

Sheba Blake Publishing

ANARCHISM AND OTHER ESSAYS

Emma Goldman



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EMMA GOLDMAN

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Emma Goldman asserts the moral right to be identified as the author of this work.

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Preface

Some twenty-one years ago I heard the first great Anarchist speaker—the inimitable John Most. It seemed to me then, and for many years after, that the spoken word hurled forth among the masses with such wonderful eloquence, such enthusiasm and fire, could never be erased from the human mind and soul. How could any one of all the multitudes who flocked to Most's meetings escape his prophetic voice! Surely they had but to hear him to throw off their old beliefs, and see the truth and beauty of Anarchism!

My one great longing then was to be able to speak with the tongue of John Most,—that I, too, might thus reach the masses. Oh, for the naivety of Youth's enthusiasm! It is the time when the hardest thing seems but child's play. It is the only period in life worth while. Alas! This period is but of short duration. Like Spring, the STURM UND DRANG period of the propagandist brings forth growth, frail and delicate, to be matured or killed according to its powers of resistance against a thousand vicissitudes.

My great faith in the wonder worker, the spoken word, is no more. I have realized its inadequacy to awaken thought, or even emotion. Gradually, and with no small struggle against this realization, I came to see that oral propaganda is at best but a means of shaking people from their lethargy: it leaves no lasting impression. The very fact that most people attend meetings only if aroused by newspaper sensations, or because they expect to be amused, is proof that they really have no inner urge to learn.

It is altogether different with the written mode of human expression. No one, unless intensely interested in progressive ideas, will bother with serious books. That leads me to another discovery made after many years of public activity. It is this: All claims of education notwithstanding, the pupil will accept only that which his mind craves. Already this truth is recognized by most modern educators in relation to the immature mind. I think it is equally true regarding the adult. Anarchists or revolutionists can no more be made than musicians. All that can be done is to plant the seeds of thought. Whether something vital will develop depends largely on the fertility of the human soil, though the quality of the intellectual seed must not be overlooked.

In meetings the audience is distracted by a thousand non-essentials. The speaker, though ever so eloquent, cannot escape the restlessness of the crowd, with the inevitable result that he will fail to strike root. In all probability he will not even do justice to himself.

The relation between the writer and the reader is more intimate. True, books are only what we want them to be; rather, what we read into them. That we can do so demonstrates the importance of written as against oral expression. It is this certainty which has induced me to gather in one volume my ideas on various topics of individual and social importance. They represent the mental and soul struggles of twenty-one years,—the conclusions derived after many changes and inner revisions.

I am not sanguine enough to hope that my readers will be as numerous as those who have heard me. But I prefer to reach the few who really want to learn, rather than the many who come to be amused.

As to the book, it must speak for itself. Explanatory remarks do but detract from the ideas set forth. However, I wish to forestall two objections which will

undoubtedly be raised. One is in reference to the essay on ANARCHISM; the other, on MINORITIES VERSUS MAJORITIES.

“Why do you not say how things will be operated under Anarchism?” is a question I have had to meet thousands of times. Because I believe that Anarchism can not consistently impose an iron-clad program or method on the future. The things every new generation has to fight, and which it can least overcome, are the burdens of the past, which holds us all as in a net. Anarchism, at least as I understand it, leaves posterity free to develop its own particular systems, in harmony with its needs. Our most vivid imagination can not foresee the potentialities of a race set free from external restraints. How, then, can any one assume to map out a line of conduct for those to come? We, who pay dearly for every breath of pure, fresh air, must guard against the tendency to fetter the future. If we succeed in clearing the soil from the rubbish of the past and present, we will leave to posterity the greatest and safest heritage of all ages.

The most disheartening tendency common among readers is to tear out one sentence from a work, as a criterion of the writer’s ideas or personality. Friedrich Nietzsche, for instance, is decried as a hater of the weak because he believed in the UEBERMENSCH. It does not occur to the shallow interpreters of that giant mind that this vision of the UEBERMENSCH also called for a state of society which will not give birth to a race of weaklings and slaves.

