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AN ENGLISH VIEW OF FREE LOVE.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE INDEX:

My dear Sir,—The letter from Mr. Voysey which has provoked a reply from Mrs. Woodhull and a comment from Mr. Morse is unfortunate for the interests of truth, if discussion is to stop here. After your words expressing desire that “the subject may rest here at present,” Mr. Voysey may be silent; yet silence seems to leave an unfair slur on him. His letter had my sympathy and general approval, as soon as I read it in your columns, although I had absolutely no knowledge of the facts concerning Dr. Nichols, and only imperfect knowledge concerning Mrs. Woodhull. I now see that what he writes, up to the mention of Mrs. Woodhull’s name, has no proper application to Mrs. Woodhull personally. My present letter aims at clearing up confusion, with the least possible pretension of advocacy or judicial decision. But if you think that to admit this letter will open the door to too lengthy discussion, I beg you to suppress it:—not but that I believe this question of free love to be of far greater importance than the discussions in dozens of your columns.

1. Mr. Voysey himself avows that he does not understand Mrs. Woodhull; for he says, “She must blame herself, if we cannot guess what she is driving at:” *i. e.*, if we are perplexed as to her designs and wishes. It is evident that he did *not* understand her; nor did I; but now all is plain. She says she “sees clearly, in the near future [manifestly with hope and approbation], that the question to be asked of mothers will be, What is the *status*, physically, mentally,

and morally of your child? and not, Who is its father?"

2. Mrs. Woodhull further speaks with disparagement of keeping man and woman together "one and one." Her words are: "In the strife to keep ONE AND ONE *tied together*, their offspring are forgotten." Add to this her implication that it is of secondary importance "who is the father," and it seems beyond question that a truthful lady must utterly disapprove of any marriage vow of faithfulness to one husband. She *does* aim, therefore, "to go backward" into the state which preceded the institution of legal marriage. She may complain of the moral coloring in the word *savage*; but she ought to admit, as a fact, that she desires to go back into savage freedom. Instead of being affronted at what Mr. Voysey says about adultery, ought she not to reply that his argument is out of place? For it implies that a vow of exclusive union to one husband has been made; which is the very thing that she deprecates.

3. Since I discern in Mrs. Woodhull the enthusiast for ideas (certainly not the apologist of vice), I conclude her to desire to put the union of parents on the same moral footing as the union (say) of sisters. If two sisters have lived together thirty years in great harmony, a breach and separation may be as painful as the separation of the parents of a family. Mrs. Woodhull may lament, as deeply as Mr. Voysey, that a wife should leave her husband or a husband his wife after long and intimate union, and may think that this, as in the case of two sisters, will rarely happen without very grave moral cause; but she maintains (if I understand her) that the right of judging whether there is adequate cause must be retained jealously by the individual, *and never be delegated to a legal tribunal*. She would have the [unmarried] pair legally as free as the two sisters; and in a case of separation she would approve or disapprove, not by a general formula of morals, but by considering the details of fact.

4. Thus it appears that Mrs. Woodhull can find lit-

4. Thus it appears that Mrs. Woodhull can find little in the public law of *marriage* to censure; the great weakness (from her point of view) is in women themselves, who, when they are capable of feeding themselves and a young family, are so foolish as to enter into vows of faithfulness to one man. If a lady of fortune choose to invite one gentleman after another, of suitable age, to be her temporary chamber-friend, and she thus produces to the community a troop of remarkably fine children, Mrs. Woodhull is indignant that such a lady should receive moral censure, or be excluded from society. If the children are physically thriving, we must *hope* well for "their moral and mental status." But the law would leave to the mother the sole control of the children, and sole responsibility for them, and would not acknowledge the smallest right of any of her lovers over her person or her property, any more than over the children. No change in the law is needed, *in so far*, but only a refusal of women to put their heads into a noose.

5. I gather that Mrs. Woodhull thinks that both law and custom are unjust to women in making it artificially hard for them to maintain themselves. So think I; so probably thinks Mr. Voysey, and thousands of those who shudder at Mrs. Woodhull's theories. But while everything should be done which can be done, by reform of law and customs, to give full justice to women as to employments and remuneration, Mrs. Woodhull will hardly shut her eyes to the fact that, after all, *few* women out of a great nation will be competent to rear a family (if it were just to put the whole burden on the mother), much less to put them forward in life; hence the tendency of her efforts is to induce a pecuniary bargain, that the lover chosen by the lady shall make a large payment, partly positive and partly conditional. The moral results of such a relation must on no account be thrown out of sight; but I do not here discuss them.

