, beads, unnecessary and cumbersome adornment; for whole hours, she remains in the windows of the jewelers, stopping in front of ugly things, but which shine; she covers herself with necklaces, bracelets, rings, pendants, ribbons, a host of trinkets which have not the slightest reason to exist, except to cost a lot of money and thereby aggravate the struggle to live.

All her toilettries are also a challenge to hygiene and common sense. She wears feathers on her head, like the savages (and our generals). Like the savages, she wears amulets, little pigs or four-leaf clovers. Like the savages, she has a taste for body paintings, illuminates her eyes, her cheeks, her lips. Like the savages, she deforms and mutilates herself. She pierces her ears to

hang objects; but she has lost the habit of piercing her lips or nostrils, which is always a gain. She squeezes her feet in extravagant shoes which make her unfit for walking; she squeezes her lungs and stomach in a corset, which compromises her health and the health of the children born to her ... if they can! But it doesn't matter to her: in the brains that slavery has depressed, vanity is stronger than anything.

It must stop. The woman must become aware of herself, have a disgust for her present state, refuse to be any longer a doll here, a servant there, a property everywhere. She must know that there is no possible dignity, and therefore no possible morality, for a being, but in freedom, in full possession of oneself. May she want to be free and she will be. The free woman is a revolution in the world whose consequences cannot be calculated. It is the end of religions, which subsist only through her, and through her they still hold the child and the man. It is also the end of wars, killers of husbands and sons, and which the wife and the mother cordially hate. For the woman's adaptation to humble tasks has at least had the good of making her lose the habit of brutality, the taste for murder. The woman educated and gaining a foothold in social life is a more effective means of pacification and disarmament than the lying words of despots. It is yet the end of prostitution, of mercenary and vile debauchery. It is the end of the reign of violence and the crushing of the weak by the strong. It is the advent of mercy and kindness.

The free woman is a new humanity that is rising.

RENÉ CHAUGHI.

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René Chaughi is the pseudonym by which Henri Gauche became known in the anarchist press.

He was a French journalist, writer and anarchist, having collaborated in several important French libertarian periodicals, for which he went into exile in Belgium and Netherlands in 1894 due to persecution by the French authorities. His pamphlets on feminist issues — *Immoralité du*

Mariage, Les Trois Complices, La Femme Esclave — have been edited numerous times and enjoyed significant popularity in French and Spanish-speaking anarchist and syndicalist circles.

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