

DOCUMENTS

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PRISON LETTERS OF RICARDO FLORES MAGON TO LILLY SARNOFF

The career of Ricardo Flores Magón, the foremost Mexican anarchist of the twentieth century, involves a curious paradox. On the one hand, he must be counted among the leading inspirers and martyrs of the Mexican Revolution. His movement, embodied in the *Partido Liberal Mexicano*, set in motion the forces that, in May 1911, drove Porfirio Díaz into exile; and his journal, *Regeneración*, which in the early stages of the Revolution reached a circulation of nearly 30,000, played an important part in rousing Mexican laborers, rural as well as urban, against the Díaz dictatorship and in pushing the Revolution in a more egalitarian direction than it might otherwise have taken. Under the banner of "Land and Liberty", the Magonista revolt of 1911 in Baja California established short-lived revolutionary communes at Mexicali and Tijuana, having for their theoretical basis Kropotkin's *Conquest of Bread*, a work which Flores Magón regarded as a kind of anarchist bible and which his followers distributed in thousands of copies. Today the memory of Flores Magón is honored throughout Mexico. His remains rest in the Rotunda of Illustrious Men in Mexico City. In all parts of the country streets and squares bear his name, and Mexicans pay him homage as a great "precursor" of their Revolution, which was one of the major social upheavals of the twentieth century.

And yet, the greater part of Flores Magón's adult life was spent not in Mexico but in the United States. When released from the Belén Prison in Mexico City towards the end of 1903, Flores Magón, threatened with further persecution, decided to leave the country and continue his agitation from across the border. On January 4, 1904, at the age of thirty, he crossed the Rio Grande at Laredo, Texas, never to return to Mexico alive. He spent the next nineteen years in the United States, more than half of them in prison. He was jailed in Missouri, in California, in Arizona, in Washington, and in Kansas, where he died at Leavenworth Penitentiary in 1922. His odyssey, as a friend remarked,

had led “directly to the Cross”.¹

What began for Flores Magón as a struggle against Díaz thus became a simultaneous struggle against American political repression. Hounded by the police, by private detectives, by postal and immigration officials, he was driven from city to city, a prey to periodic arrests and under constant threat of deportation. Between 1904 and 1907 he lived in El Paso, San Antonio, St Louis, Toronto, Montreal and Los Angeles. In San Antonio an attempt was made on his life; in Los Angeles he was beaten by the police; in St Louis and El Paso the offices of his newspaper were raided, and its files and equipment confiscated. From 1907 to 1910 he found himself behind bars in Los Angeles and in Arizona.

It was during these years in the United States that Flores Magón’s libertarian philosophy achieved its fullest flowering. At the same time, his movement fired the imagination of American anarchists and Industrial Workers of the World. Both Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman spoke and wrote on its behalf, raising funds for *Regeneración* and for lawyers and bail when Flores Magón and his associates were arrested. Additional money came from the Anarchist Red Cross in New York, thanks in part to the efforts of Lucy Parsons, the widow of the Haymarket martyr Albert R. Parsons. Voltairine de Cleyre, another prominent American anarchist, also collected funds for her Mexican comrades, to whom she dedicated her last poem, “Written-in-Red”, which was published in *Regeneración* six months before her death.² Furthermore, two California anarchists, the German-born Alfred G. Sanftleben and the English-born William C. Owen, edited the English page of *Regeneración*, while the ranks of the Liberal army in Baja California included hundreds of American anarchists and Wobblies, among them, it is said, Frank Little and Joe Hill, the most celebrated martyrs to the IWW cause.

On August 3, 1910, Ricardo Flores Magón was released from prison after three years of confinement for violating American neutrality laws. On June 22, 1911, he was convicted of similar charges and sentenced to one year and eleven months in the federal penitentiary on McNeil Island, Washington, where the gloom of prison life was relieved by visitors from nearby Home Colony, the leading anarchist community on the West Coast. In January 1914, having completed his sentence, Flores Magón went to work on a co-operative farm near Los Angeles, resuming publication of *Regeneración* on a hand press

¹ W. C. Owen, “Death of Ricardo Flores Magón”, in: *Freedom* (London), December 1922.

² Voltairine de Cleyre, “Written-in-Red (To Our Living Dead in Mexico’s Struggle)”, in: *Regeneración* (Los Angeles), December 16, 1911.

with a barn for an office. In February 1916, however, he was again arrested and condemned to one year on McNeil Island, although execution of the sentence was postponed. "Our crime?", he wrote to *The Blast*, Alexander Berkman's paper in San Francisco. "Our refusal to accept the authority of any Gods in heaven or on earth. 'Neither God nor Master!' is our motto."¹

Flores Magón's final arrest came on March 21, 1918, when he and his colleague Librado Rivera fell victim to the anti-radical hysteria that swept the United States during the First World War. Convicted under the Espionage Act of obstructing the war effort, he received an appalling twenty-year sentence (Rivera was given fifteen years) plus the one-year term which had been deferred in 1916. "A sentence of 21 years", he wrote to a friend at Home Colony, "is a sentence of life for a man as old and worn out as I am."² On November 3, 1919, because of his declining health, Flores Magón was transferred from McNeil Island to the larger federal prison and drier climate at Leavenworth, Kansas, where Rivera soon followed him. Ralph Chaplin, the Wobbly poet, who occupied an adjoining cell, found Flores Magón "gentler, and fiercer, by nature than any man I had ever met", although his "face and manner were those of a saint rather than a soldier". Serving as prison librarian, he "impressed all of us as the highest type of revolutionary idealist", and "though he was broken in health by many years of imprisonment, his zeal for human betterment was still unabated".³

It was at Leavenworth that Flores Magón began his long correspondence with "Ellen White", the pseudonym of Lilly Sarnoff, a young New York anarchist and member of the defense committee working for his release. Born in Russia in 1899, Lilly Sarnoff came to the United States in 1905 with fresh memories of the anti-Jewish pogroms she had witnessed. Joining the anarchist movement as a young girl, she was active on behalf of political prisoners, and wrote poems and sketches for a number of American anarchist periodicals, including *The Road to Freedom* and *Man!* After Flores Magón's death, she threw herself into the campaign to save Sacco and Vanzetti, corresponding with them and visiting them in prison, as she had done with Flores Magón. For many years she was a member of the Ferrer Colony at Stelton, New Jersey, where she continues to live, with her companion

¹ *The Blast*, March 15, 1916.

² Ricardo Flores Magón to Gus Teltsch, December 15, 1920, in *Epistolario revolucionario e íntimo* (3 vols in 1; Mexico City, 1925, reprinted by the Ediciones Antorcha, Mexico City, 1975), I, p. 30.

³ Ralph Chaplin, *Wobbly: The Rough-and-Tumble Story of an American Radical* (Chicago, 1948), pp. 255, 278.

Louis G. Raymond, in her seventy-eighth year. In 1971 she published a booklet of poems, the first of which tells of Flores Magón and his calvary in America, where “rebels are not wanted”, but “only those of small minds, crafty men, and ignorant”.¹

Over a two-year period, from October 6, 1920, to November 12, 1922 (only nine days before his death), Ricardo Flores Magón wrote forty-two letters to Lilly Sarnoff, all of which have been preserved and, thanks to the generosity of their recipient, are now on deposit in the International Institute of Social History. All of the letters, together with others to Harry Weinberger, Flores Magón’s indefatigable attorney, and to such friends as Nicolás T. Bernal, Gus Teltsch and Rose Bernstein (“Erma Barsky”), were published in a Spanish translation in 1925 by the *Grupo Cultural* “Ricardo Flores Magón” of Mexico City.² In 1976 the *Tierra y Libertad* Group of Mexico City issued a new Spanish translation of the letters to Lilly Sarnoff, followed by facsimile copies of the originals.³ These facsimiles, however, are so faintly reproduced that many are quite illegible. For this reason, the most important of the letters have been selected for publication below.⁴

The letters to Lilly Sarnoff are of considerable interest. For, apart from revealing the horrors of prison life during the Palmer era, they discuss at some length the major issues – the attitude towards the Bolshevik Revolution and the prospects of a libertarian alternative – which preoccupied the entire anarchist movement in the aftermath of the war. In addition, they possess genuine literary merit, being written in a glowing if excessively florid style reflecting an age of romantic

¹ Lilly Raymond, *Miscellaneous Poems* (Stelton, N.J., 1971). For further information about the Raymonds see *Vicisitudes de la lucha* (Calgary, Alberta), 1975, No 8. I am extremely grateful to them for their help in preparing these letters for publication.

² *Epistolario revolucionario e íntimo*, op. cit. Flores Magón’s extensive correspondence with Weinberger is preserved in the Sterling Library of Yale University.

³ Ricardo Flores Magón: *Su vida, su obra y 42 cartas escritas en ingles durante los dos ultimos años de su prisión y de su vida*, translated by Proudhon Carbó (Mexico City, 1976). Only one of the letters, the first, had been previously published in the original English, a photographic facsimile appearing in *Tierra y Libertad* (Mexico City), No 326 (Numero Extraordinario), November 1973, a special issue devoted to Flores Magón and his movement. The English original of one of his letters to Rose Bernstein, dated January 4, 1922, was printed in *Behind the Bars*, January 1924, an organ of the Anarchist Red Cross Society in New York.

⁴ List of letters omitted: November 30, 1920; January 11 and 25, March 8, April 5 and 20, May 17, June 28, July 12, August 16, November 1, 1921; February 6 and 21, April 18, May 23, June 19, July 17 and 30, August 15, September 3 and 17, 1922.

revolutionism that has since passed into history. W. C. Owen is justified in calling Flores Magón “one of the most powerful writers the revolutionary movement has produced”.¹ For his literary talent, combined with his idealism and moral fervor, had made *Regeneración* one of the outstanding anarchist journals of the period, winning him a devoted following both in Mexico and the United States. And his letters to Lilly Sarnoff, distinguished by the same poetic eloquence and burning idealism as his writings in Spanish, reveal a command of the English language that has not been widely known. In some respects, including the use of archaic or non-existent words (“intermeddle”, “candorous”, “ephemorous”), they resemble the prison letters of Vanzetti, which were published in 1928.²

In spite of his transfer to Leavenworth, Flores Magón’s health continued to deteriorate. Yet Weinberger, for all his strenuous efforts, was unable to secure his release. Nor would Flores Magón recant his anarchist beliefs or make a personal appeal for a pardon, preferring death to the ignominy of begging mercy from the state. “When I die”, he wrote in December 1920, “my friends will perhaps inscribe on my tomb, ‘Here lies a dreamer’, and my enemies, ‘Here lies a madman’. But no one will be able to stamp the inscription, ‘Here lies a coward and a traitor to his ideas’.”³

In the early hours of November 21, 1922, Ralph Chaplin was awakened by the night orderly and informed that Flores Magón had died of heart failure in his cell. He was forty-nine years old and in the fifth year of his sentence. Some, including Rivera, were convinced that he had been murdered, but Chaplin believed that a sudden physical collapse had indeed ended his life.⁴ At any rate, it was the prison that had killed him. The authorities, by ignoring Weinberger’s petitions for clemency and by failing to provide Flores Magón with adequate medical attention, had in effect condemned him to death. On hearing the news, Alexander Berkman, who himself had spent sixteen years in American prisons, wrote: “Ricardo was a splendid man and most devoted comrade. Those prison doctors – I know them – they’d swear you are well when you are breathing your last.”⁵ With the death of Flores Magón, the Red Scare had claimed another victim.

¹ “Death of Ricardo Flores Magón”, loc. cit.

² The Letters of Sacco and Vanzetti, ed. by Marion Denman Frankfurter and Gardner Jackson (New York, 1928).