It is the same narrow attitude which sees in Max Stirner naught but the apostle of the theory “each for himself, the devil take the hind one.” That Stirner’s individualism contains the greatest social possibilities is utterly ignored. Yet, it is nevertheless true that if society is ever to become free, it will be so through liberated individuals, whose free efforts make society.

These examples bring me to the objection that will be raised to MINORITIES VERSUS MAJORITIES. No doubt, I shall be excommunicated as an enemy of the people, because I repudiate the mass as a creative factor. I shall prefer that rather than be guilty of the demagogic platitudes so commonly in vogue as a bait for the people. I realize the malady of the oppressed and disinherited masses only too well, but I refuse to prescribe the usual ridiculous palliatives which allow the patient neither to die nor to recover. One cannot be too extreme in dealing with social ills; besides, the extreme thing is generally the true thing. My lack of faith in the majority is dictated by my faith in the potentialities of the individual. Only when the latter becomes free to choose his associates for a common purpose, can we hope for order and harmony out of this world of chaos and inequality.

For the rest, my book must speak for itself.

Emma Goldman

Introduction

Propagandism is not, as some suppose, a “trade,” because nobody will follow a “trade” at which you may work with the industry of a slave and die with the reputation of a mendicant. The motives of any persons to pursue such a profession must be different from those of trade, deeper than pride, and stronger than interest. GEORGE JACOB HOLYOAKE.

Among the men and women prominent in the public life of America there are but few whose names are mentioned as often as that of Emma Goldman. Yet the real Emma Goldman is almost quite unknown. The sensational press has surrounded her name with so much misrepresentation and slander, it would seem almost a miracle that, in spite of this web of calumny, the truth breaks through and a better appreciation of this much maligned idealist begins to manifest itself. There is but little consolation in the fact that almost every representative of a new idea has had to struggle and suffer under similar difficulties. Is it of any avail that a former president of a republic pays homage at Osawatomie to the memory of John Brown? Or that the president of another republic participates in the unveiling of a statue in honor of Pierre Proudhon, and holds up his life to the French nation as a model worthy of enthusiastic emulation? Of what avail is all this when, at the same time, the LIVING John Browns and Proudhons are being crucified? The honor and glory of a Mary Wollstonecraft or of a Louise Michel are not enhanced by the City Fathers of London or Paris naming a street after them—the living generation should be concerned with doing justice to the LIVING Mary

Wollstonecrafts and Louise Michels. Posterity assigns to men like Wendel Phillips and Lloyd Garrison the proper niche of honor in the temple of human emancipation; but it is the duty of their contemporaries to bring them due recognition and appreciation while they live.

The path of the propagandist of social justice is strewn with thorns. The powers of darkness and injustice exert all their might lest a ray of sunshine enter his cheerless life. Nay, even his comrades in the struggle—indeed, too often his most intimate friends—show but little understanding for the personality of the pioneer. Envy, sometimes growing to hatred, vanity and jealousy, obstruct his way and fill his heart with sadness. It requires an inflexible will and tremendous enthusiasm not to lose, under such conditions, all faith in the Cause. The representative of a revolutionizing idea stands between two fires: on the one hand, the persecution of the existing powers which hold him responsible for all acts resulting from social conditions; and, on the other, the lack of understanding on the part of his own followers who often judge all his activity from a narrow standpoint. Thus it happens that the agitator stands quite alone in the midst of the multitude surrounding him. Even his most intimate friends rarely understand how solitary and deserted he feels. That is the tragedy of the person prominent in the public eye.

The mist in which the name of Emma Goldman has so long been enveloped is gradually beginning to dissipate. Her energy in the furtherance of such an unpopular idea as Anarchism, her deep earnestness, her courage and abilities, find growing understanding and admiration.

