

**MEN VERSUS THE MAN; A
CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN
ROBERT RIVES LA MONTE,
SOCIALIST, AND H.L. MENCKEN,
INDIVIDUALIST**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649081936

Men versus the man; a correspondence between Robert Rives La Monte, socialist, and H.L. Mencken, individualist by Robert Rives La Monte & H. L. Mencken

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
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MEN *versus* THE MAN

A CORRESPONDENCE

BETWEEN

ROBERT RIVES LA MONTE, Socialist

AND

H. L. MENCKEN, Individualist



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NEW YORK
HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY
1910

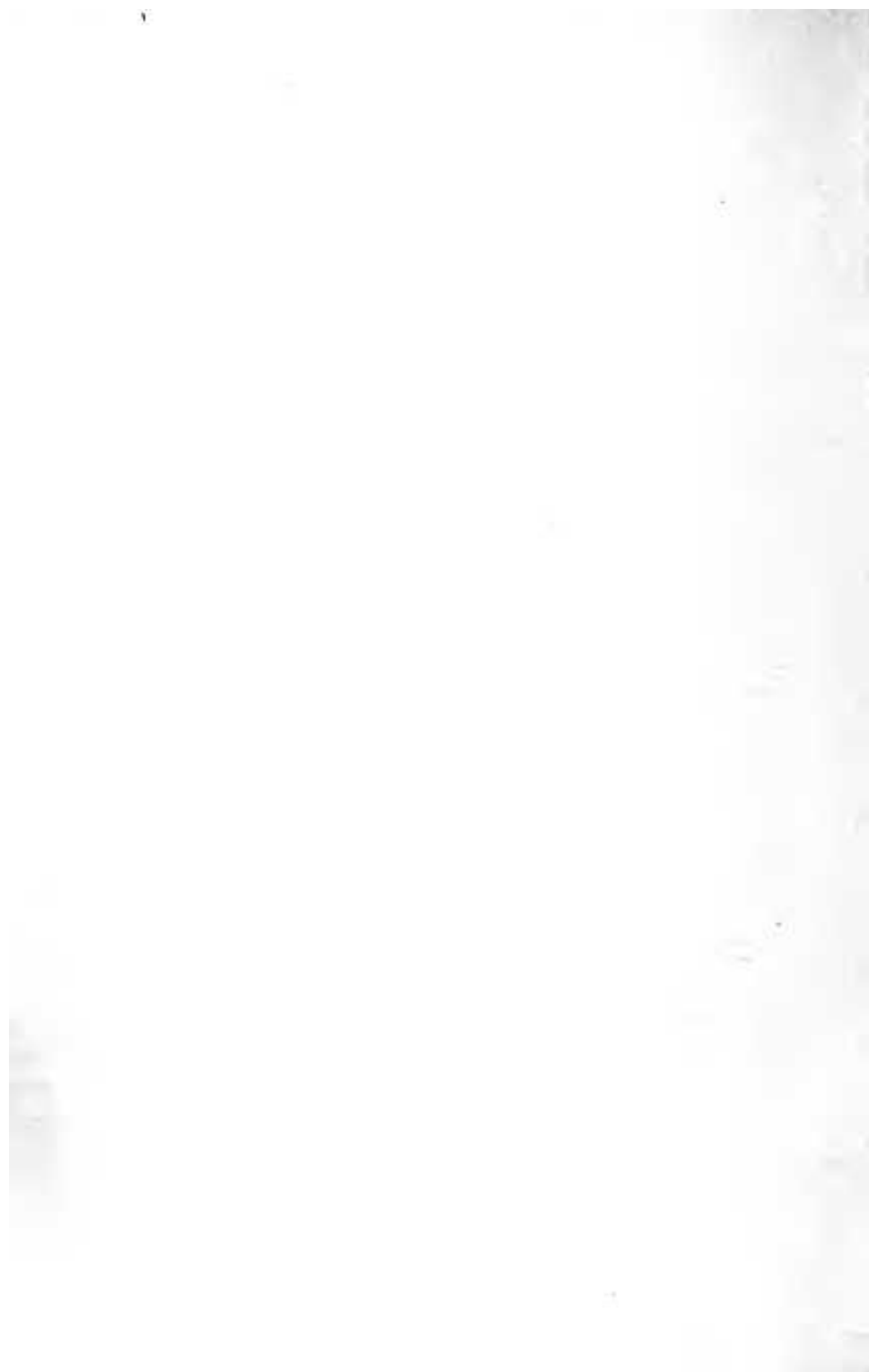
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Published March, 1910

