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The Man On Horseback

Ross Winn

December 1903.

The hand that holds the sword rules the world.

The world worships the warrior and crowns with its veneration the victorious conqueror, tho his path to fame and glory be drenched with blood and tears. The shadow of the sword lies across every page of human history, and the bayonet's bright gleam and the cannon's red glare have lighted the path of national destiny from the Babylonian empire to the American republic. The pen of the statesman is worthless unless it is backed by the sword of the soldier. War has enslaved humanity, and by war humanity has broken its chains and widened the horizon of freedom. War is denounced. Physical force is decried. But in the last analysis every civilization is the child of war and every social order is founded on physical force. The sword and the pen have always been partners, and together the statesman and the soldier have wrought; and thru all the ages the bayonet has been the agent of the brain.

Vain, vain is the dream of him who dreams of universal peace. In the very symphony of the Universe the tumultuous strains are keyed to the measure of battle, and the supreme triumphant note is war. Here, now, we have a great genius, Tolstoy, a philosopher with the heart of a child, dreaming the

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Retrieved on June 21, 2012 from en.wikisource.org
Originally appearing in *Winn's Firebrand*, Vol. II No. 7,
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grandly beautiful dream of universal peace. And here, upon a ballot-reared and bayonet-propped throne is a puny pygmy named Roosevelt, the potency of whose pen is a thousandfold more powerful for peace or war than a hundred volumes of Tolstoy's genius. And is Roosevelt therefore greater than Tolstoy? The genius of Voltaire, assisted by five centuries of oppression, created the French Revolution. Napoleon extinguished it in thirty minutes with a whiff of grapeshot. Was Bonaparte greater than Voltaire? Voltaire was the genius of intellect; Napoleon was the genius of action. Voltaire represented social progress; Napoleon was the agent of catastrophe. You cannot measure Voltaire by Napoleon, any more than you can measure Napoleon by Voltaire. You can only judge them both, as you judge all other men, by the single standard of achievement. And so history passes over Voltaire and crowns Bonaparte with the laurels of superior greatness. He held the sword and he left the impress of his personality upon the plastic face of human destiny.

It is proclaimed: "The pen is mightier than the sword." And that's all bosh, my friends. The pen is impotent without the sword. The might of the pen is greatly overrated. If I could marshal half a million muskets behind my pen, every issue of the Firebrand would effect stock quotations and create more anxiety in international cabinets than the Panama revolution. The pen can plead for justice, but unless the pleading has a Gatling gun attachment or a political graft annex, the net total of realizable results wouldn't materialize a microscopic visibility of pin-point proportions. The intellectual ink-slinger without a platoon of police behind him can no more change the order of events than a politician can eliminate the acquired propensity for roundabout lying. And when we come to analyze the world's last word on social ethics and political morals, all the chatter about equity, and the conception of right and justice, is nothing but the puril palaver of babbling balderdash, which, summed up and boiled down, amounts to about half a pint of

humbug. There is not a “wrong” named in the conventional code that does not immediately become “right” the moment it is sanctioned by a pin-head officialdom. There is no crime so dark and damnable that it cannot be transformed into the sanctified and glorified achievement of a national virtue, if it be but covered by the painted folds of a national flag. A man who should take by armed force his neighbor’s farm, butcher the helpless victim for defending his property, and apply the torch to everything in sight, would be denominated a brutal criminal, a hyena of infamy, a fiend of wanton wickedness. But a great and powerful government, with battle-ships enough to challenge query or quibble, can seize the land of a friendly people, burn, murder and pillage and otherwise make a howling wilderness of a land of smiling peace, and that is “benevolent assimilation,” and “manifest destiny.” That is simply “expansion.”

The man on horseback is the predominant figure of history. In the final analysis it is cold, brutal physical force that gives vitality to ideas. As long as Christianity was purely an intellectual force, the chief activity of its exponents was directed to getting out of the way of the gaoler and executioner. When the church got possession of the sword it became a world-mover. Diogenes may have died in his tub, for all the world remembers, but Alexander the Great, who had less intellect but more troops, subdued the world. And the deeds of Alexander were of more practical utility than the philosophy of Diogenes, even tho the conqueror didn’t know what to do with the world after he had annexed it, performed the baby act because there were no trusts for him to play Roosevelt to, and ended his career in a jag caused by too much Kentucky cocktail.

Ethics, like religion (and the two are very nearly allied), are useful chiefly to keep the human sheep quiet for the shearers. The first moral code was invented by the first grafter. When the priesthood had the graft the code was religion. When the politician and the plutocrat supplanted the priest, civil rights and duties as laid down by law became the ethical standard.

But in every case the code was for the dupes to obey and the grafters to ignore. The end of all laws and moral codes is graft. It is only in barbarian countries, where the ethics of might are not disguised as a moral code, that the grafter is unknown.

There is no personality so pleasing to a tyrant as the non-resistant. The czar permits even a Tolstoy to have being in his dominions, tho Tolstoy proclaims himself a disbeliever in all human authority. Kropotkin, who believes very much the same things that Tolstoy does, was fired out of those same dominions p. d. q. Kropotkin is a non-resistant. One "non" too many. That is a criminal offence. In this case the czar, who is himself a typical "man on horseback," demonstrates the relative consequences of the non-resistant as compared with the non non-resistant, in the estimation of the grafters. The parasites of social order respect the non-resistants, even mention them by name in their newspapers. If you had a fellow in a box and you were sitting comfortably on the cover, you would naturally commend him for keeping quiet. The political, financial and priestly parasites of our blessed social order have the rest of humanity in a box. They are comfortable seated on the lid. They esteem the non-resistants underneath very highly. If everybody in the box were non-resistants, or even passive resistants, all would be lovely for the sitters on the box cover. Nothing would so much disturb them as the presence in the box of a man on horseback.

It has been predicted that the man on horseback will put a final period to the American republic. This, at least, is an optimistic view. Let us hope that he will be the genuine article and not a fake rough rider with opulent eyeglasses and mastodonic dental furnishing. I do not refer to our heroic Theodore.