were in the ascendant, and grim memories of 1793 and the reign of Revolutionary Terror came flooding back. The Paris guillotine had been destroyed by crowds on 6 April, but no one doubted that there were now even more efficacious means available for the state to rid itself of its enemies, and it was feared that the 'new political era, experimental, positive, scientific' might produce a new form of terrorism all its own.

In a further echo of the glorious days of the French Revolution, anticlericalism ran rife. Across the city, churches and nunneries were raided, floors dug up and walls pulled down in search of evidence of crimes and moral corruption. In the convent at Picpus, three aristocratic madwomen were discovered in a shed, where they had spent the last nine years locked away to save their families from shame in a clear case of abuse, while magistrates were summoned to investigate infanticide after bones found in the crypt of Saint-Lazare were thought to belong to the illegitimate children of the nuns. A naturalist who ventured that they were more likely animal bones, mixed with the mortar for structural strengthening, barely escaped a lynching. Under the guise of rationalism, the flight of reason became increasingly widespread.

Though generally supportive of the Commune, Rochefort had maintained a careful journalistic detachment from its politics. Now, though, he wrote vehemently against Prefect Rigault, referring especially to the nauseating glee with which the clerks referred to the hostages as his 'private prisoners', arguing the need for a dictator to counterbalance the Jacobin's growing concentration of power. His preferred candidate, a year younger even than Rigault, was General Rossel, who had recently been elevated to commander-in-chief of the Commune's forces, following the dismissal of his predecessor for casting doubt on their chances of victory against the Versaillais. 'These people have good reason for fighting; they fight that their children may be less puny, less scrofulous, and less full of failings' Rossel announced; but only 6,000 men

The World That Never Was

A True Story of Dreamers, Schemers, Anarchists and Secret Agents

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2010

memories for the hard times which, they secretly suspected, lay ahead.

As the last hopes of reconciliation ebbed away, so did the Commune's more moderate leadership. Its original leaders were ground down by physical and nervous exhaustion after weeks of catching naps on hard benches as they worked through endless nights, struggling to change the world by mere strength of will. Military and political leaders had been drafted in and then dismissed, or had resigned in short order, having tried and failed to assert control over a society for whom the abandonment of deference and rejection of all authority was an article of faith. Now, with a dangerous power vacuum developing, the most extreme Jacobin elements were only too eager to step into the breach.

As a teenager Raoul Rigault had spied on the Prefecture of Police through a telescope, imagining what he might achieve were he prefect. Two days after the abortive seizure of the guns, still aged only twenty-five, he had achieved his ambition. His rule since then had been ruthless. In the ten days following his installation, over 400 men and women had been arrested as suspected traitors and whilst more than half were soon released, rumours circulated of arbitrary punishments meted out to ideological opponents and of a certain lasciviousness in his treatment of women in custody. But it was his imprisonment of the Archbishop of Paris and other religious figures that had cemented his reputation. Held hostage both against any repeat of the Versaillais' brutality following their defeat of Flourens' army, and as a bargaining chip for the release of Auguste Blanqui, their lives had so far been spared. But as Henri Rochefort remarked of Rigault, 'He was exactly the sort of fellow to say, "I'm very fond of you, but circumstances unfortunately compel me to have you shot. I am, therefore, going to do so!" '

On 27 April, Rigault was promoted to *procureur* of a newly instituted Revolutionary Tribunal. With the announcement of a committee of public safety the following day, the Jacobins

their ideals, however, the Communards were sleepwalking to disaster.

The portents were already unsettling. Four days before Courbet recorded his sense of wonderment, a long procession of Freemasons had marched out to the Paris ramparts, wearing their secret insignia in public for the first time, and carrying a white banner that bore the legend 'Love One Another'. The leadership of both the Commune and the Versailles government counted Masons among their number, but Thiers had repeatedly responded with scorn to attempts by the Paris Lodges to act as disinterested peace-brokers. Ever since the French Revolution, Catholics had been expressly forbidden to join Masonic lodges, and Masons had been placed next to communists in the list of those held to be anathema; by his attitude, Thiers had aligned himself with their paranoid vision of a French society steeped in conspiracy and polarised beyond repair. Standing braced against the wind along the ramparts, their aprons and pennants flying, the Masons had bravely presented Versailles with a final challenge to respect their neutrality, but sharpshooters picked them off like the fairground ducks on which Louise Michel had practised her marksmanship.

Wistfulness was a recurring sentiment in letters and diaries of the time, while the strains of 'Le Temps de Cerises' that drifted out of clubs and cafés, or were whistled by workers on their awestruck promenades through the city, provided the mood music. 'I will always love cherry-blossom time, and the love that I keep in my heart' went its nostalgic refrain, its story that of a beautiful woman won and lost, set to a melody that tugged the heartstrings. It had been a strange anthem for a springtime filled with hope and elation, but as the days lengthened towards summer, it assumed a bittersweet relevance. For whilst not consciously despairing or defeatist, it began to seem as though those Communards who persisted in laying the foundations for an ideal society were, in reality, storing up happy

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extraordinary future world in which genetic difference had replaced class divisions as the defining feature of society, the theme of Utopias – and their dystopian flip sides – was in the air. On the Commune's espousal of federalism, British opinion was divided over whether it offered a taste of the future or retreat into the past. *The Times* considered curious the Commune's 'wish to imitate the small Italian republics or the French communes, at the moment when other nations are grouping together and condensing in order to club their forces and their interests', while the positivist philosopher Frederick Harrison argued that 'the idea of the gradual dissolution of nations into more similar aggregates and truer political union is the idea of the future.' In light of the Commune's social achievements, however, the educationalist and social critic Matthew Arnold felt bound to concede 'that all the seriousness, clear-mindedness and settled purpose is hitherto on the side of the Reds.'

The Commune's proclamation of 19 April that 'The Communal Revolution … inaugurates a new political era, experimental, positive, scientific' chimed too with the insistence of the English biologist Thomas Huxley, 'Darwin's bulldog', that the Pope's latest syllabus of acceptable knowledge was meaningless, since power was now vested in science. But the arts too were accorded a privileged role in the Commune's vision of society, with a central committee of forty-seven practitioners appointed, some without their permission or approval, to promote the cultural life of Paris. The salon was re-established and museums thrown open to the public, while Elisée Reclus' brother Elie, who unlike his sibling had avoided capture during the Flourens sortie, took over the supervision of libraries. 'Paris is a true paradise!' the painter Courbet swooned on 30 April, 'no nonsense, no exaction of any kind, no arguments! Everything in Paris rolls along like clockwork. If only it could stay like this forever. In short it is a beautiful dream!' Distracted by

A guarantee that unmarried widows would receive the same pension as those who had been married was adopted on 10 April; a week later a law was passed banning discrimination against illegitimate children, while a groundbreaking commitment to equal pay for women would follow. Yet even then the battle would only be half won, with education the key to further success. For if the new society were to allow women to participate fully, it would need not only to alleviate their present burdens, but assist them in the essential task of raising the enlightened citizens of the future. 'Politically,' Michel would write, 'my goal is the universal republic, which is to be achieved through the development of the highest facilities of each individual, the eradication of evil thoughts through proper education, the profound comprehension of human dignity.'

Michel was not alone in seeking to redress the skewed and inadequate syllabus of France's Catholic schools: the Freemasons had been prominent in recent years as campaigners for reform. Nevertheless, the methods she advocated, based on ideas innovated with the 200 children taught in her own school, must have seemed somewhat esoteric: the use of a pedagogic language that children could naturally understand, of easily legible visual aids and of learning through play. And yet the programme for universal state education that she submitted to the Commune found influential advocates, with Edouard Vaillant, the commissioner for education, shepherding through legislation for compulsory free schooling until the age of twelve, together with provision for children of nursery age that would allow their mothers to train for work. Only the ideal society being forged in Paris in the spring of 1871, with its uncertain future, could afford to countenance ideas so far ahead of their time.

Across the Channel, the Commune struck many commentators as a fascinating social experiment. With Samuel Butler delivering *Erewhon* to his publisher on 1 May, and *The Coming Race* by the bestselling Edward Bulwer-Lytton evoking an

Introduction

In the early years of the twenty-first century, a British Home Secretary recommended that those wishing to understand what at that time was still termed the 'War on Terror' should look back to the 1890s. Parallels were widely drawn with the wave of bombings and assassinations that had swept Europe and America at the end of the nineteenth century, perpetrated by anarchists and nihilists for whom London and Switzerland had provided refuge. Then as now, it was remarked, disaffected young men from swollen immigrant communities had been radicalised by preachers of an extremist ideology and lured into violence. Some commentators wrote of 'Islamo-anarchism', while others remarked that Al-Zawahiri, the 'brains' of Al-Qaeda, had studied the revolutionary writings of the godfather of anarchism, Michael Bakunin.

The parallels were persuasive and the comparison of the new threat to western civilisation with one long since vanquished appeared almost comforting. Yet, such references are largely misleading when detached from any sense of the circumstances that moulded the revolutionaries of the nineteenth century, impelling them to seek an alternative and better future. When their world is viewed from the position they occupied at society's margins, whether by choice or ill fortune, an era named for its glittering surface as a belle époque or Gilded Age is thrown into stark relief. The effect is uncanny, for many features of that landscape do indeed echo those of our own times but in ways that should shame us as well as causing deeper disquiet.

The obscene discrepancies of wealth between the rich and the poor were painfully obvious in the last decades of the nineteenth century, existing cheek by jowl in cities such as London, but they are scarcely less troublesome now, and still more extreme in the global village. Back then, the industrial exploitation of labour and the greed of the few generated social injustice and economic instability; the unwillingness of politicians to confront malign corporate and financial powers led to disillusionment, even in purported democracies; and all was set against a background of economies staggering from crisis to crisis, uncertain how to tame a rampant, savage capitalism. Organised religion, discredited by science, flailed against its loss of authority, while others saw the greater spiritual threat in the nascent consumer culture and intrusiveness of advertising. Mass migration challenged the resilience of national cultures and created a strong cross-fertilised internationalism. Meanwhile, in a multi-polar world shaped by Great Power geopolitics, shifts in the balance of economic dynamism threatened peace, with alliances wrangled in the hope of averting or retarding the dance towards the precipice.

Extreme caution should be exercised in supposing that history ever even rhymes, let alone repeats itself. Nevertheless, the news headlines during the years that I have spent researching and writing this book have time and again left me with the impression that the intervening century has in some strange way folded back upon itself. We must sincerely hope that we too are not unknowingly caught up in such a deadly dance, and that the most extreme consequences of the flaws in that world are not to be repeated. Throughout the period in question a silent, secret clockwork of intrigue and manipulation was in operation to protect the status quo, just as it is today, yet then as now the risk of unforeseen consequences was not to be underestimated.

Framed by two revolutions, beginning with the Paris Commune of 1871 and ending with that staged by the Bolsheviks in

efforts to secure a prohibition on night baking, which had entailed notoriously inhumane working conditions, provided Marx with a rare success.

For all Louise Michel's admiration for the late Proudhon, however, she could hardly condone his conservative and some said misogynistic views on the role of women. For whilst the deliverance of the working men of France appeared to be at hand, Michel was adamant that for the social revolution to be truly radical, women would have to win their portion of liberty too; not only for reasons of justice and equality, but because it was they whose experience of oppression taught them the extent of what was required. 'Men are like monarchs, softened by their constant power' had been the sermon preached at the women's clubs in which she had been so active over the winter. To break through the final barrier of male tyranny she would embrace whatever alliance was necessary, even with one of Marx's envoys.

The relationship between Michel and the twenty-year-old Elizaveta Dmitrieva contained more obvious grounds for rivalry than cooperation. Dmitrieva was as spirited and inspiring as Michel, but half her age and far more conventionally beautiful. Like Michel, who had worn the black of mourning ever since the funeral of Victor Noir, Dmitrieva too dressed to be noticed, in a black velvet riding habit with a red silk scarf slung around her neck. And whereas the romantic life of the Red Virgin always seemed tinged with obsession, the Russian flaunted the kind of carefree attitude to romantic passion that Michel must have envied. But their common background of illegitimacy bonded them, and in the newly formed Union des Femmes they found a vehicle for the social change to which they both aspired. The combined pressure they brought to bear on the Commune's legislature quickly produced policies that would constitute the Commune's most humane achievements, many of them more than a century ahead of their time.

Belleville it was Benoît Malon who had answered her call, a figure familiar to Michel from visits before the war to the Paris offices of the International on the rue de la Cordonnerie, where it seemed to her that the narrow, dusty staircase led to 'the temple of a free and peaceful world'.

If Bismarck and Thiers truly believed the International to be a tight-knit and disciplined conspiratorial network, they could not have been more wrong. When attending its founding conference in London seven years earlier, Malon had, he would insist somewhat disingenuously, known of Karl Marx merely as 'a German professor'. Whilst Marx and Engels had imposed their will on the organisation in the years since, the French section had yet to be converted to their ideological dogmatism. 'I frequent all the parties, democratic, radical, Proudhonian, positivist, phalansterist, collectivist … Fourierist cooperations, etc.… I see everywhere men of good faith and that teaches me to be tolerant,' Malon had written of his pre-war position. Despite Marx endorsing Leo Franckel and the young Elizaveta Dmitrieva as his two emissaries to the Commune, while he stayed in London to nurse a conveniently recurring kidney complaint, the same pragmatic ecumenicalism now applied to the Commune's attempts to mould a new and ideal society in microcosm.

Malon's own sympathies lay with the federalism of the Russian Bakunin, Marx's rival for influence over the International, but it was the older anti-authoritarian theories of the Frenchman Pierre-Joseph Proudhon with which the experiment in social revolution now initiated in Paris was most strongly stamped. On 16 April, reviving the legacy of the Ateliers Nationaux of 1848, all workshops that had been abandoned or stood unused were taken into national ownership. The initiative provided the basis for a federalised, cooperative model of industrial organisation, and less than a fortnight later the system of fines imposed on workers as a means of unjust social control was abolished. Franckel's

October 1917, these are years tormented by the constant fear and possibility of violent upheaval. It was an age characterised by many contemporary social commentators as decadent or degenerate, a moment of crisis, perhaps even for the human species as a whole. The anarchists, seen as advocates of destruction and promulgators of terror, were often posited as the most shocking symptom of the malaise. The control, suppression and ultimate demonisation of their fiendish sect appeared to many a moral imperative, and was clearly as much a pleasure as a duty for many official defenders of law and order. For them 'anarchism' was a useful shorthand for the subversive threat posed by revolutionaries of all hues. Nor could the anarchists rely on the solidarity of their supposed brethren on the political left, to whom their liberal critique of state socialism was almost as intolerable as their socialist critique of capitalism was to those who wielded political power. With anarchism exposed to enemies on all sides, the violence perpetrated in its name by a few headstrong young men was more than enough to confirm the movement's pariah status in perpetuity.

It was a fate scarcely deserved by the leading ideologues of the movement, some of them figures of international standing as scientists, who had vied with the dogmatic Marxists for the claim to champion a form of 'scientific socialism'. Variously derided as utopian dreamers and reviled as desperate conspirators, with hindsight they emerge instead as plausible visionaries. Even the social democratic heirs of their fiercest critics would be hard pressed to deny that history has vindicated many of their remedies: female emancipation with state support for the care and education of children, collective social security, sustainable communities with power devolved as far as possible, with a federal United States of Europe to prevent the continent-wide wars that they foretold. The human spirit was to be celebrated against the dead hand of centralisation, and self-fulfilment would be achieved through creative work rather than material gain: the essence of the political agenda of

'well-being' now in vogue. Even their espousal of autonomous federated communities as the basis for a new form of society prefigures the ideas of localism and sustainability that many believe must now be implemented to preserve the health of the planet.

Peter Kropotkin's theory of Mutual Aid, which asserted an evolutionary argument that cooperation rather than competition was the natural state of human relations, has received support from recent discoveries in the field of genetics. All that was required for mankind's best instincts to flourish, he and his colleagues argued, was for the accreted institutions, hierarchies and privileges that had corrupted society to be swept away; left to their own devices, people would quickly and surely create a cooperative paradise. And yet it was this naïve optimism that left the movement so vulnerable to attack and manipulation.

Judged by the standards of political pragmatism, the position adopted by Kropotkin and others was catastrophic on many counts. At a time when many other socialist factions were busily marshalling their troops and handing executive power to conspiratorial elites, anarchism eschewed formal organisation or leadership of any sort, recoiling from coercion and central control. By placing such deep faith in the individual conscience and according validity to every honestly held opinion, consensus was inevitably elusive, while the movement left itself defenceless, almost on principle, against both malicious infiltration and co-option by those who sought to use political idealism as a cover for criminal intent. And whilst the anarchist philosophers' hopes that the social revolution might come to pass with little or no bloodshed was doubtless sincere, it is hard to excuse their failure to forestall the extremes of violence to which their acolytes were driven by frustration at the absence of any popular appetite for a more creative apocalypse. A dangerous credulity, though, was not the exclusive preserve of those who awaited Utopia.

join the Guard lined up for summary execution. Duval himself was dragged out from the 'miserable scum' and gunned down, to the jeering of the victors, in front of a sign advertising 'Duval, Horticulturalist'.

'Never had the beautiful city, the city of revolutions, appeared more lovely to me,' Reclus would remember, the panorama of Paris before him as he gazed down from the pathetic column of the defeated, only for a Versaillais officer to interrupt his reverie. 'You see your Paris! Well, soon there will not be a stone left standing!' Further on Reclus might have watched local women prodding the brains that spilled from Flourens' split head with their umbrellas. After such experiences, not even the most idealistic believer in the perfectibility of man could fail to comprehend the visceral passions that had riven French society, nor the depth and intensity of the hatreds that had taken root.

Only days before the National Guard had marched out, the artist Daumier had made a drawing that envisioned the apocalypse that might engulf Paris in almost mystical terms. 'Death disguised as a shepherd playing his pan pipes among the flowers of a water meadow beside the Seine, every flower a skull' was how Jules Verne described Daumier's picture, published in the magazine *Charivari*. Already, the image seemed horribly prescient and if the credulity, unprofessionalism and lack of organisation demonstrated by the National Guard's catastrophic sortie proved representative of the Commune as a whole, further tragedy was inevitable. As long as the opportunity remained to them, however, the Communards would allow themselves to dream.

During the hard winter of the siege, Louise Michel had been a vocal advocate of the immediate needs of the poor, as well as of their wider aspirations, petitioning the mayors of the arrondissements to assist with food for the starving and help meet the educational needs of the young. Clemenceau had responded to her pleas as best he could in Montmartre, and in

Undaunted by the setbacks on his right flank, Flourens had ridden on, the romantic spirit of the Commune embodied. Intent on punching through to Versailles, his column followed the straightest route, directly under the fortress' imposing walls. Were he and his generals ignorant of its reoccupation by the enemy, some days earlier, or did men whose previous campaigns had been fought at second hand, in bars and revolutionary clubs, merely underestimate the significance of its loss? Holding fire until the head of the column had passed, the fort's cannon and *mitrailleuses* then roared out, ripping into the ranks of the National Guard at close range. Within minutes, scores of bodies lay shattered in the fort's lines of fire, with many hundred more untried recruits limping or carried back towards the city. When the Versaillais cavalry rode in to finish the job, what remained behind of the straggling column was too disorientated to mount any effective resistance. It was not yet midday.

Taking shelter at an inn, Flourens allowed himself a brief rest, but awoke to find himself surrounded. The witty intellectual and eloquent rabble-rouser must finally have realised how utterly different a real-life revolution was to the stage-play antics in which he had indulged a year before, using weapons from a theatre's props store. Immune to the charms of 'Florence', a Versaillais gendarme serving under Boulanger strode forward, raising his sabre, and cleaved the vaudeville general's handsome head in two.

Alone now, on the left flank of the attack, General Duval showed what might be achieved if the National Guard was marshalled with a degree of professionalism. His men, Elisée Reclus among them, managed to fight their way up on to the Châtillon plateau. But lack of logistical foresight meant a night without cover or rations, and in the morning Duval had no choice but to order his men to lay down their weapons. Herded along in a pathetic column of the defeated, Reclus witnessed those of his comrades who had deserted the regular army to

Faced with a world of increasing complexity and rapid change, a complacent bourgeoisie craved easy explanations of anything that challenged its easeful existence. In such circumstances, the phenomenon of the all-encompassing 'conspiracy theory' was able to take root. The fanciful notion of an internationally coordinated anarchist revolution of which the isolated attacks with bombs, knives and revolvers marked the first skirmishes was only one example. Others drew in the credulous masses with fantastical stories of Freemasonic satanism and megalomaniac supermen. It was a fictitious conspiracy that harnessed the rising tide of anti-Semitism, though, which would truly define the genre: *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion.* And although public opinion was not yet ready to embrace the simplest, most ruthless solutions to such a perceived threat, the contemporary debate over criminal anthropology and eugenics darkly foreshadowed what lay ahead. That such ideas were advanced from and encouraged by the political left, with the most humane intentions, is typical of the paradoxical nature of the period.

From out of the midst of a tangled knot of forgeries, provocation, black propaganda, misplaced idealism and twisted political allegiances the horrors of world war, totalitarianism and genocide that plagued the twentieth century would grow, having already set deep roots. Credible theses have been advanced that the origins of fascism lie in nineteenth-century anarchism, or that the French nationalism of the *fin de siècle*, which itself embraced elements from the radical left, may have been the progenitor of Nazism. My interest here, however, is merely to unpick the elaborate deceptions and intrigues generated by all sides, in an attempt to discern the confluence of factors that led to the first international 'War on Terror' and the consequences that flowed from it. For amidst a welter of alarmism and misdirection, a genuine conspiracy of sorts does lie buried, less cogent and universal than that described by the *Protocols*, despite them sharing a common author, but far-reaching nonetheless.

And if there are valuable lessons to be learned from the period, the most imperative are perhaps to be discovered here, however uncomfortable they may be.

In exploring such a murky world, I have been unsurprised that the evidence has been elusive and the official paper trail often sparse. How welcome would be the reappearance of the suitcase, last seen in Paris during the 1930s, containing the private papers of Peter Rachkovsky, the head of Russia's foreign Okhrana and the fulcrum for so much of the intrigue in the period. How convenient if the files relating to the Okhrana's activities in London, and its relations with the American Pinkerton Agency, had not at some point been emptied; or, indeed, if the Belgian cabinet had forgotten to instruct that key police reports should disappear into secret dossiers, never to emerge again.

What has taken me aback, however, has been the tenacity with which the Metropolitan Police's Special Branch in London have sought to prevent access to their apparently limited records from the period: a number of ledgers, listing communications received from a wide range of sources. Along with the correspondence itself, for many years the ledgers themselves had been thought lost: pulped in the war effort, it was claimed, or destroyed by a bomb. Since their surprising reappearance in 2001, to be used as the basis of a doctoral thesis by a serving Special Branch officer, such access has not been replicated for other researchers, despite a Freedom of Information case I have pursued for several years. Following a ruling in favour of disclosure by the Information Commissioner and reprimands for the Metropolitan Police handling of the case, the police appeal to the Information Tribunal in 2009 resulted in the universal redaction of all names contained in the documents. The censored material raises as many questions as it answers.

Nevertheless, enough documentary evidence is available for a patient researcher to piece together a picture of this clandestine world of late nineteenth-century policing. The spiriting to

It was a holiday mood, too, that infused the tens of thousands of the National Guard who mustered in the squares and parks of western Paris before dawn on 3 April, ready to march on Versailles. Some blithely likened the atmosphere to that of a picnic party setting out for the country, and hopes were high that by nightfall they would have secured the heights of the Châtillon plateau and control of the road to Versailles, barely a dozen miles further on. Elisée Reclus was there, as was his brother Elie, posted to different regiments. Leading the central tine of the trident of three columns was the flamboyant Flourens, his blond locks floating in the wind, the heroic role he had so long imagined finally his to command. Such was the abounding optimism that no one had thought to deploy the big guns that had seemed so precious to their defenders in Montmartre only a fortnight before.

'*Vive la République!*' cried the first Versaillais battalion to engage the National Guard on the right flank, as if in fraternal greeting. The Communard troops felt vindicated in their hopes and lowered their rifles as the seemingly congenial foe advanced from cover. Once at bayonet's length, however, the Versaillais jerked back into an offensive posture. '*Vive la République* is all well and good,' they barked, 'but now surrender!' Beaten by a ruse, the credulous men of the Guard were bound together at the wrists, five and six abreast, and made to submit to a gauntlet of sticks and curses by the bourgeois inhabitants of Versailles as they were led through the town towards an uncertain fate. The absurd hopes that had allowed the Commune troops to become so fatally trusting was less damaging, however, than the Commune's complete failure in military intelligence concerning Mont-Valérien, the fort abandoned by the Assembly's troops in their rush to withdraw from Paris but whose massive gates had subsequently been left invitingly open by the National Guard entrusted with its defence.

massacred 300 years earlier in the French Wars of Religion, but in the weeks and years to come they would discover a growing affinity with their heretical forebears.

Despite the initial rout of the Commune's forces, optimism in Paris was undimmed. The previous two weeks had seen so many changes. Labourers and artisans had emerged from the sumps of poverty into which Baron Haussmann's social zoning of the city had penned them, blinking into the bright light of freedom and self-rule. Their 'descents' into the affluent heart of the city revealed to many a world of opulence and luxury that previously they had seen, at best, from afar. A small contribution to a fund for recent war widows bought them admission to the Tuileries Palace, the one-time home of emperors, with its acres of gilding, while they could sample the refined musical fare on offer at the new Opéra entirely gratis. Surrounded by the conspicuous pleasures and privileges of the bourgeoisie and aristocracy, yet with no cause now to be daunted by rank, Parisians greeted each other as '*citoyen*' and '*citoyenne*'.

'We are free,' proclaimed Louise Michel, 'able to look back without unduly imitating '93 and forward without fear of the unknown.' They were bold words but her hopes were not without foundation. Idealistic decrees had begun to pour from the Hôtel de Ville. Gambling was banned to save the poor from themselves, the Church disestablished, and a three-year moratorium declared on debt. It was only the beginning of what would become an extensive programme of legislation, yet immediately the virtuous example of the Commune seemed to begin trickling down. As the spring sun shone, observers claiming impartiality recorded that, in the absence of envy and oppression, crime spontaneously ceased. Only cynics whispered that the explanation lay in the abductions of troublesome elements by the Commune police under cover of night, or else suggested sarcastically that the criminals no longer had time to break the law, now that they themselves were in power.

America of the Okhrana's Paris archive following the revolution in Russia, unveiled at the Hoover Institute in the 1950s, has preserved a rich resource; so too have the archives of the Paris Prefecture of Police, whose basement contains box upon box of material, including agents' field reports, readily accessible to the public on request. Official documents jostle with a fascinating mass of material of more questionable reliability: reports from duplicitous informants, eager to prove themselves indispensible by passing off conjecture as fact; press coverage of false-flag police operations. And then there are the memoirs published by policemen and revolutionaries, all with an agenda to promote, or a desire to dramatise or justify their achievements.

The world that this book sets out to portray is one of slippery truths, where the key to success lies in the manipulation of popular opinion, where masters of deception weave webs of such complexity that they will ultimately trap themselves, and a clinical paranoiac offers some of the most perspicacious testimony. I have chosen to represent it in a mode that emphasises narrative over analysis, and in order to capture something of the subjective experience of those involved, at times I have taken the protagonists at their own estimation, recounting stories that they told about themselves as fact. For the fullest exploration of those decisions, as well as for additional material relating to certain areas covered, the reader should look to the online notes that accompany this book: those published here offer only minimal citation.

Works of literature that are more ostensibly fictional, or offer a creative interpretation of the period in some other form, are presented more critically. Radical politics and cultural bohemia frequently rubbed shoulders, each in search of new truths and on a quest to reshape reality, and the art and literature of the period are uncommonly revealing about both the life of that milieu, and the ideas that informed it. The fantastical genre of 'anticipatory' fiction, then so popular,

at first articulated the promise of technological progress to which the anarchists looked for the foundations of a utopian future, but latterly evoked the destructive horrors of which anarchism was thought capable. Similarly, the social realist novels of the day offer an unequalled insight into the hardship and injustices of everyday life, and occasionally open windows too into the underworld of intrigue.

Chimerical though the notions of an international conspiracy largely were, the geographical scope of the anarchist movement and activities of the associated revolutionaries was truly global. Rarely at rest for long, the group of protagonists with whom the book is particularly concerned were time and again dispersed by exile, deportation or flight, travelling to make a stand wherever the prospects of insurrection appeared most auspicious. Their interweaving paths are tracked across five continents, while the communities in St Petersburg, Paris, London and elsewhere where they occasionally coalesced, for congresses or in search of refuge, are more closely explored. Equal attention, though, is given to the police officials who hang on the anarchists' tails, or else lurk in the shadows with dubious intent. The book's overall progression is chronological, though the reader should be aware that consecutive chapters often overlap in time to keep pace with the disparate lives of their subjects. Individuals and themes may disappear into the background for some time, but their strands of story are more likely to resurface.

Russia, although a relative backwater for anarchism, figures prominently as a disseminator of terrorism and focus of revolutionary zeal. Paradoxically, Spain and Germany, hotbeds of anarchism and socialism, remain largely offstage except where events there impinge on the story elsewhere: more discrete in their national movements, they each warrant books to themselves, of which kind many exist. At crucial junctures in my story, much original research is deployed. Elsewhere, the panorama described is largely a work of synthesis, and I

In their naïve enthusiasm, the insurrectionists played into his hands. Publishing a letter from a general at Prussian headquarters to the new government in Paris, Paschal Grousset, a firebrand journalist, colleague of Rochefort and now the Commune's minister for foreign affairs, carelessly translated as 'friendly' the general's far vaguer assurance that 'peaceful' relations existed between Germany and the Commune. It was all grist to a Versailles propaganda mill that was busy grinding out rumours, including one that detailed how the Prussians had stood on the terraces of their billets around the city and laughingly watched through telescopes the events of 18 March unfold, while military bands played a jaunty accompaniment to the folly of the French.

Meanwhile, resentment of the Commune was further fermented by the cost to the National Assembly, in money and pride, of the predicament in which it now found itself. Lacking access to the National Bank of France, there were humiliating delays in paying the indemnity due to Germany. 'Paris has given us the right to prefer France to her,' Thiers had announced after the killing of generals Lecomte and Thomas, and *la France profonde* now rallied to his cause.

After a fortnight's hiatus, on Palm Sunday, 2 April, the supporters of the Versaillais government were finally given something to cheer when its guns opened up with a brief bombardment of the suburb of Courbevoie. 'Thank God!' Thiers confided to his diary, 'civil war has begun.' His Catholic and monarchist opponents would have been gratified that the deity's shadow fell heavily over the first clash of arms. '*Vive le roi!*' shouted the Zouaves as they charged and broke the Communard lines; only six months earlier they had been serving in the international regiment that protected Pope Pius IX as he strong-armed a fractious Vatican Council into declaring him infallible in all matters of faith and morality. The atheistic Communards may not have considered themselves to have much in common with the Protestant Huguenots

signs of weakness that might allow them to usurp power. Even the crack battalions filled with 'the flower of French chivalry' that Thiers claimed to have at his disposal were a chimera, comprising no more than the 12,000-strong residue of the regular army, a force vastly outnumbered by the National Guard in Paris. And most troublesome of all for Thiers' strategy was the fact that, in the rush to withdraw loyalist units from Paris, the key fortress of Mont-Valérien that loomed over the road out to Versailles had been unintentionally abandoned to the rebels.

To capitalise on the challenging circumstances that prevailed, Thiers required all the considerable cunning he could muster. Desperately needing time for the army to rebuild, he deftly confided to the press that he expected the city to be back under the rule of the Assembly within three weeks. Meanwhile, protracted talks with the Communards, carried out through proxies, allowed him to pose as a peacemaker. By indulging the hopes of conciliation still harboured by those who had found themselves Communards more by accident than design, he delayed for the moment any military offensive from the capital.

Meanwhile, Thiers set about harnessing the defeated French army to his will by manipulating its impugned sense of martial honour. The Communards flattered themselves that they were the true defenders of the republic, who alone had held out when the rest of France buckled. To counter the perception of their diehard patriotism, Thiers labelled them as treacherous fanatics whose subversion of the state was to blame for the fall of France and the loss of Alsace and Lorraine: they were 'communists' not 'Communards', the Paris administration's choice of name twisted to conjure the phantasm of global conspiracy against which the Catholic Church so vehemently inveighed, as a heretical pestilence that threatened civilisation. Eliminate the communists, Thiers seemed to wink at the troops, and your own, unfairly tarnished reputation will be restored.

am therefore grateful to all those on whose specialist research I have drawn, especially where it is yet to be published.

To the Victorian public, proud of their national tradition of liberal policing and of Britain as a beacon of tolerance, the very idea of a political police carried the stigma of foreign despotism. In the nineteenth century, Britain's elected politicians would never have dared venture anything resembling the kind of legislation that recent years have seen passed with barely a blink of the public eye, to threaten civil liberties that have for generations been taken for granted. That changing times demand changing laws is hard to dispute, but if new powers are to be conceded it is essential that we be ever more vigilant in guarding against their abuse. Likewise, if our political leaders are allowed blithely to insist that 'history' should be their judge, then we should at least be in no doubt that the historians of the future will have access to the material necessary to hold those leaders to account for any deceptions they may have practised. Histories bearing an official sanction, of the kind that appeal to today's security services, are not a satisfactory alternative. This book is a pebble cast on the other side of the scales.

Prologue. *This Thing of Darkness*

Paris, 1908

In the eyes of the world, the group that assembled daily in Boris Savinkov's spartan Paris apartment in October 1908 would have represented the most formidable concentration of terrorists history had yet seen. The sixty-six-year-old Peter Kropotkin, a descendant of the Rurik dynasty of early tsars, may have appeared unthreatening, with his twinkling eyes, bushy white beard, paunch and distinguished, bald dome of a head, but some suspected him of having incited the 1901 assassination of McKinley, the American president. With him sat his Russian contemporaries, the revolutionaries Vera Figner and German Lopatin, who had only recently emerged from the terrible Schlüsselburg fortress, against whose vast walls they had listened to the freezing waters of the River Neva and Lake Ladoga lap ceaselessly for twenty years. Locked in solitary confinement, in cells designed to prevent any communication, they were there as leaders of the organisation that had assassinated Tsar Alexander II in 1881. And among the younger generation, scattered around the room, there were others who could count grand dukes, government ministers and police chiefs among their many victims. But whatever the suspicions at the French Sûreté, Scotland Yard or the Fontanka headquarters of the Russian Okhrana, whose agents loitered in the street outside, their purpose on this occasion was not to conspire, but to uncover the conspiracies of others.

a conspiracy hatched in London, that had supposedly cast its net across France and which, if unchecked, might spread far beyond its borders, their aim was the extirpation of the International, led by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. That the German pair's influence over how the 'desperate folly' of the Commune unfolded was quite negligible was disregarded by Europe's forces of reaction. Colonel Stieber and the Prussian leadership may have vacated Versailles, leaving many tens of thousands of German soldiers to garrison France until the agreed reparations were paid in full, but Thiers, installed in the same offices, needed little encouragement to act resolutely from a shared hatred of socialist sedition.

Some would later suggest that Thiers had conceived the attempt to seize the guns as a ruse to draw the sting out of the revolution, pointing as evidence to the notorious unreliability of the regiment handed the job and the failure of the limbers to materialise. Either way, he had a long-cherished plan available to exploit its failure, following the government's withdrawal from Paris. During 1848, when wildfire uprisings had spread across Europe, he had been France's prime minister, advising King Louis-Philippe on how to stamp out radicalism: the fourteen fortresses surrounding Paris, including Mont-Valérien, had been built under his supervision with, some said, half an eye on implementing just such a strategy of internal control. He would now pursue the very policy he had recommended in vain back then: playing for time, to allow the army to regroup outside the capital, he would then launch a massed attack on Paris that would silence radicalism for a generation to come. Nothing, though, was a foregone conclusion.

Had the leaders of the Commune realised the true fragility of Thiers' position, both political and military, General Duval's argument for a swift and decisive attack out of Paris might have received a more positive hearing. For Thiers' very legitimacy, like that of the National Assembly as a whole, was fading by the day, with hard-line monarchist representatives sniffing for any

in a pledge of the Commune's commitment to the integrity of France that the Assembly had traded away for the benefit of the affluent few, by ceding Alsace and Lorraine to Germany.

Popular expectations were sky-high, buoyed up on a sense of empowerment. 'We are not rogues and thieves, we are the people, nothing more, and nothing is above us,' one young craftsman wrote to his family in the country, assuring them of his safety and warning them against the lies of the reactionary press. He then went on to list the Communards' aspirations: 'We do not want looting or theft, we do not want pomp and ceremony. Here is what we want and nothing else. A united and indivisible republic; the separation of Church and State; free and compulsory education by lay teachers; the abolition of all permanent armies and every citizen to bear arms, but in his own district, that is, as the National Guard.' Across France, revolutionary communes were declared in Lyons and Marseilles, Toulouse and Le Creusot, Saint-Etienne, Limoges, Perpignan and Cette. Viewed from Paris, the country appeared to be ablaze with revolutionary fervour.

Yet victory would not be quite so easy to achieve. Even in the capital there were pockets of reaction to be found, with the newly formed 'Friends of Order' offering a standard to which those who feared the Commune could rally. And the Commune ignored at its peril the guiding hand of Thiers, who had orchestrated the 'Friends' as an early part of his far larger strategy to take back the capital and rid France for good of the trouble-making radicals.

In Versailles, Thiers watched and waited, presiding over the affairs of the Assembly with an air of lawyerly predation, his cropped head and thick neck swivelling within the high, starched collars he favoured, his hooked nose befitting his owl-like nature. The weeks preceding the debacle over the cannon had seen Chancellor Bismarck and other foreign leaders urge Thiers to confront his enemies on the left. Evoking

Kropotkin, Lopatin and Figner – an exalted trio in the revolutionary pantheon – had been summoned to form a Jury of Honour, for a trial convened by the central committee of the Socialist Revolutionary Party of Russia. Their task was to determine the truth or otherwise of an extraordinary accusation made by one of their number: that the movement's most idolised hero, Evno Azef, was in fact in the pay of the Okhrana, and responsible for a shocking series of deceptions and betrayals. Commissioned for the weight of authority and experience that they could bring to bear in a case of unprecedented sensitivity, it was hoped that their status would ensure that, whatever the verdict, it would be beyond challenge.

It was a necessary precaution, for in this looking-glass trial, staffed exclusively by notorious lawbreakers, one thing above all was topsy-turvy. Vladimir Burtsev, the revolutionary movement's self-appointed counter-intelligence expert, who had levelled the original accusation of treachery, had become the accused. Okhrana ruses to seed dissent in the revolutionary movement were all too common, and after his defamatory allegations concerning the legendary Azef, the Jury of Honour needed to settle the matter once and for all.