The debt American intellectual growth owes to the revolutionary exiles has never been fully appreciated. The seed disseminated by them, though so little understood at the time, has brought a rich harvest. They have at all times held aloft the banner of liberty, thus impregnating the social vitality of the

Nation. But very few have succeeding in preserving their European education and culture while at the same time assimilating themselves with American life. It is difficult for the average man to form an adequate conception what strength, energy, and perseverance are necessary to absorb the unfamiliar language, habits, and customs of a new country, without the loss of one's own personality.

Emma Goldman is one of the few who, while thoroughly preserving their individuality, have become an important factor in the social and intellectual atmosphere of America. The life she leads is rich in color, full of change and variety. She has risen to the topmost heights, and she has also tasted the bitter dregs of life.

Emma Goldman was born of Jewish parentage on the 27th day of June, 1869, in the Russian province of Kovno. Surely these parents never dreamed what unique position their child would some day occupy. Like all conservative parents they, too, were quite convinced that their daughter would marry a respectable citizen, bear him children, and round out her allotted years surrounded by a flock of grandchildren, a good, religious woman. As most parents, they had no inkling what a strange, impassioned spirit would take hold of the soul of their child, and carry it to the heights which separate generations in eternal struggle. They lived in a land and at a time when antagonism between parent and offspring was fated to find its most acute expression, irreconcilable hostility. In this tremendous struggle between fathers and sons—and especially between parents and daughters—there was no compromise, no weak yielding, no truce. The spirit of liberty, of progress—an idealism which knew no considerations and recognized no obstacles—drove the young generation out of the parental house and away from the

hearth of the home. Just as this same spirit once drove out the revolutionary breeder of discontent, Jesus, and alienated him from his native traditions.

What role the Jewish race—notwithstanding all anti-semitic calumnies the race of transcendental idealism—played in the struggle of the Old and the New will probably never be appreciated with complete impartiality and clarity. Only now are we beginning to perceive the tremendous debt we owe to Jewish idealists in the realm of science, art, and literature. But very little is still known of the important part the sons and daughters of Israel have played in the revolutionary movement and, especially, in that of modern times.

The first years of her childhood Emma Goldman passed in a small, idyllic place in the German-Russian province of Kurland, where her father had charge of the government stage. At the time Kurland was thoroughly German; even the Russian bureaucracy of that Baltic province was recruited mostly from German JUNKERS. German fairy tales and stories, rich in the miraculous deeds of the heroic knights of Kurland, wove their spell over the youthful mind. But the beautiful idyl was of short duration. Soon the soul of the growing child was overcast by the dark shadows of life. Already in her tenderest youth the seeds of rebellion and unrelenting hatred of oppression were to be planted in the heart of Emma Goldman. Early she learned to know the beauty of the State: she saw her father harassed by the Christian CHINOVNIKS and doubly persecuted as petty official and hated Jew. The brutality of forced conscription ever stood before her eyes: she beheld the young men, often the sole supporter of a large family, brutally dragged to the barracks to lead the miserable life of a soldier. She heard the weeping of the poor peasant women, and witnessed the shameful scenes of official venality which relieved the rich from military service at the expense of the poor. She was outraged by the terrible treatment to which the female servants were

subjected: maltreated and exploited by their BARINYAS, they fell to the tender mercies of the regimental officers, who regarded them as their natural sexual prey. The girls, made pregnant by respectable gentlemen and driven out by their mistresses, often found refuge in the Goldman home. And the little girl, her heart palpitating with sympathy, would abstract coins from the parental drawer to clandestinely press the money into the hands of the unfortunate women. Thus Emma Goldman's most striking characteristic, her sympathy with the underdog, already became manifest in these early years.