³ Flores Magón to Nicolás T. Bernal, December 6, 1920, *Epistolario revolucionario e íntimo*, I, p. 24.

⁴ Chaplin, *Wobbly*, op. cit., p. 310.

⁵ Alexander Berkman to Dr Michael A. Cohn, December 14, 1922, Cohn Papers, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, New York City.

Thus it was only as a corpse that Ricardo Flores Magón, after two decades in exile, could return to his native country. When his body was brought back to Mexico, throngs of workers and peasants, with red and black flags, lined the railroad tracks as the special train with his flower-enshrouded coffin went from town to town on its way to the capital. In January 1923 he was given a public funeral, one of the largest ever held in Mexico City. Like the funeral of Kropotkin in Moscow two years before, it became a political demonstration, with banners bearing the legend "He Died for Anarchy." On May 1, 1945, the day of international working-class solidarity, his remains were interred in the national pantheon. "The Mexican state gave its blessing to the man who had cursed the existence of the State", an American historian has remarked. "It was a generous but ironic compliment."¹

The letters are printed exactly as written, misspellings and other slips included. With the exception of the first letter, the heading and the address have been omitted. These are the same throughout until the last two letters, which have "Miss Ellen White, Kansas City, Mo."

Ricardo Flores Magón
Post Office Box 7

Leavenworth, Kansas, October 6th, 1920

Miss Ellen White

New York, N.Y.

My dear comrade:

Though expected, for I was sure you would write me, your dear letter of the 27th of last September was a surprise – and a sweet one – for me: it is so beautiful! And it is written with so rare sincerity!

Your admirable letter has had the power of setting my whole being quivering as I felt your soul vibrating in its pages. Thanks, many thanks, my dear comrade. How your letter has strengthened me! I feel so depressed that I need these kind of moral props; for you must know, kindly Ellen, that I cannot get accustomed to this life I am forced to live; my mind and my body protest against this sort of existence. Oh, if I only could not think! But I cannot stop thinking. I cannot! And, consequently, every detail of prison life hurts my feelings: the walls, erected to prevent my communion with my

¹ Lowell L. Blaisdell, *The Desert Revolution: Baja California 1911* (Madison, Wis., 1962), p. 204.

brothers in ideals, with my fellow-beings, with Nature; the bars which make me think of the fear and hatred of those who dread to see me free; the rules, which command me to obey, to obey, to obey; the clubs, whose very sight hurt my dignity as though I were physically struck with them; all, in fine, in my dismal surroundings, makes me realize that I am not a man, but a thing, and this, when I feel myself to be a man yet!

Can you wonder now why your letter made me so much good? Although a stern self-analysis, to which I subject myself once and again, makes me disagree with the poetic portrait you make of me, I nevertheless appreciate it as I appreciate everything delicate, noble, lovely, beautiful: the perfume of a flower, a kindly smile, a sympathetic feeling, the twinkling of a star; and your letter is all this. You poured in its pages all the perfume, and the light, and the warmth of your exquisite soul. To me, its lines and words are not such, but something yours, something detached from your own being, something that lived first in you, and which you most generously sent out to me to brighten, and comfort, and lighten my wretched condition. And you succeeded in it, my generous friend.

Don't be afraid of writing me long. I beg you to do it. A good thing never tires me. I love beauty, and beauty is what I find in your letter, but please bow no more your gracious face made to be kissed by Father Sun. There is nothing for you to be ashamed of. It is true, I would have liked your letters to come earlier, but early or late they are welcome like a ray of sunshine. I have nothing to complain of. During the long winter months one does not blame the sun for its failing to warm our bodies and rise our spirits, and we are only too glad to see it coming to us again. Could have I blamed you for not having written me?

Write me, write me, my good comrade Ellen.

I have a letter from comrade Winnie Branstetter, chairman of the Prison Comfort Club, a branch of the National Socialist Party, with headquarters at 220 S. Ashland Blvd., Chicago, Ill. This comrade came to see me last week, and will visit N. York. I gave her our beloved Erma's¹ address, not knowing yours at the time, but I told her that our Erma would introduce her to the other comrades. She will call at 71 E. 100 St. Now this comrade writes me, and says in part: "When I go East I wish to visit Washington regarding your case. Will you instruct Mr. Weinberger² to send details regarding your

¹ "Erma Barsky", pseudonym of Rose Bernstein, a young New York anarchist and textile worker, later (under the name of Rose Mirsky) an official of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union.

² Harry Weinberger, Flores Magón's lawyer. A Single Taxer and libertarian, he

case to me at the Chicago Headquarters 220 So. Ashland, Chicago? I shall be in Washington before reaching N. York, hence the necessity of mailing information." Now, I can't *instruct* Mr. Weinberger to send her information, but I beg him to do it. Please, my kindly Ellen, to see Mr. Weinberger regarding comrade Branstetter's request, as I can't write him for having already written the letters I am allowed to send out every week.

I have to close this letter. I cannot, like you, work; but I dream and wait..... Eagle without wings, alas, and without fangs, there is nothing more for me but to dream, and this I do.

Give our Erma my best regards and fraternal love.

As for you, the sweet emotions your inspiring letter stirred in my heart.

Fraternally yours,
Ricardo Flores Magón

Leavenworth, Kansas, October 26th, 1920

My dear comrade:

At last I am able to correspond to your very dear letter of the 15th of this month, which, as the first one you was so kind as to send me, has been very welcome. Accompanying the letter, I found a rose and a piece of fern. How mindful and good you are.

I read your letter with pleasure, and, to be true, with envy at your being able to use as many pages as you wish, while I have to content myself with my allowance of two pages to pour my soul in.

Your letters can never be too long, my dear friend. What you have to say is so dear, and so witty, and so inspiring; and the way you do it is so graceful, that I cannot get tired of your words. Thus, let that beautiful stream of your feelings and your thoughts flow on, let it flow forth and reach me that I may steep myself in its charm and beauty, for I need ablutions of this sort to find inspiration. Do not be afraid, then, and let your Castalia flow.....

Your hopes are strong, and so are mine. They are not idle hopes, oh, no! The air is fraught with possibilities..... History is already writing the last lines of the period which had as its cradle the ruins of the Bastille, and is about to open a new period, whose first chapter will be known by generations to come, as the gropings of the human race upon the road of freedom. A revaluation of social values is going on all over the world, and it is evident that what five or ten years ago was of negligible or no value, now is on the ascendancy, or, at least, ascend-

defended Emma Goldman and other anarchists during and after the First World War.

ing.... The hour is approaching when the banknote and the silver or goldcoins will have not the purchasing power that the callousities in a human hand will have. Already the heirs to certain thrones could not sell their rights of primogeniture for the classical plate of lentils.... Within the hard cranium of the slave a spark has begun to gleam, a spark of the divine Promethean fire which the gods of heavens and earth were bent to extinguish, but that in many a proletarian head is already an unquenchable conflagration..... We breathe an atmosphere of conflict and unrest; something is brewing in the dark; unheard of rumors float in the air, and from the four corners of the world livid vapours ascend, and gather in the height in masses of dark clouds which forebode storms; the hour of social liquidation is about to strike; one feels the solemnity of the moment, rather than understand it; our very instincts are warning our reason of the impending birth of the new historical age. And I dream, and my dreams give me, dear Ellen, what you advice met to be in, that is, good cheer. How I love these sweet, good, faithful dreams. They never desert me. I hope, and dream, and wait, the attentive ear in the direction of the wind to catch the subtlest rumor the outside world may send in, and listen, now the jading of those striving to bring nearer the age-long expected birth, now the groans of the ones who try to perpetuate the conditions from which they derived their happiness and their power. The struggle must be keen, if one may judge so by the heat blowing at his face as though from the mouth of a raging volcano.... And I dream, and see our Earth rocking herself in her orbit, this time proud of being the vehicle of a dignified race in her march around the Sun, under the sympathetic gaze of billions of other suns and other earths..... And I lay my hand upon the breast of this our common mother to feel the pulsations of her heart, and know how happy she is at the sight of her redeemed sons, the last Cain being dead. And under the grip of a quasi-religious emotion, I kiss her, I kiss her.....

Now, my dear, beloved comrade, I must close this letter. The two pages are already at an end; but before closing my scribble, I beg you to give my love to our beloved Erma, and the other comrades who through you did send me their salutations, regretting not knowing their names, though I imagine them to be beautiful, like Erma, like Ellen.....

Hoping to hear from you soon; wishing to feel once more that sweet "whiff of your garden of feelings" – to use your own dear words – I remain in my iron cage as a nostalgic, captive eagle, dreaming, dreaming, dreaming.

Your comrade,
Ricardo Flores Magón

Leavenworth, Kansas, November 17th, 1920

My dear comrade:

It is with a feeling akin to remorse that I am writing you to-day. You have written me three letters; one on the 26th of last October, and two more on the 6th, and 7th of this month, respectively, and it is with this two-paged letter that I am able to meet the abundant stream of sweet feelings, and kindly thoughts you did let loose for my gratification and delight....

I fully understand, my dear comrade, your impatience at the slowness with which events drag along: are we so thirsty, and so hungry of what the future has in store for us! But how many are we who feel a real thirst, and a keen hunger of it? Only a few; only those who know that the present state of affairs is not a permanent one, but a single scene of the myriad acts tragedy of life, and that there are more scenes, and more acts yet to be staged. And we are so few, that we are compelled to suffer the boredom of looking, and looking, and looking at the same thing, until our boredom – for boredom is contagious – should infect other people, and arouse in them the same thirst, and the very hunger with which we are afflicted. Then, and only then, the scene will be changed, the swiftness of the change depending on the amount of crusts of bread available to fill the bellies: the smaller the amount, the quicker the change. It is sad to state this, but it is the truth. Human dignity, and human pride.... Words, words, words, as the Shakespearean character said. It is the stomach that rules to-day, as powerfully as it did when our ancestors crept about in the jungle. We are not the man-type yet: we are the link between ape and man. For where is this dignity of which we boast so much? A man or a group of men can keep under his sway millions, and millions of so-called human beings; he can subject them to all imaginable or unimaginable indignities; he can dictate them what to do, and what to do not; he can intermeddle in the private and most intimate affairs of the individual; he can even prescribe what to say and what to think and everybody submits, everybody gladly surrenders his dignity, his honor, his pride, his freedom if he only is allowed to get his allotted portion of crusts..... Is not this simply animal? But the tyrant must be careful so as not to cause the dwindling of the amount of crusts. Crusts and moving-pictures show keep nowadays the masses in submission, as effectively as bread and circus placated the sporadic furies of the Roman plebs. Thus, we have to be patient, dear Ellen, and wait for the scene to be changed. We have not to wait very long, as the crusts are dwindling, and dwindling, and dwindling, and in an inverse ratio the number of those afflicted with our thirst, and tormented with our hunger and our yearnings, is growing, growing, growing, and in the presence of this

fact, from the depths of my being issues forth a sigh of relief: there is hope!

My dear, beloved comrade, I see with terror that only a few more lines are left, and many are the subjects in your amiable letters which I would like to refer to: your failure to meet comrade Winnie E. Branstetter; your good taste in treating me with the golden lines of Gorky's and Byron's; the gracious slip of writing Vera instead of Erma; the flower, and what it means to those who understand the beautiful; the "white-collar" yoke weighing upon your neck; John Reed's death¹. How could I write you upon all this, and many other points of your beautiful and dear letters, in these two pages? And then, I have so many things to say on my own account about my thoughts, about my dreams, about my feelings, and how my whole being vibrates under their influence, and how my blood races through my arteries spurred by their warmth; but I cannot say all this in two pages, and thus I suffer the double torture of getting my body hurt, if I move too freely within my narrow cage, and my mental wings injured, if I try to spread them beyond the limits of a two-paged letter.