So it was that, for three weeks, the distinguished jurors sat behind a table and listened as the neat, intense figure of Vladimir Burtsev, with his light goatee beard and steel-rimmed spectacles, earnestly explained how the revolutionary they all knew as the 'Frenchman' or 'Fat One' at the same time figured on the Okhrana payroll as 'Vinogradov', 'Kapustin', 'Philipovsky' and 'Raskin'. *Their* Azef had bound his comrades in a cult of self-sacrifice by his sheer charisma, relished the destruction of the tsar's allies and fantasised about remote-control electrochemical bombs and flying machines that could deliver terror ever more effectively. The Okhrana's Azef had set his comrades up for mass arrest by the political police in raids that stretched from the forests of Finland to the centre of Moscow, then celebrated at orgies laid on by his secret-police

handler in a private room of the luxurious Malyi Iaroslavets restaurant. A St Petersburg apartment was, Burtsev alleged, reserved exclusively for the fortnightly meetings at which Raskin-Azef and the head of the Okhrana coordinated their priorities. This Azef thought nothing of murdering comrades, or betraying them for execution, to cover his tracks. And his heinous treachery was tinged with the macabre: once, on being shown the head of an unknown suicide bomber preserved in a jar of vodka by his police handler, he had appeared to relish identifying it as that of 'Admiral' Kudryavtsev, a rival from the Maximalist faction of terrorists.

As those in the courtroom listened to Burtsev's allegations, an instinct for psychic self-protection closed their minds. To the veteran revolutionaries Azef was a potent avenger of past wrongs, while the younger generation had allowed themselves to become emotionally enslaved to their mentor's mystique. For either group to entertain the possibility that Azef might be a traitor was to peer into an abyss. How, they demanded, could Burtsev possibly prove such an absurdity? That very day, Savinkov told the court, he was awaiting news of Tsar Nicholas' assassination on board the new naval cruiser *Rurik* during its maiden voyage, according to a plan formulated by Azef. What comparable proof of his own commitment to the cause could Burtsev offer? Was the truth not, in fact, that it was Burtsev himself who had been turned by the Okhrana and assigned to destabilise their organisation? Why, others pressed, did Burtsev refuse to name his witnesses, if they actually existed, unless they were of such questionable reliability as to make protecting their anonymity a safer strategy for him to pursue? Vera Figner, whose long imprisonment had done nothing to soften her pitiless dark eyes, snarled at Burtsev that once his infamy was confirmed he would have no choice but to make good on his promise to blow out his own brains.

Under such pressure, Burtsev played his trump card. Shortly before the Jury of Honour had convened, he confided, feeling

city to impede the removal of the guns were being dismantled, it was announced that municipal elections, suspended for almost two decades under Napoleon III, would be held within a fortnight. When the results were returned, the left had a fat majority of sixty-four seats. Though war and the subsequent tensions had driven many bourgeois families from the city, the turnout was still a good two thirds of what it had been for the Assembly elections, making it difficult for Thiers, try as he might, to declare the result invalid. The correspondent for *The Times* in London was right to discern in the vote 'the dangerous sentiment of Democracy'.

On 28 March, the 'Paris Commune' was officially declared, 'in the name of the people,' in a benign spectacle staged outside the Hôtel de Ville, with red flags flapping in the wind and red sashes worn with pride. That the representatives of the city, whose election had restored to Paris after a long absence the same administrative rights enjoyed by 'communes' of villages, towns and cities throughout France, should have chosen to adopt a similar corporate appellation was unsurprising. An already nervous bourgeoisie, however, would have received the news with profound unease, for it had been 'the Commune' of Paris that had deposed Louis XVI in 1792, and that had wielded substantial power behind the scenes throughout the Terror, growing ever more monstrous in its whims. Nevertheless, for many the ceremony was to be cherished as a rare cause for jubilation.

'What a day!' proclaimed Jules Valles, editor of *Le Cri du Peuple*. 'That clear, warm sun that gilds the gun-muzzles, that scent of flowers, the flutter of flags, the murmur of passing revolution … Whatever may happen, if we are to be again vanquished and die tomorrow, our generation is consoled! We are repaid for twenty years of anxiety.' Michel celebrated the occasion by leading a procession that bedecked the statue representing Strasbourg in the place de la Concorde with swags of flowers, and left a tricolour propped in the crook of its arm

had been neither a rout nor flight, suggesting a premeditated strategy in case the confiscation of the cannon provoked resistance, and their disdain for the disrespectful crowds that lined the streets boded ill for how they might avenge their humiliation on the people of Paris.

By dusk the central committee of the National Guard was in full control of the city. The gas flares usually reserved for the celebration of military triumphs were lit to illuminate the facade of the Hôtel de Ville, celebrating the first time since 1793 that Paris as a whole had been subject to insurrectionary rule. Yet as Benoît Malon, the leader of the International in Batignolles, would ruefully reflect, for all their bellicose posturing of the previous months, 'Never had a revolution taken the revolutionaries more by surprise.'

The mood of the Montmartre vigilance committee that night was reflective, its young members pondering, perhaps, whether a revolution born in such brutality might not be fated to end in like manner. Louise Michel's veins alone still coursed with adrenaline. Like a child eager for approval, she proposed to set out directly for Versailles, where she planned to assassinate Thiers in the supposed safety of his palace and 'provoke such terror that the reaction against us would be stopped dead.' It took the combined efforts of Ferré and his young friend Raoul Rigault, usually the most extreme voices in the group, to dissuade Michel from an action that would surely have been suicidal. Yet her instinctive sense that swift action was needed to press the advantage would soon be confirmed by the advice of General Duval, who demanded an immediate sortie of the National Guard to catch the Versaillais government on its heels. That his warnings went unheeded was perhaps the greatest error made by the insurrectionists.

Determined to erase the memory of the generals' murder, the central committee of the National Guard instead set out to demonstrate its legitimacy as a responsible and effective civic government. Even while the roadblocks thrown up around the

their rapt attention, he had tracked down the ex-chief of the Russian political police, Alexei Lopukhin, to Cologne. Discreetly, he had followed him on to a train, hesitating until they were under steam before he entered his compartment. Lopukhin might have been expected to flinch at the appearance of a possible assassin, and curse the loss of the protection he had enjoyed when in police service: the armed guard of crack agents and the locked carriages and shuttered windows. Instead, encountering one of his enemies on neutral territory, he treated him like an honoured foe. At Burtsev's suggestion, the pair settled down to a guessing game: he would hazard a description of the police department's foremost secret agent, and Lopukhin would confirm only whether his surmise was correct …

As Burtsev concluded his compelling tale, German Lopatin groaned. 'What's the use of talking?' he said. 'It's all clear now.' Azef had refused to attend the trial, arguing that a sense of affront prevented him from being present in the courtroom to clear his name. His punishment was therefore decided *in absentia*. A villa would be rented with a tunnel that led to a cave just across the Italian border where the traitor could be hanged without diplomatic repercussions. Realising that the man he had trusted above all others had played him for a fool, Savinkov bayed loudest for blood.

Until Burtsev had delivered his bombshell, only the elderly Kropotkin had been resolute in his support of his thesis. There was a personal sympathy, certainly, for Burtsev who, like his own younger self, had managed to escape from the tsarist police in the most dramatic fashion. And Kropotkin may have remembered too how, over thirty years before, he had spent many hours trying to convince a sceptical German Lopatin, now his co-juror, of his own credibility: that his aristocratic background should not stand in the way of his joining the revolutionaries. Most of all, though, he possessed a hard-earned

understanding of the bottomless depths that the chiefs of the Russian political police would plumb in their scheming. In the course of his career as one of anarchism's greatest theorists and leading activists, he had repeatedly seen idealistic men and women across the world fall prey to the wiles of agents provocateurs. Kropotkin had come to believe where persistent charges of spying and provocation were made by a number of individuals over a period of time, that the smoke nearly always signalled fire.

Stepping out into the rue La Fontaine, after the agreement of Azef's sentence, careless of the watchful eyes that swivelled towards him over upturned collars and twitching newspapers, Kropotkin would have felt a mixture of relief and dismay: that the traitor had been unmasked, but that the struggle to which he had devoted his life had engendered such a creature. The exposure of Azef was surely to be celebrated for the light it shed into the diabolical realm of shadows where he had dwelt: a world in which the boundaries of reality and invention were blurred. Kropotkin had many regrets about anarchism's long drift into the use of terror tactics, and must have been tempted to blame the intrigues and provocations of the secret police, and imagine the cancer excised. And yet, in many ways, Evno Azef embodied the central paradox of the political philosophy that Kropotkin had done so much to develop and promulgate. Simple in his brute appetites, yet dizzyingly adept as a conspirator, Azef's unusual blend of attributes shaped him into a phenomenon of a sort that no one involved in the revolutionary struggle had adequately foreseen.

Anarchism's ultimate aim was to usher in a society of perfect beings; a heaven on earth in which harmonious coexistence was achieved without coercion or the impositions of distant authority, but rather arose out of each individual's enlightened recognition of their mutual respect and dependency. Such a world, Kropotkin believed, would flourish naturally once the age-old cages of commerce, hierarchy and oppression

to be met, unexpectedly, by a second mob arriving from place Pigalle with General Clement Thomas, the loathed ex-chief of the National Guard, as its captive.

The mood of mockery quickly turned into a clamour for retribution. Forcing open the doors of the guardhouse, the mob poured in and drove the two captive generals into the walled garden of the building to face its rough justice. Powerless to intervene, Clemenceau witnessed the terrible scene. 'All were shrieking like wild beasts without realising what they were doing,' he would write. 'I observed then that pathological phenomenon which might be called bloodlust.' General Thomas was the first to die, staggering to stay on his feet, cursing his assailants, until riddled by bullets; Lecomte was dispatched with a single shot to the back. Of the rifles fired, most belonged to his own mutinous troops. The identity of those who then desecrated the corpses is less certain.

Sated or sickened by its own violence, the mob quickly ebbed away, leaving the rue des Rosiers in eerie silence. The other, lesser prisoners were immediately released, with Ferré claiming that he wished to avoid 'cowardice and pointless cruelty'; Michel later insisted that she had only demanded that the dead men be kept prisoner, without any intent to do them injury. But it was already too late for either scruples or denials to carry any weight or serve any purpose. For the time being, no authority remained in Paris to judge their crimes.

Senior officials at the Hôtel de Ville and those ministries still based in Paris had begun their evacuation to Versailles early in the afternoon, while events were still unfolding in Montmartre. Not long after, Adolphe Thiers himself, chairman of the executive and de facto head of the interim government, had made his escape, riding out to his new capital at the head of a great column of troops, who had been ordered by General Vinoy to withdraw en masse from their barracks in the city. Jules Ferry, the mayor of Paris, had to sweat out his fate for a few hours before following them in ignominious style. But their departure

down, as they accepted breakfast from motherly hands and stronger refreshment from the National Guard, it was a fatal mistake. In an attempt to assert order, Lecomte ordered his men to stand clear and fire. No one moved. Fix bayonets! For a moment, nothing; then his own soldiers turned on the general, hauling him from his horse. Amidst scenes of jubilation, rifle butts were tossed skywards and fraternisation turned to desertion. From the big guns themselves, a salvo of three blanks was fired, and the scenes at the Buttes were repeated at the smaller artillery compounds across the city.

After facing the famously loyal Breton soldiers holed up inside the Hôtel de Ville two months earlier, Michel had asserted her faith that 'One day you'll join us, you brigands, for you can't be bought.' For a blissful moment that March morning it seemed that the dreamed-of day had at last arrived, and that a peaceful revolution might be under way. Such hopes barely lasted into the afternoon, as festering resentments were given murderous vent, and the tensions between radicalism and reaction that had long troubled French political life finally revealed themselves in a mutual desire for outright confrontation to settle matters once and for all.

The first violence occurred where the debacle of the guns had itself begun, in Montmartre. Clemenceau had instructed that General Lecomte should be taken, for his own protection, to the Chateau-Rouge dance hall, one of the bohemian pleasure palaces for which the area was famous. Overruling him, Théophile Ferré, the young deputy mayor, ordered Lecomte's transfer back to the guardhouse in the rue des Rosiers. Barely five feet tall, Ferré's bespectacled air of fastidiousness belied a ruthless streak echoing that of the Jacobins who had perpetrated the Terror in 1793, when ideological purity had been pursued by means of the guillotine. Though he was sixteen years her junior, Louise Michel was infatuated with him. Entering the spirit of the wild carnival breaking out around her, she joined the horde that followed Lecomte's journey back, only

that stunted and distorted human nature were torn down. Until then an anarchist programme of education could usefully preserve a generation from such taint, and prepare it to claim mankind's birthright in full. There were those, however, who acted on the impulse to hasten the advent of that paradise, or else out of vengeance or frustration, taking only their own vaunted conscience as their guide.

Though consistent with anarchism's idealistic tenets, such a creed was a recipe for disaster in a flawed society whose injustices already drove men to insanity and crime. For when the movement's ideological leaders refused on principle to disown murder, violent theft or even paid collaboration with the police, if it helped feed a starving mouth or might advance the cause, the scope for the malicious manipulation of susceptible minds was boundless.

The world was far from what Kropotkin had dreamed it might become, but was there no hope for the future? Adjoining Savinkov's apartment block in rue La Fontaine stood the architect Guimard's newly constructed art nouveau masterpiece, Castel Béranger. In the sinuous, organic forms of its gated entrance – in the mysterious leaves and tendrils of its decorative wrought iron, that curled up from the ground like smoke, then whiplashed back – ideas central to his political creed had been distilled into a compelling visual form: individualism challenged uniformity, while progress vanquished convention. And yet the Paris in which he had spent the last three weeks – a belle époque city of exclusive pleasures and spasmodic street violence – fell far short of the aspirations expressed in its architecture.

The filigree ironwork that vaulted the new Grand Palais, the crowds that issued periodically from the stations of the recently tunnelled Métro, and the soaring pylon of the Eiffel Tower eloquently expressed the great era of change that had passed since Kropotkin's first visit to the city three decades before. But there was scant evidence that the human ingenuity

expended on the technological advances of the age had been matched by developments in the political and social spheres. While the years had mellowed the elegant masonry in which Baron Haussmann, Emperor Napoleon III's prefect of the Seine, had rebuilt Paris in the 1860s, the crushing bourgeois values of self-interest and conformity celebrated in his mass-produced blocks still held sway. Fear of a rising Germany had ten years earlier driven the French Republic into a shameful alliance with despotic Russia, and more recently it had become a full and eager signatory to the draconian St Petersburg protocol on international anti-anarchist police cooperation. Worst of all, it was old radical associates of Kropotkin's like Georges Clemenceau, prime minister for the past two years, who bore much of the responsibility for betraying the principles on which the Third Republic had been founded.

Kropotkin nevertheless retained an unshakeable faith that the rebirth of society was imminent. Perhaps in tacit acknowledgement of his part in allowing the creation of monsters like Azef, he would devote his last years to the culminating project of his life: a work of moral philosophy for the dawning age of social revolution. That future, Kropotkin was quite certain, would be born in war and strife. A renewal of hostilities between Germany and France, which had threatened repeatedly during the three decades and more since Bismarck's armies had besieged Paris, would at long last precipitate a fight for justice against the forces of reaction. It would come soon – next week, perhaps, or the week after – and its challenges could only be met if the lessons of past failures had been fully addressed. Those who remained of his generation, who had lived through those failures, must point the way.

He would have thought of them often during his time in Paris: the men and women of the Commune, who for eight extraordinary weeks of insurrection during the spring of 1871 had risen up to create their own autonomous government in the city. Some of them, now dead of old age, had become

half of the cannon bought by public subscription during the siege. While dragging them to safety, the Guardsmen had sung the 'Marseillaise', and the guns, pointing towards Versailles, where the Assembly was now based, represented a practical symbol of their independence. Their confiscation would deliver a crippling blow to the National Guard, whose shadowy central committee had in recent weeks begun to assert itself as an alternative power in the city. In Michel's eyes, Lecomte's mission exposed the government's wholehearted contempt for the disproportionate sacrifice that the capital's poor had endured in the national cause, but more than that its timing, on the day of the funeral of Hugo's son, struck her as a deep personal affront. For it was under Hugo's patronage that the campaign to buy the cannon had been conducted.

Intoxicated with indignation, hands bloody from her attempts to staunch Turpin's wound, by her own account Michel eluded her captors and made a run for it. Down the cobbled streets of Montmartre to raise the alarm she careered, past the creaking windmills that crowded the upper slopes of the hill. The denizens of Montmartre were slow to wake despite the vehemence of her cries and not until almost eight o'clock did a sizeable crowd gather, by which time the captured guns should have been long gone. In fact, they were still there, an administrative oversight having delayed the arrival of the horse-drawn limbers needed to carry the artillery away.

From atop the Buttes, the beat of the tocsins could be heard in the streets below; 'All that miserable sound,' Louise Michel marvelled, 'produced by a pair of sinewy wrists clutching a pair of fragile sticks.' Then up the hill the mob surged, women in the lead, draping themselves over the cannon, challenging the soldiers of the 88th to open fire. A tense stand-off ensued, during which the mayor of Montmartre, Georges Clemenceau, a trained doctor, pleaded with Lecomte to be allowed to move Turpin to his surgery for treatment. The general refused. With discipline among his tired and hungry men rapidly breaking

her mind and her verse: of ravening wolves, boiling oceans, revolution and martyrdom.

As well as being confidant and mentor, Hugo was also the dependable protector that she desperately needed, as the illegitimate daughter of the heir to a family of provincial gentry now making a name for herself as one of the most outspoken radicals in Paris. For Michel had an uncanny ability to place herself at the centre of historic events, where the danger was greatest. She had been among those embraced by Jules Favre, her old night-school instructor, on the steps of the Hôtel de Ville after the proclamation of the republic the previous September; when she had returned there in January, rifle in hand, to join in the firefight between the Breton army regulars defending the building and Flourens' brigade of insurrectionary sharpshooters, it had taken Hugo's intervention to secure her release from custody. The escapade had been the most violent manifestation to date of the rumbling resistance of radical Paris to the authority of the National Assembly, and had demonstrated a seriousness of intent that the government could not afford to ignore. Now Michel was about to find herself caught up in the decisive showdown.

It was three o'clock in the morning when the soldiers of the 88th regiment of the line, loyal to the Assembly, marched up the winding road towards Montmartre, their tramp muffled by ground left soft after a recent fall of snow. A Guardsman named Turpin, taking his turn on sentry duty, peered through the thick fog, before challenging their approach. Suddenly, a crack of gunfire rang out in the dark and he slumped to the ground. Rushing to assist the wounded man, with a characteristic disregard for her own safety, Michel was instantly apprehended by the troops of General Lecomte.

One of fourteen operations launched simultaneously across the city under cover of night, Lecomte's objective was the artillery park on the Buttes Chaumont, where the National Guard had, following the peace agreement with Germany, secured

Kropotkin's closest friends: the geographer Elisée Reclus, who had been captured during the Communards' first, disastrous sortie against the Versaillais forces intent on crushing their social experiment; Louise Michel, the Red Virgin, who had still been there at the doomed defence of the Issy fortress, and throughout the Communards' tragic, fighting retreat across the city.

It had been stories of the Paris Commune that had helped inspire Kropotkin to leave behind his life as a leading light of Russia's scientific Establishment and devote himself to the revolutionary cause. Ten years after first hearing the wistful recollections of Communard exiles, drinking in a Swiss tavern in the immediate aftermath of defeat, he had written them down. 'I will never forget', one had said, 'those delightful moments of deliverance. How I came down from my supper chamber in the Latin Quarter to join that immense open-air club which filled the boulevards from one end of Paris to the other. Everyone talked about public affairs; all mere personal preoccupations were forgotten; no more thought of buying or selling; all felt ready to advance towards the future.' Both Reclus and Michel had died in 1905, the year when revolution had finally touched Russia, only to end before it could begin, but that optimism remained alive.

In his obituary of Reclus, Kropotkin had paid tribute to the role played by his fellow geographer during the 1870 Siege of Paris, when he had served as an assistant to the great balloonist Nadar, whose daring aeronauts ferried messages out of the city and over the Prussian lines. Had his cerebral, reticent old friend really been one of those fearless men who floated aloft in the balloons, braving the Prussian sharpshooters? Had Reclus looked down across Paris from a vantage point higher than that from the tower, that was then not yet even a glimmer in Eiffel's eye, and dreamed of what the world might be? It mattered so much from where you saw things, and what you wanted to see.

For fiction could so easily be confused with truth, and truth relegated to the realm of fiction.

2. *Communards*

Paris, 1871

Louise Michel wiled away the early hours of 18 March 1871 at the sentry post on the rue des Rosiers in Montmartre, drinking coffee with the National Guardsmen stationed there. A teacher by profession, with her own school in the rue Oudot that she ran on progressive principles, her political views had made her an increasingly prominent feature of the radical landscape of Paris. As comfortable now among political extremists and citizen soldiers as in the classroom, she rarely missed the chance to preach the social revolution. This time, though, it may have been the prospect of the funeral later in the day for Victor Hugo's son that kept her awake.

The months of the siege had provided ample cause for mourning, but the thirty-six-year-old Michel's deep affection for the great writer and republican lent her grief that day a special poignancy, for since she and Hugo had first met twenty years earlier, they had developed an intimacy that transcended his usual philandering habits. The 'N' in Hugo's diaries beside her name suggests that they had, at least, been naked together, but for Michel, their relationship was above all a meeting of poetic souls. To the novelist she was his 'Enjolras', so named after the heroic student revolutionary in *Les Misérables*, and perhaps in teasing reference to her strong and somewhat masculine features; she addressed him simply as 'Master'. Only he, she felt, could truly appreciate her 'exalted temperament' and the mystical imaginings that filled

Despite Rochefort's presence on the Assembly's executive, even his attempts to plead for the protection of 'a young and tottering republic against the clerical element that menaced it' were barracked into inaudibility. Reacting to near certain defeat by developing a case of almost asphyxiating erysipelas, his resignation this time was prompt, followed by an extended rest cure in the Atlantic resort of Arcachon. Gambetta opted to spend his conveniently timed convalescence in Spain.

That the stresses of the previous months should have made both ill is hardly surprising, but their absence was also politic, allowing them to remain temporarily above the fray as Paris and metropolitan France reacted with inevitable anger to the Assembly's perceived betrayal of the national interest. Even the normally buoyant Reclus struggled to disguise his despondency. 'Now that everything is lost,' he wrote to Nadar, 'we must begin life over again, as though, waking from a 1,000-year sleep, we realise that everything is there for us to gain: homeland, liberty, dignity, honour …' A similar sense of determination led his more extreme associates in Paris, and those of Rochefort, to start preparing in earnest for a revolutionary year zero.

When the German army marched through the capital on its victory parade, it can have derived little pleasure from the experience. Crowds of Parisians watched its progress in lowering silence, while any innkeepers who might have thought to sell the enemy a drink were deterred by the threat of a beating. Nevertheless, the guerrilla attacks that Stieber feared had failed to materialise: having dragged the hundreds of cannon, bought for their use by public subscription, to the safety of the Red districts, the National Guard were keeping their powder dry. And whilst great pyres were lit to fumigate the place de l'Etoile after the Germans had passed through, they did nothing to dispel the germs of civil war.

1. *A Distant Horizon*

Paris, 1870

A blizzard was blowing when Elisée Reclus arrived in London in the winter of 1851 and took lodgings in a modest garret, shared with his older brother, Elie. Yet it was the search for shelter of a very different kind that had brought the twenty-year-old pastor's son to the British capital: a haven where he could engage in political debate, free of censorship or persecution.

Having abandoned his theological training when the great wave of revolutions had swept Europe in 1848, Reclus had occupied himself in its aftermath with a new course of studies under the radical geographer Carl Ritter in Berlin. On his return to France after graduation, Reclus found himself in a country braced for renewed political turbulence, as Bonaparte's nephew Louis-Napoleon edged towards the *coup d'état* that would overturn the infant Second Republic and elevate him from the presidency to the imperial throne. Reclus decided to go to London. And if he had any doubts about his decision to leave France again so soon, they were quickly dispelled when he was repeatedly stopped by the police, stationed along the roads to the Channel, and interrogated as to the purpose of his journey.

From the famed Italian socialist Mazzini, to the little-known German political journalist Karl Marx, London alone offered reliable asylum to the political renegades of the Continent. Although 7,000 had fled there after the turmoil of 1848, there was little sign of Britain's hospitality diminishing; freedom

fighter Joseph Kossuth's arrival only a few weeks before Reclus, after the revolutionary had been ousted by Russia from the presidency of Hungary, had been greeted by cheering crowds. Reclus, who increasingly counted himself a fellow traveller, could venture out without fear to public lectures by such exiled luminaries as Louis Blanc and the Russian Alexander Herzen, or to rub shoulders with the Freemasons of the Loge of Philadelphes, who were pledged to reverse Napoleon's usurpation of power. Yet amidst the excitement of open debate, it was Reclus' visits to a showman's marvel in Leicester Square that left the strongest impression on him.

Sixty feet in diameter and named after Queen Victoria's geographer, Wyld's Globe offered tourists the chance to stand on a central staircase that ran from pole to pole, and gaze up at the contoured map of the world that covered its inner surface. 'Here a country looks like an immense cabbage-leaf, flattened out, half green and half decayed, with an immense caterpillar crawling right over it in the shape of a chain of mountains,' reported *Punch*. 'There a country resembles an old piece of jagged leather hung up against the wall to dry, with large holes, that have been moth-eaten out of it.' Whatever the globe's aesthetic shortcomings, crowds were drawn by the chance to wonder at the glorious extent of the British Empire, or identify the provenance of the many luxuries with which global trade provided them. Reclus saw the construction rather differently. Tutored in Ritter's holistic vision of the natural world, and inspired by his pioneering work on the relationship between mankind and its environment, his thoughts were animated instead by the globe's potential as an instrument of humanitarian instruction.

Growing up in the countryside of the Gironde, one of fourteen children, Reclus had been forbidden by his strict and self-denying father from wandering in the fields around their home, lest his fascination with nature distract his younger siblings from their devotions. The vision that Wyld's Globe now afforded Reclus, of a world open to curiosity and enquiry, more

directly. Placards appeared across the city: 'Make way for the people! Make way for the Commune!'

Two weeks into the bombardment, King Wilhelm of Prussia was crowned kaiser of a united Germany in Louis XIV's Hall of Mirrors at Versailles. Military dress boots clattered across the polished floors under the protective eye of Colonel Stieber, who had secured the palace against a mass assassination attempt by French partisans to avenge the grotesque affront. In fact, the patriots of Paris were too busy with other matters. Returning to his residence that evening, the secret councillor received gratifying news from his spies. Even as the new Germany celebrated its victory, the first shots had been exchanged between the troops of the regular army and the radical battalions of the National Guard during a confrontation around the Hôtel de Ville. By the end of the month an armistice was agreed, subject only to ratification by a new National Assembly.

Elected to the Assembly, Elisée Reclus was clear, if hopelessly idealistic, about his duty: 'Orléanists, legitimists, simple patriotic bourgeois have said to us: dream now, guide us, triumph for us, and we shall see what happens! Let us accept the dream, and if we carry out our mandate, if we save France, as we are asked to do, then the republic will be secured and we shall have the pleasure of beginning for our children an era of progress, justice, and well-being.' Arriving in Bordeaux, where the Assembly was to sit, the scales fell rapidly from his eyes as the 'morally perilous' nature of the venture on which he had embarked revealed itself. Elected by the whole of France, the body was republican in name only, and overwhelmingly monarchist, Catholic and conservative in complexion; less than a fifth of the 768 delegates were genuine republicans, barely one in forty a radical. By choosing as its leader the seventy-three-year-old Adolphe Thiers, the strongest proponent of the armistice in the Government of National Defence, the Assembly signalled its intolerance of anyone who advocated continued resistance.

Short of a humiliating surrender, the Government of National Defence had no more answers to offer, nor many remaining concessions to pacify the radicals. As the frosts of a harsh winter ate into the resolve of those in the capital, and even the middle-class population was reduced to eating rats or, for the lucky few, exotic cuts from the animals in the zoological garden, the fault lines in Parisian society widened. In the revolutionary clubs, growing crowds gathered night after night to listen to Rochefort or Flourens press for ever greater freedoms for the people. Half starved and frozen, grief-stricken for the infants who had died on a diet of cloudy water masquerading as milk, those attending warmed themselves with the wine that was the only consumable which Paris had left in abundance, and swore that all their suffering should not be in vain. Meanwhile the Montmartre women's group, chaired by the revolutionary virago Louise Michel, thrashed out details of long-mooted social projects that made the prospect of a better world seem tantalisingly close to souls in desperate need of some source of hope.

Then, on 27 December, the city was suddenly shaken by the onset of a thunderous bombardment. From the Châtillon Heights, the newest Krupps cannon, *Grande Valérie*, rained down shells of an unprecedented calibre, each weighing 119 pounds. One by one, the outer ring of forts – Issy, Vanves, Montrouge – were pounded into submission, and the capital braced itself for a direct onslaught. General Moltke recorded the shift in tactics in chillingly abstract terms: 'An elevation of thirty degrees,' he observed, 'by a peculiar contrivance, sent the shot into the heart of the city.' The first shell to land smashed into the home of Madame Montgolfier, whose father and uncle had made the pioneering balloon flights that had so thrilled rational France in the years before the Revolution of the previous century; before long, the Panthéon and Salpêtrière hospital, the pride of Paris, were targeted

than vindicated his conversion from the cast-iron certainties of the Church to the empirical values of science. One inheritance from his father that Reclus had embraced, though, was the desire to evangelise. Recalling proposals for a great spherical 'Temple to Nature and Reason' made by the visionary architect Etienne-Louis Boullée at the height of Robespierre's influence during the French Revolution, Reclus began to dream of building an edifice vaster still. It would celebrate a world stripped of such artificial impositions as national borders, and symbolise one in which race, class and property no longer divided mankind.

In its review of Wyld's Globe, *Punch* had commented on how the positioning of the central iron staircase, which impeded a panoramic view, demonstrated 'how one half of the Globe doesn't know what the other half is doing'. Several months in London had greatly enhanced Reclus' understanding of contemporary currents in socialist thought, but his practical ignorance of the world demanded redress. Departing England in the continued company of Elie, his scientific purpose was to discover those laws of nature that, throughout history, could explain the relationship between the physical environment and the beliefs, institutions and languages on which human society was founded. Above all, though, the journey that would take him halfway around the world over the coming years was to be one of political self-discovery.

At every stage of his travels, Reclus encountered the bitter reality of the division between powerful and oppressed, and the wilful ignorance that sustained it: an Irish farm whose emerald green pastures were used to fatten cattle for export to the English market while famine racked the country; African slaves, torn from their homes and worked like beasts for profit on the plantations of Louisiana; even the rivalries of the supposed free-thinkers in Panama with whom he entered a doomed collaboration in communal living. Yet in the solidarity of the oppressed he detected a glimmer of hope. The

displaced Choctaw tribe, on whose ancestral lands the Reclus brothers set up home on first arriving in America, had sent a large donation to the starving Irish, remembering their own suffering on the 'Trail of Tears' to the reservation. Equally, the campaign for the abolition of slavery affirmed the survival of a human decency amidst the corrupt capitalism that was visible all around them in America. 'Every negro, every white who protests in exalted voice in favour of the rights of man, every word, every line in all the South affirms that man is the brother to man,' Elisée reassured his brother.

Having long since repudiated religious dogma, Reclus embraced the alternative, secular article of faith found in the enlightenment philosophy of Rousseau which had inspired the prime movers of the French Revolution of 1789. Man was innately perfectible, he asserted, not fallen for some long-dead ancestor's sin; nor was he to be saved by divine intervention, but by his own hunger for justice and equality. Schooled by Elie in the new utopian socialism of Saint-Simon, Charles Fourier and Joseph-Pierre Proudhon, it seemed to Reclus that the old revolutionary doctrines of the previous century merely needed to be recast in new terms.

The France to which Reclus finally returned in 1857 proved even less receptive to radical politics than that which he had abruptly left six years earlier. When Louis-Napoleon had seized power and proclaimed himself emperor as Napoleon III, the move had been presented as a just response to efforts by vested monarchical interests to stymie his supposedly popular policies of paternalistic socialism by refusing to alter the constitution to allow him a second presidential term. Once installed as emperor, however, he had held back from implementing his progressive vision, on the grounds that 'liberty has never helped to found a lasting political edifice, it can only crown that edifice once time has consolidated it.'

Not until 1864 did Napoleon's success in seducing the bourgeoisie, by way of their bulging purses and swelling national

For all Stieber's boastful letters to his wife claiming that six aeronauts had been seized in a day – more, in fact, than were captured during the entire siege – the Krupps anti-balloon gun had scored few hits. Meanwhile, new balloons continued to float off the production lines under the vast vaulted roofs of the Gare du Nord and Gare d'Orléans. Seamstresses worked overtime along platforms from which the trains had nowhere to run, to produce vessels blessed with the names of Rationalism's heroes: Kepler, Galileo, Newton and Lavoisier. But by forcing Nadar to switch to night launches, Stieber's strategy of targeting the balloons proved a decisive factor in the conclusion of the war.

Midnight was close to striking when the *Ville d'Orléans* took off into a cold fog, carrying essential information to the Loire army. Not until daybreak did the crashing waves of the North Sea down below alert its crew to their navigational error. Having cast all excess weight overboard, including the mailbags, they finally made land in Norway after a record-shattering journey of more than 1,000 miles, tumbling into thick snow when their basket became entangled in pine trees. Amazingly, the key message concerning the movements of the two armies, from inside and outside Paris, was caught in fishermen's nets and finally forwarded to Tours, only to arrive too late. Without the key information, it had been impossible to coordinate the French attack and the Army of the Loire were forced back in disarray, while the 100,000 troops who crossed a pontoon bridge over the River Marne from Paris were decimated when they encountered the strongest sector of the encircling Prussian front line.

The North German Confederation had demonstrated to the dissenting southern states that it could hold together far beyond the first thrilling rush of war, and attention now returned to preparations for the official unification of the German Empire.

a surprise attack on a salient that the army had previously abandoned as indefensible. Paris went wild for a glimmer of solace but speedy victory turned to even more sudden defeat as the Prussian guns opened fire on the jubilant French troops. Then, just as the city thought it could bear no further disappointment, rumours began to circulate of the armistice negotiations.

In a heavy drizzle, angry crowds converged on the Hôtel de Ville, steaming sulphurously under their umbrellas. While the drums and trumpets of the National Guard sounded, Flourens seized his chance. Dressed in a theatrical uniform from his service in the Cretan uprising against the Turks three years earlier, scimitar swinging by his side, he arrived at the flashpoint with his personal retinue of devoted sharpshooters, several hundred strong. Conciliatory officials invited him in to the council room to discuss the situation, but once there he leaped on to the great table to assert his will, carelessly shredding the baize surface with his spurs while he spat out denunciations of government treachery. In scenes more worthy of a second-rate farce than an attempted *coup d'état*, the stand-off lasted late into the night, by when the Hôtel de Ville was packed with 8,000 Guardsmen, the air fetid with their nervous sweat. Not until three o'clock in the morning was a settlement brokered by Edmond Adam, the prefect of police: municipal elections would be staged within eight days, with immunity from reprisals for the insurgents. Two days later, though, the government reneged, arresting some leading radicals and driving more underground, where they would regroup with an even sharper sense of righteousness and entitlement.

Commentators in the Parisian press mistakenly agreed that, with the 'Red threat' exposed as impotent, the danger had passed. More pragmatic minds merely hoped that the arrival of the army from Tours might stymie the threat of revolution and save the republic. In Versailles, however, Colonel Stieber was doing everything in his power to ensure that both were proved wrong.

self-confidence, create a climate conducive for him to begin the risky transition from autocratic rule to a democratic, liberal empire. In a bold gamble, the prohibition on strikes was lifted and the draconian restrictions on the press eased, but after more than a decade of repression, the radical factions had little appetite for what they perceived as half measures. Every concession Napoleon III granted, it seemed, merely released another outburst of resentment, or provided a further opportunity for plotting against his regime. Nothing better illustrated the emperor's predicament than his decision to sponsor sixty representatives of France's workers to attend a conference of their international peers that was to be held in London during the Universal Exposition of 1862, an event that carried considerable significance in an age when a nation's status was defined by technological change, commercial innovation and the fruits of expanding empire. The relationships they formed led directly to a strong French involvement two years later in the foundation of the International Association of Working Men, which encompassed a wide range of revolutionary socialist views, and whose statement of principles Karl Marx would draft.

Elisée Reclus might have felt the occasional twinge of unspoken sympathy for the emperor, as he too tried in vain to realise his ideals on the impossible middle ground of moderation and reform. At a time when Jules Verne had coined a new genre of 'science fiction' and was writing a series of books 'that would describe the world, known and unknown, and the great scientific achievements of the age', Reclus' scientific insights and literary talent commanded great interest. The prestigious *Revue des Deux Mondes* was delighted to take his scientific articles, while Verne's own publisher, the masterful Jules Hetzel, made bestsellers of his more popular works of geography. No such success, however, attended Reclus' attempts to chart his own map of Utopia, as he and Elie poured their political energies into developing a series of mutual organisations.

The brothers began their project by establishing Paris' first food cooperative, on principles similar to those pioneered at Rochdale in England some years earlier. Next, infuriated by the failings of the Crédit Mobilier, a supposedly socialist bank that pandered to bourgeois prejudices in its granting of loans, the brothers formed La Société du Crédit au Travail to offer workers a better deal. Then, finally, they founded a journal, *L'Association*, to propagate their ideas. The aim, Elisée wrote, was 'to contribute to a promotion of the relations between the republican bourgeoisie of goodwill, and the world of the workers'. Each project failed, in turn, for lack of popular involvement. Even those friends that Reclus had made in the radical clubs of Batignolles and Belleville, the heartland of Red Paris, were reluctant to explore the viability of alternative economic models that depended on such 'goodwill', preferring simply to prepare for confrontation. Disillusioned, Reclus joined their ranks, and by 1867 had become a close associate of such prominent French members of the International as Benoît Malon. He even undertook to translate Marx's *Das Kapital* into French: a pressing concern to its author, who wished to 'counter the false views in which Proudhon buried them, with his idealised lower middle classes'.

In the early summer of that year, Napoleon III welcomed the world to Paris for a Universal Exposition of his own. On the surface it was a triumph of optimistic modernity. Those visitors able to afford the entry price could wander through an enchanted world where extraordinary feats of European engineering were demonstrated within a stone's throw of stalls staffed by tribesmen from the depths of French colonial Africa or the remotest islands of Polynesia, and could witness the autopsy of a freshly unwrapped Egyptian mummy or inspect the model homes and ideal villages that Napoleon had designed for workers in the iron foundries of Le Creusot. Beneath the vast glass dome of the main pavilion, every important field of human endeavour was celebrated, while night after night in the

the eccentric Jules Allix's twenty-year-old notion of a communications system based on 'sympathetic snails' – pairs of molluscs rendered telepathic over huge distances by the exchange of fluid during mating, whose synchronised movement could communicate letter codes – saw a brief revival of interest.

Like the endless hours that the National Guard spent in drill, however, such displacement activities could keep the radicals of Paris occupied only for so long. As suspicion mounted that the government was preparing to sell out the country, the talk in Batignolles and Belleville became as feverish as the inventors' imaginings, and demonstrations more frequent and more heated: as long as Gambetta's Army of the Loire was awaited, the true patriots of the left, it was argued, deserved their chance to claim victory where the armies of the empire had failed. Trapped in a political no-man's-land, Rochefort was finally presented with a way out of his predicament on 26 October, when the commander-in-chief of the republic, General Trochu, confided in him that the fortress city of Metz, which alone had stood unconquered in the path of the Prussian advance for the previous month, was about to surrender. What was more, he was told, Jules Favre and Adolphe Thiers, the government's leading doves, had already entered into secret negotiations with Prussia.