At the age of seven little Emma was sent by her parents to her grandmother at Königsberg, the city of Emanuel Kant, in Eastern Prussia. Save for occasional interruptions, she remained there till her 13th birthday. The first years in these surroundings do not exactly belong to her happiest recollections. The grandmother, indeed, was very amiable, but the numerous aunts of the household were concerned more with the spirit of practical rather than pure reason, and the categorical imperative was applied all too frequently. The situation was changed when her parents migrated to Königsberg, and little Emma was relieved from her role of Cinderella. She now regularly attended public school and also enjoyed the advantages of private instruction, customary in middle class life; French and music lessons played an important part in the curriculum. The future interpreter of Ibsen and Shaw was then a little German Gretchen, quite at home in the German atmosphere. Her special predilections in literature were the sentimental romances of Marlitt; she was a great admirer of the good Queen Louise, whom the bad Napoleon Buonaparte treated with so marked a lack of knightly chivalry. What might have been her future development had she remained in this milieu? Fate—or was it economic necessity?—willed it otherwise. Her parents decided to settle in St. Petersburg,

the capital of the Almighty Tsar, and there to embark in business. It was here that a great change took place in the life of the young dreamer.

It was an eventful period—the year of 1882—in which Emma Goldman, then in her 13th year, arrived in St. Petersburg. A struggle for life and death between the autocracy and the Russian intellectuals swept the country. Alexander II had fallen the previous year. Sophia Perovskaia, Zheliabov, Grinevitzky, Rissakov, Kibalchitch, Michailov, the heroic executors of the death sentence upon the tyrant, had then entered the Walhalla of immortality. Jessie Helfman, the only regicide whose life the government had reluctantly spared because of pregnancy, followed the unnumbered Russian martyrs to the etapes of Siberia. It was the most heroic period in the great battle of emancipation, a battle for freedom such as the world had never witnessed before. The names of the Nihilist martyrs were on all lips, and thousands were enthusiastic to follow their example. The whole INTELLIGENZIA of Russia was filled with the ILLEGAL spirit: revolutionary sentiments penetrated into every home, from mansion to hovel, impregnating the military, the CHINOVNIKS, factory workers, and peasants. The atmosphere pierced the very casemates of the royal palace. New ideas germinated in the youth. The difference of sex was forgotten. Shoulder to shoulder fought the men and the women. The Russian woman! Who shall ever do justice or adequately portray her heroism and self-sacrifice, her loyalty and devotion? Holy, Turgenev calls her in his great prose poem, ON THE THRESHOLD.

It was inevitable that the young dreamer from Konigsberg should be drawn into the maelstrom. To remain outside of the circle of free ideas meant a life of vegetation, of death. One need not wonder at the youthful age. Young enthusiasts were not then—and, fortunately, are not now—a rare phenomenon in Russia. The study of the Russian language soon brought young Emma

Goldman in touch with revolutionary students and new ideas. The place of Marlitt was taken by Nekrassov and Tchernishevsky. The quondam admirer of the good Queen Louise became a glowing enthusiast of liberty, resolving, like thousands of others, to devote her life to the emancipation of the people.

The struggle of generations now took place in the Goldman family. The parents could not comprehend what interest their daughter could find in the new ideas, which they themselves considered fantastic utopias. They strove to persuade the young girl out of these chimeras, and daily repetition of soul-racking disputes was the result. Only in one member of the family did the young idealist find understanding—in her elder sister, Helene, with whom she later emigrated to America, and whose love and sympathy have never failed her. Even in the darkest hours of later persecution Emma Goldman always found a haven of refuge in the home of this loyal sister.

Emma Goldman finally resolved to achieve her independence. She saw hundreds of men and women sacrificing brilliant careers to go V NAROD, to the people. She followed their example. She became a factory worker; at first employed as a corset maker, and later in the manufacture of gloves. She was now 17 years of age and proud to earn her own living. Had she remained in Russia, she would have probably sooner or later shared the fate of thousands buried in the snows of Siberia. But a new chapter of life was to begin for her. Sister Helene decided to emigrate to America, where another sister had already made her home. Emma prevailed upon Helene to be allowed to join her, and together they departed for America, filled with the joyous hope of a great, free land, the glorious Republic.