INTRODUCTION

THIS book is precisely what it pretends to be: a series of letters between friends. They were written because the general subject of the organization of society was one which vastly attracted both of us, and because a space of three hundred miles made a more intimate discussion impossible. Into them there went, not so much a learned review of the evidence and the prophets, as a record of personal, and often transient opinions and impressions. Changes of position are to be noticed in more than one place, but inasmuch as the purpose of each disputant was to shake the stand of the other, this proof of occasional success may be accepted, it is hoped, without impatience. It was thought best to print the letters without attempting to transform their epistolary freedom into a more sedate dialectic manner. They offer few new contributions of either fact or theory to the great questions they presume to discuss, but it is possible that they may be of some interest as showing how variously the accepted facts and theories appear and appeal to two somewhat eager inquirers.

LA MONTE.
MENCKEN.



MEN VS. THE MAN

LA MONTE'S FIRST LETTER

MY DEAR MENCKEN:

You and I are fairly typical of the hosts of educated young men and women of upper and middle class antecedents who are so far from satisfied with life as it is that the man in the street who styles us "knockers" does not come very wide of the mark. But yet we differ, and differ widely; you, in spite of your sturdy independence of mind, are in the main a disciple of Nietzsche, or, in other words, you are an Individualist whose ideal is a splendid aristocratic oligarchy of Beyond Men ruling over a hopelessly submerged rabble; I am a Socialist and a faithful disciple of Marx—not that I believe Marx to have been superhuman or infallible, but simply that I have found him to be right in so many cases, that I feel that there is a strong presumption that he is right even where I cannot clearly see that he is.

Let us first examine the grounds of our basic agreement, and then it will be easier to recognize the reason for the very wide divergence of our con-

clusions. We are both idealists in the sense that Don Quixote and Jesus Christ and Thomas Jefferson were idealists, but there are idealists and idealists. The difference depends upon the nature of the ideal. If the ideal be one capable of attainment or at least of reasonably close approximation, the idealist is what we call a practical man—he may even be a scientist, a materialist, or an atheist, as are many of the most effective and determined fighters for Socialism. If the ideal be one hopelessly beyond reach of attainment, if the idealist hitches his wagon to a star without having studied astronomy sufficiently to ascertain whether the orbit of the star is along a road over which his poor man-made wagon may pass in safety, then we call him a dreamer, a visionary, a Utopian, or a madman. It is probable that in our secret hearts this is the view each of us takes of the other.

You, recognizing that within historical times there has ever been a rabble of well-nigh sub-human men and women, believe that the only ideal that you, as a practical man, can accept is one including such a rabble. To you the man who proposes the abolition of this sub-human herd is a mystical dreamer who ignores the stern teachings of history. It must be admitted that much of the current Socialist literature—H. G. Wells' "New Worlds for Old," for instance—which presents Socialism as a scheme for human amelioration which Society is free to adopt or reject as it will, as a

sort of patent panacea for human ills which the patient may or may not elect to imbibe; it must be admitted that the great bulk of this literature of polite propaganda goes far toward justifying your view.

But the typical Socialist of Germany, France, England, and America, the man or woman who gives his or her energies to educating and organizing and disciplining the wonderful, world-wide army, ever growing, ever marching forward, undismayed by defeat, sure of ultimate victory, already thirty million strong—the largest army under a single banner the world has ever seen—this typical, work-a-day, militant Socialist does not look upon himself or herself as a patent medicine vender, but as a John the Baptist proclaiming with no uncertain sound the advent of a New Order. Such an army inspired by a common faith, even though the faith be a delusion, animated by a common purpose, even though the purpose be incapable of realization, is a force that you as a practical man must reckon with.

But is the faith a delusion? Is the purpose incapable of realization? Let us see. If it is impossible for the Old Order to persist, then it follows that a New Order must come. I will postpone for the present discussing what that New Order is to be, and will proceed to show you that the Old Order *cannot* continue. I will give you as little history, political economy, and statistics