Write me long, long letters, dear Ellen, and as often as you can, and I beg you not to say any more that perhaps I bid you to do so out of politeness. Your letters delight me.

The London Freedom² may reach me if sent directly by the publishers. Thanks for the clipping.

My love to Erma, all the comrades, and you, my good friend.

Ricardo Flores Magón

P.S. I need a tooth-brush, and two big, colored handkerchiefs.

Leavenworth, Kansas, December 14th, 1920

My very dear comrade:

I am in receipt of your dear, beautiful letters of the 1st and 5th of this month, both of them conveying to me your great hopes, and your dreams, and deliciously interwoven with all this, like flowers peeping out of the verdure, that note of humour, of light-heartedness, or of love to those who suffer, which makes of your letters a real treat to the heart of this old rebel.

¹ John Reed, the well-known American journalist, died in Moscow of typhus on October 17, 1920.

² The principal anarchist journal in England, founded by Kropotkin and his circle in 1886.

Your news regarding an early release of political prisoners is splendid, and whatever the outcome may be, I am thankful to you; I am thankful to you whether they should let loose my wings or not, for what I appreciate is that emotion born out in some exquisite corner of your heart which prompted you to rush the good tidings to your comrade. You felt happy at the receiving of the news, and wanting me to feel happy too, you opened your heart, and made it flow its delicate perfume for my satisfaction and comfort. Thanks, thanks, thanks good, dear Ellen.

Thinking upon the matter, I do not see any reason why we, class-war prisoners, should be kept in bondage further on. To keep us pent up is, I believe, an unnecessary and fruitless cruelty. We are kept apart from the rest of the mortals in the hope that our discontent should not infect others, but are we really a source of discontent? For my part I can say that I am not. I have not raised the price of bread; I have not deprived any child of its milk; I have not thrown any family out into the gutter for lack of payment of the rent, because I have not a dwelling place even for myself; I have not deprived to anyone of the right of thinking with his own head, and of acting accordingly; I have not compelled anybody to sweat, and work, and even give his life for me; no one can point at me as the occasioner of his tatters, and his tears, and his despair. How, then, might I cause discontent? And if I am not a source of discontent, why is it that they do not unfetter my wings, and let me fly to that spot on Earth where tender hearts pine away for my absence?

All this makes me suspect that they do not keep me in captivity because I am a source of discontent, but because I want to suppress it, I strive to extirpate from our Earth all the sorrow, and degradation, and misery which spring forth from every situation wherein there is one who commands, and another one who obeys. This is my fault, I think; this is my crime, and if it is so, I bless it, and cherish it, and am ready to commit it again with my whole heart, with my whole brain, with my whole body, for it responds to the appeals of a mysterious instinct of harmony, and beauty quivering somewhere in the inmost recesses of my being. I want everything to be beautiful, in harmony with Nature. Everything in Nature is beautiful, everything in her breathes beauty, except Man – the most privileged of her creatures. Is not this a shame for Man, and an affront for Nature? Hatred, crime, sorrow, such is the lot of Man in the midst of the grandeur and the splendor of Nature, and why? Because there is one who commands, and another one who obeys; one who exploits, and another one who is exploited, and in this guise we are a blot in the face of Nature, we are a disgrace to all things and beings, for we breake all harmony and all beauty. When all

living beings exult under the breath of Life, Man withers, and rusts, and sobs, and having brain does not pause to think that the stars resent to be seen through the veil of his tears, and that the roses, the golds, and the purples of dawns and sunsets get offended at the sight of his tatters and his mange. What Man needs that he may appreciate beauty, and avoid this jarring of his in the universal harmony, is to be free. Then, and only then he will introduce his note in the mighty concert of Life, and will find for his eyes a nobler function than that of a shedder of tears, and for his heart something better than being the shelter of hatred and grief.

As the space is getting shorter, I put a stop to my vagaries. I have been sick, very sick this past week. Colds always attack me in the most severe form, accompanied by fever, headache, toothache, rheumatic pains, and last winter, even by pneumonia. You see, dear Ellen, that this poor "tropical plant" withers under this cold, gray, frowning sky. I still am sick, but not much now, and I think that in two or three more days I shall be well to wait for another attack, and so on.

Now, I must close this letter, my good, dear Ellen, wishing you happy hours on this coming holy days, when the Christian world will celebrate the coming into life of a dreamer who got assassinated by the same ones who have made a god out of him, and grovel at his feet. Be happy, and forget for a few days that dreary prison in which you are wasting your youth and your health, two treasures that our masters buy for a crust of bread. Give my love to Erma and all the comrades, and you, my beloved friend, believe that you live in my heart with those whom I love, and play a part, sweet and lovely, in the fabric of my dreams.

Ricardo Flores Magón

Leavenworth, Kansas, December 28th, 1920

My dear comrade:

Have you ever seen a blade of grass all a-trembling under the kisses of the sun, and the whispers of the breeze, and that seems to respond with a quiver to the breath of the flowers and the song of the birds, yet dumb to utter a word of appreciation and thankfulness for the undeserved blessings bestowed upon it? I am that blade of grass – a common mortal sharing the joys reserved to gods, and this is why at the reading of your letters of the 14th and 19th of this month, I could only quiver, full of emotion and gratitude for the undeserved blessings I had been made the object by you, generous, beloved friend. Your two letters brought me all what sets the lowly blade of grass a-tremble; and here I am, dumb to utter the words which should articulate and give

form and colour to this sensation of well-being gliding through my flesh, and this exultation of my soul before the light of your brain, and at the warmth of your heart, and at the whispers, and the perfumes, and the music of your soul. I receive light from you, even when knitting your brows you evoke those transitory nights of your soul, from which you cannot succeed in putting out all its stars, for there gleams your inexhaustible humour, while the charm of your youth like "a rosy cloud drifts by..." Thanks, thanks, thanks.

A year ago two of my most beloved friends, Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman were put to the sea;¹ for the rulers of this country, once the land of the free, and the home of the brave, considered them unfit to share the joys and the sorrows of the American people, and altogether too free, and too brave to allow them to pitch their tent on the soil which Tradition bestowed to the rebels of the world.... That was a moment of anguish, when Emma and Alexander set their feet on the deck of the *Bufford*: Justice let her arms hang in utter despair; Freedom thought herself to be under the grip of a nightmare; the domicile of the foreign-born ceased to be sacred, and on the dead of night he were torn away from the arms of his family, and put in chains; a breath of tragedy and terror poisoned the air; *Torquemada* grinned, and the bones at *Plymouth Rock* reddened with shame.... And now, as I remember the outrage, huddled up in a corner of my cell, I ponder, and ponder, and ponder, and ask to myself: what is the object aimed at by means of these banishments, and incarcerations, and even lynchings of those who cherish an ideal different to that sustained by those in power? And after thinking and thinking until my head aches, I can find but one answer: to kill the ideal! How far we are from the cave-man, and yet how near, too. We can sail the air; we are able to talk each other through space; we know how to wind up the lightning round a spool, and compel it to work for us; we have even chased the gods away from the heavens, and have suspended from the stars the silvery hammock of our dreams to voluptuously rock into the blue.... Yet, our jurisprudence does not differ in essence to that founded on the night of time by a thief at the shout: "this is mine!" All our social and political life, and international relations gravitate around the crime consecrated as principle by the armed hand of the first robber who breathed on Earth..... And so, when through the alchemy of humane suffering and sorrow there springs forth the white flower of a white ideal of justice, the whole social, political and international forces vie with each other to pluck it up, believing, oh, insensates! that in so

¹ Goldman and Berkman were deported to Russia on the *Buford* (not *Bufford*) on December 21, 1919.

doing they allay all danger which might put in jeopardy the sacredness of crime, while they leave alive the grim plant bearer of the divine flower. So it was that Emma and Alexander were delivered to the ocean a year ago, yet humane suffering and sorrow have not discontinued their yielding of white flowers.

How beautiful verse you write, my good Ellen. Even Byron would admire the poetry contained in the few lines you wrote in verse expressing your mood at that particular moment. Could I aspire to a better Christmas present than this flower of your being? Were not the throbs of your heart which gave its cadence to these verses? and the soft flowing of your generous blood through your arteries which lend to these rhythmic lines its melancholy languour? Thanks, divine poetess, for the splendid gift.

Yes, if I ever leave this inferno I will write a drama in English, and I will dedicate it to you.

My cold? It gives me a two or three-weeks' truce, and then charges again with great fury making my life miserable.

1921 is already at our thresholds, and raising his hand to knock at the doors. He is loaded with happiness and sorrows, and I am praying him to leave at your door a huge parcel of happiness to last you the three-hundred-and-five coming days, and to spare you of his sorrows which he may put on my shoulders, for I have grown used to them. . . .

With love to our Erma and all the comrades, and more love and admiration for you, Ellen, I remain,

Your comrade,
Ricardo Flores Magón

P.S. Please note that Ricardo has only one "c".

Leavenworth, Kansas, February 8th, 1921

My very dear comrade:

Three gems are before me, each one conveying a message of courage, a breath of wholesome enthusiasm, and a solemn pledge of devotion to the Ideal. . . . I am referring to your beautiful letters of the 26th, 27th, and 30th of last January, wherein you poured out what you feel and what you think in regards to this cause of ours, which I call the cause of Beauty, for Freedom is Beauty. There is only one word which might express my emotions at the sight of these three splendid gems: admiration! I cherish to designate your last three letters, "The Song of the Amazon. . . .", for they are a poem in three cantos. You are a poetess, and the song is beautiful. It puts me in the presence of a most unequal struggle, the struggle of a free and fearless soul against the deities of Heaven and the gods of Earth. It is your soul, your soul

bringing down by the scruff of their necks, to arraign them before the tribunal of Reason, the creatures that Man in his dread created, and for whom constructed thrones in the starry spaces; your soul dragging to the feet of human dignity, the earthly gods imposed upon Man through fraud, and violence, and crime.... It is your soul at bay, yet gallantly repulsing the onslaughts relentlessly made against it by the forces of Darkness, the hordes of all the prejudices, of all the fetichisms, of all the customs, of all the preoccupations, of all the traditions. May you wonder at my admiration? May this admiration elicit another unclassifiable smile? Yet my admiration is sincere. How could your soul resist, and actually overcome the myriad solicitations and influences of the environment? A pure, white flower born at the mouth of an inferno, yet thriving unpolluted, and fresh....

How mindful are you, my good friend. I have "Freedom" in my possession; all the numbers for 1920, and the January number of this year. I thank you, and Keell and Owen.¹ I needed this good paper; I was hungry of this healthy literature. I agree with these comrades: a dictatorship is tyranny, and cannot lead but to tyranny, and I am against despotism whether exercised by the workers or the bourgeoisie. This Russian question preoccupies me much. I am afraid that the Russian masses, after having waited in vain the freedom and well-being which have been promised them by the Dictatorship of Lenin and Trotzky, should revert to capitalism again. The actual starvation of the Russian masses after two years of management of the industries by the State, may drive these masses to the conclusion that the old system of production is good, and so, instead of putting the industries under the direct management of the workers, they may handle them back to the private owners. The effect of this action would be disastrous to the revolutionary labor movement of the world that is pinning so many hopes on the Soviet Government. These misgivings of mine make me see with deep sympathy the task of enlightenment "Freedom" is carrying on. The collapse of the Dictatorship of Lenin and Trotzky is only a question of time, and the workers of the world must be prepared to behold with serenity such failure, while by means of our propaganda they will know the causes of the failure, and will have before them the road leading to a society without masters. Please, dear Ellen, send my fraternal greetings to Owen and Keell, and all the English comrades. As my dear friend Owen wishes to know how am I getting on, you may inform him. You know that the days of my eyesight are counted.... Darkness is approaching, approaching....