America! What magic word. The yearning of the enslaved, the promised land of the oppressed, the goal of all longing for progress. Here man's ideals

had found their fulfillment: no Tsar, no Cossack, no CHINOVNIK. The Republic! Glorious synonym of equality, freedom, brotherhood.

Thus thought the two girls as they travelled, in the year 1886, from New York to Rochester. Soon, all too soon, disillusionment awaited them. The ideal conception of America was punctured already at Castle Garden, and soon burst like a soap bubble. Here Emma Goldman witnessed sights which reminded her of the terrible scenes of her childhood in Kurland. The brutality and humiliation the future citizens of the great Republic were subjected to on board ship, were repeated at Castle Garden by the officials of the democracy in a more savage and aggravating manner. And what bitter disappointment followed as the young idealist began to familiarize herself with the conditions in the new land! Instead of one Tsar, she found scores of them; the Cossack was replaced by the policeman with the heavy club, and instead of the Russian CHINOVNIK there was the far more inhuman slave-driver of the factory.

Emma Goldman soon obtained work in the clothing establishment of the Garson Co. The wages amounted to two and a half dollars a week. At that time the factories were not provided with motor power, and the poor sewing girls had to drive the wheels by foot, from early morning till late at night. A terribly exhausting toil it was, without a ray of light, the drudgery of the long day passed in complete silence—the Russian custom of friendly conversation at work was not permissible in the free country. But the exploitation of the girls was not only economic; the poor wage workers were looked upon by their foremen and bosses as sexual commodities. If a girl resented the advances of her “superiors”, she would speedily find herself on the street as an undesirable element in the factory. There was never a lack of willing victims: the supply always exceeded the demand.

The horrible conditions were made still more unbearable by the fearful dreariness of life in the small American city. The Puritan spirit suppresses the slightest manifestation of joy; a deadly dullness beclouds the soul; no intellectual inspiration, no thought exchange between congenial spirits is possible. Emma Goldman almost suffocated in this atmosphere. She, above all others, longed for ideal surroundings, for friendship and understanding, for the companionship of kindred minds. Mentally she still lived in Russia. Unfamiliar with the language and life of the country, she dwelt more in the past than in the present. It was at this period that she met a young man who spoke Russian. With great joy the acquaintance was cultivated. At last a person with whom she could converse, one who could help her bridge the dullness of the narrow existence. The friendship gradually ripened and finally culminated in marriage.

Emma Goldman, too, had to walk the sorrowful road of married life; she, too, had to learn from bitter experience that legal statutes signify dependence and self-effacement, especially for the woman. The marriage was no liberation from the Puritan dreariness of American life; indeed, it was rather aggravated by the loss of self-ownership. The characters of the young people differed too widely. A separation soon followed, and Emma Goldman went to New Haven, Conn. There she found employment in a factory, and her husband disappeared from her horizon. Two decades later she was fated to be unexpectedly reminded of him by the Federal authorities.

The revolutionists who were active in the Russian movement of the 80's were but little familiar with the social ideas then agitating Western Europe and America. Their sole activity consisted in educating the people, their final goal the destruction of the autocracy. Socialism and Anarchism were terms hardly

known even by name. Emma Goldman, too, was entirely unfamiliar with the significance of those ideals.

She arrived in America, as four years previously in Russia, at a period of great social and political unrest. The working people were in revolt against the terrible labor conditions; the eight-hour movement of the Knights of Labor was at its height, and throughout the country echoed the din of sanguine strife between strikers and police. The struggle culminated in the great strike against the Harvester Company of Chicago, the massacre of the strikers, and the judicial murder of the labor leaders, which followed upon the historic Haymarket bomb explosion. The Anarchists stood the martyr test of blood baptism. The apologists of capitalism vainly seek to justify the killing of Parsons, Spies, Lingg, Fischer, and Engel. Since the publication of Governor Altgeld's reason for his liberation of the three incarcerated Haymarket Anarchists, no doubt is left that a fivefold legal murder had been committed in Chicago, in 1887.

