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The Daughter of the Dream

William Marion Reedy

November 1908

One who reads the newspapers never has the correct idea about anyone the newspapers write about. There's Emma Goldman, for instance. From the newspapers you would judge her to be an ignorant, vulgar, shrieking harridan, with a bomb in one hand and a bottle of vitriol in the other. What is she, then? Anything but what the papers say.

She's a little woman, somewhat stout, with neatly wavy hair, a clear blue eye, a mouth sensitive if not of classic lines. She is not pretty, but when her face lights up with the glow and color of her inner enthusiasm she is remarkably attractive. She has a flue manner, easy without swagger, free without trace of coarseness, and her smile is positively winsome. Conversationally she is a delight. Her information is broad, her experience comprehensive, her reading in at least three languages almost limitless. She has wit and humor, too, and a compelling sincerity. What does she talk? Art, letters, science, economics, travel, philosophy, men and women. Pictures, poetry, the drama, personalities—the best substance for talk, and all from the standpoint of one who looks forward to the revolution. She has the eye for character and the gift of succinct expression. She is simple and not violent. She is positive without truculence.

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She is gentle and even at times tender. Her whole personality pulsates with a fervor that is infectious. She is a woman who believes in her cause and feels it with a concentrated intensity. It is the yardstick by which she measures all values. She sees in the world nothing but the material to be remolded into something nearer to her heart's desire. And what is her heart's desire?

Freedom—absolute, unconditioned, uninvasive, freedom. That is anarchy. There shall be no constraint of law upon the soul or the body of man. There shall be no duties except one's duty to one's self. There shall be no modification of any right save a sense of and regard for the rights of others. Each individual is to be a law unto itself. There shall be no institutions. Man and woman, too, shall be beyond man's rule. And the essence of all relations shall be—love. Free love, you ask? No. Just love, which is not love, if it be not free. Free of all the conventions, free of all ceremony, free of all influence save the promptings of love itself. There shall be no gods, no priests, no rulers, no judges, no policemen in the world she would make over. And before the world can be made over all present institutions must be destroyed—yes, all, except the I. Destroyed, how? By bombs? No. By ideas, by the new ideal of the sacred uninvasive privacy of man's being.

How she burns with the flaming ardor of her apocalyptic vision! How she sees it in the painting of Boecklin and of Stuck, in the rhapsodies of Nietzsche, in the chantings of Whitman and of Edward Carpenter, in the music of Wagner before "Parsifal," in Ibsen's drama, in Hauptman's mysticism, in Gorky's brutal realism, in Rodin's statues, in D'Annunzio. She can see the airy oriflammes, can hear the dimly rising songs of intellectual revolt, the idea she can feel growing in the minds of thinkers. The ideal she can hear growing in the hearts of men who are breaking away from the old conventions. "Be thyself," is to be the one adjuration of the new dispensation. "Do as thou wilt," the motto of Rabelais' Abbey of Thelma, is to be the only law. There is to be no war, nor envy, nor hatred, nor jealousy, nor greed, nor hunger, in the new time.

Throwing off all restrictions, toppling down all institutions, man shall be greater than they. He will be one with mighty Nature, his spirit mingling with hers. He will develop without let or hindrance. He shall “sit at wine with the maidens nine.” he shall see the things of life as they are. He shall do what manhood bids him do, as the Hadji Abdu El Yezdi declares in the “Kasidah.”

Who can resist such visions? Without such vision the people must perish. What is democracy but a step forward to this ideal? If that is the best government which governs least, is not no government at all the *summum bonum*? What use for Church and State if man, with every burden cast off, every bond broken, rises to his full stature and development, with a spirit purified into selflessness by very surrender to the instinct of self! What is this but the sublimation, the apotheosis of Herbert Spencer’s enlightened self interest? What is it but Prof. James’ Pragmatism—the idea that there is no good but what is good to me?

This doctrine, discussed by this little Russian Jewess with a wealth of quotation from thinkers known and unknown, with the humorous appreciation of one who has known all sorts and conditions of human beings, a woman who has languished in jails and whose picture is in the rogues galleries, a woman who lives her life and asks no quarter from the convention she defies and despises—this is anarchy. She doesn’t advocate violence. Violence may come. Let it come. It is part of the working of the free human spirits. Law is nothing but the tyranny of a king here, an emperor there, a parliament in another place, a majority everywhere. No man has a right to prescribe for another, or to proscribe another. No one has a right to punish another. No one will injure another in the time to be when laws and institutions being removed shall cease to distort the mind and abort the spirit. Parties are a superstition. Marriage shackles love. Religion stunts the soul, whatever that may be.

This is Emma Goldman’s gospel. Is it ugly or brutal or ignorant, or vicious? It is nor. It is an aspiration toward and an effort for

the perfection of humanity—"the one far off, divine event to which the whole creation moves." This little woman denies law, but she does not invoke it. She lives with another man out of legal wedlock; but she doesn't demand that she be considered respectable. She lives free and is willing to pay the price, in misrepresentation, abuse, poverty, persecution. And amid it all she is serene. She is as one sure that she is sane in a mad world. She is like the immortal Don, invincibly inspired with an ideal that the world cannot yet behold with her eyes. Recognizing neither virtues nor vices, she says that both words are the result of the blight of law and custom and rule. And she declares it all with a simple faith and earnestness that command your respect—if you are not a bigot or a reportorial yellow liar like the fellow who reported Miss Goldman's address for Monday morning's *Republic*.

There is nothing wrong with Miss Goldman's gospel that I can see, except this: She is about eight thousand years ahead of her age. Her vision is the vision of every truly great-souled man or woman who has ever lived. Her proclamation thereof is not equivalent to an incitement to the loosing of man's passions. It is the keeping of the dogs chained that makes them vicious. Laws make, but do not prevent crimes. Institutions cripple men's minds. Let man alone, let him work out his own destiny. As he has come to where he is he has dropped many superstitions, burdens, bonds. In time to come, which Emma Goldman would hasten, he will drop them all and stand forth a very god, finer than all the gods he himself has ever fashioned in his own distorted image.

Does Emma Goldman threaten society? She does. She threatens all society that is sham, all society that is slavery, all society that is a mask of greed and lust. "The spirits of Truth and Freedom" she says with *Lona Hessel* in Ibsen's play, "these are the pillars of society." These she would strengthen and upon them she would arrange such a structure as would represent all the glories latent in the power of human love having full play under limitless liberty.

A dream, you say. But life is death, without the dream. The dream is the reality to which we move. Therefore say I when we dead awoken to life from our sodden sleep in material content, we shall do so to behold, to grasp, to feel, to yield to the inspiration that carries blithely, through travail and stress and mockery and hatred, toward the goal of universal peace and love and beauty, Emma Goldman, the daughter of the dream.—William Marion Reedy in the *St. Louis Mirror*.