¹ Thomas H. Keell, editor of *Freedom*, and William C. Owen, former editor of the English page of Flores Magón's *Regeneración* and now a contributor to

I have a letter from Mr. Weinberger informing me of what you also write: that the Department of Justice will give due consideration to my case. Mr. Weinberger is very kind in keeping me well posted on every move in my case. Please salute him.

The rose received. Yes, the dear thing tells me of a red-blooded young woman who lives for the Ideal, and, most naturally, I love this rose, for it brings me a message of hope. Whenever I see young souls like yours so devoted to the cause, I look with confidence into the future of our race. So long as humanity continues giving birth to Ellen Whites, there is hope....

My cold mortifies me as always, I feel my head so heavy. Yes, I have taken medicines here, but without avail. What I need is a change of climat. I need my tropics.... These snows are beautiful, they inspire me, and I love them, but they do not love me. Thus I need my jungles, for a while at least, as my struggle calls me to the big cities.... But what am I telling? Those are dreams. The reality are these grim walls that stand between me and Life. However, I am not sorry, because I am in peace with my conscience. What the ones who keep me here would not give to enjoy that peace?

Now, I must close this letter thanking you, beloved comrade, for allowing me to share that sweet warmth that your generous heart irradiates, and with love to you, Erma, and all the good comrades, I remain anxiously waiting your next gem.

Ricardo Flores Magón

Leavenworth, Kansas, February 22nd, 1921

My very dear comrade:

Though you advice me not to answer your letters, thinking that it may injure my eyes, I cannot refrain from doing it. Writing to those I love is a pleasure, and you, Ellen, are one of them. Besides – and this may allay your apprehensions – my eyes do not ache. Occasionally there is a twitch in them, and that is all. As to the doctor, he has not come any more, but he does right – I do not need him now, and his coming would be an absolutely unnecessary expense, a mere waste of money. The cataracts have to ripen by themselves, and in the meantime nothing can be done but to wait.

Yes, I knew Mollie and the other comrades had got their sentences reduced.¹ As for me, I do not expect anything favorable after Rivera's

Freedom, having returned to his native England in 1916.

¹ Mollie Steimer, Jacob Abrams, Hyman Lachowsky and Samuel Lipman were convicted in New York in October 1918 for violating the Espionage Act by

case having been turned down. They, undoubtedly, consider him a little less guilty than myself, as he only got 15 years. Perhaps the new administration¹ should set us free, perhaps.... If it happens, let us credit the miracle to expediency, not to justice.

I fully understand your disappointment at seeing so many comrades supporting the Lenin-Trotsky's government. I am not, of course, in favor of allied intervention in Russia; we must oppose it, but we must refrain from showing Marxian tyranny as a means to gain freedom. Tyranny cannot breed but tyranny. It is better to intensify the propaganda of our Ideal to the utmost. It is most needed, for we are very few, and if a number of us expends its energies in the popularization of Maximalism, our cause will suffer a terrible setback. Yes, I understand your disappointment, my good Ellen – you are pure and sincere and very, very intelligent. But let us not grieve. If some, or many, of our brothers have got astray, others will come to our side; and if no one comes, we must not despair, for sooner or later the Marxian intoxication will fade away, and the sobered minds will adopt the Ideal that in their drunkenness they scoffed at. Our Ideal cannot perish because it is the expression of a longing of the human soul for liberty, for limitless freedom. The masses, so easily misled because they feel, but do not think, may adopt a system or other of social and political intercourse to assuage this aching longing for freedom, but they will not get relieved of their torment, and finally will understand that it is our Ideal the only one that guarantees the inviolableness of human dignity. I do not despair, and less do I when I see young, beautiful souls like yours bravely guarding the purity of the Ideal. I have confidence in you. You may be left alone; all may desert you, for human cowardice always follows the line of less resistance, but you, I am sure, will remain firm – an eagle bidding the sparrows to become eagles themselves. Soar, soar, my dear, beautiful young eagle, be yourself. Soar, soar, for the herd, in order to see you, will have to raise their heads. Soar, soar, that the human beast be compelled to stand on its hind legs, and well erect, and with its brow to the sun to see your beauty. Be yourself; if sophisticated human souls shun you as queer, or extravagant, for the poor herd cannot comprehend independent, fearless souls, do not grieve over your loneliness, go to the fields, and converse with your

distributing leaflets opposing American military intervention in Soviet Russia (their comrade Jacob Schwartz died before the trial after being beaten by the police). The three male defendants were sentenced to twenty years in prison and Mollie Steimer to fifteen years. Weinberger argued their case unsuccessfully before the Supreme Court. All four were deported to Russia on November 24, 1921.

¹ Of Warren G. Harding.

sisters – the flowers; they are good, they do not shun you, and for your words of love they always have beauty and fragrance. Alone? No; no one is alone in Nature's bosom, provided one feels and thinks; provided one realizes his close kinship with bird and beast, and plant and tree; provided one understands that the Earth is a heavenly body also, and the comet is his brother, and the star his sister. Alone, when even the modest blade of grass shooting off the rock's cleft or the crumbling wall sends to one's heart a thrill.... Alone, when the very bare cliff at one's feet tells the story of our common origin, and one cannot but feel for it fraternity and love.... Alone, when the ocean fills one's bosom with the majesty of its mighty pulse.... No: no one is alone if he only understands Life.... Thus, be yourself, my beloved young eagle, that one day these sparrows, conscious of your serenity and grandeur, shall long to be eagles too....

And now, I must say good-bye, for my wings cannot fly beyond the limits of this page. That what of my cold? I am sorry to state that it loves my poor body for a shelter. If a young socialist, Thomas R. Sullivan, happens to see you, as he promised me before his release last Saturday, he will tell you how my uninvited and undesirable guest makes me cough. But I feel well in other respects, and do not allow my eyes' trouble to embitter my soul.

I received letter from our beloved Erma. I will write her next week.

With love to Erma, the rest of the comrades and you, I remain, as always, your comrade who admires your rare devotion to our Ideal.

Ricardo Flores Magón

Leavenworth, Kansas, March 22nd, 1921

My dear comrade:

Yes, I understand; it is, if not impossible, very hard for you to write me oftener. You are not the owner of your time. Pardon me if I ever suggested you to write me frequently. I was as unmindful, and selfish, and cruel like a child. The baby demands what he wishes, without pausing to think whether the satisfaction of his desires might entail pain or any kind of discomfort to others. But then, the baby is only a baby, while I... Here it was when I needed one of those laughs of yours to awake me to my senses.

You say that "there may still be some hope" for me to be released. I fail to see it, my good Ellen. Everything indicates that there is no more hope. I have just received from Mr. Weinberger copy of a reply given him by the Attorney General¹ regarding my case as

¹ Harry M. Daugherty.

considered on the ground of my being sick. The reading of the reply made me smile. The essence of the reply is in its meaning this: "True, Magón is sick, but he can live a few more years yet, and so he must pay to justice those few years, at least." Mr. Weinberger says that he is trying to get an appointment to see the Attorney General. I appreciate Mr. Weinberger's efforts to get me free, but I do not see how might he succeed when there is a determination in keeping me here. The Attorney General does not mention at all the report made by the prison physician at McNeil Island to the Department of Justice, in 1918, as to my being afflicted with diabetes and rheumatism. It is true that my urine was examined here in September, 1920, and in the report made on the 13th of the same month the urine appears to be normal, but can this be taken as a proof as to the sickness having been cured? Any doctor can say that diabetes is an incurable disease. The emissions of sugar with the urine may temporarily disappear in this strange disease, but the malady remains just the same. This low pressure of my blood, this anaemic condition of mine, as reported by my actual physician on September 13th, 1920, cannot be accounted for by the diabetes? And what of the rheumatism that still pains me, and this eternal cold which never heals? Please inform Mr. Weinberger of all this, my good Ellen, not that he may argue in my favor with the Attorney General, for all argument is useless when there is a determination to be deaf to reason, but in order that my friends should know the truth. As you see, I am not only losing my eyesight, but I am afflicted with other diseases. My spirits, however, are high. I am not in the least depressed though I know that I am to die here, within prison walls, far away from the tender creatures who love me, and sweetened my life, and with me used to dream.... I am an eagle fallen on the swamp. My wings are forever broken so as not to leave this ante-room of Death. But I have other wings which no one can break, and I soar, soar, soar, and in my lofty place I see what the ones who trimmed my pinions fail to.... But let us pass to a pleasanter subject. I am disgusted with this horrible letter I have been writing to you on illness and other human miseries, so unfit to be mentioned in what should be an answer to the beautiful, poetic conceptions expressed in your dear letter of the 13th of this month. You succeeded, beloved comrade, in trapping the splendour of that spring-day to send it to me. The whole letter is the charm of spring sublimed through your exquisite temperament.... Yet, you complain not to be an artist. Ungrateful creature! Would mother Nature be lenient to this daughter of hers, who is so fastidious as to deny what she so bountifully bestowed upon her: artistic temperament. You are an artist, Ellen, otherwise you would have not been able to catch, and to enclose into a letter the

glamour of the hour. Are not in these serried lines I have in front of me, the golds which surrounded you at the time of writing me? If not, what is it that glitters in them, and cheers the heart like a friendly smile? And these words, do you pretend to make me believe that they are sweet by themselves, and not because you dipped your pen in the blue to trace them? And you say you are not an artist. Perhaps you do not know it – has the flower conscience of its perfume and beauty? But lo! the space left is growing shorter. How remorseful I feel for having wasted it with the prose of my infirmities... I promise not to do it again, not to disgrace any more these two pages with so hideous a subject. Your sunshine must be corresponded with sunshine. And now, good-bye. It is time for me to go into bed to be free. While asleep I am free; on, blessed night!

That your letter is long? No, no, no; but now that you have explained me how hard it is for you to write on account of not being the owner of your time, I do not want to be exacting. Write whenever you can, and short, without any sacrifice, though your long letters do me so much good.... I send my love to our Erma, and all the other good comrades, and to you.

Ricardo Flores Magón

Leavenworth, Kansas, May 3rd, 1921

My dear comrade:

Your beautiful, dear letter of the 24th of last April was received with my usual appreciation, and read with delight and interest – it is so frank, so sincere. You do not conceal the emotions my words aroused in your sensitive being; instead you open your soul to allow me to look at its wonderful depths, and for such a privilege that but few mortals can enjoy, I am grateful to you, my dear, good comrade. How cheaply did I buy this privilege – a few scores of words! A few scores of words from me, and the massive gates with which Man hides from curious and irreverent eyes his inner world, were thrown open by you for me to see.... At the brink of this infinite my heart stops its pulsations seized with awe and wonder – there being nothing so boundless and immense as a soul, and nothing so entrancing as the sight of a great one. An admirer, or rather, a worshiper of Beauty, I stand motionless before the magnificent view – to step into, or to recede from it would be a sacrilege. To the inexpert it is a chaos of colour and form, but he who understands sees in it Life in her myriad manifestations, who has sought the refuge of a pure, brave soul to escape being desecrated by those who try to imprison her into the dry pages of the law-books. Thus before this repository of Life made a sacred shrine by her mere pre-

sence in it, I stand in ecstasis, bathed in its glory, while from the innermost depths of my being a melody ascends – a hymn to Beauty, to Beauty immortal and unpolluted – for so long as there be souls like yours wherein Life may take refuge, my Ideal of Beauty shall live!