Very few have grasped the significance of the Chicago martyrdom; least of all the ruling classes. By the destruction of a number of labor leaders they thought to stem the tide of a world-inspiring idea. They failed to consider that from the blood of the martyrs grows the new seed, and that the frightful injustice will win new converts to the Cause.

The two most prominent representatives of the Anarchist idea in America, Voltairine de Cleyre and Emma Goldman—the one a native American, the other a Russian—have been converted, like numerous others, to the ideas of Anarchism by the judicial murder. Two women who had not known each other before, and who had received a widely different education, were through that murder united in one idea.

Like most working men and women of America, Emma Goldman followed the Chicago trial with great anxiety and excitement. She, too, could not believe that the leaders of the proletariat would be killed. the 11th of November, 1887, taught her differently. She realized that no mercy could be expected from the ruling class, that between the Tsarism of Russia and the plutocracy of America there was no difference save in name. Her whole being rebelled against the crime, and she vowed to herself a solemn vow to join the ranks of the revolutionary proletariat and to devote all her energy and strength to their emancipation from wage slavery. With the glowing enthusiasm so characteristic of her nature, she now began to familiarize herself with the literature of Socialism and Anarchism. She attended public meetings and became acquainted with socialistically and anarchistically inclined workingmen. Johanna Greie, the well-known German lecturer, was the first Socialist speaker heard by Emma Goldman. In New Haven, Conn., where she was employed in a corset factory, she met Anarchists actively participating in the movement. Here she read the FREIHEIT, edited by John Most. The Haymarket tragedy developed her inherent Anarchist tendencies: the reading of the FREIHEIT made her a conscious Anarchist. Subsequently she was to learn that the idea of Anarchism found its highest expression through the best intellects of America: theoretically by Josiah Warren, Stephen Pearl Andrews, Lysander Spooner; philosophically by Emerson, Thoreau, and Walt Whitman.

Made ill by the excessive strain of factory work, Emma Goldman returned to Rochester where she remained till August, 1889, at which time she removed to New York, the scene of the most important phase of her life. She was now twenty years old. Features pallid with suffering, eyes large and full of compassion, greet one in her pictured likeness of those days. Her hair is, as

customary with Russian student girls, worn short, giving free play to the strong forehead.

It is the heroic epoch of militant Anarchism. By leaps and bounds the movement had grown in every country. In spite of the most severe governmental persecution new converts swell the ranks. The propaganda is almost exclusively of a secret character. The repressive measures of the government drive the disciples of the new philosophy to conspirative methods. Thousands of victims fall into the hands of the authorities and languish in prisons. But nothing can stem the rising tide of enthusiasm, of self-sacrifice and devotion to the Cause. The efforts of teachers like Peter Kropotkin, Louise Michel, Elisee Reclus, and others, inspire the devotees with ever greater energy.

Disruption is imminent with the Socialists, who have sacrificed the idea of liberty and embraced the State and politics. The struggle is bitter, the factions irreconcilable. This struggle is not merely between Anarchists and Socialists; it also finds its echo within the Anarchist groups. Theoretic differences and personal controversies lead to strife and acrimonious enmities. The anti-Socialist legislation of Germany and Austria had driven thousands of Socialists and Anarchists across the seas to seek refuge in America. John Most, having lost his seat in the Reichstag, finally had to flee his native land, and went to London. There, having advanced toward Anarchism, he entirely withdrew from the Social Democratic Party. Later, coming to America, he continued the publication of the FREIHEIT in New York, and developed great activity among the German workingmen.

When Emma Goldman arrived in New York in 1889, she experienced little difficulty in associating herself with active Anarchists. Anarchist meetings were an almost daily occurrence. The first lecturer she heard on the Anarchist