

## Moses Harman's Mission (May 10, 1906)

Not as a writer nor as an author will Moses Harman be remembered in history, although he has won enviable fame as both; but as a liberator will he be known to future generations.

In his prison cell at Joliet he is today the most powerful advocate of sexual purity and the freedom of the press.<sup>1</sup> His enemies are doing infinitely more for his cause than he could possibly do without their opposition.

Such men as Harman, born to serve, must go to jail, to the rack and the scaffold. This has always been so and always will, as long as a large majority of mankind are subject to the will of a small minority — as long as the world is ruled by ignorance and superstition.

To shed light has always been a crime, for the simple reason that light is a menace to the rule of darkness. If Moses Harman had shed as much blood as he has light he would be honored as some great conqueror, and instead of lying in a prison pen in the sunset of his life he would be feted as a popular idol and his statue would adorn the parks of the cities. Better a thousand times this pure man in stripes of a felon than an apostate in purple and fine linen.

It is the very irony of fate that this apostle of purity should be punished for alleged impurity; that the gross and sensual in our sex life and social relations, so abhorrent to his refined and sensitive nature, and against which he has waged unceasing war, should have sufficient power to so distort his features as to have him appear the author of their being. The vulgar, ignorant censors of Moses Harman have no conception of his real mission; he is as great as they are small, and is destined to live as nobly as they are doomed to perish ignominiously.

From Jesus Christ to Moses Harman the fate of all true men has been the same; from Calvary to Joliet not one has escaped.

Not lightly are men considered who essay to serve humanity. The severest tests are applied to them and the extremest penalties imposed upon them, but the Moses Harmans no more shrink from the one or the other than if they were approaching their crowning festival.

In his prison garb today our elder brother is a powerful instrumentality in setting the dead hearts of the people to beating and opening their eyes to what is going on in the world. Every hour of his sentence will hasten by a year the end of mental and moral despotism.

Such freaks as Anthony Comstock<sup>2</sup> are the products of a perverted social order and an abnormal civilization. Freedom will finally be achieved in spite of all the insects that light upon the chariot wheels of progress.

The capitalist system, based upon the private ownership by the few of the earth and the fulness thereof, is the prolific parent of ignorance and all the ills that ignorance entails, and when this is overthrown, as it certainly will be, such monstrous crimes as Moses Harman is now the victim of will be unknown.

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<sup>1</sup> At the age of 75, publisher of the rationalist magazine *Lucifer* and author of the book *Motherhood in Freedom* Moses Harman was sentenced to one year at hard labor in the Illinois state penitentiary at Joliet. Seven issues of his publication had been declared unmailable under the Comstock Law in the summer of 1905, ostensibly for advertising for sale publications on the topic of sex.

<sup>2</sup> Anthony Comstock (1844-1915) was a conservative activist in the Young Men's Christian Association movement. In 1873 he founded the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice, an organization which successfully lobbied Congress later that year for passage of the so-called "Comstock Law" prohibiting the mailing of "obscene, lewd, or lascivious" publications — a broad category which included medical publications on gynecology, birth control, abortion, venereal disease, and basic sexual education. Comstock was subsequently made a special agent of the United States Postal Service, which enabled him to escalate his moralistic crusade — a campaign which resulted in thousands of arrests, self-censorship, and the destruction of tons of printed publications. Although portions of the Comstock Law were ruled unconstitutional over the years, it was not until 1957 that the law was finally stricken from the books.