Burning with indignation at having been kept in the dark for so long, Rochefort turned to Victor Hugo for advice. 'Don't remain any longer with a party of men who deceive everybody, yourself included' affirmed the novelist, but for Rochefort simply to submit a letter of resignation would have gone against his scheming nature. Instead, he leaked Trochu's secret disclosure to Flourens, with only an empty promise that it would go no further as a fig leaf for his mischief-making. The next day, news of the fall of Metz was splashed across the headlines. Frayed nerves finally gave way, and crowds burned the newspapers in public, while the headstrong commander of the fortress of Saint-Denis, inflamed to insubordination, launched

'to all but the most impenetrable cellars of my conscience'. And yet, for the moment, he decided to retain his position.

In the midst of the brewing storm, Rochefort's responsibilities as president of the Barricades Commission at least afforded him the chance to rehabilitate his reputation for leadership while proving that he 'was not given by nature and temperament to systematic opposition'. Throwing his energies into the practical work of organising Paris' civil defences, he signed the appeal, posted around Paris, for every home to prepare two bags of earth for the barricades that would provide a last line of resistance against any Prussian assault. Meanwhile, bottom drawers and overwrought minds were ransacked in search of national salvation. 'Hardly a day passed', Rochefort recorded, 'without seven or eight Archimedes coming in to propose some infallible means of destroying the besieging army in one blow.' A giant hammer could be lifted by balloons and dropped on the Prussian lines, suggested one proposal, another that lions from the zoo be set loose against the enemy. Most of the ideas received were rather less practical, but the republic offered a broad church for scientific talent: the commission for designing a super-explosive for use against the Prussians went to the man responsible for the bomb with which Orsini had failed to kill Napoleon III.

The highest priority was still the maintenance of robust communication with the outside world. Recollecting his first, hated job at the Department of Patents a year before, Rochefort may have regretted dismissing too hastily the myriad proposals for balloon guidance mechanisms that had then crossed his desk. In the absence of any great leap forward in the years since, it seemed that the most outlandish suggestions were now to be encouraged with funding. Pigeons equipped with whistles to deter Stieber's falcons proved especially effective, the pellicles strapped to their legs carrying photographically reduced letters. Each delivery kept a team of hunched copyists busy for several days, transcribing from a megascope projection. Even

Tuileries Gardens, hordes of ball-goers spun to the new waltz tunes of Johann Strauss the Younger.

Beneath the fairy-tale twinkle of tens of thousands of electric bulbs, however, lay a darker truth. Travellers arriving by train to wander the vaulted glass galleries of the exhibition halls, or promenade through Haussmann's new boulevards, could easily forget that the tracks of the railways and the iron substructure of housing and exhibition spaces alike had originated in the strike-ridden foundries at Le Creusot. And when they looked at examples of ideal workers' houses, they chose to ignore the reality that occupancy was offered only as a reward for those workers who toed the line. The radicals of the Red districts, though, were not so easily misled. Expelled from the city centre to make way for Haussmann's grand new urban scheme, they seethed with resentment, seeing in Napoleon's proposed welfare provisions for new mothers and injured workers projects proof that the emperor lacked either the will or the hard political support to implement in full.

Nor was it only in the realm of social reform that the Expo exhibited the overconfidence of the Second Empire. The crowds in the Champs-de-Mars who inspected the impressive scale model of the submarine *Le Plongeur*, and watched demonstrations of the secret *mitrailleuse* machine gun, spitting fire from concealment in a tent, were comforted that France possessed the ingenuity to protect her status as the Continent's pre-eminent military power. They admired with misguided equanimity the steel bulk of the enormous Krupps cannon sent to represent Prussia, Europe's rising power. And when the hot-air balloon *Géant*, owned by the satirical caricaturist and pioneering photographer and aeronaut Nadar, or the *Impérial*, Napoleon's state-commissioned balloon, carried tourists up for a bird's-eye panorama of the exhibition, few remarked on the stinking gas leaks that made their ascent so laborious, any more than they had concerned themselves over *Le Plongeur*'s failed tests of seaworthiness. Rather, they covered

their noses and imagined themselves pioneering passengers on what Henry Giffard, the other aerostatic impresario at the Expo, brazenly touted as a journey to the first station of a Paris–Moon Railway.

Yet whilst the technological sensations on display appeared to promise a future of brilliant accomplishments, one dramatic incident two months into the Exposition came far closer to revealing what the immediate future would hold. Nine years had passed since the bomb attack on Napoleon III by Felice Orsini had left eight people dead and 156 bystanders injured. During recent months, however, first Tsar Alexander II of Russia and then Chancellor Bismarck of Prussia had narrowly escaped assassination at the hands of the young radicals Dmitri Karakozov and Ferdinand Cohen Blind. That both King Wilhelm and Tsar Alexander were to visit the Expo at the same time and appear alongside Napoleon III for a military parade at Longchamp racecourse should have seen the French police at their most vigilant. Somehow, though, a young Pole by the name of Boleslaw Berezowski, seeking vengeance for the brutal repression of a revolt in his Russian-occupied homeland, took his place in the crowd and discharged a pistol at the tsar, only narrowly missing his target.

The event represented the coincidence of the two great threats that faced Napoleon, and would trouble the Continent for decades to come. For it was from the Red clubs of Batignolles that Berezowski had emerged to make his attempt on the tsar's life, one of many foreign revolutionaries who swelled the ranks of the indigenous radicals, and fired their imaginations with tales of political uprisings. And it was France's desire to redress a prospective imbalance of power in Europe that suffered as a consequence of his attack.

Industrialisation in the German states was rampant, their birth rate growing even faster than France's declined, and their production of coal – the key energy source of the age – was approaching that of France and Belgium combined, with no

those whom the government detests the most' must vote for 'the most revolutionary' candidate on the ballot, it had been Henri Rochefort to whom he was referring.

The funeral of Victor Noir the previous January, though, had revealed the cowardice that flawed Rochefort's character. Having stoked up the marchers to a high pitch of militancy with his rhetoric, at the very moment when the crowd was slavering for Napoleon's deposition, Rochefort had gone missing. Hunger had made him faint, the radical marquis claimed. In his absence, the mob's ardour had cooled and the insurrectionary moment passed. The debacle had sent his credibility tumbling. Without the proof of resolute action, erstwhile friends asked, did his satirical journalism and revolutionary pronouncements amount to anything more than a safety valve for popular exasperation, dissipating pressure rather than bringing it to a head? Even a spell in prison, from where he was liberated by the jubilant crowds on the day of the republic's birth, failed to restore his reputation.

Following Gambetta's departure to Tours, the gulf between Rochefort and hard-line colleagues such as Gustave Flourens, Paschal Grousset and Benoît Malon from his old paper, *La Marseillaise*, seemed set to widen further. For whilst they remained free to challenge the Government of National Defence with more radical visions of a new society, Rochefort could not resist the offer of a place as the token radical on its twelve-man executive, tied in to collective responsibility as a minister without portfolio. As a deputy, in 1869, Rochefort had campaigned for universal conscription to the French army. Now, though, his arguments that Paris should resist to the end found little favour with colleagues in the executive who hoped for an accommodation with the Germans. Meanwhile, fearing mob rule, the government equipped the burgeoning National Guard with only the most antiquated weapons. Rochefort was torn: stay and compromise, or rebel. To take the former option, he insisted to old friends among the radicals, required his descent

seat in the Chamber of Deputies little more than a year earlier, Rochefort seethed with resentment at the prospect of his benefactor being greeted in Tours as a 'Messiah fallen from the sky', convinced no doubt that he could have played the part with more panache than the grocer's son from Cahors. Even the graze that Gambetta's hand received from a Prussian sharpshooter's bullet irked him: a veteran duellist of notorious cowardice, he knew only too well how effectively, by conceding a flesh wound, one could win sympathy even in defeat.

Had Rochefort sincerely wanted the honour of the balloon flight, it might conceivably have been his, since Gambetta, though always a promising candidate, had been chosen only by default after his cabinet colleagues had cavilled at the risks. Yet just as Rochefort was adept at eluding death at the hands of one of his enraged challengers, despite his dauntless audacity in print, he had also revealed himself to be equally good at absenting himself whenever real danger threatened. What now troubled Rochefort most was a growing but unspoken anxiety that his own lack of nerve would forever prevent him claiming the demagogic leadership of the radical left: a position that alone, for all his vaunted egalitarianism, might have freed him from the compromises he found so painful.

Until recently, Rochefort's political future had looked so promising. Every Saturday morning during 1868, subject only to intermittent bans that the government would have liked to make permanent, the orange-red ink from the cover of *La Lanterne* had bled on to the hands of well over 100,000 eager readers, who were happy to flaunt their complicity with its virulent republicanism. Then, he had preferred exile to silence, fleeing Paris for Brussels, from where he had smuggled the weekly editions into France while enjoying the hospitality of Hugo, who adopted him as 'another son'. And when, at the time of the 1869 elections to the republican Chamber of Deputies, Elisée Reclus had written to a friend that 'those who have the most resolution, the most love of progress and justice,

slowdown in sight. Whilst little love was lost between the tsar and the parvenu Bonaparte, whose ancestor had once entered Moscow as conqueror, France courted Russian friendship as a much-needed counterweight to the growing power across the Rhine. Now, though, Napoleon III had failed adequately to protect his guest from attack. In an attempt to redeem the situation, the French emperor turned to the tsar, who was flecked with the blood of the horse that the bullet had struck. 'Sir, we have been under fire together; now we are brothers-in-arms.' Alexander's brusque response saw any small chance of an alliance disappear almost before the smoke of the assassin's pistol.

The three years following the Exposition saw the emperor's authority at home further eroded and the opposition to his regime mount as republicans of all colours increasingly made common cause. A disastrous intervention in Mexico, where France installed a puppet king only to abandon him in the face of a powerful insurgency, was compounded by a messy victory for French auxiliaries over an Italian nationalist force led by Garibaldi, whose attempt to liberate Rome from the deeply reactionary Pope Pius IX enjoyed the approval of the French left. Sensing Napoleon's weakness, the republican press in Paris tested his powers of censorship with growing audacity until, in January 1870, journalistic activism crossed from the page on to the streets.

The occasion was the funeral of Victor Noir, a journalist with the radical *La Marseillaise*, who had been shot dead by the emperor's cousin, Pierre Bonaparte, in murky circumstances, having visited him regarding a challenge to a duel. Up to 200,000 republicans joined the procession, which briefly threatened to become violent before fizzling out for lack of clear leadership. The arrest and imprisonment of the ringleaders bought Napoleon III time, but a month later another journalist from the newspaper, the glamorous and flamboyant Gustave Flourens, attempted to stage an insurrec-

tion in Belleville. On that occasion, the weapons issued to his troops proved to be mere replicas, stolen from the props room of the local theatre, but a full performance seemed certain to follow the dress rehearsal before long. Having tried repression, conciliation and reform over many years, the only option left to Napoleon was the fallback of every struggling leader: the distraction of war.

When the Spanish throne fell vacant in the early summer of 1870, Bismarck baited the trap, proposing a Prussian candidate in what was both an affront to French pride and a tacit threat of encirclement. After the French ambassador to Prussia importuned the vacationing King Wilhelm during his morning promenade in the spa town of Bad Ems to express Napoleon's outrage, Bismarck leaked to the press the king's version of the encounter, carefully edited to impugn France's breach of diplomatic etiquette. It was the eve of the 14 July celebration of Bastille Day in France and his timing was perfect. With leisure to debate the insolence of Prussia, and wine coursing hotly through their veins, the French buoyed Napoleon III up and along on a wave of chauvinism. A pope who within days would declare himself infallible gave his blessing, and the emperor declared war on Prussia.

'*A Berlin! A Berlin!*' resounded the cries of the Paris crowds on 19 July, and among the voices were those of many republicans, who later preferred to deny it, or else to claim that they had welcomed France's aggression only as a prelude to revolution. Inconveniently, though, the archetypal bumbling Teuton pilloried by French popular culture failed to materialise on the battlefield. Instead France was wrong-footed by its own incautious rush to war: its railway system had been too busy introducing its hedonistic citizens to the pleasure of seaside holidays to prepare proper mobilisation plans as Prussia had done; its artillerymen were untrained to operate the army's secret wonder-weapon, the *mitrailleuse*, and its regiments were opti-

ranks of her new republican rulers, there were already signs of dissent, ripe for exploitation.

With a favourable weather forecast, eleven o'clock on 7 October marked Gambetta's moment of destiny. The bulging eye of which caricaturists were so fond stared anxiously as he held the lip of the gondola of the *Armand-Barbes* with a tightening grip, his usually florid face blanching at the prospect of flight. '*Lâchez tout!*' shouted the pilot, the mooring ropes were cast off and the crowd gathered in place Saint-Pierre cheered as France's putative saviour raced into the sky, accompanied by a second balloon, the *George Sand*, carrying sympathetic American arms dealers. Both behemoths then dipped alarmingly, descending towards the Prussian lines from where a barrage of shots was heard. The hearts of those watching from Paris dropped with them, before rising again as the gas warmed and Gambetta soared away.

At Gambetta's moment of apotheosis, however, those republicans in the crowd of a racist disposition doubted whether he could truly be trusted, influenced by repeated, knowing references in the combative and scurrilous *La Lanterne* to his 'Jewish nose' and resemblance to a 'Polish Jew'. And had they looked for a lead to the reaction of their long-standing hero, Victor Hugo, easily identifiable in the crowd by the kepi that he had worn since the fall of Napoleon had allowed his return from exile, they would have seen standing next to him the very editor responsible for the insidious slanders, the marquis de Rochefort-Luçay.

A tall figure, whose dark, pointed beard, high cheekbones and inimitable brush of wild hair created an appearance somewhere between Mephistopheles and Don Quixote, Rochefort was a contrarian to his fingertips and, more than that, an inveterate egotist. Both he and Hugo waved off the balloons, but Rochefort did so with gritted teeth. For whilst Gambetta was supposedly an ally, who had gifted Rochefort his own unused

the moment arrives to prevent the assassination, technology and cavalry elan are shown to be equally futile beside Prussian good sense: it takes only a well-aimed elbow by Stieber to jog Berezowski's arm as he steps from the crowd with a double-barrelled pistol, and so deflect a bullet meant for the tsar. Discrepancies between Stieber's account and that of other first-hand witnesses are of little consequence. His version might have been true or false, his informant real or not; he might have had no foreknowledge of Berezowski's attack, or arranged for it to be provoked. All that mattered, finally, for Stieber, was the larger message: that for all its pride and pomp, France could not be relied upon when it came to matters of life or death.

Surveying Paris in the distance that misty October evening in 1870, Stieber could reflect that he had served Bismarck well. France had been provoked to war by the doctored 'Ems Telegram', that bore all the hallmarks of Stieber's cunning, and now, in her hour of greatest need, Alexander II refused to be drawn by the envoys of the Government of National Defence into offering assistance. With a supposed tally of 36,000 agents under his control in the occupied territory, and a base in the pleasant park-city of Versailles, whose monarchist population appeared for the moment to hate the Parisian republic even more than they did the Teutonic invader, the Prussian spymaster could now indulge in a subtler and more finessed form of intrigue.

Already he had rewritten the details of Napoleon's defeat at Sedan for propaganda purposes, inventing a scene in which Napoleon was seized while struggling to fire a jammed *mitrailleuse* at the approaching enemy. Facile in its symbolism, the account expressed a still unsatisfied desire for France's utter humiliation. Stieber was astute enough, however, to realise that Bismarck's plans for German unification were not necessarily best served by a straightforward victory; France must rather be weakened for a generation, divided and impoverished. He would have been pleased to see that in the

mistically given maps of Germany but none of France. The result was chaos when, engaged by a well-organised and highly manoeuvrable enemy, the French armies were forced to retreat.

Only six weeks later, the emperor found himself leading the last stand of the Army of Châlons, outside the citadel of Sedan. Nearly 20,000 French soldiers had already been killed in the attempted breakout and a similar number captured, with over 100,000 now encircled. According to the loyalist press, Napoleon rode before the ramparts to rally the defenders; in reality he was dosed with opiates, and courting a bullet to end the agony of his gallstones that France's military shame exacerbated. The courage he showed the following day, 2 September, was of a greater kind, when his acceptance of the need for surrender to save further futile loss of life led to his own capture and exile.

Despite the military defeat, Napoleon's opponents in Paris received the news with elation. 'We shook off the empire as though it had been a nightmare,' wrote Juliette Adam, the feminist and journalist, as those imprisoned for political crimes were freed and borne aloft on the shoulders of the crowd. Amid rapturous scenes at the Hôtel de Ville, on 4 September Léon Gambetta appeared at a window to proclaim a republic to the packed square below, the names of prospective members of the new Government of National Defence confirmed by popular acclamation. Outspoken critics of the old regime, lawyers who had campaigned against its injustices in particular, received key roles, with Gambetta himself appointed as interior minister. Descending to the crowd that thronged the steps outside, Jules Favre, the new minister for foreign affairs, embraced the most radical figures present, among them students to whom he taught politics and science at night school, calling them 'my children' in a gesture of the inclusiveness with which he and his colleagues meant to govern. The harmony did not last long.

France had achieved the creation of a new republic, which all on the left had devoutly craved, but as the armies of

general Moltke closed in to encircle the capital, the question of what that republic should aspire to be was thrust to the fore. Informed of developments in Paris, King Wilhelm fretted that France's new government might somehow conjure a *levée en masse*. He was old enough to remember tales from his childhood of how, in 1793, just such a popular army had risen to drive out the forces of the First Coalition, Prussia's among them, when they attempted to suppress the original French Revolution. The mirror image of those thoughts now preoccupied the more extreme radicals who saw, in an embattled France, fertile ground from which a true social revolution might grow, reversing the setbacks of the past eighty years.

Although reluctant to strengthen the extremists' hand, the new government agreed to throw open recruitment to the National Guard to all able-bodied men of military age. Elisée Reclus was among the 350,000 volunteers who would enlist in the weeks that followed, but he at least was under no illusion that the Guard alone would be able to raise the siege. That would require the reserve Army of the Loire to be marshalled to liberate the capital. With this in mind, Gambetta was chosen for an audacious mission: to leave the encircled city by balloon for Tours, from where he would rally the counter-attack. It was a venture in which there was a promising role for Reclus, who had recently written to Félix Nadar, now head of emergency aerostatic operations, to offer his services as 'an aspiring aeronaut … and something of a meteorologist'.

Whilst the preceding month had been warm and breezy, the September nights starry over Paris, now that the survival of the newborn republic hung in the balance, the windmills on the slopes of Montmartre had suddenly stopped turning. On 6 October 1870, an accurate forecast of the easterly winds that could carry Gambetta safely across the Prussian lines was of vital importance. Elsewhere in the city that day, Gustave Flourens, the political firebrand from *La Marseillaise*, led a demonstration that demanded the restoration of the municipal government of

director of the very police force which, only a few years earlier, had hung him out to dry.

Stieber's continued involvement with Russia created inevitable conflicts of interest. He would provide indispensable advice and intelligence to the tsar for many years to come in his struggle against sedition, but from this time on his ultimate loyalty would always be to Prussia, or rather to Bismarck and his vision of a strong and unified German state. No lover of socialists and revolutionaries, it was always a pleasure for Stieber when their persecution was his clear imperative. But when, as occasionally happened, the greater benefit for Bismarck lay in their manipulation, he was quite prepared to do whatever was required, regardless of his other freelance loyalties.

Such, it appears, was the situation in 1867, when Alexander II asked Stieber to contrive for him a seemingly chance meeting with Napoleon III. Fearing that it was cooperation against Prussia that the tsar wished to discuss, according to his own account, Stieber instead worked to keep France and Russia at loggerheads. Among the most valuable resources he possessed was a burgeoning index-card register of subversives, containing information extracted from police and underworld contacts, including at least one from the Batignolles district of Paris. Stieber claimed to have consulted this informant immediately upon arriving for the 1867 Expo on Tsar Alexander's train, and that it was he who provided the advance warning of Berezowski's assassination plans.

Tall tales were a speciality of Stieber's and his memoirs recount them compellingly, but the ability to manipulate or even rescript the seemingly inevitable course of events in the real world was also an essential aspect of his extraordinary talent for intrigue. The *mise en scène* in his recollections of the parade at Longchamp is superbly facetious: the glittering silver cuirasses and polished bayonets of 40,000 French soldiers, lined up to witness the unveiling of the *mitrailleuse*. And then, when

Soho. His reports back to Berlin were full of blood and thunder as they attempted to frame Marx and his colleagues as conspirators in a planned campaign of assassination that would usher in a general European revolution. However, his claim that 'the murder of princes is formally taught and discussed' failed to persuade a British government whose distaste for foreign spies outweighed that for their victims. Worse for Stieber, Marx deftly outflanked his campaign of provocation, writing to the *Spectator* to denounce the attempt to lure him into a conspiracy. 'We need not add that these persons found no chance of making dupes of us', he concluded. Determined to have the last word, Stieber would counter that, on the contrary, Marx had fallen for his medical disguise so completely as to ask his trusted guest to treat his haemorrhoids. Subsequent fabrications by Stieber saw the grudge between the two men deepen into a lifelong vendetta.

Always sailing too close to the wind, Stieber had eventually been dismissed from the Prussian secret police for abuses of power, but the scurrilous charges levelled at him by the press seemed only to excite suitors for his services. Installed as manager of the Kroll restaurant and Opera House in Berlin's Tiergarten, a sinecure obtained through the good offices of influential friends, Stieber one night received an invitation from the Russian Embassy that would propel him into the secret realm of realpolitik. That it was a pivotal moment in his career is apparent from his excitedly embellished account of his ensuing journey across Berlin, concealed in a laundry basket, to avoid detection by a mob still thirsty for his blood. Having helped unpack him, the young Arthur von Mohrenheim, a consular attaché, hired him on the spot. After only a short time in St Petersburg, his recruit had transformed his basic intelligence-gathering role into one of effective control over Russia's entire foreign intelligence service. So impressed was the Prussian ambassador there, Otto von Bismarck, that when appointed president in 1863, he took Stieber back with him to Berlin to serve as

Paris, banned during the Second Empire. The marchers' cries of '*Vive la Commune!*' recalled the insurrectionary government of 1792. That evening, though, in the place Saint-Pierre, revolutionary fervour was set aside and all thoughts anxiously fixed on the present, as sailors paid out the tethering ropes of a meteorological balloon that rose slowly into the misty sky.

Other novice aeronauts who rode up into the Paris sky in the weeks that followed would recount how, as the horizon curved with increasing altitude, they experienced a revelatory oneness with the 'pantheistic "Great Whole" '. The globe was already long established as a potent symbol of the deep brotherhood of man for Reclus, a committed advocate of the fledgling International League of Peace and Liberty, whose congresses called for a United States of Europe as a solution to the hazard posed by feuding dynasties and a precursor to a federal republic that would span the world. Strikingly tall, gaunt and bearded, forty years of asceticism had sculpted him into the image of a medieval saint, and he had the temperament and kind but penetrating gaze to match. Yet his days of religious devotion had long since given way to a faith only in a new and just social order. As he peered down from the balloon, between taking measurements of air pressure, the view below would have revealed to him a future fraught with difficulties.

Away to the south-east, Paris lay spread out below in all its glory, Haussmann's great radial boulevards arrowing out to the suburbs, evidence of France's defeat and not far beyond. Along the roads that extended towards the forty miles of walls that girdled the city, lines of yellow tents marked where the reserve battalions of the French army were encamped, mingling with those defeated units that had fallen back on the capital following the recent debacle in Alsace. Meanwhile, in the Bois de Boulogne – laid out by Haussmann as a great, green public space – evidence of the siege was everywhere. Hardly a tree remained standing amidst a stubble of stumps, while the grass

was cropped by a flock of 250 sheep brought into Paris in a wholly inadequate gesture towards self-sufficiency.

From time to time, close to the perimeter of Paris, a dark droplet of troops would coalesce and trickle out in formation through the city's gates to relieve the garrison in one or other of the fourteen great fortresses that comprised the capital's outermost line of defence. Every such movement drew heavy fire from German rifles and cannon. For outside the embrace of the ramparts, 200,000 conscripts from Prussia and the North German Confederation sat warming themselves beside braziers, ready to starve the City of Light into submission.

From his headquarters at Versailles, Colonel Wilhelm Stieber, secret councillor to Bismarck's government and head of military intelligence for the North German Confederation, could have watched the speck of the tethered meteorological balloon with a degree of equanimity, confident that the dice were increasingly loaded against any aeronautic politician foolish enough to attempt an escape.

For more than a week, Stieber's agents had been close to choking the last lines of communication in and out of Paris. They had tapped and then cut a telegraph cable laid secretly in the waterways between Paris and Tours as the Prussian armies approached; meanwhile, all possible sites of signal exchange with the semaphore stations on the Arc de Triomphe, the Panthéon and the roof of the newly built Opéra were under tight surveillance. To interdict the return flights of hundreds of homing pigeons that had been exchanged between Paris and the provinces prior to hostilities, Stieber had equipped the army with trained falcons. And as for the decrepit balloons that occasionally limped out of the city with no hope of return, delivery was expected any day of a new wagon-mounted gun from Krupps, with a trajectory high enough to send whatever small store of the gas-filled leviathans remained in Paris plummeting

to the earth in flames. But sealing the city off from the world was only the start of Stieber's strategy.

Stieber had first applied his talents to military intelligence during Prussia's rapid victory over Austria in 1866, but it was in the clandestine struggle against revolutionary elements that he had made his name. Amply rewarded for his nefarious efforts, he could boast the unique honour of having served concurrently as a leading figure in the political police of both Prussia and Russia and, even as he masterminded the intelligence campaign against France for Bismarck, he remained a senior security adviser to the tsar. The key to his success, in conventional war as in the fight against subversion, lay in a simple truth: that by controlling the flow of information, he could shape reality to his own design. It was a lesson he had learned long before and whose application he had been refining ever since.

Though Stieber would not have known it, his path and that of the geographer in the balloon had run strangely parallel. Some years the senior of Elisée Reclus, when Stieber was dispatched to London in 1851 by the Prussian police, he already had several notable successes under his belt as a deep-cover agent, first during the bloody suppression of an uprising by Silesian weavers in 1844, then six years later in Paris, when his intrigues at the heart of the Communist League had destroyed the organisation from within. The former escapade had led the police president to dub him a 'degenerate subject', but the latter had won him the admiration of the Prussian minister of the interior, Ferdinand von Westphalen, who promptly handpicked him for the delicate mission in England. Its ostensible purpose was the protection of precious objects loaned to the Great Exhibition of that year; the real aim, though, was to discover evidence for the prosecution of Karl Marx, who had married the minister's own half-sister and dragged her into shameful and penurious exile.

Posing as Herr Dr Schmidt, journalist and physician, Stieber had quickly inveigled his way into the Marx family's home in

Nothing short of the most brutal suppression of dissent now seemed likely to drive the youth movement towards violent tactics, at least in any significant numbers. And yet it was just this kind of brutal suppression that Dostoevsky's purportedly 'realist' writing risked encouraging in the members of a court that suffered from a congenital predisposition to fear the worst and to act accordingly. Nor was Dostoevsky alone in his distaste for the youth of Russia. As tutor to the tsarevitch, his friend Constantine Pobedonostsev, future head of the Orthodox synod, was busy inculcating the heir to the imperial throne with his own reactionary beliefs.

Meanwhile, at St Petersburg University the fervently expressed views of the brilliant new professor of physiology, Elie Cyon, and his harsh marking of papers which exhibited too great an attraction to positivism's political side, were provoking students attending his lectures to pelt him with eggs and gherkins. Thriving on the antagonism of an audience filled with radicals whose arrest and interrogation he craved, Cyon once even interrupted a lecture on the medical use of the cardiograph to venomously taunt them with the machine's alternative application: as a detector of lies and hypocrisy. Provocation of a different sort would, before long, become a consistent feature of the Russian police. Insofar as the young radicals' commitment to the positivist cause was tantamount to a religious calling, however, Cyon's accusations of blasphemous hubris held some water.

In an atmosphere heightened by grief and anger, pseudo-religious sentiments permeated the minds of even the most zealous atheists. 'They went out as bearers of a revelation rather than political propagandists,' Kravchinsky would recall, adding that 'Men were trying not just to reach a certain practical end, but also to satisfy a deeply felt duty, an aspiration for moral perfection.' Mere proximity to the movement's secret printing presses filled him 'with the subdued feeling of a worshipper entering a church', and as the *narodniki*

of the 200 regiments of the National Guard responded to his summons to defend the city from imminent attack, and on 8 May he resigned and went into hiding.

Rigault and his friends, among them Louise Michel, seized their opportunity and appointed Charles Delescluze, the much-imprisoned veteran of '48, to lead the coming battle. 'Enough of militarism!' he declared, 'No more general staffs with badges of rank and gold braid at every seam! Make way for the people, for the fighters with bare arms! The hour of revolutionary warfare has struck!' Dressed like a remnant of a bygone age, his health ruined by consumption, Delescluze was an oddly fitting figurehead for what the Commune had become as its moment of destiny approached.

Fifty dawns had come and gone since Louise Michel had raised the alarm in Montmartre, but none can yet have seemed more ominous than that which broke over the fortress of Issy on 5 May. Visiting as a journalist for the Commune's *Journal officiel*, Clemenceau described the scenes of ruined masonry, smashed by German Krupps guns and now blasted by ten Versaillais shells a minute, and noted the bodies of the 500 soldiers killed by their own countrymen, stored in a makeshift morgue in the cellars. The focus of his piece, though, was his friend Michel, ambulance woman turned virago, who four days earlier had rallied the troops to retake the key salient at the Clamart rail station, and was now keeping watch alone as the enemy earthworks came ever closer. 'In order not to be killed herself, she killed others and I have never seen her to be more calm' reported Clemenceau. 'How she escaped being killed a hundred times over before my eyes, I'll never know. And I only watched her for an hour.' It was morale-boosting stuff, but if the propaganda exaggerated her courage, then Michel was more than happy to live the lie.

'It's not heroism, I assure you,' she wrote to Victor Hugo, 'I just love danger! Perhaps that's the savage in me.' The role of Enjolras, in which Hugo had cast her in their playful com-

munications, now fitted like a glove, and Michel seemed ubiquitous. From service on the front line as a member of the National Guard she rushed to chair meetings of the revolutionary clubs and vigilance committees, then on to a hospital to tend the wounded. Nothing could sap her 'exalted' spirit so long as new schools such as one that would teach industrial arts to girls continued to be opened, or whilst she could play her part in redistributive justice, levying a tax on the convent of St Bernard to help pay for the care of the injured. But while she soldiered on, others sought distraction from their impending doom.

When the shells had begun to fall on 1 May, softening up the city for the assault, public performances continued to draw audiences. There was even an appetite for operas with what seemed like morale-sapping themes, though the success of *Le Prophète*, Meyerbeer's dramatic account of the crushing of the Anabaptist insurrection in sixteenth-century Munster, might simply have been due to the ice ballet choreographed with dancers on roller skates that was introduced to lighten the tone. 'This grandeur, this tranquillity, this blindness in an assembly of men already menaced by 100,000 *chassepots*, is one of the most stupefying facts ever given to a historian to record' wrote the twenty-one-year-old Gaston Da Costa, Rigault's secretary from the Prefecture of Police.

Da Costa's reaction to the complacency was to climb on to the roof of Thiers' town house, urging on the crowd that accompanied him to loot its contents and burn it to the ground. The next day, 16 May, it was the Vendôme Column that was targeted, crowds filling the square to witness the demolition of the great monument that Napoleon had erected in celebration of his victory in the Battle of Austerlitz. 'We wanted it all' remarked Courbet, who as head of the arts commission would be blamed for inciting the vandalism. For three hours that afternoon they hacked and sawed and pulled on ropes until the column toppled. Laid out on manure straw, its verdigris mass provided a spectacular backdrop for photographs, in which Com-

of 612 being taken into custody in the course of the year, of which nearly a quarter were women. Others estimated the total, including those seized the following year, to be as high as 4,000, Pahlen's supposedly comprehensive figure representing rather the number who would be kept in detention for at least two years without trial. 'It was as though a disease had swept through a certain social stratum,' Vera Figner would remember. 'Everyone had lost a friend or relative.' Chaikovsky fled the city, along with Klements, Kravchinsky and the others; only Kropotkin, fatefully, remained behind.

As the radical movement buckled, the ideologues of reaction cranked up their rhetoric, encouraging the police to carry on relentlessly with the persecution. The contribution of Fyodor Dostoevsky at this time was insidious. A quarter-century before, the novelist had himself been under sentence of death for sedition and reprieved only at the very last moment. During his penal service in the army, however, he had come to revile the idols of his youth with the kind of excoriating scorn that only those for whom religion had filled an existential void can muster. Writing to Tsarevitch Alexander in 1873, he presented his work on *The Possessed* as a process of empathetic enquiry: 'to pose the question, and, as clearly as possible, to give an answer to it in the form of a novel: In what ways in our transitional and strange contemporary society is the emergence possible not just of Nechaev, but of Nechaevs, and in what way may it happen that these Nechaevs eventually gather for themselves Nechaevists?'

Whilst the literary merit of Dostoevsky's work is beyond question, his alarmist preoccupation was unjustified and arguably irresponsible. Nechaev was imprisoned in the dreaded Alexeyevsky Ravelin prison, a triangular moated tower, slightly removed from the Peter and Paul fortress and entirely isolated from the world at large; unlikely ever to re-enter society, the revelations during his trial had lost him all support and his doctrine of murderous conspiracy stood discredited.

At first the arrests were haphazard, carried out by Third Section officers following a vague scent and lucky enough to stumble upon radicals clumsily disguised in their ersatz peasant costumes, or else to receive tip-offs from locals exasperated by the hectoring tone of their uninvited guests. The hopes of the *narodniki* that the economic slump of two years earlier, and the hardship that it had caused to subsistence farmers, might have broken the peasantry's deep loyalty to the tsar as their mystical leader proved misplaced. With time, plus a thousand Tikhomirovs and Kravchinskys to offer enlightenment, the peasants might perhaps have been cured of their superstitious awe of authority; as it was, radicals across all of Russia's thirty-seven provinces soon discovered that they had walked into a picturesque trap. More often than not it was *they* who were seen as the enemy, and the tsar's agents as the peasants' protectors.

The youthful elite of the country was picked up by the cartload and hauled into indefinite detention. Some were indeed committed activists, many others simply friends along for the ride and the country air, or merely unlucky acquaintances. But as the Third Section sifted through their haul of prisoners, patterns and connections began to emerge that made possible a further stage of more methodical and carefully targeted police action. Colonel Stieber's recent reforms of the Third Section had been designed to prepare it to confront and disrupt continent-wide networks of diehard, professional revolutionaries; the present campaign of persecution against untried men and women who were barely out of their teens was like shooting fish in a barrel.

Sofia Perovskaya was among those seized in the first St Petersburg raid late in the summer of 1873, Tikhomirov in one of the many that followed during that November. Piece by piece the movement in the capital, blamed for the ineffectual rabble-rousing, was dismantled. The exact numbers of those rounded up are elusive. Count Pahlen, the minister of justice, wrote

munards arranged themselves in formal rows, as though attending some bourgeois festivity. Few there would live long enough to have their picture taken again. 'This colossal symbol of the Grand Army – how fragile it was, how empty and miserable! It seemed to have been devoured from the middle by a multitude of rats, like France itself, their glory tarnished' was how one survivor remembered the grand act of destruction.

For the previous week, the enemy from Versailles had been advancing, overwhelming the forts and fighting their way across the Bois de Boulogne. The Communards may have disparaged the enemy troops as lackeys of the rich and powerful, but the release by Bismarck of over 200,000 prisoners of war had made them a formidable opponent. The failings in military discipline were all on the Commune's side, where too many of those who had revelled in their new freedoms now spurned Delescluze's rallying call to 'save the country, though possibly now only behind the barricades' in favour of further symbolic gestures of retribution.

As the Versaillais pressed forward, the Tuileries Palace, the Hôtel de Ville, the Palais de Justice and the prefecture all went up in flames, along with dozens of other public buildings. In the case of the Tuileries, the central dome of the Salle des Maréchaux was blown up with gunpowder less than forty-eight hours after the last Sunday concert in the gardens had attracted an audience of 1,500. The Communards' explanation, that the arson was strategically necessary to slow the advance of the Versaillais, was plausible only in rare instances.

Day after day the enemy pressed on, fighting from street to street, flanking the barricades thrown up in their path, charging through alleys and courtyards, or sledgehammering their way through the internal walls of apartment blocks to emerge and shoot down their defenders from behind. It was a bewildering battlefield even for veterans, let alone those experiencing war for the first time. National Guard reinforcements would arrive to find themselves in the eerie stillness of a killing ground

from which the battle had moved on, their dead comrades left propped against the walls under a drifting pall of gunpowder smoke. And when saboteurs were blamed for the explosion of the avenue Rapp arsenal that cost 200 lives, fear spread in Communard Paris that the enemy was already in their midst.

As dawn broke on 23 May, Louise Michel was back in Montmartre where the adventure had begun, awaiting an assault more ferocious by far than when General Lecomte had come for the guns. In the quiet of the night, amid the perfume of early summer, she picked flowers for the dead, and must have wondered whether she would join them before the day's end. There were scarcely a hundred Guardsmen to defend the Buttes, while in the previous six weeks the cannon in the artillery park had been allowed to rust beyond use. Once again descending the hill to summon help, Michel found herself caught up in the fighting in the streets below. Before she could return, the hill had fallen. The captured National Guard were marched directly to the garden of the rue des Rosiers guardhouse where the generals had been killed, one of the many liquidation centres that were springing up across the city, and massacred.

East along the boulevard de Clichy the Commune fighters were pushed back. A fierce resistance was mounted in place Blanche, where a battalion formed from the Union des Femmes and led by Michel's friend, Natalie Lemel, was said to have been in the thick of it; women whose loved ones had died and had nothing left to lose, they fought with abandon. Falling back, Michel passed General Dombrowski, the Polish commander of the Right Bank, who shouted that all was lost; the next moment a bullet knocked him dead from his horse. His comrades improvised a shroud out of blue silk sheets they found in the nearby home of Baron Haussmann, whose urban redesign with its long straight boulevards was proving so useful to the Versaillais army's manoeuvres.

while he was solving it I would explain the alphabet to another. Then I would assign a lesson to one who could read, then explain a map to others.' Yet Tikhomirov's diligence in responding to his pupils' questions drew him into dangerous territory. Asked by his chemistry students about the will-o'-the-wisps and wood goblins that filled the fields and forests, he and his colleagues were perfectly unguarded in explaining away such features of rural folklore as phosphoric miasmas and magic-lantern effects; but what appeared to such confirmed rationalists as a virtuous debunking of superstition, was tantamount to an attack on the essential credulity of the masses on which the entire social system depended.

Even at the time of the supposedly liberalising reforms of 1862, an edict had brusquely outlawed the teaching of workers as 'likely to undermine faith in the Christian religion and in the institution of private property, and to incite the working classes to revolt.' To a Third Section grappling with an ever more complex society – one in which the emancipation of the serfs was accompanied by the growth of independent professions and a growing intelligentsia – the underlying principle remained crucial to their maintenance of social order. Since Karakozov's attempt to kill the tsar in 1866, an anxious and uncertain Alexander II had fallen deeper under the influence of a reactionary cabal at court, and the actions of the *narodniki* were bound to provoke a forceful response.

