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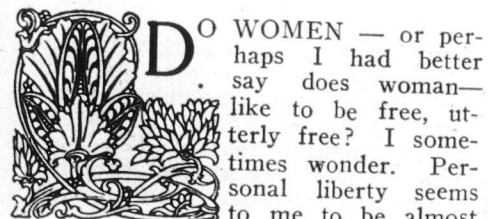
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Do Women Want to be Free.

By Robert Michens.



DO WOMEN — or perhaps I had better say does woman — like to be free, utterly free? I sometimes wonder. Personal liberty seems to me to be almost the best thing in life — the liberty to come in and go out when one pleases, unwatched, unquestioned, unwondered at; the liberty to wander when the wandering spirit comes upon one; the liberty to be what many people call "odd"; the liberty, in short, to be one's self so far as one can be one's self without doing harm to others or encroaching upon their freedom. And many men certainly revel in this personal liberty, and would sacrifice almost everything to have and keep it. But the other day, when I said to a clever woman that I often pitied women because I thought they had so much less of this liberty than men, she answered: "O, but we don't want all that. What we want is to be

looked after and taken care of." Some years ago there seemed to be a new unrest in the world of women; they seemed to be dissatisfied with the existing conditions of their lives, to want a greater emancipation. Book after book was written by them sounding a note of revolt. There was the revolt of the daughters and the revolt of the spinsters, who declared, some of them, that they preferred to be spinsters, and would hate to be married.

Clubs were formed for these pioneers. Speeches were made. There were perpetual debates, in which men were denounced, and mere mothers — those old fashioned women who thought "a woman's highest and noblest function" was motherhood — were sneered at and derided. Women were to be this and to be that. They were to enter all the professions. They were to sit in legislative halls. They were to wear trousers if they pleased, and they did — a few of them — wear those frightful garments called "divided skirts," at which when I looked I sometimes desired their death, for in

death they should not be divided. There was a cropping of hair and a wearing of shirt collars, and a good deal of swaggering that was supposed to be "manly." And the old fashioned women cried, "What are we coming to?" And some of us men echoed the wail in bass voices, but with acute anxiety. And what has it all ended in — or shall I say is it all ending in? The smoke of the cigarette, or reaction?

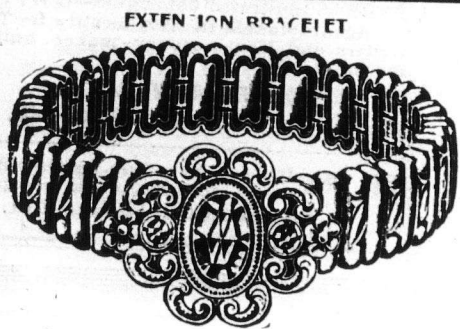
Well, there seem to be symptoms in the air. Lucas Malet, a wise and temperate minded woman, writes an article on "The Threatened Resubjection of Women." Miss Elizabeth Robins, that wonderful Hedda Gabler of former days, that brilliant representative of the younger generation knocking at the door, publishes "A Dark Lantern." And many other women seem to be weary of the worry of revolt, to be inclined to return to the older state of affairs, and to say that, after all, there is something in President Roosevelt's advice to women, advice which I surely need not quote here, since all the world that knows anything knows it. But is this reaction the outcome of men's cruel obstinacy and fierce determination to be master, or is it only the natural consequence of woman's secret pleasure in being dominated? That is the question that interests me, and which the women can answer if they will.

Do women as a whole — the great majority of women, that is — wish to be free? Would they be happy in being free as many men are free? Women themselves often make me doubt it. There are certainly women who passionately rebel against any attempt on the part of men at dominion, even at guidance. But are they typical, or are they, on the contrary exceptional women? My observation leads me to suppose that they are not typical at all. Being a man I find it difficult to understand how any human being can take pleasure in being ruled, but I have certainly met numbers of women, and many of them women of strong character, who even sought a ruler instinctively, as if their natures need just that — governance, a master, some one who said to them, "I am stronger than you. You must recognize that fact. You must play second fiddle to my first." It is idle, I think to pretend that women are as free, or nearly as free, as men. They are not. It would be easy to prove that. Men know it quite well, and you might search far before you could find a man anxious to change his sex. He knows that if he could change his sex he would lose some of his freedom, and to such a loss he could with difficulty reconcile himself. But I do not think the great majority of women wish to change their sex in order to gain man's freedom. In "A Dark Lantern" the heroine becomes in the end almost a slave to the man who has conquered her. But Hedda Gabler of the old days presents her to us thus, as a willing slave, and I do not know that she is being ironic. Perhaps she, too, sees that woman, not old fashioned woman or modern woman, but just eternal woman, does really prefer "in her bones" to play second fiddle rather than first. But of one thing I feel pretty sure, and that is that woman likes the first fiddle to be a Joachim — none of your pretty-pretty, sugary, scentbottled performers, but some one leonine, firm, with a powerful "tone," a virile "attack," one who can draw a sound like an organ from the "G string," and whose "double stopping" excites almost like a trumpet call.

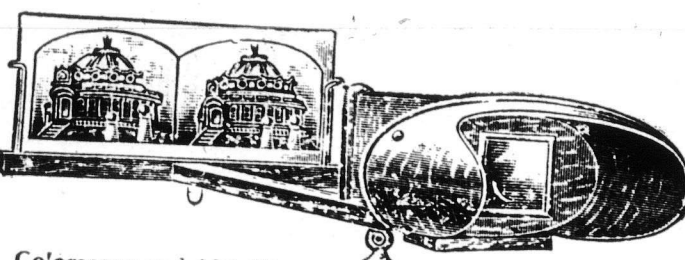
If all men were Joachims probably we should never have heard of the "revolt of the women" and the "new woman"; probably the second fiddle players would never have tried to go on strike. But, unfortunately, there are plenty of weak men in the world who arrogantly assume that they are born to dominate women in every way their superiors.

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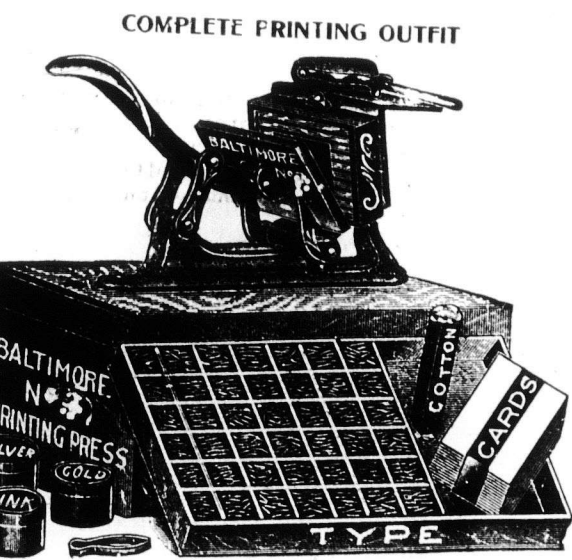
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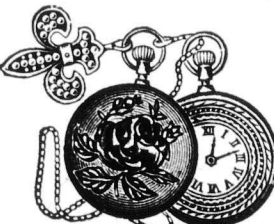
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