I have another letter from our Harry Weinberger. I say “our”, because you esteem him, and you esteem only what is good and nice. He accompanies copy of a letter that under the date of April 18th, last, Mr. Daugherty, the new Attorney General, sent him regarding my case. How diametrically different you and Mr. Daugherty judge me. Your generosity makes you think my words enchanting ... yet, I failed to charm Mr. Daugherty. He thinks me “dangerous” ... and is of the opinion that a prison’s cell is the fittest place for me. The most degenerate and degraded criminals walk daily out of prison to continue their interrupted task of poisoning the people with all sorts of drugs, or of luring young maids into prostitution, or of embezzling the poor’s hard earned money. The raper goes out a free man that he may carry misery, shame, and dishonour to homes otherwise happy but for him. “Justice” opens the prison’s gates for the banker to go out and resume his work of driving to pauperism and despondency hundreds and thousands of innocent people. For the assassin, too, there is “justice”, as though there were not enough blood daily spilled out all over the world, to make it imperative the letting loose of blood-thirsty characters. In fine, antisocial crimes are looked upon with benevolent eyes by “justice”, but he who upholds an Ideal of brotherhood, peace, and love is regarded dangerous, and kept pent up to rot and die like a ferocious beast. My whole being shudders before this appalling corruption of the most elementary instincts that marked the departure of Man from the beast. When are we humans to stop this mad race toward the primeval darkness? From sociable animals we have turned individualistic monsters, and instead of stretching out our hands to take hold of a common banner of brotherhood and love, everyone hoists higher and higher the black pennant of egotism – each one for himself! Under these circumstances I am deemed dangerous, and my doctrine monstrous – the wolf hates to hear that his fangs should be extirpated... Thus for ferocity’s sake I must remain a prisoner. I do not complain – it is only natural for the hyena to believe it his privilege to feast on decaying flesh; those who strive at being wolves, have a right to, but for decency’s sake, do no cover such appalling regression to barbarism – if we have ever emerged from it, which I very much doubt – with the cloak of Justice.

As to the book “The Judgement of Peace”, did not arrive. Instead, the old catalogue I am sending back to you, was delivered to me. I am ashamed that after having you taken so much pains in sending me the

asked for book, it had got astray somehow. Perhaps your order was mixed up by some clerk or other. I am so sorry of having caused this waste of money.

It is time to say good-bye, and I have not said all what I have to say, but my allotted space is waning and a stop is necessary. Please give my love to Erma and all our good comrades, and you accept it, as it is what my heart feels for those who are gentle, and good like you, my beloved comrade.

Ricardo Flores Magón

Leavenworth, Kansas, May 31st, 1921

My dear comrade:

You certainly was in a jocular mood when you wrote those lines referring to my having admitted any possession of "charms". I used the word "chains", not "charms". The interest you exhibit regarding María and Lucía¹ is touching, for these two creatures, with Carlos, Lucia's seven years old son, are the beauty of my life. These three beings love me, and their pure, disinterested, abnegate love makes me happy, and I am thankful to them, and love them, and adore them, because while their love has made me happy, it has only won them tears and suffering... Lucía and María have been in jail for my sake, the dear tender creatures. In 1912, while I was being tried with others for having helped the Mexican peon to break their chains, one of the witnesses for the prosecution so cynically lied, that Lucía grew indignant and slapped the liar in the face. The judge of my trial must have thought of the justice that assisted her, for he only reprimanded her, but a few days afterwards, when sentence was passed on one and the other comrades, and friends and sympathizers made a demonstration that the brutality of the police converted into a riot, Lucía, who was conspicuous among the demonstrators, got arrested, savagely ill-treated and thrown into a dungeon occupied by degenerate drunken women and teeming with vermin. She is daring and has a keen sense of justice. My ideals are her ideals. I think, my dear comrade, that this detail of my daughter's character is a fit answer to your inquiring about her. María's case has not come up yet. It has been continually postponed since July, 1918, when she was arrested. She remained five months in the county jail, for there was no one willing to go on bond for her. While in jail she was put to terrible tasks, and as she suffers from the womb, fell dangerously ill. Her critical condition aroused at length humane feelings among the ones who have money, and \$5000

¹ Flores Magón's wife and daughter.

bail was provided for her release. She was indicted under the espionage law. She is very brave, and my ideals are hers. She loves what I write or what I say on the platform, and her applause is in grand part responsible for my endeavor in seeking becoming forms of expression. She loves what is beautiful, and I rack my brain to make it yield what her lovely soul needs. I have to please her taste, and I do it with all my heart – my greatest pleasure is to give pleasure to those I love. As to my Carlitos, he is a beautiful, unusually intelligent child, and very fond of me. I love him with unmeasurable love. In fact, I am crazy for him, and he deserves all love, for he is sweet and nice. He began to attend the Walt Whitman rationalist school¹ some time ago, but bad financial conditions compelled María and Lucía to move to a remote quarter of the city, and he could not go to his classes any more. They are now trying to move again to a place in the school's neighborhood, as they abhor the idea of Carlitos mind getting spoiled by the common bourgeoisie education. Do you want to know anything more, my dear Ellen? You certainly do not intrude. You are most welcome to my paradise. The beautiful flowers in it are to be seen precisely by pure, courageous souls like yours. I cannot grudge you any information regarding the three tender creatures whose love for me has only won them tears and suffering, suffering and tears which they think amply compensated by a word of endearment softly whispered in their ear by me.

My cold? I am just recovering from an unusually severe attack of the dreadful ailment that lasted two weeks. I was very, very ill. I do not say any more about it, because I think it to be tiresome for my friends to be told of my ailments each time I write them, and besides this, I hate to waste my two pages with gruesome narratives of the miseries of my old, illtreated flesh. I want my two allotted pages to be the conveyors of this something which stirs within me shouting for expression; of this mysterious craving which preys upon my soul urging it to find the fountain that must forever quench its formidable thirst. Two pages are too precious to be converted into the vehicle of a load of carrion. I prefer to send you flowers, flowers fresh from the garden of my soul. But, lo! the two pages are gone without having taken the flowers.... I beg your pardon, my good Ellen, and I assure you that the next two pages for you will be crammed with many, many flowers.

Please tell Mr. Weinberger I have his last letter wherein he says the copies will be sent. I heartily thank him for his unlimited kindness. As for the catalogue, please throw it away.

¹ See p. 403 and note 1.

With love to our beloved Erma and all the good comrades and to you, I say good-bye.

Ricardo Flores Magón

Leavenworth, Kansas, June 14th, 1921

My dear comrade:

Your welcome letter of the 8th inst. to hand. It came a little late, but it came and I am glad it did.

The Walt Whitman School was founded by William Thurston Brown in 1919. I think he was the founder of the Stelton School you speak about. It is a Modern School of the type of that founded by Ferrer in Spain.¹

You are very nice, my dear Ellen, when you say that it is not loathsome for you to learn about my infirmities, and encourage me to speak thereof... But then you do not know what a selfconceited fellow this old friend of yours is. I hide my ailments as zealously as the leper conceals his ulcers. It is an unbecoming modesty on my part, I own it, but if a woman has a right to mask her physical charms, why must not I be permitted to secrete my ugliness? Could I deck my illnesses so as to lend them grace and poesy... but as I fail to conciliate aesthetics with pathology, I deliberately and carefully shun the subject, thus keeping out of sight the miseries of the flesh, as when in the throes of agony the helenic warrior used to pull his shield to his face, as though to put a screen between his contorting face and the grandeur of Nature. It is for Beauty's sake that I place the shield of silence between my ailments and you.

I have not received another copy of "Freedom", as Erma must have told you. By what you tell me conditions in Russia are just the same as in any other country. It cannot be worse, but let us not take it to heart. I detect in what you say the sadness with which your noble heart is filled. Cheer up, my dear comrade! If our hopes and illusions mercilessly killed by the coarseness of reality lifeless lie, amid the sweet corpses there rises something more valuable than the dear dead – Experience. Those who could not believe our assertions will now think how true it is that Tyranny cannot evolve itself into Freedom. Tyranny

¹ The execution in 1909 of Francisco Ferrer, the Spanish anarchist educator, touched off a worldwide movement to establish libertarian schools modelled after his Escuela Moderna in Barcelona. Both the Walt Whitman School in Los Angeles and the Stelton School in New Jersey were of the Ferrer type. William Thurston Brown, though not a founder of the Stelton School, had been its director from 1916 to 1919 and had founded similar schools in Portland, Oregon, and Salt Lake City, Utah.

breeds Tyranny. The so-called necessary transition between Tyranny and Freedom has really proven to be a transition between a revolutionary abortion and normalcy, that is, czarism, though with a new garment to satisfy the shallowness of the masses. The other governments are very stupid, for if they are bent to the collapse of what is called the dictatorship of the proletariat, which in reality is the dictatorship of Lenin and Trotzky upon the proletariat, it is through their friendship and not through the aggressiveness that they would precipitate what they long for – the restoration of the capitalist state in Russia. I have been watching day by day the compromising and killing of the revolutionary principles in Russia. It is grievous, of course, to see the wanton assassination of the vague hopes of the peoples, but nothing is lost in the long run. If they believe to-day that Freedom can be gained through Dictatorship, they will be wiser to-morrow, and will conquer Freedom by breaking all shackles. Cheer up!

It was nice of you to have sent the flower. It is red, like my heart, and looking at its crimson petals I wonder whether inside their apparent innocence there rages and flares some formidable passion for other flower, or for light, or Freedom. Now it is my prisoner, but never has a captive been loved and pampered as this flower is. A few lines accompanied it – the commitment paper. Nothing is said as to its origin, its place of birth or other particulars, the fair sender being well aware that a flower speaks by itself, recommends itself, unceremoniously introduces itself after the loose manner of children. And my flower speaks... Speaks of you, the dreamer, the poetess, the sweet messenger of a happy to-morrow for the race. It speaks of the friendly gleam in your eyes, and the amiable smile playing in your lips as your nimble fingers placed it inside the folded missive, and by its narrative I presume the emotions that smile and gleam betrayed. For these exquisite emotions I give you thanks, and beg you to accept them, forgetting for an instant that individualism of yours you spoke me of some weeks ago. I feel pleasure in paying smile with smile, friendly word with friendly word, sentiment with sentiment.

Now I must close. Good-bye for this time. How nice it would be to spend these brilliant days in the woods, or by a river, or at some sea-shore with those one loves. Good-bye again. My love to our Erma and all the other good comrades, and to you my good Ellen.

Ricardo Flores Magón

Leavenworth, Kansas, September 5th, 1921

My dear comrade:

I was beginning to think that perhaps my last letter had again been laid aside by that poor woman you spoke of the other day, and that this was the cause of your silence, but your dear letter of the 27th of last August explains how the "blues" have seized upon you making two victims, you and me, you, because you have been in their grip, and me, because I was deprived of receiving your beautiful letter earlier.

You want my opinion as to what attitude we libertarians should adopt before the syndicalist movement. One thing I firmly believe we must not do – to be against it. Of all forms of labor organizations, syndicalism stands on the most advanced ground, and it is our duty to help it, and if we cannot bring the movement as a whole to the high plane of our aspirations and ideals, we at least must endeavour to prevent its receding to more conservative aims and tactics. I do not believe, however, that syndicalism will ever succeed in breaking up the chains of the capitalist system by itself; that will be the work of a chaotic conglomeration of tendencies; that will be the blind work of the masses moved to action by despair and suffering, but then syndicalism can be the nucleus of the new system of production and distribution, and in this role it will be of great importance, for its action will not only prevent the prolongation of a chaotic condition favourable to the enthronement of a new despotism, but will keep the masses from want and privation, rendering thus difficult, if not impossible, their reversing to the dead state of things. Have I been clear enough, my dear Ellen? But you know all this as well as I do, and I am afraid that this scrawling of mine on so obvious a question may send you to sleep; you, however, have asked my opinion and I cannot evade an answer. As you see, I consider that syndicalism will be of great use to prevent the prolongation of the inevitable chaos, for it will be an organized tendency already established at a time when many other tendencies will grope hither and thither in the darkness of the moment unable to find a definite direction. Now, in view of the logical role syndicalism is destined to assume in the great crisis confronting us human beings, we libertarians must not lie inactive, we must systematically and persistently soak the syndicalist movement with our doctrines until the saturation point, so that when the moment should arrive, production and distribution be accomplished on libertarian lines. Already many syndicalists partake of our ideals – let us influence the rest by means of an intensive propaganda. It is high time to have a meeting of our own somewhere in the world to study the means of facing what is coming. The meeting must be, of course, of international character. That

meeting would give great impulse to our work, I think, but now let us change the subject.