'They ruled by fear,' Kropotkin would write of this hard-line faction, led by Shuvalov and his ally Trepov, and advised by the manipulative Prussian counter-subversive, Colonel Stieber. The tsar himself was the prime target of their alarmism, and was soon in thrall to their exaggerated reports of 'the spectre of revolution about to break out in St Petersburg'. Even once it became clear that their concerted campaign of repression had backfired, following the decision to recall the female medical students from Switzerland, draconian tactics continued to be advanced as the only way out of a worsening predicament.

of our education and our culture.' Time and again, the exuberance of privileged youth collided with the hard realities of work and poverty, producing consequences that were heavy with black comedy and pathos. With their motto of 'All for the people, and nothing for ourselves', the *narodniki* descended on unsuspecting factories and peasant communities in groups of three or four, yet few had any hard skills to offer in exchange for the food they took from the hungry mouths of their hosts' families. One gaggle of teenaged girls who earnestly resolved to acquire a trade in St Petersburg before departing typified the pervasive naïvety: 'Their faces are young, serious, decided and clear', reported one contemporary observer. 'They talk little because there is no time. And what is there to talk about? Everything has been decided. Everything is as clear as day.'

Nor were the privileged Chaikovskyists any longer immune to the indignities of proletariat justice. Bored by a lecture that Klements was delivering, one metalworker at a munitions factory reached round from behind to smear him with axle grease. Kropotkin decried the affront to his friend as symptomatic of the self-interested elitism that he had witnessed previously among the more complacent of the Swiss watchmakers. His own failure to find the right words to win over the ill-educated masses had left him smarting. Even when he turned his hand to written propaganda, in the form of a historical novella, Tikhomirov had to step in as ghostwriter to untangle the ideological knottiness of Kropotkin's prose.

Undoubtedly, some *narodniki* were better suited to their chosen task than others. A subscriber to the 'great man' theory of history, Kravchinsky's choice of a back-breaking job as a sawyer, and his physical strength and determination, apparently made such a strong impression on the peasants that it prised open their minds to his propaganda. Tikhomirov offered an equally upbeat assessment of his own dynamic contribution as a teacher: a more fitting and hard-headed choice of role than many. 'I would give an arithmetic problem to one;

'I proclaim war without truce or mercy upon these assassins,' the Versaillais commander General Gallifet had warned more than a month earlier. It was the women of the Commune above all who were demonised by the Catholic country boys of Thiers' army, the sexual revolution that had taken place an unwelcome challenge to their conventional sense of masculine prerogatives. At Chateau d'Eau, among the last of the barricades to fall three days later, the female defenders would be stripped and brutalised before being slaughtered. Michel, captured at some point along the way, miraculously managed to avoid their fate, but with every misstep by the Commune's defenders, any hope of quarter receded.

During the weeks since Rigault had taken them hostage, the Archbishop of Paris and his fellow prisoners had remained untouched, despite mounting Communard losses. Now, finally, Rigault's self-restraint cracked. Ferré, his recent successor as prefect of police, signed the death warrant for the archbishop, who had generously written of his persecutors that 'the world judged them to be worse than they really were'; Rigault himself commanded the firing squad at Saint-Pelagie prison. Though he and the archbishop had been bitterly at odds during the recent Vatican Council, Pius IX would condemn his murderers as 'devils risen up from hell bringing the inferno to the streets of Paris', and the Versaillais treated them accordingly. The harshest persecution of all, though, was reserved for the *pétroleuses*, crones rumoured to have set Paris ablaze in a diabolical hysteria, in what rapidly came to resemble a witch hunt.

'I am known to be cruel, but I am even crueller than you can imagine,' Gallifet snarled at a column of prisoners containing Michel. She sang a mocking tune in reply, but once more seemed strangely invulnerable, amid scenes that became more hellish by the hour. Among the general population, any suspects found with powder-blackened hands or shoulders bruised from the recoil of rifles were selected for summary execution, while the general himself picked out others to die

simply for their ugliness. Somewhere among the carnage, Rigault was killed by a shot to the head, his body dumped in a gutter among the piles of corpses.

'All around us fall from the skies, like black rain, little fragments of burned paper; the records and the accounts of France,' wrote the novelist Edmond de Goncourt, reminded of the ash that had smothered Pompeii. For others the agony of the city brought to mind 'a great ship in distress, furiously firing off its maroons'. From the boulevard Voltaire, the last small remnant of the Commune's soldiers retreated, but with almost nowhere left to go. Turning, they saw their leader Delescluze climb the barricade and offer himself to the enemy's rifles, silhouetted against the sunset. 'Forgive me for departing before you,' he had scribbled to his sister, 'but I no longer feel I possess the courage to submit to another defeat, after so many others.' The report of the shots that felled him would have merged into the ambient noise of killing that filled the balmy, sun-soaked evening.

Mostly it was the whirr of the *mitrailleuses* doling out deadly punishment: 'an expeditious contrivance', said *The Times*, that 'standing a hundred yards off, mows them down like grass'. In the Red neighbourhoods its distant sound blended with that of flies that buzzed over the makeshift mortuaries, gorging on the spilled blood. A few score men, the final defenders of a society that believed that 'property is theft', would hold out for one more night in the Père Lachaise cemetery, sheltering behind the tombs and gravestones, on plots bought and owned by their occupants 'in perpetuity'. The following morning they were coralled over the crest of the hill towards the rear wall, against which they would be butchered. And yet the Semaine Sanglante, or Bloody Week, still had several days to run. 'No half measures this time. Europe will thank us when it's over,' a priest in Versailles reassured a friend.

'Childhood, individual liberty, the rights of man – nothing was respected. It was a mighty letting loose of every sort of

position, and dedicating oneself to the service of the masses.' It was to be a great, noble, bracingly self-effacing adventure.

The precocious Sofia Perovskaya had already set a fine example the previous year, when she had lived alongside the peasantry for several months while administering to them inoculations against smallpox. Now Chaikovsky, Kropotkin and Kravchinsky were among the first to venture out, testing the water with visits to local factories. It was an uphill struggle. Often they delivered the same lecture to the same audience, twice in quick succession, to be sure that they had understood. But while Kravchinsky was greeted with 'encores' for his rousing, demotic style, few were able to grasp the meaning of Kropotkin's rarified prose.

By the summer of 1873, the early trickle of radicals had surged into a torrent of many hundreds, their numbers swollen by the return of scores of young women from Switzerland, most trailing male admirers in their wake and with a moral point to prove. The government could scarcely have encouraged domestic disturbance more effectively than by its ill-considered and untimely threat to bar any medical students who stayed in Switzerland from ever graduating in Russia. And the government's dissemination of vicious propaganda claiming that the women were using their medical knowledge to abort the babies conceived of their promiscuity had fuelled their outrage. Like the original group of Chaikovskyists, once back in Russia the women of the Fritsche Circle also targeted factory workers as being 'more highly developed mentally' and therefore more receptive to their message.

Nevertheless, the tactics of the *narodniki* were fraught with hazards, and though well intentioned, the campaign 'to the people' was propelled by intellectual arrogance and class guilt, as Chaikovsky's later testimony admitted: 'We believed that history itself had laid upon us the mission to open up to the *narod* some truth that only we knew, and thereby … deliver the *narod* from all the suffering and humiliation that it bore for the sake

ideal, forcing his cautious colleagues' hand by volunteering for a task that entailed utter submission to the group's will.

The new role that Kropotkin proposed for himself would have meant severing all ties with the group, to plunge back into the life of the imperial court that he so despised. Only, this time, he would be there with something close to treachery in mind. 'I will agitate among the higher courtiers, I will try to unite them, if possible, into some form of organisation,' he promised the circle, who were eager for constitutional reform. To establish a radical cell so close to the heart of tsarist power, where reactionary forces were in the ascendant, risked almost certain arrest. But imprisonment was not the greatest sacrifice Kropotkin was prepared to make on behalf of 'such a collection of morally superior men and women': as a man who had renounced his title and his lineage, the denial of his true sympathies that such a deep-cover operation entailed would have amounted to a double torment. Fortunately for Kropotkin, his brinksmanship paid off: the question of policy was revisited to find more common ground.

On one subject all could agree: it was from the benighted common people of Russia – the *narod*, peasants and factory workers – that the pressure for change must come. For Chaikovsky, the greatest mistakes made during the reforms of the early 1860s stemmed from a lack of consultation with the people whom they affected, who might have anticipated the catastrophic consequences the tsar's advisers failed to foresee. Some of the young idealists of the circle heeded Bakunin's advice that they should seek to merge with and learn from the people whilst inciting them to revolution. Most, however, preferred the lesson of Lavrov's *Historical Letters* of 1868: that as members of the intelligentsia they had a moral duty to lead the peasantry to enlightenment. Collectively, the Chaikovskyists decided to follow the latter's advice, 'breaking all ties with the past, leaving parents, friends, studies, social

clerical fury – a St Bartholomew to the sixth power,' Rochefort would later record of the Semaine Sanglante, recalling the terrible massacre of Huguenots by Catholics 300 years earlier. He underestimated by half. The death toll of the 1793 Terror too was overshadowed, as was its rate of execution. Then, only 2,500 had been guillotined in eighteen months; in a single week of 1871, ten times that number or more died from bullets sprayed by the *mitrailleuses*. The Paris municipality paid for the burial of 17,000 Communards, but the bodies of many more disappeared into the fabric of the city, buried haphazardly beneath the overturned barricades, in the Parc Montceau, or in the chalk mines under the Buttes Chaumont, the pleasure garden gifted to the working class four years earlier, where now the tunnels were dynamited to conceal the dead.

Rochefort himself was arrested on a train outside Paris, attempting to escape via a route operated by the Masons that had previously spirited Elie Reclus to safety. He had been betrayed, it was said, by Paschal Grousset, one of the Jacobins with whom he had verbally crossed swords. Louise Michel's route out of Paris was guaranteed, as a member of one of the columns of prisoners a quarter of a mile long that bled out of the city towards the army base on Satory Plain, now a concentration camp. 'We walked and walked,' she would recall, 'lulled by the rhythmic beat of the horses' hooves, through a night lit by irregular flashes of light … We were marching into the unknown …'

3. *From Prince to Anarchist*

Russia and Switzerland, 1871–1874

In 1871, Prince Peter Kropotkin, one of Russia's most eminent young scientists, reached a watershed, his growing awareness of social injustice leading him to question whether he could remain a part of the Establishment. During the previous decade he had led expeditions by the Imperial Russian Geographical Society into Asia and beyond the Arctic Circle, travels that informed his groundbreaking reconstruction of the geological changes that had reshaped the earth during the glacial period. Now, when offered the post of its secretary, he declined. In the face of the widespread human suffering that he had witnessed in the course of his life, the honour struck him as an empty vanity. 'What right had I to these higher joys,' he reasoned, 'when all around me was nothing but misery and the struggle for a mouldy bit of bread?'

For more than ten years, after the 'Saviour' tsar, Alexander II, had first granted the serfs their freedom then backtracked on a slew of other reforms that might have made the gesture meaningful, the youth of Russia had postured as nihilists. During that time, Kropotkin and his older brother, Alexander, had remained focused on the theoretical challenges of effecting social change. In 1871, however, a female friend of Alexander's wife had crystallised Kropotkin's dilemma. Sofia Nikolaevna Lavrova was a graduate of the Alarchinsky courses, which from 1869 had offered women in Russia a non-degree programme of higher education. She was now studying in Switzerland and, during a trip back home to

that it should be political only, rather than a more general upheaval in the structure of society, and must be achieved by constitutional means. Martin Langans, a leading member of the circle's sister organisation in the south of Russia, would offer an eloquent expression of the limit of their hopes: 'Back then,' he wrote, 'we believed that the state, like any powerful weapon, could both create happiness for mankind and oppress it, and that the mechanics lay in the creation of circumstances under which the abuse of power would become impossible.'

A visceral hatred for the tsar had yet to take hold, with the group directing its ire against those reactionary officials who were perceived to mislead and misinterpret him. On the one occasion when a member proposed assassinating Alexander II, the entire circle rounded on him, threatening to obstruct his intentions using whatever physical means necessary. And yet to those persuaded by Bakunin's analysis of Russia's predicament, any delay seemed certain only to weaken their position and play into their enemies' hands. While they hesitated, the advance of European capitalism and industry would continue to seduce the peasant from his loyalty to the land and erode the traditions of communistic solidarity, offering the distant prospect of individualistic self-advancement whilst plunging workers into even worse living conditions than before.

For all his admiration of the circle and its members, Kropotkin refused to cede on the key principle of collective action, and tried every ruse to win the majority around to his view. Initially declining to surrender his personal wealth to the communal coffers, he made certain that no one could mistake his stance for avarice or self-interest. It was 'because I am saving it for a more important time,' he told them. 'Later, when it becomes necessary to arm the workers in order to destroy the bourgeoisie, then no one will give a kopeck.' Staking his fragile credibility with the circle on this sensitive issue, he went on to reaffirm his commitment to the collective

anarchist, [while] anarchism for us was still entirely new.' Even Kravchinsky lagged behind Kropotkin in this respect, for despite his later profession to have been an anarchist at this point, his erroneous claim that 'in 1870 the whole of advanced Russia was anarchist' suggests a certain ideological confusion.

Few in the circle would have disagreed with Kravchinsky's proselytising atheism, and most would have thrilled to Bakunin's claim that the traditional Russian village community, the *mir*, would be in the vanguard of the eventual revolution, 'freed from the oppressive tutelage of the state to become an ideal form of anarchical government, by all with the consent of all.' For most young Russians, however, faced with the realities of a tight tsarist security apparatus and the atrophied popular instinct for justice, any question of a revolution within their own lifetime appeared, for the moment, delusional. Replying to his brother's musings on the subject some years earlier, Alexander Kropotkin had expressed what remained the majority view among the country's dissidents: 'Of course I would rush to a social revolution; I would go to the barricades … But as for the success of the revolution, I wouldn't hope for much; it would be too early I'm sure, and they would defeat us.' Semi-clandestine visits to Russia by prominent figures from the Commune in the aftermath of the debacle of 1871 had briefly bolstered the extremist case, with Klements later reflecting that events in Paris had sparked 'a new era in the development of the revolutionary deed in Russia'. Yet the conspicuous pathos of the defeated Communards' predicament underlined the futility of insurrection, if launched prematurely. The fate of Marx's envoy to the Commune Elizaveta Dmitrieff, arrested on her return home from Paris and sent to suffer a slow death in Siberia, offered the bitterest reminder of the price to be paid for such sedition.

Kropotkin's admission had nevertheless galvanised debate within the twenty-strong circle over the nature and scope of the change that Russia required. Still, though, the majority held

Russia for the summer, became a regular visitor to Kropotkin's apartment in St Petersburg, charming him with her intellect and challenging him over his lack of political engagement. When their friendship prompted the political Third Section of the police to search his rooms for smuggled seditious literature, Kropotkin was torn between outrage at the intrusion and contentment from finally being deemed worthy of their attention. When the withdrawal of government funding for his next Arctic expedition was withdrawn, he had the excuse for which he had been waiting: he would visit Sofia in Zurich and use his time in Switzerland to take stock.

Until only a few years earlier, the final stage of the journey would have been arduous, travelling by coach along the military roads that Napoleon had laid across the Alpine passes, before concluding his journey with a rapid descent on the far side of the mountain range by sledge: 'like being precipitated downstairs in a portmanteau' according to one English traveller of the time. A Fell railway had offered a questionable improvement in 1868, its locomotive heaving soot-blackened carriages over the Saint-Cenis route by means of a cogged ratchet on a notched rail; by the time Kropotkin set off in February 1872, Alfred Nobel's dynamite had blasted a route clear through the mountains to the promised land beyond. A man used to challenging travel, he would nevertheless have appreciated what it meant to live in an era of remarkable technological progress.

A decade earlier, Kropotkin had graduated from the Academy of the Corps of Pages with the highest distinction and a choice of the most prestigious military commissions. To the shock of the imperial court and his family, he had enrolled instead in a regiment of Cossacks stationed in the depths of Siberia, deliberately cutting himself adrift from his privileged background. His hectoring father was apoplectic: all the military discipline he had imparted to his son, all the gifts of rifles and sentry boxes, had failed to inspire Peter to better his own rather undistinguished army career. It did not

help that his late wife, whose memory Peter's stepmother had done everything she could to erase, had herself been a Cossack, with all that fiery tradition of independence. Peter's rectitudinous cousin, Dmitri, then serving as Tsar Alexander II's aide-de-camp, had tried to intervene, urging him to stay and pursue the glittering opportunities that awaited him in St Petersburg. Even the tsar himself had taken an interest, insisting that his erstwhile page de chambre explain his eccentric decision in person. On being told by Kropotkin that he hoped travel might afford him insights into how society could be improved, Alexander II had appeared overwhelmed with world-weariness. Kropotkin would later conclude that the tsar was already predicting defeat in the great programme of reforms that he had set in motion only months before. Fortunately, however, the young Peter was owed a favour. When mysterious fires had swept through the adminstrative district of St Petersburg, the initiative Kropotkin had shown in raising the alarm had saved much of the old wooden city from devastation. He chose the Siberian posting as his reward.

The twenty-year-old Kropotkin took with him to Siberia a smouldering disdain for all arbitrary authority. As children on the family's feudal estate in Nikolskoe, deprived of their dead mother's tender attentions, Peter and his brother Alexander had considered themselves fortunate to enjoy 'among the servants, that atmosphere of love which children must have around them'. But it was the kindness and fellow feeling of the oppressed. Little had changed for the serfs since the days of Ivan the Terrible, and to Kropotkin's father and his ilk, they remained mere property: 'souls' to be traded without regard to ties of blood or affection and ruthlessly exploited. Not even death could free them from their bondage, as the teenaged Kropotkin would have learned when helping his tutor translate Gogol's *Dead Souls*: in the vicious world it satirised, beatings were liberally administered, and those serfs punished by being sent into the army as cannon fodder,

turned railway boom town. Fellow junior officers remembered how his room was stripped of all furniture except a stool, so that nothing should distract from his reading, which he continued even while walking around the barracks. If the other soldiers viewed such eccentricities with some suspicion, their respect for his burly frame and innate acumen in military matters deterred mockery. He was a man over whom women would swoon and men hover in the hope that something of his aura might rub off on them.

Kravchinsky's admission at this time into the Chaikovsky Circle, unopposed and at the first attempt, was hardly surprising: he had already demonstrated a ready talent for the circle's main business, having smuggled illicit pamphlets on his own initiative for some time. His knowledge of the French Revolution also struck a chord with members, who self-consciously modelled themselves on Danton, Desmoulins and the Girondists of the 1790s. The welcome he received was in marked contrast to the group's more circumspect reaction a few weeks later when Dmitri Klements put forward the name of Prince Kropotkin for membership.

The thirty-year-old Kropotkin appeared, at first, an antiquated anomaly to a group that was bound in most cases by connections from school and college days, but there was more to their resistance than this. German Lopatin did not mince his words. 'What prince do you have now? Perhaps he wishes to amuse himself beneath the mask of democracy,' he argued, 'but later he will become a dignitary and cause us to be hanged.' Eventually, Kropotkin was elected thanks to the testimony of the recently released Sofia Perovskaya that he was reliable and 'completely young in spirit'; but whilst those who had suspected him of a hidden agenda mistook its nature, they were not altogether misguided. Lev Tikhomirov probably came closest to the truth when he recognised in Kropotkin an intellectual impatience with his colleagues: 'A revolutionary to the core [he was] already at that time an

applicant to the circle, who on failing to receive the unanimous agreement of members necessary for admission had turned informer for the Third Section, evoked their devoted and egalitarian beliefs with surprising generosity. 'There are no "juniors" and "elders" among them, all are equal, everyone acts according to the circumstances, unaffected by the wishes of others, though the manner of their actions does reflect a mood of resolute unity, as they are always following a common aim.' In reality, by mid-1872 that unity was becoming increasingly fragile, and even after the departure of members who favoured a more direct form of action, the whispered debate over future policy continued.

Into this simmering uncertainty stepped the dashing figure of Sergei Kravchinsky. Intense and solitary by disposition, when he joined the Mikhailovskoe Artillery Academy as a cadet he already spoke four languages and, having honed his revolutionary credentials since adolescence, possessed a grasp of radical ideas far in advance of his years. Strikingly handsome, with a rich mane of brown hair and the beginnings of a fulsome beard, he was remembered by one contemporary, Shishko, as 'an exceptionally serious and even sombre young man, [with] a bit of a stoop, a large forehead and sharp features'. The strongest impression that the nineteen-year-old Kravchinsky had made on Shishko, though, was during a summer camp in the forest near Lake Duderhof when, addressing a clandestine gathering of cadets on the imperative of revolution, his oratory had taken flight. Invoking the great and expeditious changes wrought by the French Revolution, compared to which the endless examples from history of concessions from above appeared meagre and easily reversible, Kravchinsky's seditious ideas left his audience shaken and intoxicated.

Weeks after his barnstorming performance the restless Kravchinsky had abruptly abandoned his studies for an unglamorous posting to Kharkov, a provincial backwater

where the floggings were still crueller, and those who expired under the whip would have the remaining quota of lashes administered on their corpse. 'Leave me alone,' one of his father's serfs had snapped when Kropotkin tried to comfort him after a whipping at the local barracks, 'When you grow up, you think that you won't be exactly the same?' The rebuke stung the young prince and, as a cadet, a display of intolerance for unjust authority, of the kind that permeated society from top to bottom, had landed him in solitary confinement for six weeks on a diet of bread and water: a foretaste of what was to come.

Kropotkin's journey to Irkutsk in 1862 offered an education he would not forget. It took him past endless scenes of human suffering: a living hell of a kind he could never before have conceived. In the labour camps of the east, convicts mined gold waist-deep in freezing water, or quarried salt with frostbitten hands for the few short weeks that they could expect to survive the appalling conditions: to be sent there was a death sentence. As fast as they expired, others replaced them, transported from occupied Poland in their thousands, and in soaring numbers after the Polish rebellion of 1863 was ruthlessly suppressed. Kropotkin was relieved to discover that there were at least humane, even liberal men serving among his colleagues in the regiment, though it soon became obvious that they were very far from representative of the imperial administration as a whole.

Shortly after Kropotkin's arrival, his commanding officer General Kukel, who had taken the new recruit under his wing, was removed and disciplined for wilful negligence, having allowed Michael Bakunin, the lionised revolutionary, to escape and plague the regime with his plotting from abroad. Eager to avoid Kukel's hard-line successor, Kropotkin volunteered to oversee a convoy of barges along the River Amur, a 'new world' ceded to Russia by China only a few years before. But the job served only to deepen his disillusionment. When a

storm wrecked the convoy, Kropotkin undertook a breakneck mercy mission back to St Petersburg – by means of sled, horse and train – to demand assistance from the capital. Funds were forthcoming, but soon squandered on personal luxuries by the local officers responsible for the purchase of rescue tugboats.

Promotion brought Kropotkin further dismal insights into the canker of corruption and callous self-interest that infected the Russian Empire. Having secured an appointment as secretary of the prison reform committee, the condition of the Siberian transit camps had horrified him, but his recommendations were disregarded, leaving him no alternative but to resign. Beneath the casual brutality and venal incompetence that confronted him at every turn, in the exploitation of the workers Kropotkin had started to perceive an underlying dynamic that was more pernicious still: the harsh imperatives of Western capitalism, as it rapidly colonised a Russian economy built on the robust and flexible foundation of the village *mir*. 'This is where one can gaze every day to one's heart's content upon the enslavement of the worker by capital,' he wrote to his brother Alexander following a visit to the Lena gold mines, 'and at the great law of the reduction in reward with the increase in work.'

Years later, Kropotkin made an even bolder claim in his *Memoirs of a Revolutionary.* 'I may say now, that in Siberia I lost all faith in state discipline. I was prepared to become an anarchist.' The sight of hungry peasants handing crusts to prisoners more famished than themselves, the 'semi-communistic brotherly organisation' of the political prisoners, and the non-hierarchical structure of the indigenous tribes of Asia all seemed evidence that altruism, mutuality and cooperation were the true bedrock of a well-functioning human society. Meanwhile, his experience of military command, in the most adverse conditions, reinforced the belief that collective effort lies at the heart of all successful social enterprises, while the best leadership inspires rather than directs.

children', he wrote facetiously of the tsarist goverment, 'simply don't comprehend that it is more dangerous than a hundred A. Kropotkins.' Ex-followers of Nechaev, abandoning terrorism for the subtler challenge that evolutionary theory posed to religious and state authority, lost none of their passion in the transition, 'Every one of us would have gone to the scaffold and would have laid down his life for Moleschott or Darwin.' The positivist efforts of Karl Marx to anatomise the social condition, diagnose its ailments and prescribe a cure were yet to make anything like such a deep impression.

Following Natanson's arrest and imprisonment in February 1872, Nicholas Chaikovsky emerged as a calm influence to which the circle's members looked in the midst of the ideological ferment that engulfed them. Even the heavy-handed policemen who had detained the pioneers in their raid on the Kusheliovka summer colony in 1871 appear to have recognised something exceptional in him: while the other suspects were subjected to prolonged grilling, he had been left in peace to study for his university exams. Taking the lead in the circle's endless correspondence with bookshops, libraries and their new sister groups, the circle became closely identified with him. All members should fund the cause to the utmost of their ability, he determined, while themselves maintaining a habit of frugality in order to encourage self-discipline, and foster solidarity with the privations of the Russian peasantry. When the book-trading business found itself in urgent need of capital, one of the Kornilova sisters even went so far as to marry a fellow 'Chaikovskyist' with the express aim of extracting a generous dowry from her father, an affuent merchant, to augment the regular contributions that she and her sisters made from their allowances.

For a while, difficult decisions were taken by Chaikovsky almost unilaterally, but such a style of leadership was so at odds with the group's guiding principles that it could not last. One

of utopianism from Russian literature of the period – alludes to futuristic architecture and food production only as background detail for its vision of a society made perfect by free love, socialism and the disappearance of religion.

By the beginning of the 1870s, though, the ground was shifting. A new generation of radicals was coming to the fore who insisted that there was 'more out there than the social sciences, that the anatomy of a frog won't get you very far, that there are other important questions, that there is history, social progress …' Alongside the elevated political and historical tracts that formed their staple reading, the high-minded youth of Russia developed an appetite for intrepid stories of adventure – by Fenimore Cooper and, especially, Verne – and they craved intellectual heroes who were similarly single-minded.

Before 1871, Darwin had been known in Russia merely as a disciple of Lamarck, who held that inheritance was subject to only limited environmental influence. The publication of *The Descent of Man* gave him a distinct and compelling reputation of his own, as a scientist whose daring new ideas might, by extrapolation, help unravel the whole tightly wound mythology of Russian hierarchy, in which the tsar's position was guaranteed by divine will and the instinctual deference of the masses. For if evolution discounted the Genesis story, then the rationale of Adam's fall and Christ's promise of redemption surely came tumbling down, dragging with it any claim to authority for God's intermediaries on earth. Moreover, Darwinism confirmed mankind's shared birthright, while Thomas Huxley and others tenaciously teased out the social significance of 'the survival of the fittest'; the political and economic subtext was not lost on those determined to work deep change in Russian society.

When an anxious Alexander Kropotkin wrote to his brother Peter in 1872 that he feared himself to be under police surveillance, he drew comfort from the imminent appearance in Russia of translations of Darwin's most recent work. 'Those nice

During the latter years of the 1860s, as vested interests at court seized upon any pretext to roll back the reformist agenda initiated by the tsar, Alexander Kropotkin was the more active of the brothers in opposing the tsarist regime, while Peter continued to enjoy many fringe benefits from membership of the Russian elite. Geography rather than politics claimed most of his attention, on expeditions that filled the state's coffers: charting new routes to the gold fields to increase their profitability helped win him a gold medal from the Imperial Society. When the hazardous dynamiting of cliffs for the construction of one road prompted a revolt by the Polish slave gangs, leading to the execution of five of their number, Kropotkin was sickened. Nevertheless, he found it hard to renounce the joy of scientific discovery that his work afforded him: 'the sudden birth of a generalisation, illuminating the mind after a long period of research', such as he felt on apprehending how geological folding had formed the Asiatic mountain ranges. And his glittering career promised many more such moments.

In years to come, Kropotkin applied these same powers of analytical and synthetic thought to the question of how to create the ideal human society, and the form it should take, dismissing any 'study of nature without man [as] the last tribute paid by modern scientists to their previous scholastic education'. For the moment, though, he salved his conscience by compiling a comprehensive guide to the soils and topography of Russia, to assist the peasants in their productive cultivation of the land. It was a token gesture of solidarity with the twenty million or more serfs, whose predicament had only worsened under the ill-considered terms of their recent emancipation.

The greatest threat to the peasants' economic independence, however, came not from any shortcomings in their husbandry of the land but from the rapacious attitude of their former masters, whose greed had not been satisfied by compensation with government bonds. Once released from the tacit contract of mutual obligation that had provided the foundation for cen-

turies of feudalism, Russia's landowners embraced the capitalist ethos of the market with a rough passion, while continuing to pocket the government's cash. Rents were doubled, land reclaimed for the slightest infraction on the part of its new owners, and every effort made to claw back property through the landed class' domination of local government. Still tied to their village communities, unable to afford better land elsewhere, those serfs who had been freed looked back on their indentured days with more than a little nostalgia.

Under intense lobbying by vested interests and the grinding pressure of a deeply conservative culture, Alexander II's bold plans had crumbled faster even than Napoleon III's progressive social schemes had in France. With unrest brewing among large elements of society, ambitious reforms to the army, judiciary and the education system were all reversed: schools, maternity facilities and homes for injured workers were either closed or else never opened, and censorship was reimposed. The second wave of emancipation, which many hoped would prove more thorough and genuine than the first, broke and lost its force before it reached land. And following the attempt by the young radical Dmitri Karakozov to assassinate the tsar in 1866, hardliners had the perfect excuse to reassert themselves at court, accelerating the drift towards repression; ineptitude and a lack of resources were the only brake on the conservative backlash.

The educated youth of Russia felt the collapse of the reforms as both a moral outrage and a personal disaster, restricting as it did their own intellectual and political freedoms, while exposing the hypocrisy of their parents' generation. Seeing how their fathers shamelessly mouthed idealistic platitudes while continuing to act as petty autocrats, they had adopted an attitude of excoriating candour, in defiance of all the hollow proprieties of social convention. Where they could be acquired, the writings of foreign authors and philosophers were read and discussed in search of possible solutions to the extreme injustices of a sclerotic system. It was a tension symptomatic of that between reform and conservatism with which tsarist society as a whole was riven.

Throughout the 1860s, the positivist philosophy of Auguste Comte – a 'religion of humanity' whose central article of faith was the potential of scientific enquiry to reveal solutions to society's problems – had become a touchstone for progressive Russians. These were 'civilised' men, as the exiled political theorist Lavrov termed them, *intelligentnyi* and *kul'turnyi*, who understood Pisarev's imperative to test both scientific knowledge and atrophying cultural convention to the point of destruction. In a letter to the tsar, Comte even offered his scientific system as an audacious means for Russia to bypass the interim phase of democratic rule and head straight for a new dispensation based on the religion of humanity, but his proposal went unanswered. Instead, the tsarist regime became ever less tolerant: practitioners of science were no longer to be considered irrelevant bores, but as possible threats to the state. At a moment rich in scientific promise – from Dmitri Mendeleev's classification of the elements by their chemical properties in his Periodic Table of 1869, to Viacheslav Manassein's overlooked discovery of the properties of penicillin two years later – the censor's blue pencil regularly filleted *Znanie*, Russia's first popular scientific journal, of any taint of positivism.

Inevitably, a climate stifling of imaginative playfulness and emotional release was to prove dangerously counterproductive for those who wished to maintain the status quo. In those rare cases when utopian science fiction was written and published in Russia – such as Prince Odoevsky's novels *The Year 4338* and *The Town with No Name* – it was earnest in its preoccupations: concerned less with the extravagant possibilities of space travel and underwater exploration that so fascinated French and British authors, than with the new world that might be realised in the here and now by social renewal. Even the utopian section of Chernyshevsky's *What is to be Done?*, 'Vera Pavlovna's Fourth Dream' – by far the most notable example

eighteenth century, as well as books by Marx (the translation of whose *Das Kapital* Lopatin initiated), Herbert Spencer, J. S. Mill and, perhaps most inspiringly of all, Charles Darwin.

It had long been a corrosive paradox of Russian intellectual life that a fierce passion for imaginative science among many in the educated sections of society was matched by indifference, or even outward hostility on the part of the authorities. Ever since Catherine the Great had failed to invest in Ivan Polzunov's refinement of the steam engine for the gold-mining industry in favour of the tried and tested British model, Russia's discoverers and inventors had struggled for lack of encouragement. Whilst groundbreaking research continued to thrive in the country's chemistry, engineering and medical faculties, society rarely saw the practical benefits.

The military ministry was the solitary exception, in the intermittent support it gave to aeronautical and rocket technology. Indeed, the previous twenty-five years had seen striking proposals emerge for balloon guidance systems such as might well have altered the outcome of the Franco-Prussian War, had they been available to the besieged Parisians. Whilst the ministry backed Alexander Mozhaisky's development of a prototype aeroplane during the early 1870s, even the successful flight of a scale model could not sustain its interest for long. Scant attention was paid either to the invention, some years before Edison's success, of the filament light bulb by Alexander Lodygin, as the curious by-product of his work on helicopter design.

Ironically, the very lack of any Russian tradition of implementing such innovations afforded great freedom to the empire's most enquiring minds, which were left untramelled by the practical requirements of production. Every conceptual breakthrough, however, appeared only to feed the growing tension between the claims of progressive thought, which challenged convention and pushed the boundaries of knowledge, and a moribund regime intent on holding the line.

rotic society, a process stymied by the tsarist censor's restrictions on books and papers that contained the faintest hint of sedition. Among home-grown writers, the St Petersburg novelist Nicholas Chernyshevsky developed a huge following: 'there have been three great men in the world,' wrote one prominent young firebrand at the time, 'Jesus Christ, Paul the Apostle, and Chernyshevsky.'

Chernyshevsky's character Rakhmetov in his 1863 novel *What is to be Done?*, written in the Peter and Paul fortress while he was imprisoned on charges of sedition, was seized upon as the very model of a revolutionary. A university dropout who renounces wealth, God and all the mores of a moribund civilisation, Rakhmetov pledges himself to a life of extreme asceticism, without wine, women or cooked meat and with a bed of nails on which to prove his powers of will and endurance; science and socialism are the sole object of his devotion, and cigars his only pleasure. That Chernyshevsky had intended the characterisation as a critique of the follies of youth did nothing to deter young people from aping Rakhmetov's manners and demeanour, any more than Ivan Turgenev's satirical intention when creating Bazarov in *Fathers and Sons* discouraged them from adopting the label of 'nihilist' coined by the author. The nihilists were easy to identify: with shoulder-length hair, bushy beards, red shirts and knee boots for the men, bobbed hair and dark, unstructured clothes for the women, and a unisex fashion for blue-tinted glasses, walking staves and smoking endless cigarettes, they stood out a mile. When it came to policing them, however, and censoring their reading or the course of their education, the reversals in the reform programme had left one crucial loophole.

Since 1861, male Russian citizens had enjoyed far greater travel rights: a passport and official permission to leave the country were still required, but their acquisition was usually a formality. The consequence was burgeoning émigré communi-

ties, especially in Switzerland, that had long been bolt-holes for dissidents of all hues. It was not merely the chance to applaud revolutionary sentiments that brought the younger sections of the audience to their feet at every performance of Rossini's *William Tell* in the St Petersburg opera house; they were applauding the example set by Switzerland's legendary liberator in resisting oppression.

In the aftermath of the Europe-wide upheavals of 1848, the Swiss authorities had briefly bowed to international pressure, handing over a number of political refugees to their own governments. Since then, though, trust had gradually returned, with Zurich and Geneva now a cacophony of foreign voices, and only the lurking presence of spies to remind the political refugees of their troubles back home. Unsurprisingly, Switzerland had become the most fecund source of the banned works of literature, history or philosophy that were smuggled into Russia to feed its more enquiring minds. But from the late 1860s cities like Zurich also held a less cerebral attraction for male émigrés, being home to an unusual concentration of passionately idealistic young women.

Medicine was a favoured subject for student radicals, offering an opportunity to alleviate suffering – of the individual, if not of society as a whole – and the pride of having embraced a truly rationalist vocation. For young women, the thought that their parents might be shocked by the notion of their cosseted daughters dissecting cadavers in anatomy lessons may well have held its own appeal. But there were many practical obstacles to be overcome. In 1864, the St Petersburg Medical-Surgical Academy excluded women, and they were subsequently banned from taking the final exams necessary for a medical degree in any institution in the country. The result was a continuing exodus to Switzerland, where a medical diploma could be obtained.

Domineering fathers who withheld their permission were outflanked by means of marriages of convenience with male

rnilova. Their course of reading and discussion was sustained on a monotonous diet of soup and horse-flesh meatballs, varied only when they resolved to sacrifice the puppies who played under their balcony, 'so that in the name of the struggle against prejudice we might try dog'. That summer also provided most with their first taste of Third Section tactics when the students were first raided and then, despite the absence of incriminating evidence, hauled in for intensive questioning and photographed for the police records.

The attention of the authorities was not easy to shake off and the arrest of Natanson the following February brought home to members the seriousness of the risks. The less resolute soon withdrew, concerned that being implicated in such an enterprise would cause irreparable damage to their academic careers. Behind them, though, they left a determined core of activists, eager to carve their mark on Russian history.

Beside the Paris Commune, the other event that had marked the year 1871 for radical thinkers was the trial *in absentia* of Bakunin's dangerously charismatic protégé Nechaev, whose belief in the role of violence in maintaining discipline within his revolutionary groupuscule had led to the brutal murder of Ivanov. In reaction to this, the tight-knit Chaikovsky Circle adopted a firm policy of rational persuasion and set out to propagate further groups on the model of their own. Rejecting the strict hierarchy that Nechaev had espoused, the circles were to be characterised by equality and transparency, in which each member could be trusted to play their part. A national organisation for the publication and distribution of affordable editions of banned texts was rapidly established, the professionalism of which was said to have shamed the legitimate book trade. Seminal works, the most illicit of them printed in Switzerland and smuggled into the country, became available to readers for the first time: familiar names like Chernyshevsky, Dmitri Pisarev and Peter Lavrov, but also revolutionary French texts from the

Still wearing the formal dress required by the Geographical Society at its public events, Kropotkin was led into the Third Section's headquarters in the Summer Garden, up several flights of stairs and past endless pairs of guards, to the suite of cells on the top floor. While other detainees had often been left to stew, sometimes for months, before they were interrogated, at four o'clock in the morning, three days later, Kropotkin was dragged to the hot seat. Bleary-eyed, he refused to divulge anything but his name and a smattering of irrelevant detail and was soon transferred to solitary confinement in the notorious Peter and Paul fortress. His cell was in the old artillery embrasure of the Trubetskoy tower, whose walls had been padded to prevent the tapped communication that kept the other inmates sane. It was a chilling end to an adventure that had begun with so much hope.

The Chaikovsky Circle had its origins in the socialist library that a young Mark Natanson had created for his fellow students at the Medical-Surgical Academy in 1869, so that they might read and discuss banned works of political theory from abroad and censored Russian literature. Not until 1871, however, had the circle coalesced into something close to its final form. That summer, mathematics student Nicholas Chaikovsky graduated into a world rocked by the events of the Paris Commune. To meet the urgent need for a safe space in which the most daring young freethinkers of St Petersburg could take stock and look ahead, he arranged a retreat in the village of Kusheliovka, a few miles upstream from the city on the River Neva. Devoting themseles to study, those present fully embraced the circle's ethos of earnest commitment and austerity.