6. When Mrs. Woodhull says that "to marry for a home is not a whit better than prostitution,—indeed, is prostitution," she seems hardly to understand the true meaning of that ugly word,—which is, "presenting oneself for public or indiscriminate sale." It is to be lamented that any woman should marry either *chiefly* or *solely* for a home; yet oftentimes such a marriage is far from unhappy, and to confound it with prostitution is surely extravagant; but I write now solely to recall attention to the true meaning of this word. A kept mistress or concubine is *not* a prostitute, though, alas! she is too often on the road towards becoming one.

7. Mr. Voysey's question: "Are we men, or are we beasts?" and his phrase "bestiality" have ex-

asperated Mrs. Woodhull; and certainly the color of the last word must be deprecated. But she differs little as to fact. Her own words in reply are that she "is determined to rise to the level of the female brute," and in fact she makes the freedom of the brute the goal of her aim, as far as appears. If she merely insisted that no woman whatever, married or unmarried, should forfeit her control over her own person, I (for one) heartily agree, and have in print maintained the need of changing our laws of marriage on this very matter; moreover, I find the analogy from the brutes of value as strengthening the female right of *Veto*,—though I wish all the facts were clearer. But it is one thing to say that marriage ought not to give to a husband compulsory powers over a wife; another thing to say that no legal marriage ought to exist at all. All antiquity regarded marriage by law as the beginning of civilization,—"*concubitu prohibere vago*;" and to overthrow this institution is to go back to the state of brutes. Mrs. Woodhull desires "the physical, moral, and mental *status*" of children to be improved; brutes have no care for the *moral and mental* state of offspring. Herein consists their difference from us: else those in which the sexes are numerically about equal would be entirely a pattern for us.

8. Mrs. Woodhull writes as if it were certain scientific fact that children are now "born murderers, drunkards, and other criminals." If she allude to the enormity of drunken fathers, she touches on what is abominable, but exceptional. Evil rights given by the law to husbands are open to her attack. But an overthrow of marriage does not remove the evil. It is too notorious to us in England that intoxicating drink, above all other things, carries men into sexual debauchery. On the other hand, she must not expect us to believe, on the word of some medical practitioners, that vice and crime exist solely or chiefly through hereditary transmission.

9. Some strong passages that Mr. Voysey has written apply to phases of sexual liberty different from that claimed by Mrs. Woodhull; especially the right of having, besides one's wife or husband, a *spiritual* wife or husband. The spiritually married are supposed to have an unlimited mental and moral intimacy, including a frequent companionship and interchange of sentiment. This is that which will only too often cause people to fall "over a precipice." I think Mr. Voysey will modify his epithet, "*nasty theories*," and the phrase *bestiality*, without at all weakening his deep disapproval of the theories, as tending to the overthrow of family life and to entire social licentiousness.

It is impossible now *not* to discuss these matters, and in the circles which are free from religious authority they will be most faithfully and usefully discussed.

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[If "silence" on Mr. Voysey's part should "seem to leave an unfair slur upon him," it would be both unjust and unkind to avail ourself of Professor Newman's generous permission to "suppress" the above letter. But we have not the slightest wish to "suppress" it. On the contrary, we are very glad to publish it, if for no other reason than to present a notable instance of the discussion of a very delicate subject in a style at once fearless, frank, courteous, and totally free from personal reflections of an invidious nature. Professor Newman has set a noble example of the true way, and the only effective way, of criticising views which are too often met with an irrelevant torrent of abuse; and what he has said on the subject we consider eminently fitting and forcible. Mr. Voysey's letter, as we understand it, was not at all designed to cast any reflections on personal character; but we saw with regret that it would almost inevitably be considered to do so, and our only effort has been to avoid getting THE INDEX involved in profitless personal controversies. If he feels desirous to rectify any misunderstanding of his words or his intent, he will not hesitate to do it; for we trust no one, least of all Mr. Voysey, supposes that we meant to intimate any wish to the contrary. Our own disapproval of the "Free Love" theory is every whit as emphatic as that of Mr. Voysey or Professor Newman; but the latter's opinion of Mrs. Woodhull as an "enthusiast for ideas [of a very crude and one-sided nature], certainly not the apologist of vice," is also ours. We add that we agree to every word of the closing sentence of the above letter; and discussion of the "social question" in these columns is just as much in order as that of any other, provided it be conducted with the same dignity and decorum that mark this letter throughout.—ED.]