I read the "Gadfly", "Back to Methuselah", and the works by Stepniak and Tolstoy. I have not read "Woman" and "Hunger", but I do not want to after your sound criticism of the works. I am a very fastidious reader, Ellen. Is there any new work by Romain Rolland or Andreas Latzko? I have read "Jean Christophe", "Men in War", and the "Judgement of Peace". "Men in War" is a masterpiece, the work of a genius. I want to read something like it, brilliant, vibrant, superb. The dullness of the average good novel makes me sick. Pardon this getting of the words out of the line, I cannot see well. Perhaps you will succeed in finding a wonderfully written novel later on.

The postcard? Is beautiful. Our Erma did send me one like this last year, when she happened to see the cataracts. I have not seen the wondrous waterfall, and I think I shall never do. I have been very near of Niagara Falls, but with the police on my heels, and under such circumstances one does not want to see, but not to be seen.¹ The postcard is beautiful, but I do not like the title. It is not a dream, but a fact – the lure of the abyss... Danger is a harrowing thing, but there must be at its bottom a Nymph beckoning to one. I cannot stoop at the brink of a precipice without feeling a mad desire of plunging into it. Sometimes, at the sight of a live-wire carrying an enormous voltage, I hardly can abstain from touching it. A loaded pistol tempts me to apply its cold muzzle to my temple... Is it curiosity, so extreme a curiosity as to assume a morbid character? I do not know, but to me there is something alluring in danger, a Nymph or something lovely beckoning at its bottom. I believe that the man or woman who designed that Nymph on the postcard must feel like I do.

I have letter from our Erma, but I shall write her until next week. In the meantime I send her my love through you, and so to the other good comrades. As to you, my good, generous, dear Ellen, more love and admiration.

Ricardo Flores Magón

P.S. Please overlook the dullness of this letter written by the one who has the cheek of laughing at the average good novel. – Ricardo.

¹ In March 1906, under threat of extradition to Mexico, Flores Magón fled from St Louis to Canada, remaining in Toronto and Montreal for six months before returning to the United States.

Leavenworth, Kansas, September 19th, 1921

My dear comrade:

The last gleam of hope of receiving in time your dear words had already faded away, when, lo! your beautiful, sweet, encouraging letter of the 13th inst. was handed to me. I hastily thrust my fingers into the envelope, whose bulky appearance was full of promise, and found therein your dear letter, the dispersed petals of what in life was a rose, a magnificent poem by a magnificent poet, and a series of pictures of the Niagara and thereabouts, the most beautiful of which being the one representing the ice mountain you once climbed . . . and this because I see you at its white, cold summit.

You do not in the least tire me with your questioning, my good Ellen, but what I have to say on the subjects by you broached is so elementary, that I am afraid of annoying you, my accomplished young comrade. When I spoke of Syndicalism, I meant the revolutionary Syndicalism, that is, the union of actual workers that has as its aim the overthrow of the capitalist system by direct action. This Syndicalism is the one we must help get strong. In regards to the trade unions of the A.F.L. type, we must persistently show to their members the necessity of adopting the new ideals and the new tactics that the present conditions demand. We must not let them alone; we must propagate our ideals among them if we care not to run the risks of having them aligned with the enemy in a moment of crisis. This is the most we can do with the trade unions of the A.F.L. type – to propagate our ideals among their members in order that they, at least, may not be against their own class when the circumstances should sternly compel each one to take a side. True, and very true, the Syndicalism we have here, in this country, has degenerated, but it is the only one we have, and we are forced to deal with realities, with what is and not with what might be. If we could transform overnight the trade unions into class-conscious revolutionary unions, we should put all our energies to the task, but we cannot do it; we would necessitate years, and years, and years to accomplish the tremendous feat, and events, the phenomena of social life, will not stop their giddy flight to give us time in which to perfect and oil the machinery we intend to use in a future which is perhaps nearer to us than we dream of. Thus, under the circumstances, we must not put obstacles to the Syndicalist minority, we must not let that minority alone to devote our whole time to the catechism of the trade unions, lest the approaching crisis surprises us teaching the ABC of social rights to the aristocracy of labor. We must teach them that ABC of course, but without neglecting the main task, that of making of Syndicalism the most revolutionary labor organization. Had we twenty, thirty or forty years before us in which to

work the astounding transformation of the trade unions into class-conscious revolutionary Syndicalism, we could attempt it, and we would necessarily succeed, but when there is no time to lose, when the crisis may start at any moment, next month, or next year, or within the next five years at the most, we must work with the best instrument or the less spoiled one we have at hand, to meet the coming events, and in our case the less spoiled instrument is the shadow of Syndicalism vegetating in the darkness around us. Let us invigorate this shadow; we have no time to construct new weapons. I do not know whether I have succeeded in answering to your questions, dear Ellen, and in case I did not, just tell me so, that I do not feel any weariness in obliging you, though I am afraid of boring you to death with these my poor cogitations.

Yes, I deserve the lovely reprimand lovely Mollie used to fling upon teasing comrades. Shame on me, because I am too selfconceited ... but I was forgetting something you ask me, about the pamphlet by comrade Graham.¹ I read it with the utmost interest and found it ultra-splendid in its indictment against the dictatorship, but I do not agree in declaring war against the Marxists that in all countries are endeavouring the overthrow of capitalism. This would be to insure a victory to the common enemy. I am for presenting a solid front against it, and then, when the monster is dead, to fight against any imposition the Marxists would pretend to carry on. And with this the space has dwindled to almost nothing, and I must stop with the regret of not having given a chance to the tiny fairy you suppose dwelling in some nook or other of my brain, to display the fabric she is glad of weaving for you. Good-bye then. I correspond the love those amiable comrades feel for me. I will write to our Erma this week; and now I close this scrawling sending you my comradely love.

Ricardo Flores Magón

Leavenworth, Kansas, October 3rd, 1921

My dear comrade:

Your dear letter of the 24th of last month is with me. It is a most interesting letter, and you must be tranquil for it did not bore me, it could not bore me. It is a document, and a dear one, which speaks of the pains you put your brain in to discern the path you must tread in your generous endeavours. It cannot weary me to see a young soul seeking the light, and the only thing that I regret is that the sought

¹ Fred S. Graham [Marcus Graham], *Anarchism and the World Revolution: An Answer to Robert Minor* (New York, 1921).

for clearness be not in me. I, however, take my pencil to answer the questions at issue, and if the answer is far from luminous, it is, my dear Ellen, by all means sincere and very willingly made.

It is true, the syndicalist union we have in this country¹ has lost the spirit which animated it during its youth. I know that it has repudiated its best tactics; but is this repudiation an irrevocable one? No; we can compel this herd to adopt revolutionary tactics again and to throw its executive committee overboard if we only display all our energy among its membership. If I am of the opinion that the libertarians should join the syndicalist union with preference to others, it is because its members are, at least, class-conscious, which in itself is a great advantage upon the trade-unions to whose members we should have to teach the most rudimentary principles of the class-war to make them assume a revolutionary attitude. This will be the task of many, many years with the result that the impending catastrophe would surprise us in our kindergarten teaching the ABC to bearded babies, and when we raised our face it would be to see the Marxists already in the saddle. We must bear in mind that we are not under normal conditions when we could leisurely work in the preparation of a distant future. The moment is abnormal; if we are not aware of the swiftness of the current it is because we are in it, running with it, and the abnormality require emergency measures. This is why I am in favor of taking as our weapon the notched and rusty syndicalist union. In the time it should take to put it in working order we could not make a new one. Of course we must not neglect the kindergarten if we have time to spare, and we must see to it that time be spared for the training of the trade-unionist babies. That movement you speak of pro-shop committees must be encouraged, and in general, as you say, every one must work for the ideal wherever he is; but if it is possible to carry on a concerted action the best to do, I think, is to concentrate our attention to the syndicalist union that the abhorred centralization die and the killed good tactics be restored.

Yes, we disagree on the question of the pamphlet. I consider it excellent when it throws light on what has happened in Russia, but I fail to see its pertinence when it advocates open warfare with the Marxists in countries where there is in preparation an attempt to break the chains. Such warfare in these countries would only enhance the life of the enemy, and therefore its power, for while fighting among ourselves we would let it in peace. This, of course, for does not mean that we must abandon the propaganda of our ideals,

¹ The Industrial Workers of the World.

which we must not do. We must incessantly propagate our ideals, but must assist in the common task of breaking the yoke. If it is necessary to throw a log across a creek to reach the opposite bank, and the log is heavy and require the strength of two men, one is not to fight with the only man who has the same purpose; one has to accept his help and work in the spanning of the creek. Once on the other side, the fighting does not wrong, the creek has been cleared, and the danger that made imperative the passage was left on the other bank. The pamphlet in question counsels a bitter fight before the log be thrown across the creek. I cannot agree with this. If we are afraid that once on the other side the one who help us may try to put upon us the same conditions, or even worse, than the ones that make us abandon the present bank, we have time to be prepared for the emergency. Let us work; let us propagate our ideals with intensified energy. This point is very important, and I would like to know other reasons in favor of a fight to the knife among the ones who try to break the capitalist yoke, but I want to make it clear that the Marxists I do not want to fight against before the log be thrown across the creek, are the revolutionary ones; those who no more advocate the ballot.

Lo! I have no more space, and perforce I have to close my letter with the presentiment that you will not agree with me. I am sorry, for I feel great pleasure when you agree with me. Perhaps, after all is said, you are right. You are in a position to judge things better than I in this horrible inferno. You are in contact with the masses. You feel their pulse, while I only guess it. May this confession serve to paliate any disappointment you might feel at the way your old, but sincere friend that so well loves you, sees things. Give my love to our Erma and to all our good comrades, and you, my dear Ellen, rest assured of enjoying great quantities of it.

Ricardo Flores Magón

P.S. Pray read the book first; it shall intensify its value; it shall make the gift richer.

Leavenworth, Kansas, October 18th, 1921

My dear comrade:

No; we do not altogether disagree, nay, I am sure that the disagreement, if looked until its minutest detail, is more apparent than real. This is comforting, and your beautiful, dear letter of the 8th of this month adds more comfort yet.

So you have read some of the letters I have written to comrade Irene Benton, and they have been of your liking... How this gratifies

me. I did not even suspect that those little fragments of my soul would ever reach you.