As well as Chaikovsky himself and Mark Natanson, the group included German Lopatin, a member of the general council of the International and a young veteran of conspiracy, Sofia Perovskaya, the estranged daughter of the ex-Governor General of the capital, and two sisters by the name of Ko-

friends, which combined cunning with the frisson of moral transgression. Those impressionable youths who had read Chernyshevsky possibly considered the role of cuckold an honourable one: taking his feminist and free-love principles to an extreme, the author himself insisted on remaining faithful to his wife, despite her attempts to contrive affairs for him, while goading her into taking numerous lovers herself. It was said that on one occasion he had even continued scribbling away while she took her pleasure with a Polish émigré in an alcove of the same room. For the male friends and tutors who agreed to marry the aspiring female doctors, however, separate bedrooms were usually considered a sufficient sacrifice.

The earnest young women of the émigré colony were nevertheless uncompromising in their expectations, and not least of the men who wooed them. Whilst the privileged male youth of Russia might dabble in socialism and empathise with the peasantry at arm's length, without necessarily causing undue damage to their career, for their female counterparts the success or failure of the reformist enterprise had huge personal ramifications. Accepting the case for sublimating their feminist agenda in the cause of a wider 'social revolution', they were determined to instil in their male colleagues a shared sense of determination, and a commitment to the cause that demanded almost monastic austerity.

Vera Figner vividly captured the earnest atmosphere of this radical milieu. Years later, when she wrote her memoirs, she could still remember her arrival in a dreary, drizzly Zurich, and the drab view of tiled roofs from the window of her room. Having married to secure freedom to travel, and then sold her wedding gifts to cover the cost of several years' study abroad, not even the severe temptation (for a tomboyish country girl) of a lake teeming with Switzerland's famously sweet-fleshed fish, the fera and gravenche, could distract her. 'I won't even go fish-

ing!' she primly assured her diary, 'No! There'll be no fishing or boating! There'll be nothing but lectures and textbooks!'

Studious attendance on the courses soon forged strong bonds between her female companions – Auntie, Wolfie, Shark and Hussar, as they called themselves – who encouraged each other's awakening political awareness. Thirteen of the women formed a discussion and study circle, on the model of those then flourishing in Russia, and named it after the Fritsche boarding house where most of them lodged. '*Mesdames* – all of Europe is watching you!' the chairwoman – most often Lydia Figner, Vera's sister – would declare, grandiosely paraphrasing Napoleon Bonaparte. The full pathos of some of the subjects they thrashed out could not have been predicted at the time: of the group who engaged with the question of 'Suicide and Psychosis', tsarist persecution would later impel five to take their own lives.

When the Swiss hosts expressed concern over the young women's supposedly lax attitudes, the opportunity was seized upon to practise their developing powers of rhetoric. The vicious rumours of sexual orgies – the usual slanders used throughout history to undermine independent women and radicals – were most likely promulgated by the network of Third Section spies that Wilhelm Stieber established in Switzerland some years before his involvement in the Siege of Paris. In reality, the darkest secret of their gatherings was their addiction to an expensive import from the Orient, which crippled their finances and blunted their dynamism: tea. When it came to sex, by contrast, the women may have appeared to embrace Chernyshevsky's free-love ethos, but their creed of renunciation far outweighed any tendency to libertinage.

Kropotkin was not alone in being lured to Switzerland by the prudish, caffeine-addled temptresses of Zurich, but he was among the most pure-hearted. Week after week he worked through the night in the socialist library that Sofia Lavrova had established with her room-mate, gorging on the theoretical

5. *To the People*

Russia and Switzerland, 1874–1876

On 22 March 1874, as the humming wires of the telegraph cables carried news of Rochefort's audacious escape from New Caledonia around the world, St Petersburg awoke to startling news of its own. The previous evening, Prince Peter Kropotkin had been taken into custody by the infamous Third Section of the police while on his way home from the Geographical Society after delivering a long-awaited lecture expounding his new theories about the Ice Age in Siberia. St Petersburg society was stunned, its salons feverish with rumour and outrage. Apparently Kropotkin had been tricked into responding when an undercover police agent, feigning distress, called to him by the code name 'Borodin'. Now he was being held at police headquarters, awaiting interrogation about his suspected involvement in the city's foremost subversive organisation, the Chaikovsky Circle.

A few weeks earlier, nearly all those members of the Chaikovsky Circle still at liberty had escaped south from St Petersburg in the hope of inciting a popular uprising. Kropotkin alone had insisted on remaining in the capital as part of a desperate recruiting drive intended to rebuild the underground networks that the police were busy uprooting. The plan had been that Kropotkin would join the others at the crucial moment of rebellion, but his obstinate confidence that his apparent respectability would protect him from arrest had proved pitifully misplaced.

timistic vision of human resourcefulness, and a consoling echo of his own isolation in that of the proud Nemo.

literature of which he had for years been starved. By day, he sampled the melting pot of revolutionary and utopian ideas that the different exile traditions had created in the city, until his desire for further knowledge outstripped even his fascination with Sofia. Eager to further his education, it was not long before Kropotkin packed his bags for Geneva, for centuries a centre of religious as well as political dissent and now the scene of a simmering dispute between the followers of Karl Marx and Michael Bakunin.

When Michael Bakunin had visited London in 1865 as a fugitive from Siberia, Karl Marx remarked with barbed generosity that he was 'one of the few people improved by prison'. Since then the relationship between the two men had deteriorated to an extravagant degree. Marx, busy insinuating his way into the leadership of the newly founded International Working Men's Association and intent on making it a vehicle for the dissemination of his own theories, was adamant that a hot-headed Slavic rival like Bakunin should not be allowed to challenge his monopoly of influence. In this he had the support of his friend and financial supporter Engels, whose skill as a propagandist was a huge asset to his cause. Bakunin, meanwhile, though born into an aristocratic family with extensive estates, possessed an impressive if rather over-inflated reputation as a revolutionary whose mettle had been tested on the barricades of 1848, with an exciting story to tell of his escape from prison in Siberia, and racial prejudices that even exceeded Marx's own. What he lacked, however, after years of enforced absence in Siberia, was a formal organisation to sustain his self-image as the high priest of socialism.

During the second half of the 1860s Bakunin had gained a tenuous foothold in the International, brokering alliances with other radical groups whose grand titles belied their infinitesimally small membership. But with Marx increasingly intolerant of Bakunin's presence, the battle lines between them

were drawn: Bakunin's doctrine of federalism and grass-roots activism on one side, Marx's vision of a centralised authority guiding the workers towards the coming revolution on the other. Bakunin would doubtless have put it more simply: freedom and autonomy against authority and repression.

The bitterness between the two men and their supporters had grown in intensity since the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War. Bakunin's early and abortive attempt to inspire the creation of a federal, revolutionary France by his declaration, in October 1870, of a commune in Lyons had prompted Marx to comment that 'At first everything went well but those asses, Bakunin and Clusuret, arrived at Lyons and spoiled everything.' And yet, despite the paucity of Marxists among the leading figures of the Commune and his initial opposition to the Paris insurrection, it was Marx who had contrived to emerge, in the summer of 1871, as the perceived mastermind of the international revolutionary movement and all its actions.

After listening to Engels present a summary account of the Commune's origins to the executive committee of the International in late March 1871, Marx had been content to accept the commission to write a longer address on the subject. Surfacing only to repudiate the most egregious slanders against him, Marx had kept his head down for the duration, digesting every scrap of information to emerge from Paris. Only when the Bloody Week was drawing to a close had he read *On the Civil War in France* to the central committee in London. Quickly and widely disseminated, it presented a powerful first draft of history to counter the Versaillais lies.

'Working men's Paris, with its Commune, will be for ever celebrated as the glorious harbinger of the new society,' boasted his opportunistic obsequy, and Marx was gleeful when his address was mistaken as something akin to a general's valediction to his brave but defeated troops, that promised a counter-attack across an even wider front. 'I have the honour to be at this moment the best calumniated and most menaced man of

unrecognisable to the fugitives. The slightest infraction of the rules was punished with a spell in the sweltering cells, while the only work by which the deportees could now earn subsistence wages was on the chain gangs. The days of night swims, fishing and hunting were over, and while the 'harmonious cooperation' of the Kanaks in the face of ever more demeaning colonial oppression continued to encourage Louise Michel's belief in the perfectibility of man and society, any residual hopes of building a Rousseauist Utopia on the island crumbled away. Money orders from Georges Clemenceau and letters from Victor Hugo kept her spirits up, along with wholly impractical plans for an escape by raft, but the prurient interest shown by both her fellow Communards and the authorities in her ménage with Natalie Lemel soured her existence. Michel resisted attempts to separate them, insisting as always that her only passion was for the revolution, but the malicious rumour that they were lovers eventually led to an acrimonious split between the two women.

The Nouméa of 1876 was a far cry from the titular *Mysterious Island* of Jules Verne's new masterpiece, whose five fugitives are escaping not to America but from Confederate captivity in the Civil War, and by balloon rather than ship. Driven out into the Pacific by a storm, they land on a seemingly enchanted, uninhabited island where strange forces assist them in gradually reconstructing the sum of civilisation's knowledge. The novel's revelation that the guiding hand behind the marooned soldiers' achievements belongs to Captain Nemo, who survived the *Nautilus*' cataclysmic underwater battle and is in hiding on the island, is surely all Verne's own. But in its sympathy for those cut off by fate from their homeland, and its strangely inverted echoes of the Communards' experiences of exile, the influence of Paschal Grousset, who would collaborate on Verne's next book, may already be discernible. And for all the rancour between the fellow fugitives from New Caledonia, even Rochefort might have found some solace in the novel's op-

descent into nihilist chaos. Even Gambetta appeared to turn his back on his erstwhile ally, arguing, not unreasonably, that the country was not ready for his return. And if Rochefort were tempted to test the vigilance of the country's security arrangements with a clandestine foray across the border, his expedition would have been short-lived. For in the previous three years, five million pages from the prefecture's archive of criminal records, destroyed by Raoul Rigault in the Commune's dying days, had been painstakingly reconstructed by cross-referencing with those of every court, tribunal and prison in France.

For his next haven, Rochefort chose Switzerland, from where the smugglers' routes to Paris were less well guarded than those across the Channel, allowing him to maintain distribution of *La Lanterne*. Not long after his arrival, however, he sat for a portrait by Courbet, who had escaped back to his native region of the Jura, on the Swiss side of the frontier, only to be declared liable by the French government for the 320,000-franc bill to rebuild the Vendôme Column. It was a chastening experience. Courbet's still lifes of the time expressed a soul locked into trauma, struggling to free itself but numbed in the attempt. Trout lie glassy-eyed, the hooks caught in their mouths and the fishing line tugging tortuously from out of frame, their blood dripping on stones that recall the slippery red cobbles of the Paris killing fields.

Invited by Courbet to view his portrait, Rochefort revealed a rare glimpse of self-loathing, recoiling from what he saw as the image of a Portuguese diamond merchant: shallow, mercenary and self-regarding. Trapped among the dispossessed and embittered, it would not be easy for Rochefort to reconcile himself to his own company.

For Louise Michel, left to languish in New Caledonia, Rochefort's escape had made life far harder, with the imposition of a new regime whose severity would have been

London,' he wrote to a German benefactor, 'which really does one good after twenty years' idyll in my den.' But while the prestige that accrued to Marx may have encouraged him to face down Bakunin once and for all, it was a sensational murder case in Russia that provided him with the ammunition to assert his ascendancy over the International.

Sergei Nechaev had arrived on Bakunin's doorstep in March 1869 like some irresistible Lucifer: young, handsome, bright and charismatic, with a matchless pedigree in the political underground. He was, he claimed, a collaborator in the 'Secret Revolutionary Committee' – the inner core of the 'European Revolutionary Committee' set up by an associate of the tsar's would-be assassin, Karakozov – and codenamed simply 'Hell'. Having been arrested in St Petersburg, he was on the run. And lest anyone should doubt the sincerity of his commitment, he was dedicated to a life of fanatical asceticism.

Bakunin was wholly enchanted. For years, his bravura assertion that Russia was ripe for spontaneous revolution had rested on nothing but wishful thinking; now here was the son of a serf, a factory worker who had clawed his way up by dint of will and intellect, come to vindicate his claims with the most compelling personal testimony, and bearing fiery tidings that their time had come. If Bakunin wanted an acolyte, though, Nechaev was not going to be an easy conquest. The twenty-year-old made clear that he was seeking not a mentor but an equal, whose sponsorship could burnish the lustrous aura he already possessed. Bakunin agreed, and a potent but misbegotten manifesto soon emerged from their collaboration.

When presenting his ideas, the manifesto had long been Bakunin's preferred form, the assertive nature of such documents punching through the tedium of the essay, their titles claiming 'secrecy' and promising deliciously occult insights. *The Revolutionary Catechism* was no exception, but for its new-found vigour and razor-sharp edge; Nechaev's nihilist

influence led Bakunin's zeal to new extremes. 'We devote ourselves exclusively to the annihilation of the existing social system. To build it up is not our task but the task of those that come after us,' asserted one of its more restrained statements, while others advocated terroristic murder outright. The document gifted Bakunin's enemies the opportunity to caricature his theories as advocating senseless violence. When Nechaev returned to Russia with the aim of preparing a full-scale revolution for 19 February 1870, his actions seemed to prove their case.

Travelling in disguise between St Petersburg and Moscow, with a certificate from Bakunin declaring him to be 'an accredited representative of the Russian section of the World Revolutionary Alliance No. 2771', Nechaev set about creating his own cell-based organisation called the People's Revenge (Narodnaya Rasprava). Members were expected to adhere to the imperatives of the *Catechism*: 'The revolutionary is a dedicated man. He has no personal interest, no business, no emotions, no attachments, no property, not even a name … In his innermost depths he has broken all ties with the social order, not only in words but in actual fact'. Most importantly, however, they were required to submit themselves unquestioningly to Nechaev's will and the instructions he conveyed to them from the central committee.

When a member of the St Petersburg cell, Ivanov by name, astutely questioned the very existence of this secret committee, Nechaev decided to eliminate the threat to his authority. Each of Ivanov's colleagues was to take a hand in his murder to demonstrate their absolute commitment to the cause. Nechaev had already acquired the habit of incriminating students in order that their punishment by the authorities should radicalise them, and this was the next logical step. Following the macabre farce of Ivanov's killing, Nechaev had succeeded in escaping back to Switzerland before the crime was discovered, but had

no hint of the fierce fighting that had taken place there, focusing instead on scenes of middle-class leisure, while the Parc Monceau, one of the bloodiest butcher's yards of the Versaillais execution squads, is depicted drowning in blossom.

Those seeking to lose themselves further in the Catholic and bourgeois mythology being laid down by the Third Republic need only have wandered up through the narrow, twisting streets of Montmartre, inhabited now only by widows and grieving mothers, to where the foundations were being laid for the most strident symbol of what that ideal republic had become. The decision to build the Sacré-Coeur marked an incontrovertible reassertion of Catholic France's dominance over its capital city. Designed in a neo-Romanesque style intended to evoke the churches of the pious, peasant south, its bleached dome would, its architects planned, loom above the city, a purifying presence. When it was revealed that the site purchased for its erection in 1875 included the very garden where the generals Lecomte and Thomas has been killed on the first day of the Communard insurrection, the Catholic *Bulletin du Voeu* expressed disingenuous surprise at the coincidence. Oriels of sunlight breaking from behind clouds over Montmartre had demonstrated divine approval of the site, declared the newly installed Archbishop Guibert, but the true reason for the choice was clear: to expiate the crimes of the Church's enemies, on ground made sacred by those martyred in the Catholic cause.

The Catholic Church was again ascendant, flush with new state subsidies and with its educational function, of which it had been stripped by the first act of the republican government, now restored by MacMahon's government. It was confident too, unequivocally damning the Commune as 'the work of Satan' at the ceremony to lay the first stone of the Sacré-Coeur's choir. There was clearly no place in this France for Henri Rochefort, the Mephistophelian polemicist whose deference-defying journalism many blamed for the country's

Rochefort's revival of *La Lanterne* in London, and his spirited if thwarted attempts to have it smuggled into France using techniques developed during the Prussian siege for the pigeon post, do not suggest a man who planned to retire his pen from the polemical struggle. But social standing mattered to the marquis, who was stung to discover that Madame Tussaud's waxworks museum had moved his statue from the company of France's elite to the Chamber of Horrors. Having excited the interest of the high-society hostess Madame Olga Novikoff, neither he nor Grousset were in any position to decline invitations to her cosmopolitan soirées at Claridge's that were attended by such luminaries as Gladstone, Matthew Arnold and the newspaper editor W. T. Stead. In her role as an arch tsarist propagandist and occasional Russian police agent, however, Novikoff always played a long game, and it is tempting to imagine that her cultivation of Rochefort was no exception.

During the few months that Rochefort remained in London, he monitored events in France closely in the fervent hope of a general amnesty that would allow the convicted Communards to return home. It was not to be. France had plunged into collective amnesia, and memories of the Commune and of those diverse characters associated with it had been hastily brushed under the carpet. Tourists continued to visit Paris as they might the ruins of Pompeii, to witness the archaeology of catastrophe, but the City of Light was already rising from the ashes. Observing the flowers that had begun to grow among the ruins of Paris, the patron of the Café Guerbois in Montmartre, a favourite haunt of the Impressionist artists, remarked that 'Inanimate matter, no more than men, is not made to suffer protracted grief.' He perfectly expressed the mood of the times. The artist Monet, recently returned from England where he had spent the war, enjoyed glittering success for the first time in his career with paintings informed by a similar sentiment. His famous views of the riverbanks at Argenteuil and Asnières give

been tried and convicted *in absentia* in 1871 and was, at the time of Kropotkin's visit, fighting extradition.

That Nechaev had all along been a terrible liability was now obvious to Bakunin yet still he could not bring himself entirely to disown his protégé. 'No one has done me, and deliberately done me, so much harm as he,' Bakunin would write, and yet he maintained a correspondence with Nechaev. It was a fatal error, both for the future of revolutionary socialism and, more immediately, for Bakunin's reputation.

Accusations concerning the pair's ongoing conspiratorial activities were collected by Utin, the leader of the Marxist faction in Geneva, or else fabricated. For his pains, Marx rewarded Utin with recognition of his group as an official splinter of the International in Switzerland. He then convened a meeting of his cabal at the Blue Posts pub in Soho for what he termed the London Congress of the International. The challenge of travel in post-Commune Europe prevented many delegates from attending, while the émigré Communards in London, who had begun to distrust Marx's egotism and challenge his dominance within the organisation, were excluded on the grounds that they might be French police spies. Having eliminated all sources of disagreement, the congress did Marx's bidding: Nechaev was indicted and Bakunin thoroughly smeared as an accessory to and beneficiary of his violent crimes. The German Marxist Wilhelm Liebknecht topped off the character assassination by labelling Bakunin as a tsarist agent, paid to undermine the International.

The feud between Marx and Bakunin now spilled over into open warfare. Convening a congress of its own in the Swiss village of Saint-Imier in late 1871, the Jurassian Federation – the anti-authoritarian core of Bakunin's support, which had been founded in the Swiss canton of the Jura a year before – denounced the London event as a partisan farrago. Some delegates countered Liebknecht's charge by asserting that it was Marx himself who was the spy, hired by Bismarck. In fact,

Bakunin sincerely saw strong similarities between the two autocratic Prussians, while the new Germany itself seemed to him the very embodiment of the modern nation state: one 'based on the pseudo-sovereignty of the people in sham popular assemblies' while exploiting them for the 'benefit of capital concentrated in a very small number of hands'. Writing his pamphlet *Statism and Anarchy* in 1873, Bakunin presciently identified in Bismarck's Germany the roots of a kaiserism and militarism that would generate something monstrous. Where his judgement carried less moral weight, however, was in his accusations of anti-Semitism.

Hypocritically, Bakunin insisted that he was 'neither the enemy nor the detractor of the Jew', while denouncing 'this whole Jewish world which constitutes a single exploiting sect', and 'reign[s] despotically in commerce and banking.' Having become the victim of its machinations, Bakunin now decried the London Congress of the International as 'a dire conspiracy of German and Russian Jews' who were 'fanatically devoted to their dictator-Messiah Marx'. From a man who possessed both strong conspiratorial and millenarian tendencies himself, his words sounded like a bitter and vicious howl of envy. Such anti-Semitic sentiments, however, were far from unusual, and would only become more vehement and widespread with the passage of time.

Once in Geneva, it took Kropotkin a certain amount of trial and error to discover his natural political allies. Home to the city's branch of the International, the Masonic Temple Unique was an obvious first port of call for someone of his background and socialist inclinations. In Russia, Freemasonry had for a century provided a haven for, in Bakunin's words, 'the choicest minds and most ardent hearts' from among the gentry, where they could nurture their social conscience. But whilst it had been Masons who were imprisoned in Schlüsselburg for their radicalism under Catherine the Great, the fire had long since

From a top floor in Newman Passage, a cooperative *marmite* fed several hundred a day, while small tailors' and cobblers' workshops began to market the craft skills of which Paris found itself suddenly deprived. Keeping the Communards at arm's length, most middle-class British benefactors preferred to channel their donations through the Positivist Society. Others shamelessly submitted their requirements, as if to an employment agency: for every £100 from an MP, or £5 from a cautious housekeeper, there was a request from a brothel owner in search of willing seventeen-year-olds, or a 'pinching housewife' offering £1 a year for a cut-price maid-of-all-work. Compassion fatigue soon set in, and suspicion displaced pity.

Although the British government declined to pass on surveillance reports to their Continental counterparts, such dossiers were nevertheless compiled, with the Communards subject to frequent night raids by the Metropolitan Police. Inhabiting the dystopian metropolis depicted in Gustave Doré's *London: A Pilgrimage* of 1872, or Thomson's epic 1874 poem 'City of Dreadful Night', morale among the London émigrés suffered, and paranoia took hold. News of the escape of the New Caledonia fugitives provided a welcome boost, and Rochefort's arrival in London, just in advance of Grousset, was a rare opportunity for festivity. His decision to decline the invitation to a banquet held in honour of the escapees on the grounds that it might appear 'incendiary and saturnalian' sounded a misjudged note, however, that was at once pious, high-handed and cowardly. It seemed to confirm what his detractors had alleged: that he was an egotistical dilettante, a mere contrarian whose radicalism was superficial and self-serving. 'Rochefort is not a revolutionary,' a police informer claimed to have been told by the journalist Félix Pyat, 'he is a boy who stands next to the revolution in order to advance himself, but he has none of its principles; he has only hatred of governments.' Despite being Rochefort's most venomous rival, and a possible police agent, Pyat's character observations were rarely less than astute.

Of all France's neighbours, Britain had probably received more refugees from the Commune than any other country. While the fires still raged in Paris, Prime Minister Gladstone had signalled Britain's hospitality by declaring that there would be no extradition of those fleeing political persecution, despite pressure from certain quarters of the press. For decades it had been a central tenet of British liberalism that where social unrest was widespread, abroad at least, the causes were better dealt with by concessions that repression. Whilst Lord Elcho argued in Parliament that an exception be made for 'the authors of what can only be regarded by the civilised world as the greatest crime on record', initially, at least, there was strong sympathy in the country for the Communards and no little distaste for their persecutors.

Hypocrisy characterised the attitude adopted towards the refugees by the Versailles government, which vehemently complained that Britain was sheltering subversive criminals, yet made no effort to close the French ports. When Gladstone's government responded that the immigrants imposed a heavy social burden, there even followed an insouciant French offer to hand a subsidy to those departing. Up to 1,500 Communards arrived, their dependants raising the total number close to the 4,500 who had been punitively transported. Some arrived at Dover in chains, abandoned there for the local workhouse to feed before setting them off on the tramp to London, unshod, on blood-caked feet. Not until late 1872 had the stream of vagrants eased, by when the charitable system was overflowing and the capital's parks were littered nightly with French families sleeping rough.

Through a mixture of self-help and public benevolence, by the time of Rochefort's arrival the Communards had begun to put down roots. For the most part they congregated in the rookeries of St Giles or Saffron Hill, or else the marginally better slums around Charlotte Street, north of Soho, that became an expatriate Belleville or Montmartre-in-miniature.

gone out. 'A jabbering old intriguer … useless and worthless, sometimes malevolent and always ridiculous,' was Bakunin's verdict of Italian Freemasonry when he had tried to co-opt it to the revolutionary cause, and Kropotkin could only concur. And whilst Kropotkin admired the enthusiasm of the workers attending the classes run by the International, 'the trust they put in it, the love with which they spoke of it, the sacrifices they made for it' seemed to him wholly misguided. Dominated by the followers of Marx, its meetings struck him as fatuous: a display of intellectual vanity that bamboozled those who deserved better.

Preferring the company of the workers to that of the Marxists from the International, Kropotkin, 'with a glass of sour wine … sat long into the evening at some table in the hall among the workers, and soon became friendly with some of them, particularly with one stonemason who had deserted France after the Commune.' The stonemason, like many hundreds of Communards who had flooded into Switzerland in the wake of the Bloody Week, had little left to do but reminisce.

Tales of the utopian dreams that had briefly flickered into life in Paris the previous spring touched Kropotkin with inspiring visions of a future in which society might be comprehensively refashioned. The contrast between this spirit of optimism and the power-hungry machinations of the local Marxists shocked Kropotkin – in particular, reports of how Utin was conniving to get an influential Geneva lawyer elected to the local government by suppressing workers' plans for strikes – and brought a moment of revelation. 'I lived through it after one of the meetings at the Temple Unique,' he recollected in his memoirs, 'when I felt more acutely than ever before how cowardly are the educated men who refuse to put their education, their knowledge, their energy at the service of those who are so much in need of that education and that energy.' If his friends and acquaintances in Zurich, most of them supporters of Bakunin, had left him in any doubt of where he should

look for a political ideal that still burned hot, the Communard workers in Geneva set him firmly on the right path. The final stage of his journey of self-discovery led him to the Jura, where Bakunin had his strongest following.

The industry that had made the Jura so hospitable to federalist, anti-authoritarian politics – the dawning 'anarchist' movement – owed its origins, ironically, to the autocratic instincts of a radical who had preceded Marx by three and a half centuries. As part of Jean Calvin's programme of moral reforms, the wearing of jewels had been banned in 1541, driving the city's goldsmiths into a new trade that would employ their miniaturist skills towards a utilitarian rather than sumptuary end: watchmaking. By the end of the century, Geneva boasted the first watchmaker's guild in the world, and the success of the industry during the following hundred years led its practitioners to spread out from the saturated confines of the city along the Jura mountain range. Over time, villages set amid the meadows of the Jura became home to specialist workshops that worked in a process of cooperative manufacture, each contributing distinct parts of the mechanisms. This innovative division of labour helped make the region a centre of precision horology, with the Grand Council of Neuchâtel founding an observatory in 1858 to provide a chronometric service, and the initiation of the Jura's famous time-keeping competitions. Accuracy to within one second a day was the minimal requirement for all products, with prizes for the watches that best withstood a range of environmental factors. Little can the winners – Edouard Heuer with his workshop in Saint-Imier, and Georges Piaget in nearby La Côte-aux-Fées – have guessed the glamour and prestige that before long their names would represent.

The luxury enjoyed by those who bought their products, however, was not reflected in the lives of the majority of watchmakers. Working within a scientific context, and with high demands made of their skill by the intricate engineering, they were nevertheless part of a community that was intellectually

His own explanation was homesickness, an ailment familiar to the exiled Communards of America: men like Edmond Levraud, who wrote of 'the disgust and the hatred I feel for this rotten race … [where] everyone is corrupt and degraded.' But Rochefort's sentimentality and fastidiousness were as nothing compared to his journalistic instinct for the scoop. Grousset suggested that Rochefort had intentionally tricked his companions in order to steal a competitive lead in selling his account to the press back home: Rochefort's booking of the last berth on the next Atlantic steamer coincided with news that his article had boosted sales of the *Herald* in Europe fivefold. Alternatively, a peremptory warning from those who feared the incendiary effect of his eloquence may have convinced him to leave.

Rochefort's travels of the previous 280 days had taken him almost 30,000 miles. As an achievement it could not rival that of the Bostonian radical and railway magnate George Francis Train, who four years earlier had managed a global circumnavigation in only seventy days, before heading off to France to try to claim the leadership of the Marseilles commune; nor that of Verne's fictional hero Phileas Fogg, who had scraped in just under the eighty-day limit stipulated by his Reform Club bet in 1873. But considering the extraordinary circumstances under which it was undertaken, and the enforced sojourn of several months in New Caledonia, his adventure surely outshone the Cook's Tour of 1872, whose well-heeled clients had boasted at every step of their 220-day itinerary in frequent dispatches to *The Times* of London. One last hazard lay ahead when, after nine days on board, Rochefort decided to land at Queenstown in Ireland. Finding that the Catholic country had little sympathy for a man tarred with the Commune's killing of the clergy, he was lucky to escape being lynched by a priest-led mob. London, however, promised a warmer reception altogether.

Having passed through Salt Lake City and Omaha, it was while Rochefort's train was halted at Chicago station that the press finally caught up with him. The proposition borne by Mr O'Kelly from the *New York Herald* was a generous one: a fat fee, and a two-page spread guaranteed over two days in return for exclusive rights to Rochefort's first article about the Commune and life in New Caledonia. The chance to set the record straight, free of censorship and with no concessions required to the prejudices of his readership, attractive in itself, was made irresistible by an undertaking that an edition would be distributed in France, regardless of any possible negative reaction there. While Olivier Pain visited Niagara Falls, Rochefort worked through the night scribbling more than two thousand lines of impassioned prose.

Concerned that Rochefort should not be distracted by invitations to receptions and dinners, and doubtless to hike the value of his exclusive rights, the *Herald*'s editor arranged for Rochefort to be taken off the train as it approached New York and conveyed the last few miles of his journey from the outskirts in a covered carriage. Such was the tumultuous reception of the first instalment of his article on 31 May, however, that not even the discretion of the Central Hotel on Broadway could seclude him from the besieging crowds, and he was obliged to retire briefly to the New York countryside in search of peace in which to prepare his speech for the promised public meetings.

The first lecture, delivered to a highly distinguished audience of several hundred in the New York Academy of Music, moved many who heard it to tears at the plight of the Communards and the fate of the Commune. One reference to the Kanaks claimed the last word on the subject of savagery: 'We send them missionaries,' he opined acerbically in a line he would repeat, 'while it is they who should send us their political leaders.' Further dates were added to a lecture tour that already included Boston and Philadelphia, but then, quite unexpectedly, Rochefort announced that he was to return to Europe.

alive and receptive to new political ideas. Already living on the poverty line and now threatened by the mass-production processes being developed in the United States, those working on a small scale from their homes were ready recruits to a movement that drew inspiration from their own autonomous society. Content in its isolation and self-sufficiency, how glorious it would be, the Jurassian Federation argued, if its example could only convert the world.

Kropotkin's way into Jurassian society was through James Guillaume, a young teacher from the Jura town of Le Locle and Bakunin's trusted lieutenant. The young ladies of the Fritsche circle had met Guillaume at the congress of the anti-authoritarian International at the village of Saint-Imier in the autumn of 1871 but any initial introduction they provided was not effective. At first Guillaume received Kropotkin frostily, being overwhelmed by his many responsibilities as an editor of the movement's newspaper. It was only when Kropotkin volunteered to help in the task that he received a warm handshake. In return for his work, he would be introduced to the community of watchmakers and learn all he wished about the federation. Kropotkin felt that he had found his spiritual home, and was determined to adopt a trade that would allow him to remain, after his twenty-eight-day travel permit had expired.

The months that Kropotkin spent in the Jura exposed him to yet more stories of the Paris insurrection of spring 1871. Among the illustrious Communards who had sought refuge there was Benoît Malon, ex-mayor of the Batignolles district, now working as a basket maker in Neuchâtel and also assisting Guillaume with his newspaper. Malon's stories of the Commune brought the dream to life for Kropotkin in a way that the testimony of the Geneva exiles had failed to do. They also reinforced the true horror of the Commune's suppression. Kropotkin recalled how 'the lips of Malon trembled and tears trickled from his eyes' when he recollected the tragic slaying

during Bloody Week of thousands of young men who had rallied to the radical cause. Trawling the international press to better understand the disaster in Paris, Kropotkin was 'seized by a dark despair'.

It was while Kropotkin was staying in the Jura that Elisée Reclus too finally reached Switzerland, arriving on 14 March. After months of imprisonment, his sentence of transportation had finally been commuted to ten years' exile thanks to the good offices of the American ambassador to France, an admirer of his four-volume geological history *The Earth*. The experience had left him traumatised: 'I felt around me the impenetrable wall of hate, the aversion of the entire world to the Commune and the Communards,' he wrote. But in Switzerland he could at last begin the slow process of recovery.

There is no record that the two great geographers met in 1872, though had they done so, the grey-faced, haunted survivor of the prison barges with the faint aura of holiness would surely have made a strong impression on Kropotkin. It would be three decades before Reclus agreed to set down in writing his thoughts on the Commune, but he had resolutely upheld the prisoners' oath to defend it. He later recollected how, on his first day in Switzerland, he gently converted an old woman from her horrified prejudices about the insurrection in Paris to a warm respect for its aims. Bakunin, who had some years earlier turned his back on Reclus, having erroneously suspected him of sympathising with Marx, could not help but be reconciled to him. 'There is the model of a man,' the old Russian is reported to have said, 'so pure, noble, simple, modest, self-forgetting … a valuable, very earnest, very sincere friend and completely one of ours.' In light of Bakunin's own uncertain temperament, even his slight criticism that Reclus was 'perhaps not so completely the devil of a fellow, as might be desired' might be taken as a recommendation.

Kropotkin found it harder to gain Bakunin's attention. Though he longed for an audience with the great man, no invi-

lured to the New World of opportunity by promises of good jobs and land for free. The chance to begin afresh appealed powerfully to those who had suffered most from the injustices inflicted by the Old World's arbitrary authorities. Wave after wave of determined poor had entered the country, to be ruthlessly exploited by established industrialists, only for those who clawed their way up to some small position of power to oppress the new ethnic groups who followed them. It was a brutal and ugly system, yet hugely productive of wealth. Now, though, the monstrous, accelerating engine of unregulated capitalism appeared to have stalled, and the society it had sustained looked likely to collapse into chaos.

In September 1873 the inconceivable had happened when the great railway entrepreneur Jay Gould went bankrupt, a victim of his own corruption, triggering an economic collapse that, within weeks, had plunged the country into a depression. With unemployment soaring and wages plummeting, the Commune appeared to offer the burgeoning ranks of America's social malcontents a dangerous example. The *New York Times* predicted a time when the immigrant 'socialists of the cities would combine to strike at the wealth heaped up around them' and the 'native American' would respond with arms to the 'rebellion against property', just as he had to the 'rebellion against freedom' that sparked the Civil War. During that winter, tens of thousands had turned to the International in search of support and representation, and there was widespread fear that a mere spark might 'spread abroad the anarchy and ruin of the French Commune'. Warnings received by the New York police were terrifyingly unambiguous: plans were in hand for a paramilitary organisation of 1,600 men modelled on the National Guard whose battalions had occupied Paris. The great demonstration in Tompkins Square of January 1874, brutally suppressed by nightstick-wielding mounted police, was only a first skirmish. All New York needed, four months later, was the arrival of France's most polemical propagandist.

to her for refuge, and the protection of her powerful arm will be at once thrown around them,' declared the local newspaper, while the celebrity status accorded them by the press in general afforded the fugitives a first inkling of how the outside world was perceiving the Commune as France's 'third revolution'. The holiday mood persisted as they set out on a route similar to that taken by Bakunin thirteen years earlier on his escape from Siberia, via South East Asia, with Rochefort using a visit to Fiji and Honolulu to cram his luggage with tribal art. In San Francisco, however, the solidarity of the group began to fracture. Taking umbrage at claims by Grousset that he was reneging on his promise to pay their passage home, Rochefort ignored the eagerness of the city's socialists to feast their heroes, and the press to hold interviews, and hid himself away. Only two days after arriving, he and Olivier Pain were gone, leaving behind their four companions to accept the lavish plaudits of the city's well-wishers, together with a £165 collection that, in the absence of Rochefort's financial help, would eventually cover their Atlantic passage.

The America that Rochefort travelled through was one whose press was not uniformly indulgent to his escapes. In a country still coming to terms with its own vastly more destructive civil war, the Commune had received a huge amount of coverage, most of it hostile. Even the moderate *Harper's Weekly* inveighed against the supposed savagery of the Commune's 'cruel and unreasonable' women, asserting that it would prefer to find itself at the mercy of a horde of Red Indians; while even the more sympathetic *Nation* swallowed the lie that the transportation of Communards was 'for their mental and moral health'. Versaillais propaganda had flooded across the Atlantic, finding a sympathetic hearing in a nation whose propertied classes feared the likelihood of social strife closer to home.

The threat had never been more real. Ever since the 1830s, immigrant labour from the poorer areas of Europe had been

tation was forthcoming – this despite Kropotkin's passionate belief that his was the right side of the socialist schism. At a time when even Bakunin's most fervent acolytes were beginning to question his judgement, Kropotkin was unreserved in his admiration for the old man's achievements. In particular, the failed expedition that Bakunin had led in 1870 to establish a commune in Lyons – which Marx had brusquely dismissed – struck Kropotkin as 'the first case in recent years, if I am not mistaken, of a serious protest against a war from the side of the population.'

Kropotkin did not need Guillaume to shower him with evidence of Marx's monstrous egotism and the simmering vindictiveness of Engels; his experiences in Geneva were enough. He was repelled by Marx's extraordinary belief that he was owed the gratitude of the Communards for 'having saved their honour' in writing *The Civil War in France*, and by Engels' vicious slander of a Communard exile in London by the name of Adolphe Smith who had protested about the high-handed behaviour of the Marxists in the International.

Most of all, Kropotkin distrusted Marx's claim to have discovered in the nebulous realm of economics a science of human society. Marx and Engels could rant at Bakunin and his followers as 'babblers of nonsense' who had 'no idea of social revolution … only its political phrases; [for whom] its economic conditions have no meaning', and whose theories were 'Schoolboyish rot!' However, the question remained: beneath all the spurious historical analysis and baroque argumentation, was Marx's hope that the state would ultimately 'wither away' really any more hard-headed than Bakunin's expectation of a spontaneous revolution by the peasantry? The Marxists may have bandied about 'utopian' as a term of disparagement, but the vestiges of metaphysical thought were endemic to socialist theory. Surely what mattered most, Kropotkin realised, was the practical means by which society was moved in the right direction. And in Bakunin's writings – even the shockingly vi-

olent *Catechism* – there was a genuine attempt to answer the question of how it was possible to be both truly democratic and act decisively by embracing collective responsibility and rigorous discipline.

Kropotkin waited for weeks in the hope of an invitation to visit Bakunin at home in Locarno. Neither the evenings he had shared with Bakunin's wife and his old gaoler General Kukel in Siberia, nor Bakunin's friendship with Sofia Lavrova's flatmate Natalia Smetskaya seemed to help. Was the delay down to Bakunin's precoccupation with his work on *Statism and Anarchy*, or with the Nechaev affair, Kropotkin must have wondered, or was the explanation to be found in the imminent return to Russia of Bakunin's wife and children and, in light of his declining health, their possible last parting? Eventually, Guillaume informed Kropotkin that Bakunin would not be able to see him. He was under too much strain in dealing with the schism. Instead Kropotkin should abandon his plan to learn a trade – a waste of his talents, and a position in which, as a foreign prince, he would struggle to gain acceptance – and return to Russia without delay, where he would be of more use to the cause.

So it was that the man destined to become Bakunin's ideological heir never did crunch across the butts of cigarettes and cigars that littered the floor of Bakunin's study to meet his intellectual mentor. Not until years later did Guillaume divulge that Bakunin had, in fact, disregarded Peter Kropotkin as being, like his brother Alexander, a follower of the more cautious and gradualist ideas of Peter Lavrov, who urged the intellectuals of Russia to teach as well as follow the peasantry. It was perhaps inevitable that Bakunin should shun a fellow aristocrat. In flight from his own privileged origins, and questioning more than ever his right to lead the people while not being of them, even Bakunin's ill-judged embrace of the 'authentic' Nechaev had not taught him to see beyond the guilt he felt for his aristocratic birth.

siege, the geography of New Caledonia in case one day he should be called to escape from it. In fact, rather than initiating an escape plan Rochefort was fortunate to be allowed to join Pain's and Grousset's existing scheme. At huge risk, the pair had been scouting opportunities for several months, concealing themselves at the entrance to the harbour from where they tried to hail passing ships. What Rochefort brought to the project was the cash that could open the reluctant ears of the ships' masters, and the English captain of a coal supply ship called the *PCE* – the *Peace, Comfort and Ease* – was soon recruited. Whilst Rochefort underwent a training regime of nocturnal bathing expeditions to accustom his eyes to the dark nights and toughen his muscles, three Freemasons among the six prospective fugitives persuaded key guards to turn a blind eye.

By chance, the date chosen for the escape was 18 March 1874, the third anniversary of the confrontation over the Montmartre cannon that had precipitated the Commune. The previous evening, the prisoners had been forced by an approaching storm to seek cover in their huts. Rochefort slept badly; woken in the early hours by a friendly black chicken, he seized upon it as an auspicious sign. When he, Pain and Grousset reached the shore, however, the swollen seascape that stretched out before them was of the kind Michel celebrated in her wild, romantic verse, but which evinced from Rochefort nothing but dread. Recognising that the chance might not come again, all three launched themselves into the heaving darkness. At the appointed rock, the other members of the escape party hauled them out of the water and, before long, a launch appeared to carry them to the *PCE*. With a 1,000-mile voyage to Australia, they had ample opportunity to celebrate their freedom.

The long and circuitous journey back to Europe began well with a hearty welcome in the Australian port of Newcastle. 'It is enough for [England] that men who struggle for freedom flee

would eventually take a more deadly form in their dealings with the Kanaks.

Then there were the cases of 'fatal nostalgia'. Although it did not suit the resolute tone of Rochefort's later accounts to discuss it, he must have found it awful to watch as, one by one, his fellow prisoners succumbed to the condition. Though not recognised by the colony's doctors, who preferred to record anaemia or dysentery as the causes of death, terminal grief was all too real for those who had been transported. Its favourite victims were the heartbroken fathers of small children, but 251 Communard prisoners were said to have been afflicted during the first three years, with the eight-month lapse between sending and receiving letters home making the torture of homesickness a perpetual feature of New Caledonian life. Some simply wandered off into the forest to die, others wasted away, like the Communard Passedouet, who, watched by Rochefort, sat endlessly rocking and intoning 'Proudhon, Proudhon'.

Survival depended on maintaining one's morale. While awaiting transportation, Louise Michel had secured permission from the French Geographical society to serve as its correspondent in New Caledonia. The society perhaps hoped that she would supply observations on the nickel deposits that had been discovered there a few years earlier and for which state companies had begun to mine. Michel, however, chose to disregard the public demands of the society's president that members embrace 'besides a scientific end, a political and commercial object', and busied herself with gentler plans to experiment with the cultivation of papayas and record Kanak folklore. Meanwhile, to vent her fury at those who now ruled France, on the 28th of every month, without fail, she wrote a letter of remonstration to '*la Commission dite des Graces*' that had failed to commute the execution of her beloved Ferré on that day in November 1871.

Rochefort would later insist that he had shown even greater foresight than Michel, researching, even during the Prussian

Perhaps, though, the fruitless wait was not so arduous or lonely for Kropotkin. It seems that the 'Fritsche' girls had developed a taste for the pastoral beauty of the Jura and took to spending their spring vacations there. And the Jurassic landscape, which had already given its name to a whole age in the earth's development, would have provided the geographer in him with abundant opportunities for observation at a time when he was working out his theory about the ice caps that had once covered northern Europe.

Three months after arriving in Zurich, and two months after the Russian authorities had expected him home, Kropotkin set off on a circuitous journey back to St Petersburg: first to Belgium, bypassing Paris and the suspicious eyes of post-Commune France, then doubling back to Vienna, before heading to Warsaw, and finally back to Cracow. Somewhere along the way he collected a large cache of banned literature; before crossing the Russian border, he stopped to arrange a smuggling operation that would carry it and future material into the country under the noses of the tsarist police. Having crossed the line of legality, nothing would be the same again for Prince Kropotkin. Years earlier, aged twelve, he had abandoned the use of his title, but only now was he ready to renounce the last ties to his past life and the security that his privileged status had always afforded him.

4. *Around the World in 280 Days*

New Caledonia to Switzerland, 1873–1875

Henri Rochefort felt seasick from almost the moment he set foot on the frigate *Virginie*. Only a few dozen metres into his four-month ocean journey and he was already retching: not the mere queasiness of a sensitive stomach first encountering rough waters, but hearty vomiting that would continue for days on end until he was bringing up only bile. Among the five men with whom he shared his cage in the cargo hold, and the twenty-one women in the enclosure opposite, there were those who remembered quite well the sudden illness that had felled him during the Noir funeral demonstration three years earlier, and the eye infection that kept him away from Paris, recuperating, in the prelude to the Commune. Forced to listen to Rochefort's groans night and day, they must have wondered whether he was not in fact suffering a nervous reaction to the turbulent circumstances of his embarkation.

The period since Rochefort's capture in the dying days of the Commune had held horrors and humiliations far worse than he had experienced during previous spells in prison in the Second Empire. Arraigned before the military tribunal, the charges had threatened his dignity as much as his freedom: not grand accusations of treason or conspiracy that he might have batted aside with a rhetorical flourish, but demeaning insinuations that he had stolen artworks from the Louvre and bronzes from Thiers' ransacked home. And when it came to his inflammafer their old journalistic colleague temporary accommodation. If, as credible rumours in France suggested, it had indeed been Grousset who had tipped off the Versaillais authorities about Rochefort's planned escape from Paris in the dying days of the Commune, then this hospitality was the least he could offer by way of amends.

Michel, reunited with her bosom friend from the barricades, Natalie Lemel, was also drawn into life on the Ducos peninsula, where she wisely insisted on staying despite demands from the administration that she be moved on. The sketches she made here are deceptively picturesque, almost Arcadian, with the huts of the small prisoner communities grouped around a central fire and cooking area, implying the kind of simple conviviality enjoyed by native tribes the world over. By day, the convicts followed the custom of the Kanaks: fishing for lampreys and hunting the island's kangaroos, though the physical gulf between the sickly, clumsy Communards and the strong and graceful natives, with their traditional Stone Age methods, was all too obvious. By night, especially in the high summer of December and January, the Europeans escaped the clouds of mosquitoes by retreating to the basalt rocks by the sea and the shelter of nets.

The reality, unfiltered by idealising draughtsmanship, was less comfortable. The Communards' solidarity with their fellow men only went so far, a fact noted by Rochefort as he pottered about in his regulation straw hat and ungainly moccasins, with sailor's culottes exposing his spindly calves. During his days as a newspaper editor, Rochefort had become known to the Arabs as 'the good man' for his advocacy of the rights of the North African peoples who had participated in the South Oranian insurrection against French rule; and yet on New Caledonia he found himself almost alone in treating the Algerian Arab prisoners with comradely respect. Although victims themselves, the heroes of the Commune were only too ready to vent their frustrations on the Africans in displays of vicious disdain that

Two hundred miles from tip to tip and twenty-five or so across, the long, thin strip of the main island is surrounded by coral reefs and distinguished by two mountain peaks that rise from a ridge running most of its length. First occupied by France in 1853, its geographical features served to demarcate the island's various communities. North of the larger mountain lay the area to which the indigenous Kanaks were now mostly restricted, their population already plummeting from an original 100,000 due to a range of nefarious French practices (though not yet halfway to the mere one in ten who would be left at the end of the century). On Nou Island, out in the ocean to the east, the harshest regime of all awaited those transported as violent criminals, who were clapped into manacles to drag out their sentence of 'double chains', under threat of further dire punishments for recalcitrance. For those 'Deported to a fortified place', the Ducos peninsula near Nouméa, the island's capital, offered a marginally less arduous environment, and it was thence that Rochefort and Michel were first taken, the latter in transit to the Île des Pins, fifty miles off the southern tip of the main island, which was home to those for whom deportation alone was deemed sufficient hardship.

Eager crowds of Communard exiles from the earlier convict ships, promised that their families would one day be able to join them, had gathered to welcome the new arrivals. Their hopes were swiftly dashed when they saw no sign of their relatives. Rochefort and Michel, too, experienced a sinking of the spirits. After they absorbed the immediate shock of finding such a concentration of notorious radicals so far from home – among the non-Communard prisoners, was the tsar's would-be assassin from 1867, Berezowsky – they would have noticed the emaciated faces of ragged creatures who had all but given up on life in the fourteen months since their arrival.

Rochefort was grateful to be delivered from the pathetic scene as Olivier Pain and Paschal Grousset intervened to usher him towards their huts, which they had newly extended to of-

tory journalism, the fact that Rochefort had cunningly continued to propose hypothetical violence to his readership whilst dismissing the awful notion at the same time cut little ice. 'You turned this government to ridicule in your articles,' inveighed the president of the tribunal, enthroned beneath a vast painted crucifixion scene, 'and you know that in France ridicule kills.'

Brutal and exemplary sentences were being handed down unstintingly: twenty-five of the Commune's leaders and fiercest proponents, including Ferré and General Rossel, were shot at Satory military camp in short order. Influential friends were concerned that Rochefort might suffer a similar fate, or that his name might at least slip on to the lengthening lists of lesser miscreants due for deportation to France's distant penal colonies in South America or the Pacific. The price of clemency, they ascertained, would be Rochefort's acceptance of humiliation. When Edmond Adam, hero of the 1870 standoff at the Hôtel de Ville, testified that his ex-colleague was merely a 'fantasist who lacked prudence', Rochefort had sat in chastened silence; when summoned to the dock, he bore himself with a meekness that few would have recognised. His lawyer, Albert Joly, even persuaded him to compose a compromisingly abject letter pleading with Gambetta to secure his release. The strategy of self-abasement appeared to work and the threat of transportation lifted, though Rochefort is unlikely to have felt much gratitude as he sat shackled atop a stinking mattress, as a Black Maria juddered its way to the prison fortress of La Rochelle.

Imagining himself the romantic heir of the Calvinist rebels three centuries earlier, who had held out there against an interminable Catholic siege, Rochefort enjoyed sufficient freedom in prison to start work on a novel, buying off the antagonism of inmates with abundant gifts of contraband tobacco. Even after his transfer a year later to the slightly less congenial conditions of Fort Boyard between Île d'Aix and Île d'Oléron, he had watched unperturbed as the frigates *Danae* and then *Guerrière*

steamed away over the horizon, carrying his old comrades to the penal colonies. The worst that fate might have in store, solicitous friends assured him, was a brief spell in an apartment on the prison island of Sainte-Marguerite followed by early release. But then, on 23 May 1873, the hard-line General MacMahon, ex-commander of a French army whose officers found it easier to blame the Communards for the country's defeat than their own shortcomings, became president of the republic.

Rochefort, it was announced, would join the final consignment of Communards to be shipped to New Caledonia. His friends were horrified. What of the compassionate considerations that had weighed upon the original judges: his weak health, and the children he would be leaving as virtual orphans, following the death of their mother, a servant whom Rochefort had finally married while in prison? Victor Hugo took up the cudgels, arguing that transportation exceeded the court's terms: 'By it, the punishment is commuted into a sentence of death!'

No one who had seen the pitiful hulk of the *Virginie*, languishing on mudflats off the Atlantic coast, could have doubted the legitimacy of Hugo's concern. The long line of sea-salts who declined to captain the ship may well have suspected that President MacMahon considered a deep-water grave to be the most convenient end for her undesirable cargo. Destined to be sold as firewood at the end of the journey, the ship's minimal refit allowed only just enough time for the Communards' last appeals to prove futile. Finally accepting his hazardous fate, Rochefort signed the papers appointing Juliette Adam – outspoken feminist, wife to Edmond Adam, and Rochefort's own ex-lover – as guardian to his children, and instructing the sale of his property for their benefit. The anxiety he felt at his predicament as he clambered on board was enough to have turned even a strong stomach queasy.

the ancient tradition – that reached from before Jesus Christ, through the Gnostics and Anabaptist sects – which Rochefort used to hook in to Michel's mystical inclinations, though there is little to suggest that he was a man who took the long view.

One old, Enlightenment theme, at least, that seems certain to have arisen in their discussions was that of the 'noble savage'. Charges of 'savagery', sometimes 'cannibalistic', had flown in all directions during France's recent upheavals: against those who had waged war on Prussia, only then to cry foul; against the murderous mob in Montmartre; and the troops who perpetrated the massacres of the Bloody Week. But for the deportees to New Caledonia, home to the aboriginal Kanaks, the question assumed a stark, new relevance. In purging French society of its regressive strain by a policy of transportation, the pseudo-republic of the early 1870s believed that it had definitively reclaimed the high ground of civilised behaviour, on which national moral regeneration might be founded. For those romantic souls who persisted in cherishing both the ideals of social revolution and a faith in noble savagery, the message of their punishment was clear: taste the brute laws of nature in the Antipodes, and then decide whether you were right to reject the solaces of paternalistic government. And once converted, if they chose to act as unofficial agents of French colonialism during their exile among the native Kanaks, then so much the better.

The *Virginie* cast anchor in Nouméa harbour on 10 December 1873, four months to the day after leaving Orléron, having made up time since rounding the Horn. After countless days in the vast emptiness of the Pacific Ocean, even those passengers due to begin a sentence of hard labour must have felt some relief at stepping ashore. But as the new arrivals were separated out into three categories of convict and led off to their respective grades of punishment, New Caledonia quickly revealed itself to be among the harshest of colonial territories.

Nautilus, sent tumbling to the seabed by the giant squid in the book's final scene, another sunken dream.

So potent and uncannily predictive did the symbolism of *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* seem to those left reeling by the Commune's fall and its pitiless aftermath that later, as the dates and details of the book's publication faded from memory, rumours even began to circulate that the work's true creator was none other than Louise Michel herself, paid 200 francs by Verne for a first draft inspired by the *Virginie*'s crossing to New Caledonia. In reality, Michel's only personal connection to the underwater tale was the membrane between her toes that she had inherited from her father and which she displayed to Rochefort on board the *Virginie*; perhaps to reassure him that in her web-footed company he could not drown, or else to illustrate the Darwinism she had learned at night school.

In later years Rochefort would talk of the kindnesses of 'his lady neighbour of the starboard side' but Michel herself was not easy to help, constantly accepting charity, only to give it away. So it was that the felt boots that Rochefort had hoped would protect her from the frost-coated deck were soon warming feet that Michel considered to be needier than her own. According to Michel's autobiography, however, she treasured far more the intellectual insights with which Rochefort furnished her on the journey: an introduction to 'anarchism' that would inform the remaining thirty-five years of her political life.

Which ideas, though, did Michel mean to encompass, in her somewhat anachronistic application of a term yet to be properly defined in 1873? Doubtless, she would already have encountered the theories of the leading French exponents of the anti-authoritarian, communistic tradition among friends in the Montmartre clubs. But if not Proudhon or Fourier, perhaps it was the federalist principles of Bakunin that were so thrillingly novel to her when expounded by Rochefort, or else the older example of Gracchus Babeuf, a progenitor of anarchism from the days of the first French Revolution. It might even have been

The first Rochefort knew of Louise Michel's presence on the *Virginie* were the jokes she cracked across the narrow corridor that divided their cages. 'Look at the pretty wedding trousseau MacMahon has sent me,' she had offered by way of introduction, posing her gangly, angular body in the regulation navy-issue clothes with which the prisoners had been supplied. Rochefort, of course, knew of the Red Virgin by repute. He could hardly have avoided the tall tales of her courage during the dying days of the Commune and had read, in prison, Victor Hugo's poem in celebration of her metamorphosis into the 'terrible and superhuman' figure of Virgo Major. He was glad of her company.

On the face of it, Rochefort and Lousie Michel had little in common. Rochefort was a philandering aristocrat, a potentially bitter reminder to Michel of her own father, with whom he shared a predatory taste for servant girls. Moreover, in contrast to the marquis' supplicatory contrition before the tribunal's authority, Michel had been unflinching in her resolve. 'Since it appears that any heart which beats for liberty has only one right, and that is to a piece of lead, I ask you for my share,' she had declared, calling the judges' bluff, while threatening that 'if you permit me to live, I shall never cease to cry for vengeance.' From Rochefort's perspective, in turn, Michel might have seemed the revolutionary counterpart of those deluded Joans of Arc whose appearance across France as putative saviours in the face of the Prussian invasion had attracted his scorn. Nevertheless, in the close confines of the *Virginie*, they discovered a complicity that went beyond the terrible oath of loyalty and vengeance that the imprisoned Communards had sworn. When Rochefort was moved to a private cabin for the sake of his health, and served seven-course dinners from the officers' table, Michel did not join in the sniping of those who suspected favouritism due to his Freemasonic connections. And when Michel gave up her own warm clothes and shoes to other prisoners, Rochefort passed

on a pair of felt boots supplied by the captain, claiming that they had been given to him by his daughter, but were too small.

Without steam engines to assist the *Virginie* when she was becalmed, the journey was long enough for a firm friendship to form, even before unforeseen revisions to the planned route. The ship had only just left port when the French admiralty issued the captain with orders to steer clear of the waters around Dakar, lest she be intercepted by a revolutionary fleet from the Spanish port of Cartagena, where insurrectionists had declared a republic. The ship's lookouts scoured the horizon for sight of the old red and yellow pennant of Spain with the royal crest ripped out, and a lengthy detour was charted by way of the Canary Islands. In reality, however, whilst Elisée Reclus, in Switzerland, might dream that a revolutionary Mediterranean federation had risen to assume the mantle of the Commune, by the time the *Virginie* had set sail Cartagena was already under intense siege by monarchist forces, and about to fall.

The hysterical propaganda that had enveloped the Commune had left nervous officials susceptible to even the most improbable scares. Just a few weeks earlier, the military governor of Marseilles had assembled a hundred-strong posse of mariners to hunt down a school of killer sharks that proved to be wholly imaginary. The source of the misleading intelligence was letters purporting to be from local fishermen but in reality forged by a disgruntled cub journalist on the local paper. It was a first coup in the career of Gabriel Jogand-Pages, as he was then known, on his way to becoming the greatest hoaxer of his era. For decades to come he would expose with mounting ruthlessness the true depths of prejudice and credulity that was rotting French society from the core.

As the *Virginie* charted her slow and creaking course south through the Atlantic, other monsters preyed on the minds of the passengers. In 1857, a ship called the *Castilian* had spotted a terrifying creature in those very waters, while four years

later the French naval frigate *Alection* had barely escaped the clutches of a giant squid. Then, in 1866, there were repeated sightings, of a pulsing, phosphorescent object beneath the waves, far longer than any whale. By 1873, such accounts had become entrenched in the popular mind through the fictional filter of Jules Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*, which had first been published in the run-up to the Franco-Prussian War: the phosphorescent tube was explained as the submarine *Nautilus*, with the squid cast as its mortal enemy.

Verne's glorious anti-hero, Captain Nemo, held an obvious attraction for the Communards. A brooding champion of freedom and science, he salvaged the treasure of sunken wrecks to fund national liberation movements, and crowned his scientific engagement by recognising the imperative of social revolution. 'The earth does not want new continents,' he opined, 'but new men.' And quite apart from the inclusion in the book's second edition of line drawings by newspaper artists who so recently had illustrated the tragedy of the war and the Commune, Verne's novel contained veiled references to contemporary radical politics. Components of the *Nautilus* had been fabricated at the Le Creusot steelworks and Cails & Co. in Paris, the two main centres of recent socialist unrest, while only the delicate diplomatic situation between France and Russia at the time of the book's composition had prevented Verne from making explicit Nemo's background as a Polish patriot whose young family had died under Russian occupation. The fictional captain may have brought to mind comrades from the Commune like Dombrowski or Wroblewski, his fellow Polish commander in the doomed defence of Paris against the Versaillais. It was his sheer force of will, however, as a traceless 'Nobody' hell-bent on vengeance – 'monstrous or sublime, which time could never weaken' – that would have resonated most powerfully with the book's Communard readers. That, together with the fate of the

Writing from Switzerland at the time, Henri Rochefort had coined the term 'opportunism' to disparage those timid republicans who procrastinated over the issue, fearful that if they were to address the question of an amnesty for the Communards, the monarchist parties might use their liberalism against them. 'The Opportunist', he argued, 'is that sensible candidate who, deeply affected by the woes of the civil war and full of solicitude for the families which it deprived of support, declares that he is in favour of an amnesty, but that he shall refrain from voting for it until *the opportune time … At the opportune time* is a term of parliamentary slang which means Never!'

The reporter for the committee of deputies, it had been Louis Andrieux himself who finally signed off in 1879 on an agreement for the return of those guilty only of political rather than criminal acts, and so deemed less dangerous to the state. As a succession of ships – the *Creuze*, the *Var*, the *Picardie*, the *Calvados* and the *Loire* – carried the Communards home, however, his new role as prefect of police seemed ever more a poisoned chalice. Walking among the crowds on the evening of the first Communards' return from exile, and listening to the speeches delivered by the pitiful straggle of broken convicts, their self-justificatory message, which sought to revise the official version of history, made Andrieux profoundly uneasy. It had been murders by the Versaillais army that had sparked any retributive acts of violence that the Commune of 1871 might have performed, they insisted, and more vengeance was due.

In the impoverished slums that Emile Zola had so shockingly evoked in his novel *L'Assommoir*, two years earlier, there were many ready to listen to such rabble-rousing. To oversee the Communards' peaceful reintegration into French society and prevent them becoming a catalyst for popular discontent would require every inch of Andrieux's skill as a schemer. Yet as the new prefect took stock of his job, familiarising himself with the workings of his domain, the case from the archives

huddled together with their hosts in smoky peasant huts, solemnly discussing politics late into the night, revolutionary hymns would spontaneously be sung. 'One couldn't help recalling scenes of the first centuries of Christianity,' admitted Kravchinsky, his thoughts as much about those absent in prison, as those active in the field. As had happened during the Paris Commune, the radical movement in Russia was already laying the foundations of a martyrology: one that Kravchinsky, the arch-propagandist, hoped might counter the self-righteous pieties of its Orthodox enemies.

Maintaining morale became ever more important. More by accident than design, the initial efforts of those who 'went to the people' had indeed scored an important symbolic point, by demonstrating the solidarity of what seemed like an entire generation against oppression in all its forms: whether by family, state, class or tradition. Yet such had been the pressure of the youthful energy released that the campaign had snowballed out of control, losing discipline and focus.

As his friends were picked off one by one, Kropotkin seethed with frustration. Having elicited an invitation to draft a manifesto for the circle, he returned to the question of revolution that so vexed the Chaikovskyists, apparently with an agenda to railroad colleagues who were absent among the peasants or in prison, into adopting a more robust policy to counter the depredations of the police. Brushing aside the adamant assertions of other Chaikovskyists that they were not anarchists, but rather social democrats, populists or even democratic republicans, his document *Why We Must Concern Ourselves with the Structure of a Future Society* asserted that 'there is not the slightest doubt that among different socialists of the most varied shades there exists a rather complete agreement in their ideals'. Moreover, the vision it offered – of a federal society in which all benefited from advanced education and all participated in 'useful labour' – was premised on the notion that any lasting change in society

must be revolutionary and would involve toppling the tsarist regime by force.

While in Switzerland, Kropotkin had wrestled with his conscience over the bloodshed that would inevitably accompany any revolution, and concluded that a popular rising in Russia could be justified. To succeed, however, it would need to be far greater in scope and organisation than the Paris Commune, and the inauspicious circumstances then prevailing could not be allowed to delay the job of preparation. 'By acquiring arms one can develop arsenals, and the troops will stand with the people,' he promised and, during the winter of 1873, set about plotting the creation of armed peasant bands, *druzhiny*, who even in failure would 'imprint their revolutionary action upon the minds and hearts with their blood'.

Although the draft of Kropotkin's manifesto was never presented to the Chaikovskyists for their approval, and never likely to receive it, when a copy fell into the hands of Third Section agents it was seized upon as powerfully incriminating evidence for their most extravagant claims against the circle. Kropotkin was not a figure whom the authorities could easily dismiss as a mere adolescent troublemaker: only a short time before, the Geographical Society had again offered him an official position. Once his secret identity as the revolutionary 'Borodin' was confirmed, however, arrest was inevitable, and yet for all Kropotkin's intellectual achievements, at the crucial moment his carelessness severely compromised the movement: a letter found by agents searching his apartment provided the key to deciphering the movement's coded communications, and exposed many of its members to persecution.

Stalwart silence whilst in the Peter and Paul fortress could now save only Kropotkin's self-respect, and yet nearly two years later, police records show that Kropotkin was still honouring the Chaikovskyists' pact of secrecy. By then, however, weakening health was threatening him with martyrdom in its fullest sense.

of schedule, and appeared set on a course of national renewal. Yet as Andrieux took stock of his new responsibilities in the field of law and order, he was all too aware of the dangers and challenges that bubbled away just below the surface.

Against the economic odds, French commerce was thriving, whilst the resumption of Haussmann's vastly ambitious building plans for the boulevards of Paris signalled a boom in the construction industry. The night-time streets of the capital glowed with gas lighting, electricity flowed increasingly freely, and the Post Office operated an efficient pneumatic mail system, propelling letters to their recipients within the hour; for those still more impatient to communicate a message, the telephone offered a somewhat limited alternative. In the eyes of the world, too, the Universal Exposition of 1878 had proved that France had regained her confidence and *joie de vivre*, with the Moorish flamboyance of the Trocadéro Palace providing a striking addition to a city more usually bound by strict neoclassical discipline.

With national pride restored, however, the ghosts of the past, stranded in the purgatory of New Caledonia or the French émigré colonies abroad, forced their way back on to the agenda. At the Exposition itself, visitors could clamber, forty at a time, inside one exhibit that seemed to offer a silent rebuke to the unjust treatment of the Communards: the giant iron head of the Statue of Liberty. Designed by the sculptor Bartholdi, engineered by Gustave Eiffel and financed by bold entrepreneurialism, the statue was to be donated to the American people on the centenary of their Declaration of Independence. But among the thousands who attended a benefit opera by Gounod or bought a miniature replica of the sculpture, or the millions who played the 'Liberty' lottery to help pay for the gift, a proportion must have marvelled at the irony of celebrating America's revolutionaries, when France continued to deny its own their freedom.

9. *Inconvenient Guests*

Paris, 1879–1881

The rumbustious political life of France had been temporarily muted by the trauma of the war of 1870 and the revolutionary Commune that followed in 1871. Any trace of the radical ideals out of which the Third Republic had been born, as the Prussian armies closed in on Paris, had been all but erased during the presidency of MacMahon in the years that followed. Even moderate republicans had been sidelined, or else, when electoral success forced their inclusion in government, the slightest challenge to Catholic or conservative interests had seen them dismissed. In early 1879, though, MacMahon retired from office short of his seven-year term, having staked his credibility on a failed campaign to bolster the conservative vote. Nine years after the Third Republic had first been declared, and four years since its legality had been confirmed, the leadership of France was finally delivered into genuinely republican hands.

Installed as prefect of police soon afterwards, the thirty-nine-year-old Louis Andrieux epitomised the hard-headed pragmatism of the incoming administration. A lawyer by training, as a young procurator in 1871 he had backed the suppression of the Lyons commune, and since his election as a republican deputy in 1875 had won influential allies, including Léon Gambetta, the aeronautical politician of the Siege of Paris, for his deft understanding of the need to ensure social stability in a period of political transition. By a remarkable effort of collective will, the country had long since paid off its war reparation, far ahead

Alone in his freezing cell, cramped with rheumatism and wheezing with respiratory problems, the pressure on Kropotkin had been intense. Scores of prisoners had already succumbed to the terrible conditions in which they were forced to live. When a solicitous visit by the tsar's brother, Grand Prince Nicholas, failed to extract a statement of regret and renunciation from Kropotkin, the authorities appeared quite content that Peter Kropotkin should be next. 'Bring me a doctor's certificate that your brother will die in ten days and only then will I free him,' the procurator replied, with seeming relish, to pleas for clemency on his behalf by his sister-in-law, whose husband Alexander had himself been arrested while Peter was in prison, and sentenced to ten years' exile in Siberia on the flimsiest of pretexts. Kropotkin's predicament seemed equally hopeless, and the unproven claims by Nicholas Fodorov a few years earlier, that soon he would be able to resurrect the dead, provided scant comfort. Eventually, though, science did intervene in the form of the chief physician of the military hospital, who insisted that Kropotkin be transferred to his care for a period of convalescence.

Acting on Kropotkin's smuggled suggestions, a plan was drawn up by Dr Orest Veimar, a friend of Kravchinsky and an independent-minded sympathiser with the Chaikovsky group. The looser security measures in force at the prison infirmary in the northern suburbs of St Petersburg were probed and tested: the daily delivery of firewood noted, inside assistance procured, and a top-floor flat overlooking the exercise yard was rented. From there a violinist would signal the all clear as part of a complex system of communication. A prizewinning racehorse called Varvar, or Barbarian, was bought by the doctor and harnessed to the getaway carriage, and the other cabs in the vicinity hired to hinder the police pursuit.

As the day in late June earmarked for his escape approached, Kropotkin received a message, concealed inside a pocket watch, confirming his imminent rescue. Then, at

the last moment, calamity struck: a run on red balloons had stripped St Petersburg's toyshops of a key element in the gaolbreakers' signalling system. A few days later, they arrived better equipped.

Those present recounted their memories of the sequence of events as a compelling montage: the bunch of red balloons drifting up over the wall of the prison infirmary, Kropotkin raising his prisoner's cap to indicate his readiness, then casting off his cumbersome coat for the 300-yard dash to the perimeter of the courtyard; the guards distracted by conjuring tricks performed by Kropotkin's accomplices, caught momentarily unawares. The fugitive then leaped into a waiting carriage, which rocked and threatened to overturn as it rounded a sharp corner at speed; from the barrels of the guards in the receding background puffs of smoke exploded harmlessly. And all was set to the strains of a wild mazurka that floated out from the violin played in a window high above the scene. Then the final shot: the anarchist prince, tapping a top hat firmly down on his head by way of disguise.

Discrepancies between the the participants' accounts of the evening that followed perhaps suggest a degree of embellishment, or else testify to the intensity of the celebrations, first in a private room in Donon's famous restaurant, and then a well-stocked dacha on the road out towards Finland. After so many tragic failures, the presence among the outlaws of Kropotkin, his face pale and drawn, almost unrecognisable after shaving his fulsome beard to conceal his identity, represented a much-needed success. Little can any of them have guessed, however, that his escape would mark the start of many decades of exile.

Travelling undercover from St Petersburg to Finland, then on by ship more openly to the Swedish capital, Christiana, now Oslo, Kropotkin finally arrived in Hull in June 1876. It was with a profound sense of relief that he saw the fluttering Union Jack, 'under which so many Russian, Italian, French and Hungarian refugees have found asylum'. For a restless Kropotkin, how-

once and for all. The official record would state tuberculosis as the cause of death. However, the aptitude for dissimulation later shown by the reactionary cabal, and by its security chiefs above all, makes it is almost possible to imagine that the letter-writing Nechaev of 1881 never existed at all.

'We trust that no personal bitterness will cause you to forget your duty or to cease to wish to know the truth,' Lev Tikhomirov told the new tsar in the manifesto promptly published by the People's Will. 'We too have cause for bitterness. You have lost a father. We have lost fathers, brothers, wives, children, and our dearest friends. We are prepared to suppress our personal feelings if the good of Russia demands it; and we expect the same of you …' It was a bold negotiating tactic, not to say impertinent, and one doomed to failure.

nobody had raised the alarm, nor even paid them the faintest attention.

Nicholas Rysakov was the first to step forward and launch his grenade; a momentary glimpse of Alexander as he passed was burned into Rysakov's retina by the blinding light of the explosion that followed a second later, catching the company of guards that followed. Undamaged, but for a few splinters, the imperial sleigh slowed to a halt a few dozen yards further on. From that moment, accounts differ. The loyalist press would later report how the tsar had stepped out and walked calmly back to survey the damage and offer what solace he could to those who lay injured on the road: soldiers with shrapnel wounds, some fatal, and a young boy who would not make it alive to hospital. If these accounts were accurate, it was a brave but disastrous decision.

Approaching the small group clustered around Alexander, Grinevitsky raised the second canister over his head and dashed it down between himself and his target. The blast consumed them both, and left the Tsar of all the Russias crumpled on the ground. His legs shattered, he tried to crawl, hands clawing the compacted snow as his entrails spilled out through a ragged hole ripped through dress uniform and stomach. So pathetic a sight did he present that one of the other assassins instinctively made to help him, only to be pushed back by guards.

His death, less than an hour later, was reported throughout the capitals of Europe before the end of the day. Almost as quickly, his planned programme of reforms was buried as the forces of reaction set about implementing long-cherished plans for repression. Whose purposes the rabid voice of the unseen Nechaev had best served is a matter of opinion: the nihilists may have finally made their point, but the result was to return the initiative to the reactionaries, with Pobedonostsev's protégé in line to assume the throne as Alexander III. Either way, by the end of the following year Nechaev's voice was silenced

ever, the search for congenial company and a secure environment in which to develop his dangerous ideas had only just begun.

6. *Forward!*

America and Back, 1874–1878

Just as the defeat had dispersed Communard fugitives around the world, so the persecution of the *narodniki* by the tsarist authorities now began to create a diaspora of Russian radicals. For most, the move abroad was impelled by a simple instinct for self-preservation, while revolutionary evangelism was the motive for others. In the case of Nicholas Chaikovsky, however, his arrival in New York in late 1875, with his heavily pregnant wife, had a quite different explanation. For whilst the other members of the circle that bore his name were still risking arrest in their struggle to galvanise the peasant masses, Chaikovsky had succumbed to a growing sense of alienation from precisely the 'adventurism of the intelligentsia' that he himself had done so much to foster in the preceding years.

Plunged into a maelstrom of spiritual self-doubt, Chaikovsky had experienced an epiphany whilst passing through the provincial town of Oryol in the spring of 1874, when he had chanced to meet Alexander Malinkov, the charismatic leader of a religious cult. 'In every man there is a divine element,' Malinkov taught. 'It is sufficient to appeal to it, to find the God in man, for no coercion to be necessary. God will settle everything in people's souls and everyone will become just and kind.' Amidst the growing attrition that surrounded the populist project, Chaikovsky found deep consolation in the message.

Chaikovsky's old associates had greeted news of his conversion with incredulity. How, they asked, could he have been

suicidal intent: 'I or another will strike the decisive blow … He will die, and with him, us, his enemies and murderers.'

Ever since Goldenburg had named Zhelyabov as the prime mover of the assassination plots, he had topped the 'Wanted' lists. News of his arrest came as a great relief to the tsar, who had not spent consecutive nights in the same bed for many weeks, to confound the imminent attempts on his life that anonymous letters regularly threatened. Throughout that time Alexander II had shown courage of a kind for which few at the time gave him credit, determined as he was to fulfil his 'civilising mission' and redeem his legacy as the Saviour Tsar: 'to see Russia set on her peaceful path of progress and prosperity'. With his nemesis now in custody, he had surely approached his crucial meeting with Loris-Melikov that Saturday with a new lightness of spirit. For once, he may even have allowed himself a reprieve from checking faces in the passing crowd against the police album containing photographs of those known to want him dead.

The following morning, when the tsar's entourage pulled out of the palace and on to the icy streets of St Petersrbug, it took an unusual route, to the home of Grand Duchess Catherine. It was a courtesy visit, at which Alexander would explain to his elderly aunt the groundbreaking package of constitutional reforms that he had agreed with Loris-Melikov the day before, and whose announcement was imminent. The detour taken by the imperial party reduced, at a stroke, the intended three-pronged ambush by the People's Will assassins to a single point.

Loitering on either side of the road that ran beside the Catherine Canal, the four appointed bomb-throwers must have felt that the bombs concealed beneath their coats rendered them agonisingly conspicuous. Yet by half-past one, when Sofia Perovskaya lifted her handkerchief in warning, and the first horses of the tsar's Cossack bodyguard appeared,

of imprisonment, and a will that punishment had failed to break,' Figner would later enthuse of her new correspondent. His smuggled approval was a decisive factor, perhaps, in light of the new shocks that the terrorists would face as the moment for action approached. For on Friday, 27 February (Old Style), only two days before the date scheduled for the attack, Zhelyabov was arrested, betrayed by a colleague who had turned informant to save his own life when awaiting trial the previous autumn.

With the entire project thrown into jeopardy, an emergency meeting of the core conspirators was called for three o'clock on the Saturday afternoon. As Sofia Perovskaya minuted the meeting's urgent resolutions, starting with the recovery of the bomb-making material from her lover Zhelyabov's apartment, she must have known that success in their enterprise would surely now mean execution for him. The self-control she showed inspired the others to hold their nerve. In Vera Figner's apartment, hours later, she and Kibalchich settled down to a long, tense night of bomb-making, while Perovskaya slept, emotionally exhausted.

It was hazardous work for tired eyes and shaky hands: cutting to size empty kerosene canisters, before filling them with nitroglycerine to create the impact grenades which Kibalchich had devoted his recent energies to perfecting. One slip and the entire building would have been rubble; wisely, Kibalchich set aside his trademark top hat, lest it fall disastrously from his head. By daybreak, four neat canisters sat on the table, ready for delivery to the home of Gesia Gelfman, where the designated bomb-throwers had convened. When Figner got there, she was unimpressed to find Frolenko – who was to light the mine's fuse – shovelling into his mouth a breakfast of bread and salami, washed down with wine. 'To do what I have to do, I must be in complete control of my faculties,' he retorted, continuing with what seemed likely to be his last meal. The diary of another accomplice, Grinevitsky, makes plain the bombers'

won over by such a charlatan, whose son announced to visitors that 'Daddy is God', and who had once been a favourite student of the reviled Pobedonostsev? Conveniently they failed to remember how often Malinkov had challenged his tutor. When Chaikovsky made the mistake of inviting fellow members of the sect to shelter overnight in a safe house belonging to the circle, the radicals present had made their feelings known by keeping the pacifistic 'Godmen' awake deep into the early hours with bitter accusations. Chaikovsky, though, was adamant, in both his new-found faith and his determination to emigrate.