Do you remember, Ellen? A year this month we began corresponding to each other. One year! – a mere drop in the ocean of Time; but to the sorrowful, an age... I am fortunate, however – there are a few hearts that love me, and during these last twelve months I have periodically received a friendly word from one, a sweet smile from other, the sympathetic throb from that which understand my plight, and so on, and from them all I have gathered strength, and from them all I have collected the love I need to sweeten my bitter existence. You have been one of my more assiduous correspondents. In fact, I do not wrong Truth if I say that with the exception of the sweet, innocent creatures whose hearts bleed on account of my absence, you, my good Ellen, have been the most constant writer, and I appreciate this... Your letters open so splendid parenthesis in my gray, monotonous life! Only twice in the stealthy creeping on of the last three-hundred and sixty-five days, did your dear words fail to reach me on the accustomed terms. For all this, is not the occasion worthy of being celebrated? It is; indeed it is! And as I have a plentiful store of a certain old wine that makes the sluggish blood frantically race through the vital avenues of the flesh, let me pour some in your goblet. Now, drink of it... Does it taste good? It is a wine that in my innocent infancy I pledged to the gods, but having not found them in Heaven, nor on Earth, I now offer it to Man. Is it too strong? Drink it nevertheless, my good Ellen, and thus divinely drunk let us sing, let us sing to Life, you, as you conceive her under your cherished northern skies, I, as I behold her with my inner vision, leisurely moving about under the blue expand... Another drink? With pleasure, my good friend, and let us continue our song, our song to immortal Life. Behold, there is Life! The vapours of this wine have conjured her. No; do not kneel; let us see her in her face, and enjoy her, for she is ours. How beautiful is she now, whereas a moment ago, before our drinking of the wine I once stored up for the gods, how ugly she was as we beheld her pinioned between the articles of the Law; dumb with the gag of conventionalism and bigotry; pitifully weighed down under the heavy load of superstitions, customs, traditions... The Life this wine puts before us is free; is mistress of her body and her soul. She knows of chains, of course, but they are the sweet bonds of amorous arms oppressing happy necks; she knows of gags, indeed, but they are the gags of quivering lips eagerly come into contact in a glorious endeavour of drinking each other's souls. Life in captivity is not Life; it is slavery, thralldom, bondage servitude, but not Life. Life is free; is Freedom by autonomasia. Oh, let us drink once more!

No; do not be afraid – the wine will last. Have not I said that I have a plentiful store of it? It will last to make us drunk, and to intoxicate some others besides us. Lo, we are surrounded by stars! They are those of our brothers who have already got drunk, and have thus become stars. I do not longer see the thief, the tramp, the prostitute, the slave; I only see stars, stars, stars. Where is he that but a few minutes ago stretched out the tremulous hand to the passer-by yielding to an alm all human pride? And the beautiful young woman that a while ago was kindling in her enchanting eyes all sorts of mercenary promises, where is she? I fail to discern among this magnificent array of suns, that dark hand which nervously sought to hide itself from sight, lest the curdy blood on it might be detected... And the ox-like man, where is he, and what has become of his yoke? I see but stars, stars, stars indulging in a revelry that shakes the infinity, and instead of rulers, Life reigning. Life has conquered thanks to this wine; let us drink even more, and let, my good Ellen, that others partake of it, be them hundreds or thousands, be them thousands or millions, let us squander the whole store, for mind it, I keep it for Man, so that his soul thus tuned with mine be able to vibrate when my soul do, and mine do respond to the quiverings of his in a sort of Aeolian sympathy... But lo! I cannot go any further in my mad stampede through the regions of my fancy. I have no space to move in. I have already reached a barrier that I cannot trespass, and I am forced to leave you for a while. Good-bye, then, my dear friend.

With love to Erma and the rest of good comrades, I close this letter with more love to you.

Ricardo Flores Magón

P.S. Oh, pardon me! The poor flower you sent me is reproaching my indifference towards it, and the dear, sweet thing is right. Drunk as I was I forgot it... But I love it, I love it.

Leavenworth, Kansas, January 24th, 1922

My dear comrade:

I am in possession of your dear letter of the 18th of this month, of the nice flowers enclosed, and the clipping, and the letter from Miss Alice Stone Blackwell.¹

Miss Blackwell wrote me, too. She says that Mr. George E. Roewer, 20 Pemberton Square, Boston, Mass., is ready to do something for

¹ American suffragist, reformer, and translator of Russian and Spanish literature, who was active on behalf of political prisoners, including Sacco and Vanzetti as well as Flores Magón.

me – and Rivera, of course, – to bring about our release. To begin working, Mr. Roewer wants to get all the facts about our case, and I beg you to inform Mr. Weinberger about this as he can send him full particulars. Mr. Roewer wants to be in communication with Mr. Weinberger, and also with Mr. Roger Baldwin,¹ and though you assured me the other day that you are not nice, I do not believe it, and so I think that you will be so nice and amiable as to inform Mr. Baldwin of Mr. Roewer's desire, and to excuse this old friend of yours for so much troubling you. As Miss Blackwell sent your letter to Mr. Roewer, she now wants your address again. I will write her tomorrow.

Yes, my good Ellen, "as soon as one hope fails, up springs the next ...", and it is a bliss that it is so, for what would Life be without hope? There would be no Life in the first place, as hope in its last analysis is nothing more nor less than desire, the mysterious urging that prompts the plant to send its root into the bowels of the earth in the hope of finding food; the creative force that succeeded in enlarging the giraffe's neck that it could more comfortable feast its palate with tender leaves; the wondrous stimulus that has spurred Man to construct wings, in the hope of snatching the sovereignty of the air from the condor and the eagle; the divine vibrations of the nerves blooming in the brain in a glory of dreams... Hope promotes advancement, and her legitimate daughters are Protest, Science, and Art, while Despair is the puny mother of Starvation, and Submission. Hope! was not hers the mysterious hand which made Columbus steer westwards...? Hope! is not she the Fairy that has revealed to the astonished soul the universe enclosed in a single atom...? Hope! thy finger-print is evident in the debris of the Bastille. Hope! thy healthy breathe cast off to the winds altars and thrones, sceptres and crowns... The human heart needs hope, and it is for this that as soon as one hope fails, up springs the next. I have had so many hopes... Many of them are now dead, and my heart is heavy with the weight of their corpses, but new ones have always replaced them, fair and rosy – hopes are always fair, hopes are always rosy – and I continue hoping, hoping, hoping...

Dear Ellen: I did not know that so many people in Mexico wished me to be free. Mr. Weinberger has not as yet told me something of his impressions in that beautiful region. If you know, please tell me, and also what they are doing or intend to do to get my release.

This time, my good Ellen, I could not help laughing a little – only a little – at your lovely naïveté. You say that it superfluous to speak to

¹ A founder of the American Civil Liberties Union and sympathizer with the ideas of Kropotkin and Goldman.

me of Beauty, and you say this when it is Beauty what I love most... Is not my laughter plainly justified? When I am deprived of all which makes Life lovable why to deprive me also of the words which might make me feel what the writer felt in his intercourse with the outside world, and especially when it happens that the writer is – as in your case – provided with exquisitely sensitive nerves, capable of the most wondrous reactions?

You are right, Ellen, I am unknown, so unknown that they put P instead of R at the foot of that poor son of mine. I enjoyed its reading, as the interpolations made to make it fit the Russian situation, are very opportune. Thanks for the clipping.

And now I must close this letter, though not without expressing my appreciation for the flowers you sent me, whose sweet innocence softened my heart and caused it to be lenient toward your refusal of speaking to me of Beauty. You did not speak, but these flowers do. They tell me that you are nice and good, and I believe what these flowers say, for only nicety and goodness can prompt a person to make a present with such emblems of Beauty.

I am not well yet, and I am afraid that I shall not be before the weather be warm, steadily warm, which means that I have to suffer for some four months more. I am, however, better than when I last wrote you, but a loathsome neuralgia accompanies me day and night, night and day. I am a wreck, I am a wreck, and only Hope gives me strength to cling to Life.

Good-bye. I have letter from our beloved Erma. Please tell her that I will write her next week. I received the \$5.00 she sent. My love to her, to all the good comrades, and to you in abundance.

Ricardo Flores Magón

P.S. Instead of that literature Miss Blackwell proposed to send me, I would rather have beautifully written books, translated into English, from the best modern French, German, Scandinavian, Russian, Italian and Hungarian writers. I can read French and Italian, and so translations from these last languages are not absolutely necessary.

Leavenworth, Kansas, February 14th, 1922

My dear comrade:

I am laughing again, and it you, my good friend, who once more furnishes with the necessary stimulus for my mirth. Your very dear letter of the 6th of this month is full of news perfectly calculated to give my soul the cheer and warmth that so much is in need of, yet, with that charming naïveté that I love in you, for it refreshes and

rejuvenates me, you say – “I meant to write you a real nice letter, and I’ve written nothing at all of anything like that”... May I ask for something charmer...?

Your dear letter did me much good. I gave it to Manuel with the clipping. He could not do the same with his clipping as it was not delivered to him. Our Owen’s words did me much good too, for as I do not consider myself a “first rate” writer, but only a humble and sincere servant and worshipper of Beauty, I see in his dear words his love for me, and this I appreciate, this fills me with sweet emotion. And the magnanimity of J... – how I do love this dear boy. Tell him, however, that I am very ill, and cannot enjoy so frequently gifts of such nice things. I would rather have, if he can afford it, a book from time to time, but then, as I am a very fastidious reader – my taste being jaded – I can only read with pleasure nicely written, wonderfully written, superbly written books. Rivera received his chocolate, and is grateful.

I wrote a letter to Miss Blackwell, and she answered me – she is such a nice lady. She says that they will do all they can for me... Hope is so sweet that I cannot reject this new, rosy one, though I am already so ill that I think I shall not be able of thoroughly enjoying my freedom if at last it comes.

That all you are working to make human life beautiful? You do not need to tell me, Ellen dear, – I know, I know... I know that you are dreamers, and dreamers always work to make the world beautiful. Should I not be chained to this rock, I would be with you, my beloved brothers and sisters, I would be with you in those heights far beyond the blue... And when tired of wandering on the roads of the infinite, I would descend on Earth to shake among my fellow beings my starry-dusted mane... And with a gesture, suggestive of the wonders I have come through; and with a gaze, betraying my acquaintance with a million stars; and with a voice, that would partake of the harmony of the spheres, I would speak to them... I would speak to them of what I had seen in my ultra-terrestrial travels. I would tell them that individuality is the only thing that counts and enters in the making of the grandeur and the splendour of the universe. To the awe-stricken multitude, I would say: “brothers, there is no master in the infinite space, and the only law ruling there is mutual love and mutual help, for in order for everyone to fully enjoy its individual life, it is necessary that it helps the others to enjoy theirs, and that law is gravitation, or in other words, mutual attraction, love... Love reigns supreme among stars and earths, comets and moons, each one helping according to its strength, but not one receiving less help than it requires to gloriously swing on its orbit. There is no heavenly body called king or president, czar or sultan – all

them are brothers, and all them love each other. I bear witness to this wonderful love... Hearken! from the nearby shore there comes the formidable rumour of a mighty sign – it is our Earth that answers through her oceans the amorous attractions of the moon... Thus by means of love, and only by these means, without the whip of a master, without the garrulous gatherings of legislative assemblies, without the existence of judges, policemen, soldiers, hangmen and their hellish paraphernalia, stars and earths, comets and moons harmoniously live, each one enjoying its individual life freely, wholesomely, happily... Brothers, I bid you to become stars and earths, comets and moons!" Thus would be my speech, and when those in the multitude were exchanging^a between them interrogative looks as to the meaning of the for them strange words, I would board the first opalescent cloud sailing by, to gather a fresh provision of impressions in the blue, on the roads of the infinite, that I could come anew among my fellow-mortals to show them that Beauty is Freedom...

Mr. Weinberger has been kind enough as to send me copy of a letter he has just sent to those in Washington, asking my being released on account of my growing, and now alarming, infirmities. You are so nice that you are going to thank him for me; can I hope this...?

Please do not send me that Mexican review.