Messianic ideas had long flourished in Russia and, consciously or otherwise, had informed many of the socialistic theories to emerge from its political philosophers. Even Lavrov's popularism was premised on the idea that the soul of the peasant, the *muzhik*, contained the germ of social salvation, and that a hidden, mystical force inherent to the peasant community would one day rise and sweep away bourgeois complacency, bringing renewal to the whole of mankind. Similarly, the young missionaries 'to the people' regularly held up the United States as a model for the freedom and social justice to which Russia could aspire: a country with no tsar, but rather a president elected by and representative of the people themselves. In the years since the Civil War, the intelligentsia's fascination with America had seen any number of schemes and companies set up to assist with emigration, with pioneers dispatched to help populate new communities.

No such preparation had paved the way for Chaikovsky, however, and having travelled to America ahead of Malinkov's main party of fifteen, it fell to him, in New York, to determine their final destination. There was no shortage of existing communes that the sect might have joined: ready-made, if flawed, Utopias that included Josiah Warren's Modern Times on Long Island, Noyes' Oneida in New York State, the Fourierist Reunion in Missouri, or the Shakers at Sonyea, to name only the most prominent of several hundred then active. However,

it was to a small colony called Cedar Vale, established near Wichita in Kansas, that Chaikovsky was drawn by an open invitation from its founder, a Russian calling himself William Frey, for newcomers to join him in 'the great laboratory of all ideas and aspirations that agitate against the contemporary world'.

In prospect, Chaikovsky would have found much about Frey with which to identify. Born William Giers, a mathematical prodigy like Chaikovsky himself, he had excelled first at the Artillery School in St Petersburg and then in the army. But Giers' professional life had exposed him to the suffering of the masses, and their dispiriting political inertia had plunged him into a state of suicidal despair. Rejecting a promotion to serve as Surveyor General of Turkestan, he had preferred to set sail for a new life, having adopted his new surname while passing through Germany to denote a devotion to freedom. 'We want persons who are kind, tolerant, and earnestly devoted to communism as the best means of benefiting the human race,' he had written of his colony, in the letter published by Peter Lavrov's newspaper *Forward!* He even warned potential recruits that 'they must be actuated by principles, and not merely selfish purposes'. The proposition must have struck any self-regarding idealist as irresistible, but there were reasons too for Chaikovsky to have hesitated.

While breaking his journey in London, Chaikovsky had been warmly received by Lavrov, whose purpose in publishing *Forward!* was to keep his readership informed about labour struggles internationally, including those with which the more industrialised regions of America were racked, and the picture it painted of the country on which Chaikovsky had set his sights was quite at odds with Frey's vision of rolling prairies and opportunity. 'Ship after ship departs from Europe bearing with it people who are filled to excess with sufferings in the Old World and who naïvely expect to find a different life in the New World,' Lavrov wrote, warning that 'The naïvety of these

plausibly explained as spilled sour cream. But still they were edgy. When Barannikov was apprehended, the knowledge that they would all be exposed to immediate arrest if he broke under interrogation drove morale even lower.

Then, one day at the end of January 1881, a letter smuggled out of the Peter and Paul fortress was delivered to Vera Figner: a voice from the past that carried an almost mythic force. In the eight years since Sergei Nechaev's capture and incarceration in the Alexeyevsky Ravelin, shackled in solitary confinement on the tsar's express instructions, little had been heard of him. Some assumed that he had been left to die, after striking a police general who had visited Nechaev's cell to recruit him as a spy. Now it was clear that not only had he survived but had retained enough of his guile to capture the sympathy of all the prison guards, and establish communication through one of them with the outside world.

The first request Nechaev sent Figner to pass on to the executive committee of the People's Will was that a team be assigned to break him out of prison. On learning that the resources committed to the assassination plot made this impossible, 'The Eagle', as he named himself, nimbly assumed a more selfless and flattering tone: though awed by their boldness, he would like to offer the benefit of his tactical expertise. Zhelyabov, he suggested, should assume the position of 'Revolutionary Dictator' once the established political order was overturned. But first, he said, they must 'Kill the tsar!'

When Nechaev's orchestration of the murder of his rival Ivanov had come to light back in 1870, many young radicals had been willing to give him the benefit of the doubt and exonerate his crime as a fine example of ruthless necessity in a greater cause. For those populists who had themselves now abandoned the moral scruples that had guided their action during the intervening years, something like their original assessment of Nechaev again pertained. 'There remained only an intelligence that had retained its lucidity in spite of years

ity for the tsar. Loris-Melikov's bold initiative to disband the Third Section, and so bring an end to its counterproductive heavy-handedness, had inevitable consequences for the security of the tsar, while the secrecy surrounding his relationship with his mistress compounded the problem. When the ageing Wilhelm Stieber had passed on advance intelligence about the Winter Palace bomb plot from his spies in Geneva, for example, it was concern that Catherine Dolgorukova's residence in the Winter Palace should not be revealed that had led the tsar to refuse a search of his private quarters. After she became Alexander's wife as the 'Princess Yurievskaya' within a month of the tsarina's death in June 1880, she would attempt to safeguard his life, wheedling for him to take a winter holiday in Cairo, to be followed by his abdication; but her efforts were in vain.

The combat unit of the People's Will had learned the lessons of its failed attacks on the tsar's train, spread across locations several hundred miles apart, and now focused its attention on a shorter route: that of Alexander's weekly Sunday excursion from the Winter Palace to his riding school at the Mikhaylovsky manege. A cheese shop was rented on the Malaya Sadovaya, and in the biting cold of early January 1881 a tight-knit team that included Zhelyabov, Vladimir Degaev and Alexander Barannikov set about digging a tunnel from its cellar in order to mine the road. A backup squad would wait by the roadside with hand-held grenades, and Zhelyabov would loiter alone with a concealed dagger, ready to deliver the *coup de grâce* if all else failed.

The tunnelling tested their resources to the limit. The frozen ground made it hard and heavy work, and the old problem of how to dispose of the soil was solved by filling empty cheese barrels. With scant funds to provide stock that would allow the 'shopkeeper' to play his role, the barrels at least filled out the storeroom; when a surprise police inspection noticed liquid from the melting earth seeping from between the staves, it was

people is excellently made use of by clever swindlers.' Moreover, he explained, the time was at hand when the workers in America must fight their exploiters, and it was surely no place for idle social experimentation.

It was advice worth heeding, but all too easy for the imperturbable Chaikovsky to disregard as serving Lavrov's personal agenda that political change at home should be the primary duty of any Russians contemplating emigration. Chaikovsky's discovery that the atmosphere of growing intrigue and persecution he had found so intolerable in St Petersburg pervaded even émigré life in London must have made him uneasy too, and the steamer waiting in Liverpool docks all the more appealing. For whilst Lavrov himself was unaware that the sizeable private donation that sustained his newspaper was actually paid by the Third Section, the activities of its less subtle agents in Britain were all too obvious, as they used bribery and blackmail to stiffen Scotland Yard's somewhat desultory efforts at keeping the Russian community under surveillance.

On the long journey from New York to Cedar Vale with his wife and co-religionists, Chaikovsky would have ample opportunity to reflect on the wisdom or otherwise of his decision and to revise his rose-tinted view of America. During the previous decade, sums that were almost inconceivable had been spent on the expansion of the country's railroads, netting vast fortunes for the entrepreneurs who had driven their development far beyond any immediate need. In the process, tens of thousands of indigenous peoples had been displaced from their land, and huge numbers of railway workers had suffered injury or death, not to mention the attrition on those toiling without safety provision in the mines and foundries that fed the railroad with its raw materials. The risks to the brakemen were all too obvious as they clambered over moving carriages to set the brakes, or whipped out their fingers as the buffers of rolling stock clanged heavily together for manual coupling. Had Chaikovsky known in full the miserable terms of their employment, half starved

and lacking legal protection of any kind, he might have thought the freed serfs of Russia almost fortunate by comparison.

Every stage of the journey brought new and alarming insights, but nowhere more so than the town of Wichita, at whose newly built station the Russian family and their fellow 'Godmen' finally alighted. 'Leave your revolvers at police headquarters and get a check,' read the sign that greeted them, but the sound of six-shooters being fired at flies on saloon walls spoke of a certain laxity in the enforcement of this rule. Wichita was booming. Rail links to the eastern cities and a steamboat connection to New Orleans saw to that, along with the influx of cash that came from the jangling-spurred cowboys who delivered herds of longhorn cattle for shipment along the Chisholm trail from Texas. In the six years since it had been founded, Wichita had already acquired close to 3,000 regular inhabitants, outstripping its once larger neighbours, and the building plots on its grid plan of 140 streets were rapidly starting to fill. Bars occupied a disproportionate number, though the Masons had already secured a prominent position for their hall.

Arriving as they did in the final weeks of 1875, Chaikovsky and his companions would have been just in time to witness the dregs of the wild carnival that engulfed the town between June and December. For a few days the population of Wichita swelled to twice its normal size with seasonal traders bringing with them an influx of gamblers and whores. Brass bands blared from the doors and windows of saloons every hour of the day and night, while Deputy Sheriff Wyatt Earp attempted to keep order. 'Near Brimstone' was how one journalist headlined his report on Wichita, and Chaikovsky is unlikely to have lingered long.

If he had wondered what Lavrov meant when he wrote of the 'swindlers' who awaited naïve immigrants to America, Chaikovsky would by now have had a range of candidates, from the exploitative railroad bosses to the local card sharps.

he adopted a decidedly liberal slate of policies that aimed to tackle the causes of discontent as much as its consequences. It marked a major shift from the attitude that had prevailed previously, when members of the Kharkov *zemstvo*, the people's representatives, were sent to Siberia for petitioning the tsar to 'grant his own faithful servants what he had granted the Bulgars': a constitutional settlement. Nor was Loris-Melikov deterred from pursuing the tsar's new 'civilising mission' when, only days after his appointment, an assassin's bullet glanced harmlessly off the cuirass he wore beneath his regular uniform, and lodged in the fur collar of his coat.

Initially, at least, the strategy appeared to bear fruit. The executive of the People's Will promptly called off two bomb attacks against the tsar, including one for which a hundredweight of explosives had already been positioned in the Catherine Canal in St Petersburg, and indicated that a permanent ceasefire could be secured by concessions on constitutional reform. But whilst Loris-Melikov embarked on a series of consultations with interested parties, the People's Will were offered no place in the dialogue, and their fragile faith in his good intentions began to break down. The high price of trusting the authorities was soon amply illustrated by the Third Section's unscrupulous manipulation of the captured Goldenburg. Placed in a cell with a turncoat radical, to soften him up, he succumbed to his interrogators' persuasive assurances that only the threat of continued violence was preventing reforms. Those comrades whose names he divulged were promptly rounded up. Realising he had been duped, Goldenburg committed suicide.

When the Trial of the Sixteen in October 1880 resulted in the execution of three members of the People's Will for conspiracy, their friends resolved that it was no longer enough merely to have demonstrated the seriousness of their intent: they must achieve their threatened objective. The vote for the renewal of hostilities, pitilessly forced through by the group's female members, came at a moment of heightened vulnerabil-

in the tsar as their friend and protector, liberal reforms were proposed most ardently by Alexander's mistress, Catherine Dolgorukaya. Pregnant with the fourth of his illegitimate children, with secret apartments reserved for her use in the royal palaces, the failing health of the tsarina made Dolgorukaya's position a strong one. But for the hardliners grouped around the tsarevitch and his mentor, Constantine Pobedonostsev, newly appointed as chief procurator of the Orthodox synod, the solution lay in ever more draconian repression to crush all seditious elements that threatened the status quo. And they were in do doubt about where the greatest danger lay.

After the Turkish War had ended ingloriously for Russia, and the terms of the Berlin Treaty had damaged her national interest, the novelist Dostoevsky had written of the British prime minister, Disraeli, as a tarantula who 'used the Turks to crucify Slav brothers in the Balkans'. The military intervention he had ordered was not the self-interested act of a Great Power, but one facet of a greater Jewish conspiracy. Reflecting on the state of Russia in a letter to Dostoevsky, Pobedonostsev saw its tentacles closer to home too. 'The Yids', he ranted, 'have invaded everything, but the spirit of the times works in their favour. They are at the root of the Social Democratic movement and tsaricide. They control the press and the stock market … They formulate the principles of contemporary science, which tends to dissociate itself from Christianity.' Anti-Semitic measures should, both men clearly believed, be central to the tsar's political agenda.

The chosen instrument of their hard-line policy was to be Count Loris-Melikov, whose capture of the city of Kars had been a rare high point in the recent war. Since succeeding the assassinated Dmitri Kropotkin as Governor General of Kharkov he had demonstrated a welcome ruthlessness, winning over even those who saw him as an Armenian parvenu. His advocates were stunned, however, when having been appointed chief of the Supreme Administrative Commission,

Perhaps, though, as the train had chugged through Missouri, he would have also reflected more closely on the letter Frey had written to *Forward!*: 'To veto the reproduction of undesirable children … grossly sensuous … gratification of his own senses': the phrases that leaped out were troubling indications of a dogmatism regarding the physical life of the commune. Might Lavrov's warning have been alluding to a swindler of a different kind altogether, who played on one's hopes of a promised land of freedom in the Midwest, but delivered only another kind of servitude?

Undaunted, Chaikovsky crossed the verdant plains outside Wichita with high hopes, approaching the 'Happy Valley' in which Cedar Vale lay. Nor, after the final forty-mile trek, did the place disappoint, at least at first sight: a pleasant community of seventy farms and twenty schoolhouses spread across rolling prairie, its people hard-working and peaceable. However, when William and Mary Frey – thin and feverish, shivering in threadbare old Unionist overcoats and smiling a slightly too eager greeting – emerged from a ramshackle building, the travellers must have felt more like a rescue party happening upon marooned sailors than hopeful recruits to a thriving social experiment. Perhaps, for a moment, Chaikovsky experienced a first twinge of the bitter homesickness described by a previous Cedar Vale colonist in his book *The Prairie and the Pioneers*, and the longing that he and his Russian cohabitants felt 'to be under our own poor grey sky, surrounded by naked and cold plains and forests!'

Letters from the author of the Prairie memoir, Grigori Machtet, to Mary Frey, once frequent, had become less so of late. The reason, though, would have become plain to the colony when editions of *Forward!* containing Machtet's recent contributions finally reached Cedar Vale. It was as if he and Chaikovsky had exchanged places, though the world of radical St Petersburg into which Machtet had immersed himself on

his return from America seemed already to have progressed several steps further towards political upheaval in the short time since Chaikovsky had left.

When the reactionary professor Elie Cyon had roused his students to riot a year or two earlier, forcing the closure of the university for several months, the tsar had simply dispatched the outspoken academic to Paris as a privy councillor, and the tension had been defused. Recent protests, however, had incurred a more extreme and confrontational response, and none more so than the funeral of Pavel Chernyshev. A medical student who had been arrested in error, he had subsequently died from tuberculosis due to the appalling conditions in which he was held. While crowds chanted an elegiac verse hastily composed by Machtet, Chernyshev's open coffin was processed around sites symbolic of the tsar's infamous penal system: courts, police headquarters and prisons.

In the past, the tsarist administration had paid lip service, at least, to the basic dignities of political prisoners, but the time for such indulgence was now past. On direct instructions from the tsar, the words 'an honourable fighter for a sacred cause' were excised from the dead man's grave. 'A great judgement day' was coming, his outraged mourners proclaimed in reaction, when the thin crowds to whom they usually proselytised would 'be transformed into tens, even hundreds, of thousands, who, with weapons in hand, will go out into the square to judge the executioners, torturers, robber barons and exploitative landowners.' The authorities, however, moved swiftly to ensure that the cataclysm would be indefinitely postponed, with the Third Section stepping up its repression.

Having struggled against mounting odds to maintain the Chaikovskyists' links with the peasantry, frustration now drove Sergei Kravchinsky to join the exodus of fugitive dissidents. His first stop was Paris, as it had been for Chaikovsky, but his final destination was to be not some spurious heaven on earth but a war zone: Bosnia and Herzegovina, where

the lever. Nothing, save the sound of the train rolling on, uninterrupted. The bomb had failed to detonate.

On the outskirts of Moscow, Hartmann had dismissed the rest of the team: he and Sofia Perovskaya would stay on alone, two respectable citizens in their home, to all appearances: she with the honour of giving the signal, he to fire the charge that would kill the tsar. 'Price of flour two rubles, our price four' read the coded telegram that had arrived earlier, locating their target. Deep into the evening they too waited, as Zhelyabov had done a few hours before, allowing the first train to pass. But this time, as the fourth carriage of the second train drew level, the detonator was triggered. A deafening explosion of earth and the wrenching of steel. Then sudden pandemonium. It was a ghastly scene. Amidst the wreckage of the fourth carriage, sticky red ooze covered everything; only after the initial shock subsided and the sweet smell of preserved fruit began to pervade the air did onlookers realise that it was merely a bloodbath of jam, being shipped from the Crimea to supply the pantries of the imperial palaces. The tsar had changed trains just before his departure and had already arrived safely in Moscow.

Alexander II's relief would be short-lived. In February, a devastating explosion tore through the Winter Palace, killing eleven soldiers who were standing guard and injuring fifty others. Only his decision to extend a meeting elsewhere in the building with Alexander of Battenberg, the new puppet king of Bulgaria, saved him. The dining hall in which they were to have met was destroyed by a blast from the kitchens below, where a lone People's Will bomber had planted dynamite that he had brought in stick by stick over several weeks, under cover of his job as a carpenter. The terrorists' deadly game could not be allowed to continue, but how to stop it?

Differences over security policy divided the Russian elite, drawing out latent suspicions and personal resentments among those closest to the tsar. To restore the people's faith

purchase of a drill, Perovskaya's sangfroid saw them through. And day by arduous day, the intermittent thunder and clack of train wheels sounded out the diggers' growing proximity to the line, and the approaching moment when their work would be tested.

Then disaster struck. Dispatched to collect a case of dynamite and meet Kibalchich so that the scientist and bomb-making expert could advise him in its use, Goldenburg was arrested; after a mix-up over their rendezvous, Kibalchich arrived just in time to see him dragged away. Fresh explosives were sourced, but then, at the last moment, the Moscow electricians who had promised to provide Hartmann with the battery needed to detonate the charge haggled over the price. Lacking access to ready cash, Hartmann handed over his engraved gold watch: lavish overpayment and an incriminating error that would nearly cost him dear.

At last, though, everything was set. The three groups waited in feverish anticipation to know which route the tsar would take. At the last minute news came through. Fearing seasickness in rough weather, the tsar had decided against the Odessa route. If Zhelyabov failed, it would be down to the Moscow unit.

It was the night of 19 November 1879. Reeling from lack of sleep, having for months been leading the double life of aspiring businessman and local personality by day and ruthless terrorist by night, Zhelyabov could do no more. Heavy rain had flooded the depression between the high railway embankment and the position from which he would stake out the passing train, leaving him and his collaborators drenched and shivering as they buried their bombs and laid the wires. But as he watched the first decoy train pass and awaited the arrival of the second, as advised by spies in Simferopol, he must have felt confident that his moment of glory was fast approaching. Calmly he counted: one, two, three carriages, then the fourth. Was that the tsar at the window? Timing it perfectly, he pressed

the imposition of onerous taxes by the Ottoman Empire had provoked a popular revolt in which he meant to hone his skills as a militant revolutionary. While the tsar's generals hung back, hamstrung by factional wrangling over the geopolitical complexities of engagement in the Balkans, Kravchinsky would plunge in, sensing an opportunity to seed a socialist future in lands liberated from Turkish misrule.

Departing Paris in August 1876 with Klements as his sole companion, Kravchinsky crossed from northern Italy into war-torn Bosnia, where his military training promptly earned him the command of a rebel division's artillery: a single cannon. His excitement was to be short-lived, however. Marooned in a landscape of suffering, rendered toxic by a cycle of massacres perpetrated by Ottoman irregulars against the Bosniacs and avenged by them on the Turkish population, Kravchinsky felt the futility of his predicament deeply. Before long his pride would take a further battering: confronted by a steep hill, the rebels had no choice but to bury their cannon, while a puffed Kravchinsky – who had been famed among the bookish Chaikovsky Circle for his outstanding physical prowess and hardiness – had to be carried piggyback over the ridge by his commanding officer.

Contradictory messages filled his letters to Russia and his reports to Lavrov. In one letter he summons colleagues to the fight, then declares that 'I won't start calling comrades over from Russia until I have been convinced with my own eyes. I've become very sceptical.' The Bosniacs are 'a brave, decisive and cunning people', but the insurgents 'a gang of ordinary bandits'. 'There isn't even the faintest whiff of socialism here,' he claims, shortly before opining to another correspondent that 'You could lead socialist propaganda here wonderfully.' The contradictions suggest a man unsure of how best to brazen out the terrible reality of his disappointment, yet all too alive to the risks of defeatism. The candid appraisal of the liberation movement he has promised to *Forward!* cannot be delivered, he admits, until 'it's all over, because it would be

counterproductive to tell the whole truth now. It has to be inflated for the sake of politics.'

Insofar as Kravchinsky's intention in Bosnia had been to convince those he had left behind in Russia that 'we have to take up, not the pen, but the knife', he had failed. His adventure ended with a brief spell in a deafeningly noisy and brutal Turkish gaol, about which he remained silent until many years later. The one saving grace, however, had been the friendships formed with members of the Italian contingent, among them the sons of the legendary Garibaldi, who like him had seen in the Balkan liberation struggle the perfect testing ground for revolutionary action.

While the insurgency of the nationalist Risorgimento remained a touchstone for Europe's revolutionaries, however, the new imperative since the watershed of 1871 was to promote the creed of internationalist socialism. 'It was on the cadaver of the Commune – fecund in its ruins – that we pledged ourselves to the struggle between the old spirit and the new,' wrote one member of the Italian movement, 'and it was from the blood of the slain Communards that the omens were drawn.' Foremost among the promulgators of this inspiring vision was the twenty-four-year-old Errico Malatesta, and whilst he had no personal experience of the Paris uprising to offer, he provided Kravchinsky with a living link to Bakunin, who had otherwise passed beyond reach.

From the furthest reaches of the Russian Empire in Asia to the southernmost point of Europe, where African and Latin blood mingled, the 1860s and 70s seemed to breed revolutionaries in a recognisably similar mould. The son of a propertied factory owner, Malatesta's early childhood had been blighted by respiratory illnesses that led doctors to predict his early death and left him vulnerable to infections throughout his life. Sickness, though, had not subdued a stubborn, contrarian streak that, subjected to the 'cretinising and corrupting' dogma of a religious boarding school in Naples, bred a spirit of resis-

her comrades were not deterred. From the small house they had purchased near the railway line, only a couple of miles out from the Moscow terminus, a fifty-yard-tunnel had to be dug before the middle of November. The men worked in shifts, arriving before daybreak and continuing until the early hours. For weeks on end they edged forward: the bookish Morozov, wilting under the physical effort; the conceited Grigori Goldenburg, at whose hand Dmitri Kropotkin had died, and who insisted on being at the forefront of any action; and Lev Hartmann, one of those freed from prison by Frolenko and since co-opted to the executive committee of the People's Will. Four others helped too, taking their turn at digging. They advanced a scant four yards each day, inserting props that sagged under the weight of the earth overhead and continually bailing out the water that seeped in, threatening to flood the tunnel. The wet sandy soil they excavated while wedged into the tunnel on their hands and knees, with scarcely room to wield their tools, was scattered as discreetly as possible over the yard outside. Piles of it filled the rooms of the house and its outbuildings, which smelled like a grave. The possibility of collapse loomed large as the tunnel passed beneath a muddy track; even the reinforced props creaked and bowed whenever a laden water cart passed overhead, and the sappers carried poison to ensure a speedy death should they be entombed.

While the men tunnelled, Perovskaya sat cradling a pistol, ready to fire at a bottle of nitroglycerine and blow them all up should the alarm be rung on the upper floor to warn of approaching police. Incidental problems were resolved with a quick wit: clever procrastination when an old resident arrived to retrieve her possessions from the soil-filled shed; a superstitious rant to deter neighbours who came rushing to extinguish a fire; the invocation of a cat with an inexhaustible appetite to explain the quantities of provisions observed entering the house. When a gendarme and local surveyor arrived to assess a mortgage application made by the group to fund the

neously at three points, hundreds of miles apart, covering the most likely permutations in the tsar's itinerary.

Targeting the first possible route, Vera Figner was dispatched to employ her female wiles to assist one of the radicals in securing a job with the railway company near Odessa. The sob story she told concerned a manservant in St Petersburg who was being sent south in search of fresh air for his consumptive wife. It was an approach fraught with risks, and Figner barely escaped an interview with her first mark, Baron Ungern-Sternberg, with her honour intact; as the governor of the region, the Baltic aristocrat had assumed that her approach implied recognition of his seigneurial rights. Dusting herself off, Figner next aimed lower, enthralling the local railway master with the sleek velvet and swaying peacock plumes of her outfit. Frolenko, the movement's master of disguise, fresh from springing three revolutionaries from prison by posing as their gaoler, was chosen to take the part of the railway guard and plant the bombs.

Leading the second team, Zhelyabov posed as an industrialist looking to set up a tannery in Alexandrovsk, near the railway boom town of Kharkov. His target was a section of track on the Simferopol–St Petersburg line, the tsar's most direct route home, along which police patrols passed every three or four hours. Nerves of steel and a high level of concentration were required, and the mere presence of the zealous, charismatic Zhelyabov helped maintain the group's morale: 'He was a man who compelled attention at first glance,' wrote one of his colleagues; 'he spoke quietly, in a low full bass, with determination and conviction, on the necessity of terror.' Women succumbed readily to his charms, but in the heroine of the third team, Sofia Perovskaya, he met his match: while she tamed his philandering ways, he won her over from a distrust of men, rooted in hatred for her tyrannical father.

The third route seemed the least likely, as it would require the tsar to divert his journey to Moscow, but Perovskaya and

tance. A confirmed atheist and anti-authoritarian by the age of fourteen, only his youth saved him from prosecution for a disrespectful letter written to the new king of Italy, Victor Emmanuel II. Next came medical studies, a characteristic first step for guilt-stricken young humanitarians on the road to political activism, the flamboyance of which, in Malatesta's case, led to his expulsion from the course and flight from Italy in search of a mentor. Having crossed the freezing St Gotthard Pass at the coldest time of the year, he arrived at Bakunin's home in Switzerland penniless and with a fever running so high that the Russian felt obliged to watch over his sickbed in person: he could hardly have made a more dramatic first impression.

Defeat in the struggle for control of the International in 1873 had seen the revolutionary fervour that had sustained Bakunin through countless doomed uprisings and secret societies begin to ebb. Exhausted by the ceaseless machinations of Marx and Engels and the calumnies they poured upon him, disappointed by a world where repression had become 'a new science taught systematically to lieutenants in military schools of all nations', Bakunin had grown weary of pushing 'the rock of Sisyphus against the reaction that is triumphant everywhere'. Regardless of the realities, Malatesta's devotion was absolute. 'It was impossible for a youth to have contact with [Bakunin] without feeling himself inflamed by a sacred fire, without seeing his own horizons broadened, without feeling himself a knight of a noble cause,' he wrote, and took up arms as the old man's paladin, travelling to Spain under the code name 'Beniamino'. In 1874, he prepared an insurrection in Bologna intended to reinstate Bakunin as the revolutionary hero that he had once been. 'I am convinced that the time of grand theoretical discourse, written or spoken, is past,' the Russian had declared. 'It is no longer time for ideas but for deeds and acts.'

It must have taken a wilful blindness, by this point, not to recognise Bakunin for the corrupt husk he now was, but Malatesta was not alone in his credulity. With a certain rheumy-

eyed regret for the life of aristocratic ease that he had left behind in Russia decades earlier, Bakunin was squandering more than merely his energy in the spendthrift pursuit of an old man's folly: the refurbishment of the grand house and estate of La Baronata, on a hill overlooking Lake Locarno, the cost of which had absorbed nearly the entire sizeable inheritance of Bakunin's eager acolyte, Carlo Cafiero. It took the young Italian's belated realisation that hiring picturesque milkmaids and excavating an artificial lake was not wholly essential to the creation of a revolutionary headquarters before he finally staunched his indulgence of the old rogue.

If only to raise the spirits of their bombastic icon, and without any genuine prospect of success, the young Bakuninists had nevertheless proceeded with the Bologna plan. Unless from a sense of obligation, it is hard to explain Bakunin's own half-hearted participation except as a craving for the kind of heroic death that could obscure the embarrassment of the Baronata fiasco and extricate him from his responsibilities to his young family. Yet when the insurrection failed to take hold, he had been grateful to elude the Italian Carabinieri, even at the price of further crushing indignity: the notorious scourge of organised religion was reduced to shaving off his locks and donning a priest's robe to disguise his identity, while comrades had to push his capacious posterior through the door of a waiting coach.

Undaunted, Malatesta had followed up the Bologna debacle with a similarly doomed attempt to incite insurrection in Puglia, where only five of the several hundred expected activists actually materialised. Emerging from prison with his appetite for revolutionary adventure still unabated, the summer of 1875 had seen him on a mission to Spain to stage the prison break of an anarchist who proved infuriatingly reluctant to be liberated, before he returned to join the Masonic lodge in Naples, repeating Bakunin's mistake of a decade earlier by thinking that he could transform it into an instrument

To gain credibility in his undercover role, Rachkovsky had acted as a decoy on behalf of the radicals, donning a wanted-man's coat to distract the police while the real subject of their surveillance caught a train for Odessa using a forged passport. Unable to resist sharing his amusement at the ruse with his Third Section colleagues, Rachkovsky had chosen the People's Will plant Kletochnikov as his confidant; as Kletochnikov had by this time been awarded the Order of St Stanislas, perhaps Rachkovsky felt his loyalty was beyond question. The next edition of the *Narodnaya volya* newspaper exposed Rachkovsky's treachery. Spirited away to Vilnius under police protection, he was lucky to escape with his life. Never again would he take anyone at face value.

Temporarily, Kletochnikov's colleagues in the People's Will had the advantage, armed with a steady flow of privileged information about their opponents' plans and state of knowledge, and when necessary with invaluable tip-offs.

The 13,000 miles of railway track that had been laid in the preceding decade, financed for the tsar by loans from Western capitalists, must have appeared a terrible affront to the People's Will, whose members prided themselves on standing in the vanguard of science and enlightenment. A piece of autocratic sleight of hand, it stole their progressive thunder, dressing cold-hearted reaction in the stuff of forward-looking optimism. For despite representing a practical statement of control and confidence, the expanding railway network was experienced by the tsar's subjects as a monumental act of generosity that embraced them all. By striking the tyrant down as he raced along these sleek new tracks, using state-of-the art explosives, the People's Will could symbolically reclaim their rightful place as heirs to the future, while laying bare the tsar's hubris and vulnerability. In expectation of the tsar's return from the imperial family's winter vacation at the Black Sea resort of Yalta, the decision was taken to mine the railway network simulta-

Some months would pass before the schism in the Russian radical movement would crystallise, but the Voronezh conference marked the fateful moment when hope gave way to anger. That their extremist policy had been necessitated precisely by their failure to inspire the 'people' to rise up was conveniently overlooked as they named their splinter organisation the People's Will.

In the more innocent age that was now drawing to a close, the radicals had referred to the feared agents of the Third Section, whose unofficial uniform made them quite easily identifiable, as 'the pea green overcoats'. Now, though, as the struggle shifted into the world of conspiracy, both sides were developing a more sophisticated approach to concealment and infiltration. The populist heirs of the Chaikovsky Circle had already scored a remarkable intelligence coup by placing a mole at the very heart of the tsarist security service. It had taken Nicholas Kletochnikov, a young graduate, considerable time and tenacity to acquire his post as confidential clerk to the investigation department of the Third Section: first he had insinuated himself into the maternal affection of his reactionary landlady, next convinced her that he shared her political views; only then had she felt inspired to recommend him for recruitment. Although Peter Rachkovsky did not yet know it, the police headquarters were severely compromised and a single misplaced word could blow his cover.

Rachkovsky's successes as a police spy had been swift and significant. Once the recommendations of the Archangel radicals had paved his way to acceptance by the People's Will, he had promptly betrayed the very friend about whom the police had first interrogated him, and soon after had exposed the previously unsuspected Tikhomirov as the pseudonymous 'Tigrich', whose identification was a Third Section priority. But as each new arrest narrowed the field of possible traitors in The People's Will, his associates were becoming suspicious. In the end, Rachkovsky's own incaution gave the game away.

of revolutionary organisation. After such embarrassing disappointments, anyone less single-minded than the tight-framed, tousle-haired and alarmingly moustachioed Malatesta might have been chastened: instead, perfectly undeterred, he plunged headlong into the ideological quicksand of Bosnia.

By the same count, Kravchinsky should have noted Malatesta's unblemished record of failed insurrections and given him a wide berth. Had Kravchinsky been able to meet Bakunin for himself, while travelling through Switzerland on his way to the Balkans, perhaps his curiosity would have been satisfied, but only a few days previously age and ill health had finally claimed the sixty-two-year-old revolutionary. In Malatesta, Kravchinsky had found a surrogate who carried the conviction needed to help restore his battered faith in the possibility of a beneficent revolution. 'We must make unceasing attempts, even if we are beaten and completely routed, one, two, ten times, even twenty times,' Malatesta might have told his new friend, repeating words of encouragement written by Bakunin to another *narodnik* two years previously; 'but if on the twenty-first time, the people support us by taking part in our revolution, we shall have been paid for all the sacrifices we will have endured.'

With Malatesta's first mention of an arms cache in Puglia, left buried from two years earlier, and of a new scheme to mount an insurrection near Naples, all Kravchinsky's previous plans and promises were instantly forgotten.

'We had planned to go to Montenegro together, before he had the whim of going to Italy instead,' the earnest young Klements wrote plaintively from Berne, complaining about Kravchinsky, whom he nicknamed the 'Bluebird' dreamer. As Chaikovsky read the letter, the icy wind howling through the ramshackle walnut-wood walls that the 'Godmen' had thrown together for shelter at Cedar Vale, his baby wailing from the cold, his sympathy is likely to have been fleeting.

His own predicament offered enough misery of its own, though whether the physical demands of life in Kansas or its communal nature was more taxing, he would probably have been hard put to say.

'They have neither pilots nor lighthouses,' had been how Frey described the ideal colonists he sought to recruit, since 'everything is unexplored, everything must be discovered anew'. The 'second-rate prairie' on which Frey had chosen to stake out his plots yielded little to the incompetent husbandry of the colonists, however, who lacked even the skill to milk their cow, let alone produce the cheese or butter that might have made more appetising the ascetic diet of unleavened bread prescribed by the vegetarian Frey. The material challenges the group faced, however, were at least equalled by the emotional torment they suffered.

Though a modest lifestyle was accepted as part and parcel of the struggle for a new social order, the newcomers baulked at Frey's evangelical imperative to 'break yourself' in order to release the true communist within, and vigorously resisted when he urged them to renounce clothes. Mealtimes were a trial too, with anyone late to the table forbidden to eat, even if delayed by urgent community business, while the other families winced as Frey subjected his daughter to daunting tests of mathematical prowess and punished her failure with a dowsing of cold water. Maybe he considered such treatment physically beneficial, as well as character building: with quinine unaffordable, a bath of rainwater was also the proposed cure for Chaikovsky's malaria on one occasion.

'This slow, constant mockery of man's moral liberty' was the overriding impression that would stay with Chaikovsky, who must have dearly wished that before leaving Europe he had thought to consult Elisée Reclus' travelogue of 1861, *Voyage à la Sierra-Nevada de Sainte-Marthe*. A bible for those seeking to establish communes in America (despite Reclus' antagonism to such social experiments), it warned of the perverse tendency of

survive. Whilst grimacing aristocrats downed their restorative draughts, Zhelyabov plotted with his extremist colleagues to administer a bitter and deadly medicine of his own. In readiness for the life ahead, he had already separated from his wife and young family to avoid their being persecuted for his future deeds, while his earlier fascination with the explosive charges used by the fishing fleet in Kiev to bring stunned shoals floating to the surface, hinted at what he had in mind.

By the time the members of the more moderate Land and Liberty faction of populists arrived at the designated clearing in the Voronezh forest, the trap was truly set. When the moderate Georgi Plekhanov leaned nonchalantly back on a tree to mockingly read out an article arguing the legitimacy of terrorism, he expected most of those present to endorse his abhorrence of such sentiments. Their silence left him nonplussed: 'In that case, gentlemen, I have nothing more to say,' was all he could muster. His colleagues were ready to cast aside the fundamental principle of non-violence which had guided the movement ever since the end of Nechaev's short and brutal career nine years earlier, although many still cavilled at Tikhomirov's argument for the formation of an organisational elite to coordinate a new strategy that would punch through to political power.

'It was my belief', one of the young women present would recollect, 'that the revolutionary idea could be a life-giving force only when it was the antithesis of all coercion – state, social and even personal coercion, tsarist and Jacobin alike. Of course it was possible for a narrow group of ambitious men to replace one form of coercion by another. But neither the people nor educated society would follow them consciously, and only a conscious movement can impart new principles to public life.' The fear was that they might recreate just those circumstances that had seen the decay of the French Revolution into dictatorship.

For a hard core, however, including Kibalchich and Vera Figner, Tikhomirov's recommendations were compelling.

among fifteen executions for politically motivated crimes that year, including one as punishment for purely propagandist activities. Gone were the traditional Russian scruples about the sanctity of human life, which made it so difficult to recruit to the post of public executioner that one man covered all the European provinces. Now the job was often left to amateurs, fortified with vodka to the point of oblivion, and grotesquely clumsy: ill-tied nooses sent condemned men sprawling to the ground, only for them to be strung up again until the task was accomplished.

Observing the huddles of political prisoners waiting under guard to be led out of the city on the first stage of their long march to Siberia, even radicals previously inhibited about the use of violence were forced to reassess their position. The security of the movement had always warranted extreme sanctions against traitors: the euphemistic 'withdrawal from circulation'. The appearance in court of one informant from Kiev, who had been been repeatedly stabbed and left for dead, his face dissolved by the application of lime, offered an even more powerful warning than the note left with him: 'This is what happens to spies.' Logic dictated that such defensive measures should be applied equally to those who controlled the informants, but implied terrible ramifications. 'If you decide to kill a spy, why shouldn't you punish the policeman who encourages his base profession and who profits from his information by making more arrests?' was how Kravchinsky presented the argument, 'or even the chief of police who directs the whole thing? Finally and inevitably comes the tsar himself, whose power spurred the whole gang into action.'

It was this question that the leaders of the radical movement were summoned to debate in the forest of Voronezh in June 1879. Determined to stage a coup against any in the movement who resisted their terroristic agenda, the 'Troglodytes' had convened for a preliminary meeting, to plan strategy, in the nearby spa town of Lipetsk, in whose mineral waters no fish could

utopian communities to constrain rather than encourage liberty, and their susceptibility to petty tyrants. Reclus had no time either for the utopian theories of Charles Fourier, with his wild promises and bizarre symbolism, according to which two crops at least should have flourished in Cedar Vale: the cauliflowers of free love, and the cabbages whose leaves represented illicit liaisons.

That Frey had decided to create his own colony may have been due to his prudish distaste for the sexual antics he and Mary had encountered elsewhere. Their first taste of cooperative life, in New York, had ended when 'hungry debauchees' with an appetite for promiscuity had swamped the commune, and discomfort at the libertarian ethos at Reunion had similarly prompted their departure. Whether Mary agreed with his view that they had escaped 'the most discordant and hellish life that could be imagined', however, is an open question. As a radiant young bride, eight years earlier, she would have been entitled to expect great things of marriage to a well-connected and highly respected scientist. Even after settling in America, the prospect of being free to pursue her own ambitions as a doctor would have made the hardships endurable. Since then, though, Frey's neglect of his wife's romantic and libidinous needs had led her to search for satisfaction outside the marriage.