Erma wrote me a very nice letter this time. How good is our Erma! I send her my love, and to all our comrades. As for you, good and dear Ellen, that so successfully strive to keep me in good spirits, I send more love and heartfelt thankfulness.

Ricardo Flores Magón

Leavenworth, Kansas, February 28th, 1922

My dear comrade:

It is your dear, beloved letter of the 22nd of this month which gives me occasion for writing you the present one.

Yes, I blushed ... but there was such sweetness intermingled with my confusion... Thanks, thanks, my beloved comrade! And thanks, too, for all those who love me. Love is a blessing, and I am grateful to you all, to Erma and Owen, to you and Jack.

Yes, I blushed ... and I did it because I saw myself too small in front of such greatness and in my confusion I could only think – how good my comrades are! how good!

^a *manuscript* exchanging

I understand your feelings at the sight of the scabs. These contemptible creatures are not human beings, are they? They may have the external human appearance, but they have not human sentiments and feelings, those mysterious sentiments and feelings they had, when together with their brothers revolted against the tyranny of the jungle, and became men... These scabs have lost those sentiments and feelings that we call solidarity, and they have lost them when they are most needed, when the beasts to be fought and conquered are no longer in the jungle, lurking behind the trees, or laying in ambush in the brakes, or hiding in the darkest corners of the caverns – the beasts are now to be found in sumptuous offices in the heart of populous cities, dressed like men, smiling like men, externally behaving like men. They have no claws; they do not bounce upon their prey; they do not strangle human life in the constriction of their formidable coils – the beasts have cunningly modernized their methods. The beast is professor, and teaches the pupils that cooperation is nonsense, and that competition is the only progressive force; the beast is legislator, and makes laws devised to protect his own bestial interests, though apparently made for the protection of the weak; the beast is ruler, and enforces the laws; the beast is minister of some god or other, and counsels obedience, and patience, and resignation... The result is the scab – a human being that has lost through thousands of years of the ruling of the beasts that instinct, that in the dawn of the species, prompted him to stand by his kin to accomplish the breaking down of the tyranny of the jungle. He is no longer human in instincts, but bestial. He does not feel love for his fellow-beings, but hatred, as in everyone he sees a competitor, a rival, an enemy grimly standing between him and his bread – civilization having atrophied the instincts of solidarity that made of him a man... The scab is not a man, or at the most, he is a degenerated man. He does not contribute to the development of the species – he obstructs, as in the path of human advancement he is the stumbling block, being in fact the firmest and staunchest supporter of the ruling of the beasts. Without the scab, the beasts would fall, for he is strike-breaker, he is soldier, he is policeman, he is jailer, he is hangman – the claws, the horns, the tusks, the coils, the hoofs of the modernized beasts... Our task is to humanize the scab, and what a task is this! But we have to do it, we have to accomplish it, as the success of our endeavours means the downfall of the ruling of the beasts. It is useless to make plans for a future of Freedom and Justice if the scab remains scab.

The same disappointment you experience when you do not succeed in expressing what you feel or think, frequently overcomes me, and I think it to be the case with all those who earnestly try to master

the art of translating into words human emotions and human thoughts. Do not get discouraged, however, my dear Ellen, for it is not your fault nor mine – the human language is extremely poor. We have not enough words to express every shade or hue of feeling and thought. We have words for red, and blue, and yellow, and a few other words for a few shades of these colours, just as we have for pain, and gladness, and a few shades of these emotions, and this, when the shades of them is infinite. Perhaps in years to come, when the scab should have disappeared from the face of the Earth, a humanity, enjoying the indispensable leisure to imprison in the net of a word the most elusive emotion and the faintest gleam of thought, might succeed in attaining what it is impossible for us. Let us then be content with the words at our command, and let us sincerely endeavour to make the best use of them in our offerings to our goddess – Beauty.

I have letter from J. The raisins have not come yet. As we have had very bad weather, I could not see Roy last Sunday. My love and salutations to him.

With love to Erma and the other good comrades, and especially to you, my kind, good, beloved comrade, I say good-bye,

Ricardo Flores Magón

Leavenworth, Kansas, March 14th, 1922

My dear comrade:

Your dear letter of the 28th of last February, with copy of the letters by Mr. Weinberger, and some flowers, received.

Mr. Weinberger is working nicely. He sent me copy of a letter he wrote to Lucia wherein what he is doing is told. I am afraid, however, he has not gotten the laboratory's report. This is the most convincing document as to the seriousness of my ailments, for it is not the opinion of a physician based on guesses, and which might be influenced according to his sympathies or antipathies. The laboratory report is based on stern facts – the reactions operated by chemicals on the sputum. The chemicals say the truth; they do not incur in error; they cannot have bias, and for this reason I have insisted so much in the importance of Mr. Weinberger getting hold of the laboratory's report in its full length, for I understand that the experts make in it some recommendations as to what I need to prevent consumption. Please tell Mr. Weinberger that a faithful copy of the complete document should be desirable, as after that no one would dare to insist stating that my health is good... Miss Blackwell writes me, and says that Mr. Daugherty wrote Mr. Roewer that I am afflicted with a cataract ... when I have cataracts in both eyes! By one year hence he may say

that I have no cataracts at all ... but let us leave this sordid subject alone, to strike on a pleasanter one. And what pleasanter than the flowers you sent me? They are dead, it is true, but I do not know why, even dead, flowers are poetic ... at least for me. It may be, perhaps, because I cannot see them without thinking of unfulfilled dreams and withered hopes, which are dead flowers also, alas, and I have many of these... But who is he who does not bear in his soul an overcrowded graveyard of withered hopes and dead dreams? The rich and the poor, the healthy and the infirm, the learned and the ignorant, all have their hopes and their dreams, and they all love their dreams and their hopes. A great many of these hopes and these dreams may not fly, they may crawl, they may creep about like worms in search of filthiness ... but they are cherished by their possessors nevertheless. The noblest and most beautiful hopes and dreams, however, are those of the oppressed. These hopes and dreams have wings, they fly because they are aspirations of what they have not – Peace, Justice, Freedom ... the universal desire of those who bear a yoke; the common aspiration of those who drag a chain in every latitude, under whichever sky, in every nook and corner of this Earth; the hope of the Asiatic coolie and the Egyptian fellah, the dream of the Russian muzhik and the Mexican peon... These dead flowers speak to me of dreams and hopes, and I sigh, and a sweet melancholy takes possession of me. Flowers should not die; hopes and dreams should not die – they are so beautiful! Most fortunately when one dies another takes its place equally charming and lovely, and one thus gets strength to drag on, to drag on... There is darkness all around, and one does himself to sit and die – he gropes, he gropes about, and why? because of hope... And I think that even the man about to be hung, when his neck shrinks at the cold touch of the noose, must perceive faintly gleaming in his brain, like a glow-worm creeping in the dark, the spark of a hope – that of the sudden snapping of the rope whose contact makes his flesh crawl... All blessings for Hope, the dynamic force which gives one strength to drag on, to drag on. Kill Hope, and Life herself will disappear, for Hope is condition of Life.

I thank you, my dear Ellen, for your words of sympathy on account of my ailments, and I am grateful to the comrades you speak of for the same. Your love, their love, gratifies me, comforts me – love is so rare a bliss for the rebel... Hatred – this is the usual reward of he who honestly says what he thinks. I know of storms hanging on my head; I know of fists threatenly shaking all around me; there is no room in my face for the saliva of those who refuse to be my friends, and I choke in an atmosphere poisoned with the breath of anger, and Despair, and Contempt; but this whiff of love from my good comrades

soothes me, calms me with its sweetness and freshness. "Thanks", I know, is a poor word to give in exchange of love – the greatest of gifts – but in this case it is the expression of a delicate emotion that woke up in my soul when your sympathy called at its door, and so, I feel delight in repeating the word – thanks, thanks, thanks...

There is no space for more, and I must close my letter. I feel just the same as during the last five or six months – bad – and my flesh dwindles, dwindles, dwindles. I belong to a remarkably strong stock, and this has helped me; but now I know that I am mortally wounded...

With love to our Erma, all the comrades, and for you in great measure, I say good-bye.

Ricardo Flores Magón

Leavenworth, Kansas, October 15th, 1922

My dear comrade:

You failed to disappoint me... Was that frail, exquisite little creature that for a brief period of time sat in front of me, the one that she herself depicted in her missive of the 4th of this month as being rough, and unnice, and what not?

Please, my dear Ellen, suspend that endeavour of yours of trying to convince me that you are not nice, for if before your visiting me you was white Ellen, after having feasted my soul with the sight of you, the same white Ellen you are. That my words are too nice... But, pray, may one be too nice with the friends one loves? Life is rough, and hostile, and cruel, and it is delicious to feel while groping on its craggy paths the comforting pressure and the sweet warmth of friendly hands...

For how long did my tired eyes behold you? Was it a second? It was just a touch of sympathetic wings in the wilderness; a peep of the sun through a frowning sky; the glimpse of a smile beyond a wall of clenched fists... How grateful I feel to you!

"Time is up!" – said a commanding voice – and the dream converted into reality for a second, was over, to leave me in the grasp of this eternal nightmare...

Some three hours after, nice fruit was handed me... My emotion was so intense that I felt tears racing to my eyes. You, without employment, sacrificing your urgent needs for me... My gratitude is immense, I admire your generosity, but I beseech you, beloved comrade, not to buy me anything while out of work, nor while working when you need the money to continue your tour westwards.

I must close here this letter. Thanks again for having broken with your grace, however for an instant, the greyness of this life of

mine in this pit wherein souls and flesh rot.

With comradely love,
Ricardo Flores Magón

P.S. Please give my regards to comrades Debouchez, Bessie Zoglin¹ and the others you may meet.

Ricardo

Leavenworth, Kansas, November 12th, 1922

My dear comrade:

Your dear letter of the 9th of this month brought me relief – I was so grieved on account of your inexplicable silence. I thought many things – “she is ill”; “she went out of Kansas”; “she is already bored to death with my letters” ... in fine, I could not explain to myself what it seemed to me a very strange behavior of yours. So, your letter filled me with pleasure.

Mr. Weinberger has now great hopes. He thinks that one of these weeks we – Rivera and myself – shall go free. Please, dear Ellen, to ask comrade Bessie Zoglin whether may I depend on her promise of getting bond for me, so that I may remain for two months in this country before the deportation order be executed. Rivera does not need bond, as he wants to go to Mexico without delay.

Mr. Weinberger already has Mr. Longworthy’s report. It is not a fair and impartial report. He admits, however, my being ill, though not seriously so. In fact, I do not [...] ^a to be a tubercular patient. I know that it is bronchitis which I have, though I know, [...] ^b even from a simple cold tuberculosis may develop.

I am glad you will not insist in depicting you so differently from the way [...] ^c of you, and I thank you for allowing me to say that you are nice.

Yes, I am sorry, too, that we shall never meet again... But if I go free soon, I hope to be able of bidding you good-bye, my beloved comrade.

I have to close this letter now. Yes, it is cold, and I dream of the South, and its sky, and its flowers. Before long, perhaps, shall I be blessed with its beauty... And when by my native cliffs I happen to

^a *fragment of manuscript missing, probably claim*

^b *fragment of manuscript missing*

^c *fragment of manuscript missing*

¹ Bessie Zoglin, an anarchist in Kansas City, Missouri, founded a committee to aid political prisoners at Leavenworth.

discern the vague outline of the northern shores on which lay scattered the wreckage of so many hopes of mine, I shall say with a sigh – I meant well, my blonde brothers, I meant well, but you could not understand me...

With comradely love,
Ricardo Flores Magón¹

¹ Nine days later Flores Magón was found dead in his cell. Rivera was released a few months afterwards and returned to Mexico, where he died in 1932 after being struck by an automobile.