Grigori Machtet may not have been the first to fill the gap in Mary's heart and bed, but after his return to Russia, she had struck out desperately for independence, her brief visit to Chicago in search of a baby to adopt turning into a year's absence. When necessity finally forced her back to Cedar Vale she had maintained her habit of free-loving, conceiving a child by her next young Russian paramour. Despite belonging to that generation of Russian radicals which had held Chernyshevsky's writings as gospel truth, Frey's jealousy seems to have bitten deep, and in his ever more pedantic enforcement of the community's rules he may well have been sublimating the frustration he felt at the loss of control over his personal

life. With his original partners in the foundation of Cedar Vale long gone, few of its subsequent residents were psychologically strong enough to withstand the Wednesday meetings that he still found so 'electric, thrilling, [and] beneficent': mutual criticism followed by enforced public confession may have been intended to clear the air, but the effect was rarely restorative.

The commune's manifesto had been full of fine sentiments: 'For the cause that lacks assistance, For the wrong that needs resistance, For the future in the distance, And the good that we can do,' it pledged. Its journal had once recorded such sentiments as being 'like sailors throwing the baggage overboard to save the life … in order to get something to live on', but entries had already ceased by the time of Chaikovsky's arrival. Since then, the reality of their shipwrecked existence had become painfully apparent to everyone: it was the colonists themselves who lacked assistance, and Frey who needed resisting, while the ideal future to which they aspired lay so far over the horizon as to be quite fantastical. By late 1876, Chaikovsky and a chastened Malinkov had moved their families to a second shack just across the river from Frey's own: 'With what shame one recalls many episodes of this life,' the leader of the 'Godmen' later wrote.

Chaikovsky bridled at the grim fascination with which the other residents of Cedar Vale watched their social experiment failing, and when the Kansas authorities launched a formal investigation into the commune's supposed immorality, the humiliation became too much. To extricate himself, though, was no easy matter. Chaikovsky had staked everything on Cedar Vale and was penniless. Reluctantly leaving his wife and child behind, he set off on foot in the hope of earning the price of their escape.

While Chaikovsky shivered through the icy American winter and spring of 1877, Kravchinsky basked in the balmy Mediterranean climate of Naples, where he had arrived from

in 1874 against his professor's reactionary influence in the university, and for the crime of lending a prohibited book to a peasant had subsequently spent three years in prison, pending the pronouncement of his two-month sentence. Now a fully fledged militant, his fascination with rocket design was put on ice, while he devoted himself to the construction and testing of terrorist bombs in his home laboratory.

The aspiration that the rest of society might join the radicals in demanding change had reached its high watermark at the beginning of 1878, when the Trial of the 193 ended in acquittal for a large majority of the defendants, many of whom had been held for several years. The impudent Myshkin, who had railed in court against 'a farce … worse than a farce … worse than a brothel where girls sell their bodies to earn a living', received a sentence, though, of ten years' hard labour. In St Petersburg a heady atmosphere engulfed those who had been freed: 'People thronged their apartments from morning to night. It was an interrupted revolutionary club, where ninety to a hundred visitors attended in a day; friends brought with them strangers who wished to shake hands with those whom they had looked upon as buried alive.' Yet almost immediately the steel door of repression had again swung shut: extrajudicial measures were introduced to excise any leniency from the system, and a number of those acquitted were nevertheless sent into internal exile on the tsar's prerogative; jury trials were abandoned, with hearings moved from civil to military courts, and the investigative procedures of the Third Section sharpened.

The freelance, uncoordinated nature of a series of attacks in spring 1879 only invited further repression. Kropotkin's cousin, Dmitri, had been the first victim, shot in February; two months later, on 2 April, it was Tsar Alexander II himself who was in the firing line. Ambushed while walking in the grounds of the Winter Palace, the tsar frantically dodged five bullets and was saved only by the presence of mind of a loyal peasant who nudged the assassin's elbow. The hanging that followed was

true allegiance once and for all. He would, he confirmed, render the police whatever services they asked of him; his offer was gratefully accepted, and he was directed to infiltrate the People's Will without delay.

In only a few months, concurrent with Rachkovsky establishing himself in St Petersburg, the People's Will organisation, or Narodnaya Volya, had come to dominate the radical landscape in Russia, although its numbers remained intentionally small. With its immediate roots in the uncompromising 'Troglodyte' or 'Death and Freedom' faction of the populist movement, most of its prime movers were familiar names from the Chaikovsky Circle: men and women who had remained in Russia during the worst of the persecution, and become radicalised by the punishments inflicted on their comrades. For Lev Tikhomirov, the traumatic memory of Bogoliubov's vicious beating was compounded by the knowledge that humiliation had since sent the poor man mad, while others had witnessed naïve students, detained without charge while 'going to the people', locked in cages and then hung over the latrines until they passed out from the fumes. The toll of political prisoners who had died from neglect or mistreatment already approached seventy.

Among the populists who had risen rapidly through the depleted ranks of their local cells, many had come to recognise that a new level of ruthlessness and professionalism was required if anything resembling social justice was to be secured. Zhelyabov was one such, the son of serfs, who as a child had witnessed his aunt dragged away by the bailiff to be raped by the local landowner, and had enrolled in the radical movement following one of his frequent and groundless arrests. Frustrated by the failure of past efforts to force concessions from the tsar, Zhelyabov already concluded that 'History moves too slowly. It needs a push. Otherwise the whole nation will be rotten and gone to seed before the liberals get anything done.' And then there was the scientist Kibalchich, who as a student of physiology under Elie Cyon had rioted

Bosnia late the previous year. Posing as a consumptive, Abram Rubliov, he had at first attracted little attention among the other northern Europeans there for their health, during what was then the peak tourist season. Only the attentive care he received from a pair of fetching young Russian ladies prompted malicious rumours of a *ménage à trois* at 77 Strada Vendagliere. Far more than Italian morality was at risk, however, for one of Kravchinsky's companions was Olympia Kutuzov, the radical activist who had married Carlo Cafiero a couple of years earlier, while the other, Natalia Smetskaya, was the ex-room-mate of Kropotkin's Zurich friend Sofia Lavrova, now in flight from punitive exile to Siberia. And the work that preoccupied him was the composition of a pioneering manual of guerrilla warfare.

Meanwhile, Malatesta devoted himself to practical preparations, convinced that the time was ripe for yet another attempt at insurrection. Although socialist in name, the national government had been elected on the suffrage of barely one in fifty of the population, and was dependent for its survival on support from the very propertied classes whose inept management of the land had caused widespread economic damage. Moreover, whilst ideologically at odds with the Catholic Church, and demonised by the intemperate Pope Pius IX, both shared a common enemy that was subject to ever more ruthless government persecution: the communists and, above all, the anarchists, whose numbers the police estimated to be in the tens of thousands nationwide, with Naples second only to Florence as a centre of support.

Faced with organised resistance to its half-hearted reforms in the 1860s, the Italian authorities had cast their opponents as 'brigands': a linguistic sleight of hand that had since earned a spurious scientific legitimacy from a young doctor called Cesare Lombroso. Like Malatesta, he too had been drawn to medical studies by his social conscience, and also shared a commitment to the education of the peasantry, the redistribution of

land and a strong anticlericalism. One dull December morning in 1870, however, while examining the skull of Vilhella, Italy's most famous recent outlaw, 'a vast plain under a flaming sky' had revealed itself to him: the beautifully simple, if horribly mistaken apprehension that the criminal was 'an atavistic being who reproduces in his person the ferocious instincts of primitive humanity and the inferior animals'.

His notion of the inherently 'delinquent man' struck a blow against Catholic ideas of 'sinfulness', but at the same time challenged the fundamental tenet of revolutionary socialism: that man was perfectible. And whilst offering the nascent science of anthropometry a compelling vision of a subspecies whose 'facial asymmetry, irregular teeth, large jaws, dark facial hair, [and] twisted noses' could be measured and graded with calipers, it also opened the door to political repression and racial subjugation. For what, after all, were the doomed and stunted creatures of his imagination, if not genetic detritus, upon whose eradication mankind's highest development depended?

Malatesta could not have disagreed more. Following his late master's dictum that 'Popular revolution is born from the merging of the revolt of the brigand with that of the peasant', for him, the uneducated outlaw was to be celebrated as an avenging force of nature and recruited to the political struggle. It was with this belief that he and his friends focused their efforts on the Matese massif, a mountainous region several miles inland from Naples. During the winter of 1877 and into spring, they tramped repeatedly several thousand feet up to the icy massif, still deep in snow and home to packs of wolves, to build what they believed to be a strong relationship with the natives of the region: a population proud of their warrior ancestry and indomitable independence. For this they had the assistance of Salvatore Farina to thank, a veteran of Garibaldi's campaigns whose knowledge of the local dialect opened doors, and whose

tude to the exiles, after only eighteen months his new career lay in tatters. But whilst his detractors must have sneered at the grand farewell arranged for him by the exiles, Rachkovsky already understood how a parting gift of letters from those very radicals, recommending him to the political dissidents in St Petersburg, could be turned to greater profit than any number of degrees or Civil Service commendations.

Effortlessly sliding into the capital's shady demi-monde, between middle-class legitimacy and the revolutionary underworld, Rachkovsky grew ever more slippery, and his intentions increasingly opaque. For where did his loyalties lie when, during that winter, he worked as a tutor in the household of Major General Kakhanov of the Third Section or, the following April, secured the editorship of the newspaper *The Russian Jew*? Were his purposes sincere, or was he insinuating himself into the trust of either the police or the revolutionaries, on behalf of the other, with mischief in mind? 'Tall, brown hair, big black moustache: dense and drooping; long and fat nose, black eyes, pale face … Wears a grey overcoat, a hard black hat; walks with a cane or umbrella. Intellectual face,' stated the description of him handed out to police surveillance agents. That he was being watched might simply have been a ruse to keep his recruitment secret from all but those in the Third Section with the highest clearance.

Short of the paunch and neat pointed beard he subsequently acquired, the arch-intriguer of later years is already recognisable, of whom it would be said that 'his slightly too ingratiating manner and his suave way of speaking – made one think of a great feline carefully concealing its claws.' For the moment, though, Rachkovsky was not yet the capricious master but still the plaything of others, whose dangerous games would come close to destroying him. Hauled in for interrogation by the Third Section in the spring of 1879, over his association with a certain Semionovsky who was suspected of concealing the assassin Kravchinsky, Rachkovsky was obliged to declare his

8. *Spies and Tsaricides*

Russia, 1878–1880

There was nothing in Peter Rachkovsky's career before 1879 to augur his destiny as the greatest spymaster of his age, who would inherit the mantle of Colonel Stieber. Born in the Ukraine, the son of a humble postmaster and a nobleman's daughter, both Polish Catholics, Rachkovsky's lack of a family fortune obliged him to make his own way in life, and aged sixteen, in 1869, he had joined the Civil Service. Beginning as clerk in the Odessa mayor's office, he was shunted through various minor secretarial posts in provincial administrations until, by 1875, he had finally clawed his way up to secretary in the office for peasant affairs. Along the way, however, lay the wreck of his failed marriage to Ksenia Sherle, from whom Rachkovsky had separated when the tedium of the life that he could offer had driven her to take lovers. An energetic man with higher expectations than his wife had appreciated, he responded by embarking on a course of legal studies that quickly led to a position as a prosecutor in the ministry of justice, and a posting to the frozen northern extremes of Archangel.

Quite what happened next, or rather why it happened, is hard to divine. Having shown no previous sign of the kind of angst that drove so many of his contemporaries into anti-tsarist activity, Rachkovsky perversely chose the very moment when he had finally gained a professional foothold to reveal a liberal streak. Dismissed on 23 September 1878, under pressure from hard-line local reactionaries enraged by his lenient atti-

enthusiastic reading of the locals' reactions to their presence further emboldened them.

Attuned by Bakunin's constant urging of caution about informants, however, Malatesta had caught the scent of betrayal and Farina's sudden disappearance confirmed his fears. The action, scheduled to begin on 5 May, would be brought forward by a month, regardless of the wintry conditions that still prevailed in the mountains. It was not enough to outwit the authorities in Naples though, who had kept the revolutionaries under surveillance since January. Police spies noted every arrival and departure from the hilltop village of San Lupo, where Malatesta made his base camp, and before long the Carabinieri took up concealed positions around the Taverna Jacobelli, where the weapons from the Puglia cache were being stockpiled, and waited for the moment to strike.

Kravchinsky and his Russian companions had good reason in April to want to strike out against authority, as news came through of the recent mass persecutions of their friends in St Petersburg. Already, though, their contribution had fallen short. The funding of the adventure by a Russian heiress, who was rumoured to have named marriage to Kropotkin as the sole price of her support, had never materialised: the reality was simply that Natalia Smetskaya had been looking for a husband, to meet the conditions of a bequest. Far worse frustration was to follow. Returning to San Lupo from a visit to Naples, the day before the expedition was due to begin, Kravchinsky was intercepted at the nearby Solopaco station by armed police. There had been a shoot-out, a *carabiniere* had been killed, and Malatesta and Cafiero, together with only ten followers and a hastily arranged mule train, had escaped up into the mountains. Kravchinsky himself, however, was going nowhere.

Detained for interrogation in Benevento under the wittily improvised pseudonym 'Nobel', Kravchinsky may have kept his spirits up by imagining his friends carrying out a glorious

tour of the Matese towns and villages, a great army of righteous peasants rising in their wake. In reality, though, such an outcome had never been likely, and the seizure of a copy of Kravchinsky's own guerrilla manual at the time of his arrest may have worsened their predicament, convincing the authorities to commit greater resources to snuffing out the band's activities. Twelve thousand troops were mobilised for the hunt, intimidating the peasantry into spurning their would-be liberators, and cutting off towns to starve them out.

The best that Malatesta could hope for in the circumstances was to impress the peasantry he encountered with the zeal and honour of the revolutionaries. Passing through the villages of Gallo and Letino, his paltry band indemnified the custodians of the municipal archives before making a bonfire of their tax and property records. Without Farina to translate their words into local dialect, however, their rousing speeches fell flat, and Cafiero was reduced to the simplest rhetorical formula: 'If you want to, do something,' he shouted in exasperation at the warily mute peasants, 'If not, then go fuck yourselves.' Yet the group persisted in their ideals: each morning the leadership passed to a new member of the party, approximating anarchist principles of dispersed authority, and even when half starved after a forty-eight-hour march they declined to eat a solitary goat out of pity for the herdsman. But after five long days, the game was finally up. Trapped in a farmhouse, they watched the troops close in. The powder from their guns drenched beyond salvation, Malatesta and his friends surrendered.

During the months of his imprisonment Kravchinsky immersed himself in the prison community of artisans, tradesmen, ex-Garibaldean insurrectionaries and professional intellectuals from across the country, learning Italian and Spanish, but struggling to keep boredom at bay. Writing to Kropotkin, he reluctantly pleaded for 'domestic and personal news' in place of the 'political argument' that caused letters to inmates to be confiscated, though he appears to have had no

namite was produced, the supervisor balanced on a one-legged stool, lest a moment of sleepy inattention lead to disaster. As geographers, Reclus and Kropotkin could have expatiated confidently on the kieselguhr used to stabilise the dynamite: a porous, friable clay composed of tiny, fossilised crustacea. It is doubtful, however, that they yet grasped quite so well the implications for 'propaganda by deed' of Nobel's recent innovation, gelignite. Stable, powerful and portable, it could be slipped all too easily into portmanteaux or else concealed beneath coats.

lition of the wage system altogether. If Malatesta begrudged Kropotkin and Reclus their ascendancy as the anarchists' ideological guides, by the time he left Switzerland in the summer of 1879 – rather than accept a fine and imprisonment after his arrest near Lugano on the night of 12 June – he had to acknowledge how effective they had been in focusing minds.

In the course of the give and take of argument, it appears that a transformation also occurred in Reclus' stance towards the legitimacy of violence as a tactic, as he engaged with the hard moral choices implicit in a commitment to revolution. Having conceded some months earlier that if existing society was governed by force, the anarchists were justified in using force in response, in December 1878 he went further, writing in pained terms to a female correspondent that 'in order to give birth to the new society of peace, joy and love, it is necessary that young people not be afraid to die'. Galvanised, perhaps, by the personal resolve that Kropotkin had displayed in November when he publicly congratulated the assassins of the governor of Kharkov, Kropotkin's own cousin Dmitri, Reclus was finally released from the state of frozen circumspection in which his cruel experience of the Commune had left him. The painful duty of the conscientious man to embrace transgression was confronted head-on. 'In society today you cannot be considered as an honest man by everybody. Either you are a robber, assassin and firebrand with the oppressors, the happy and potbellied, or you are a robber, an assassin and a firebrand with the oppressed, the exploited, the suffering and the underfed. It is up to you, you indecisive and frightened man, to choose.'

The implications of that choice, however, were becoming increasingly stark. From the quiet shores of Lake Geneva, Reclus and Kropotkin would have heard the distant echo of explosions up in the mountains, as engineers blasted a route for railways or roads. Until recently, the use of dynamite had been a hazardous business. Nobel's own brother had died for a moment's carelessness, and at the factory at Ardeer in Scotland where dy-

trouble acquiring copies of Marx and other socialist writers for his edification. Kravchinsky must have feared that it would be a long time before he would be able to put into practice the lessons he had learned. Even the astonishing amnesty for political prisoners announced after the death of King Victor Emmanuel on 9 January 1878 seemed unlikely to include the Matese insurrectionists. At last, though, after many anxious hours of uncertainty, the heavy doors of the prison creaked open and Kravchinsky, Malatesta and six companions emerged into the cold, crisp light of the New Year.

Penniless and ill-shod, Kravchinsky set off to walk the 400 miles up the Italian peninsula to Switzerland. As a parting gift, his fellow prisoners had pressed upon him an Italian dagger, and as he strode on, pondering the injustices inflicted on the youth and peasantry of Russia, his thoughts must have dwelt on its stiletto blade and the deep mark it might carve on the psyche of their persecutors.

Chaikovsky had done his walking during the summer of Kravchinsky's imprisonment, and could hardly have chosen a worse time to be on the tramp. The spring of 1877 had seen heavy rains turn the roads of Kansas to a quagmire, after which prairie fires had swept the Chisholm Trail in the unseasonally harsh heat of early summer. Elsewhere in the country, though, it was not merely the weather that was proving tempestuous as the press predictions of an American commune during Rochefort's visit three years earlier seemed set to be proved right.

After three years of recession, there appeared to be no end in sight to the plight of America's workers, victims of the great industrialists' rapacity: the willingness of their ruthless companies to cut wages to below starvation levels, and then halve them again, before knocking a dime off their shareholders' profits. Worse, the causes of the economic collapse lay in the robber barons' own greed: the overexpansion of

their railroads and associated enterprises which had led to desperate price-cutting wars. 'Capital has changed liberty into serfdom, and we must fight or die,' asserted a labourer in St Louis, and one slogan reverberated across demonstrations, and was whispered conspiratorially in workers' hovels: that it was 'better to die fighting than work starving'.

Setting out equipped with nothing but $10, a Russian chemistry degree and 'a dilettante knowledge of carpentry', every step of Chaikovsky's three-week, 420-mile journey in search of work took him closer to Philadelphia. It was thence that Marx had attempted to transplant the International to save it from Bakunin in 1874, and there that it had quickly expired, only to take on a new life during the Centennial Exhibition of the Industry of All Nations the previous year, 1876, as the Working Men's Party of the United States. Of more immediate relevance to Chaikovsky, however, Philadelphia was also home to the railway companies that lay at the heart of the spreading storm. No one in the eastern states needed the telephonic apparatus that Alexander Bell had demonstrated at the exhibition to warn them of the violence: the bush telegraph of railwaymen conveyed the information only too clearly.

Chaikovsky had presumably left Cedar Vale before news filtered through of the first downing of tools by railroad workers on the Baltimore & Ohio line on 16 July, and the shooting dead of a striker by militiamen that followed it. He must already have been on his way by the time he heard about the troop shipments from Philadelphia to proletarian Pittsburgh where a new civil war seemed to be brewing, this time on class lines. The strike action would soon spread to over 80,000 workers nationwide. The wonder is that Chaikovsky did not turn in his tracks, but perhaps he felt somehow complicit; after all, the support and sympathy shown towards the strikers in the small towns through which he passed – by free labourers, farmers and tradesmen, and even their sheriffs – was the stuff of which his St Petersburg circle had dreamed.

The inexorable rise of Bismarck's mighty Germany seemed to them, as it had to Bakunin, strangely of a kind with the bullying and overbearing brand of Teutonic socialism propounded by Marx and Engels. Threats such as that made at the Ghent Congress by Wilhelm Liebknecht, leader of the Social Democrats and friend of Engels, against a leading anarchist compatriot then resident in Switzerland – that 'If you dare to come to Germany to attack our organisation we will use every means to annihilate you' – only compounded the impression. For all the hatred and distrust that existed between Bismarck and Marx, the projects of both were centralising and dogmatic, and the anarchists' hope was that, as their fortunes had risen together, so too they would fall, co-dependent to the end.

In 1879, staying at Reclus' house in Clarens, Kropotkin and his host collaborated closely, and together founded a newspaper, *Le Révolté*. It was a meeting of minds that proved productive on all fronts, the Russian offering the benefit of his specialist knowledge of Siberia as the Frenchman composed the sixth volume of his *Universal Geography*, while calm study and conversation allowed Kropotkin to work out 'the foundations of all that I wrote later on'. Their discussions sparkled, the advantage flowing without rancour from one to the other, generating fresh perspectives on tired subjects. Told that the two ideals of anarchism and communism howled in pain at being paired, Cafiero had shortly before observed that 'these two terms, being synonyms of liberty and equality, are the two necessary and indivisible terms of the revolution'. Not the least achievement of Reclus and Kropotkin at this time was to trace a path towards their reconciliation.

Government would be abolished, in favour of a free federation of producers and consumers; property would be distributed by need rather than the contribution of labour; and for the moment, rather than demanding improved wages and working conditions, trade unions should militate for the abo-

realm risked terrible consequences. Even before Cesare Lombroso had presented his first ideas on criminal anthropometry or Francis Galton coined the notion of eugenics, at either end of the 1870s, such concerns had permeated the fantastical fiction of two of France's and England's most popular novelists. In *The Coming Race*, published in 1871, Edward Bulwer-Lytton had astutely identified the fundamental tensions latent within 'scientific' socialism. The utopian world inhabited by his perfect beings, the Vril-ya, was exposed as something closer to a dystopia when its price was fully accounted: the slower and more brutish breed of *Untermenschen* left languishing in perfection's wake, and the suppression of individualism, such that 'a thousand of the best and most philosophical of human beings … would either die of ennui, or attempt some revolution.' Although written in a somewhat allegorical style, Jules Verne's *The Begum's Millions* of 1878 addressed similar questions within a more contemporary frame.

Reworked by an initially reluctant Verne from a first draft by none other than Paschal Grousset, the ex-foreign minister of the Commune and Rochefort's fellow escapee from New Caledonia, it inevitably struck a chord with the anarchists. Its two protagonists, the megalomanic Professor Schultze and Dr Sarrasin, a specialist in the new field of hygiene, found neighbouring colonies in the American Midwest, that fabulous land of 'infinite possibilities' and false promises. In Frankville, Sarrasin's concern is the holistic health of the community, whilst the Stahlstadt of Schultze, author of *Why are all Frenchmen Stricken in Different Degrees with Hereditary Degeneration?*, is a militaristic city whose super-gun menaces its neighbour. 'Germany can break up by too much force and concentration, France can quietly reconstitute itself by more freedom,' was how its publisher, Herzel, explained the central theme, and neither Kropotkin nor Reclus would have disagreed.

Newly inaugurated as president of the United States, Rutherford B. Hayes, however, was a world apart from the ideal holder of that office that the Chaikovskyists had described to the peasants. The bulk of his votes had come from working men, and his opposition to any unprecedented deployment of federal troops in a labour dispute was a matter of record. But while the election's outcome had hung in the balance, with contested results in Florida and elsewhere, it was the head of the Pennsylvania Railway who had chaired the special electoral commission, and it had been while travelling in a private company rail carriage that Hayes had finally celebrated its ruling in his favour. Then and since, he and half his cabinet had sold their souls to the railroad bosses, who had all but dictated the appointment of his secretary of war.

Hayes' resistance to his multi-millionaire puppeteers quickly crumbled. Troops were redeployed from South Carolina, Virginia and even Dakota to put down the strikers. From supervising resettled 'redskins', soldiers turned their attention to suppressing socialist reds, and from guaranteeing the new-won rights of blacks to denying the basic economic rights of working men of all colours. Thousands more troops were made ready, with the navy shipping men to Washington to secure the capital against rioters. In light of the scruples shown by regular officers, however, even this was deemed insufficient: mercenaries would be required to complete the job, and they would be supplied by the Pinkerton Agency.

Back in the late 1830s, the young Scot, Allan Pinkerton, had been among the leading firebrands of the Chartist movement, when mass support for its reformist challenge to the British Establishment posed a genuine threat of revolution, and shared friends in common with Marx and Engels. Under threat of deportation to Botany Bay he had fled to the United States, and in an extreme volte-face turned his insider's understanding of subversive organisations into a thriving business. Having established a name for himself during the

Civil War as a Unionist spymaster, in peacetime his company's freelance operatives had earned their spurs chasing down Jesse James, then by infiltrating the Mollie Maguires: an Irish labour organisation notorious for its murderous bully-boy tactics against strike-breakers, mining company officials and any non-Irish immigrants who threatened their ascendancy. Pinkerton's exposure and extirpation of the Mollies in the first half of the 1870s had in short order sent union membership tumbling from 300,000 to barely a sixth of that number.

Like its clients, the detective agency suffered during the recession, but Pinkerton had 'The Larches' to pay for: his fortress-like country house built with timber shipped specially from Scotland, from whose central cupola-topped tower guards equipped with binoculars watched for approaching assassins, and beneath which a secret escape tunnel ran. Safe behind its defences, Pinkerton surveyed the conflict racking the country with a keen professional interest. 'It was everywhere, it was nowhere. It was as if the surrounding seas had swept in upon the land from every quarter, or some sudden central volcano had … belched forth burning rivers that coursed in every direction,' he wrote, calculating his profit. The storm, however, subsided almost as quickly as it had gathered: the posting of army detachments along all the trunk lines, under the command of General Getty, broke the strikers' will, and almost all had returned to work by 1 August. For Pinkerton, though, this was only the beginning.

Using undercover investigators, the agency produced an unequivocal judgement: 'the strikes were the result of the communistic spirit spread through the ranks of railroad employees by communistic leaders and their teachings.' Middle-class fear and outrage was stoked, while the police, militia and army attacks that had provoked mob violence were speedily forgotten and the railroad bosses exonerated. The strikers were stigmatised with that cruellest of labels: they were 'un-American' socialists unworthy of the care or protection

The most obvious challenge to 'evolutionary socialism' came from the political right. In 1878, a Bismarckian nationalist called Ernst Haeckel, who in his professional capacity as a biologist was preoccupied with the deterioration of the Teutonic race, found himself wondering 'what in the world the doctrine of descent has got to do with socialism: the two theories are as compatible as fire and water'. Socialism 'demands equal rights, equal duties, equal possessions, equal enjoyments for every citizen alike', while evolutionary theory argues 'in exact opposition to this, that the realisation of the demand is a pure Impossibility … [since] neither rights nor duties, neither possessions nor enjoyments have been equal for all alike nor ever can be.' The only answer Marx could offer was a metaphysical faith in the dialectic mechanism, whereby contradictions latent in the most recent, capitalist manifestation of that community would see to it that matters did eventually change.

Some years would pass before Kropotkin's thoughts on the subject settled into a coherent form, but as early as the mid-1860s he had begun to formulate a hypothesis informed by personal observations in Siberia of how the cooperative behaviour of animals appeared to be a key factor in a species' success. Meanwhile Reclus, doubtless inspired by his recent friendship with Kropotkin, presented in 1880 his own political observations on the subject in the pamphlet *Evolution and Revolution*. 'Will not the evolution which is taking place in the minds of the workers', Reclus wrote, 'necessarily bring about a revolution; unless, indeed, the defenders of privilege yield with a good grace to the pressure from below?' That same evolutionary process in popular consciousness would, if receptive young minds were properly tutored, ensure too that justice and equality prevailed in the new society that would follow.

While some sought in evolutionary theory a scientific justification for their dreams of human perfectibility, however, others recognised that its eruption into the political and social

by Marx and Engels to be the standard-bearers of 'scientific socialism', even while they slurred their rivals' ideas as empty utopianism. In a letter to Guillaume, Kropotkin delivered his verdict on Marx's great work with a succinct sneer: '*Kapital*', he wrote, 'is a marvellous revolutionary pamphlet but its scientific significance is nil.' Marx's reliance on the universal dialectical pattern that Hegel had conceived for the purpose of explaining the historical process in metaphysical terms, served only 'to repeat what the utopian socialists had said so well before him'. It was, Kropotkin asserted, not the anarchists who were guilty of wishful thinking, but those who claimed that the contradictions of bourgeois society would inevitably produce socialism: a dangerously fatalistic notion that appealed to the proletariat even as it sapped their will to strive for the revolution. 'The political authority of the state dies out,' Engels wrote. 'Man, at last the master of his own form of social organisation, becomes at the same time the lord over Nature, his own master': it seemed to Kropotkin a hateful doctrine of passivity, premised on a pseudo-religious promise of deliverance.

What was worse, the theories of Darwin that were so precious to adherents of the positivist tradition were all too readily abused by followers of Marx: forced to yield up analogies from nature to support the idea that out of class conflict, society would evolve into a perfect form. From Europe to America, the bones that were being dug out of the earth were making Darwinian ideas of evolution a hot topic. The year following the Universal Socialist Congress at Ghent in April 1877, an entire herd of iguanodons would be discovered by miners at the nearby St Barbara colliery at Bernissart. They were a time capsule from the Middle Cretaceous period, thirty or forty specimens in all, suspended in a sinkhole of Wealdian clay, together with the smaller fauna of 125 million years past: unprecedented proof, if any further was needed, of Darwin's theories.

of the law in the Land of the Free. They lacked due respect for property or the hard-won wealth of men like the steel magnate Andrew Carnegie, who had pulled himself up by the bootstraps. Newspapers drew comparisons with France's Commune and suggested 'making salutary examples of all who have been taken red-handed in riot and bloodshed, just short of the bloody vindictiveness shown by the Versaillais in 1871.' In the absence of photographs of the events, the illustrated press now commissioned draughtsmen, who had previously lampooned the robber barons as lacking even the social conscience of the European monarchs, to produce images of infernal destruction and diabolic strikers.

After twenty-three days journeying through an embryonic civil war, Chaikovsky's fragile nerves were close to breaking. Having seen the viciousness of American class conflict he craved a speedy return home, but events in Russia rendered any such hopes futile. Pyrrhic victories in the war against Turkey had inflated nationalistic fervour, while the persecution of Chaikovsky's old friends and colleagues became ever more harsh. Up to four years on from their arrest, hundreds were still held awaiting trial in overcrowded conditions, and treated with growing contempt by their gaolers. And any illusions Chaikovsky harboured that his absence in America might prevent charges being laid against him would have been dispelled by news of the fate of Grigori Machtet, sentenced to exile in Siberia for his role in setting up a training camp for agitators.

Toiling as a hired-hand carpenter in the shipyards of Chester, near Philadelphia, Chaikovsky clung to the wreckage of his faith as the twelve-hour shifts under beady-eyed supervision brought him close to a state of complete breakdown. 'Religion is rising,' he persisted in claiming, 'and so I shall seek it no matter where, even in the most outworn and dying Christianity.' The utopian community of Harmonists near Pittsburgh, who

saw in the Great Strike 'the beginning of the harvest-time spoken of in scripture', offered one possible haven, but on the suggestion of a fellow Russian he instead joined the Shakers at Sonyea. As time and rest healed his mental wounds, however, he recoiled from their submission to Christian doctrine, feeling that they should have been searching instead for 'the presence of divinity in themselves': the only sure foundation, he now held, for successful communistic life. Frey wrote to him, warning of the risks of political engagement – 'The building of the barricades and the beating of drums will drown out your voice. The people will simply not listen to you' – but the new-found solicitude of the Cedar Vale tyrant could not draw him back.

With the arrival of a subscription by friends in Russia to cover his family's travel expenses, Chaikovsky made directly for New York City, where his wife and daughters awaited him. Next came a ship for Liverpool. France and Switzerland lay ahead. By the time he arrived there, Kravchinsky would finally have staked his unsavoury claim to fame.

Establishment to whom he proved a headache. Kropotkin too may have been momentarily discomforted by the addition of a new element to the complex expatriate mix, just at the moment when external circumstances promised to effect a conciliation between himself and Reclus.

With the excuse of pressing deadlines for the annual delivery of the latest volume of his *Universal Geography*, Reclus was able to remain aloof from much of the sectarian wrangling that marred the late 1870s. He could instead adjust his own position in response to events, conveniently free from any immediate obligation to publicly account for himself. A sagacious presence in the wings, he would perfect this persona over the rest of his long life. At some point during 1877, for example, the firebrand Most left his one and only meeting with the geographer convinced that 'Elisée Reclus I count as one of the greatest inspirers since I became an anarchist.' Yet, at the time, Reclus was adamant in opposing the violent action that Most had begun to espouse. Likewise, in the spring of 1878, Kravchinsky had been only too pleased to serve as a messenger, carrying important papers from James Guillaume to Reclus, despite knowing full well their recipient's views concerning attacks of the kind he was planning against Mezentsev.

It seemed, for a while, that only Kropotkin would prove immune to Reclus' wisdom and charm. Yet such were the pressures bearing down on the nascent anarchist movement by late 1878 that even when Reclus published a stinging rebuke to Kropotkin concerning the Russian's preference for dramatic, egotistical gestures over a gradualist, altruistic policy founded on education – expressed in the deeply humane article 'The Future of Our Children' – the slight was soon forgiven lest it jeopardise the pursuit of their common interests.

On one issue, above all, the geographers' rigorous grounding in empirical method brought Kropotkin and Reclus together in shared indignation: the conceited claims made

Malatesta's first port of call on his travels had been Alexandria, where an anarchist group was already active by 1877, but he was impressed no less by the growing strength and dynamism of the Egyptian nationalist movement. Pillaged by Europe since time immemorial, the parlous state of Egypt's economy had become evident in 1875, when the Khedive's bankruptcy had forced him to sell his shares in the Suez Canal – the country's most precious strategic resource – to the British government of Disraeli, for the paltry sum of £4 million. In 1879 the European Commission would officially declare Egypt insolvent, but before then mutinous rumblings in the army had already signalled the depths of a problem that went beyond mere finance, to the very heart of Egyptian identity.

It was to the Italy of the early days of Garibaldi's Risorgimento that the new generation of Egyptian leaders turned in search of a model for their own endeavours. And although derelict as a revolutionary force in Europe, Freemasonry also provided for Egyptians with a crucible for political debate and organisation: the radical reformist Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Latif Bey Salim (who would lead the army rebels in February 1879) and even the Khedive's heir apparent, Tawfiq, were all members of one secret lodge. Whether for his anarchist evangelising or his contacts with the ideologues of nationalism, the Egyptian authorities were sufficiently alarmed by Malatesta's presence – and, in particular, his call for a demonstration outside the Italian consular building in support of the failed assassin Passannante – to order his immediate arrest and then bundle him aboard a French ship bound for Beirut. From there, Syria was his first choice of destination, then Turkey and finally his native Italy, but repeated refusals to allow him ashore forced his weary return to Geneva via Marseilles.

Malatesta's arrival could not have been less welcome to the Swiss Sûreté, which was clamping down on any of its guests who incited violence abroad. But it wasn't only the

7. *Propaganda by Deed*

Switzerland, 1876–1879

For Europe's revolutionaries, Switzerland was a second home, but in the summer of 1876 it was visited too by those whose interest lay more in mankind's past than in its future. Only twenty miles along the shore of Lac Leman from Elisée Reclus' home in Clarens, and nearer still to Geneva, a Roman city was said to have been discovered, submerged beneath the water. Tourists from as far afield as Scandinavia and Poland descended, classicists and amateur antiquarians, and entrepreneurial locals rowed them out to where the city supposedly lay, pouring oil on the water's surface to create a window through which they might peer. There was a street corner, the experts gasped, and there, on the lake's deep bed, the statue of a horse. Learned papers verified the marvel, explaining the lost city's position with half-baked reference to the latest geological theories. It was, of course, a brilliant hoax. The young radical Jogand-Pages, whose last major coup had been convincing the French navy to chase imaginary sharks off the coast of Marseilles, had once again toyed with public credulity. And once again he had escaped undetected.

A pioneering theorist of tectonic shift, Elisée Reclus would have given the archaeologists' fanciful explanations short shrift, though he was probably too busy to notice. His vast project, *Universal Geography*, conceived and planned during his long incarceration in the prison barges at Trébéron, was in its early stages; every continent and country on earth would be examined, every great river and mountain range, all with

reference to the human populations that had shaped and been shaped by them: the work of a lifetime. Not content with this undertaking, Reclus had also been refining his vision of an ideal society, and how it might be achieved. He had arrived in Switzerland in 1872, half broken by imprisonment, but now he was regaining his strength.

Reports sent back to Paris by agents of the French police stationed in Switzerland, including the sharp-eyed informant Oscar Testut, trace a growing vehemence in Reclus' political engagement. Early in 1874, Reclus' 'shadows' had seen little cause for concern in this 'very learned man, [who is] hard-working, with regular habits, but very much a dreamer, bizarre, obstinate in his ideas and with a belief in the realisation of universal brotherhood'. Within weeks, however, Reclus' second wife had died in childbirth on Valentine's Day, and the balance of his interests shifted. Craving distraction from grief and less constrained by family responsibilities, he now embraced the revolutionary cause with such ardour that, by 1877, his activities among the émigré plotters were being closely observed. 'Since his arrival in Switzerland,' another agent opined, somewhat overexcitedly, 'he has not ceased to give the most active assistance to every intrigue of the revolutionary party.'

That same year, the agents noted the return to Switzerland of another geographer, Peter Kropotkin, drawn back to the Jura by a hunger for passionate political companionship. But though their shared intellectual interests might have recommended Kropotkin to Reclus as a soulmate, the pair immediately found themselves rivals in an émigré community that was traumatised by the failure of the Commune, and increasingly polarised as to the best way forward. Bakunin's death in the summer of 1876 had left the anti-authoritarian wing of the International rudderless. Now, as its members gathered at socialist congresses across Europe, new leaders and fresh ideas were called for. Questions that had previously been of mere style and emphasis became a matter of genuine substance, epitomised by

for melodrama on to the political stage. As a prominent socialist in Vienna in the late 1860s, his rabble-rousing address to a mass demonstration on the eve of a general strike had incurred a sensational charge of high treason. 'If you judge such constructive criminality and such justifiable malefaction and such reasonable transgression wrong, then punish me,' Most declaimed to the courtroom: the gavel banged out a sentence of five years, but he was soon amnestied and deported. There followed a series of picaresque adventures as he wrong-footed the Prussian police time and again, his preaching of class war finally winning him election to the Reichstag and, with it, immunity from prosecution. It was a privilege he tested to the full during the war against France in 1870 and its aftermath, urging his supporters to replace the bunting that festooned the industrial town of Chemnitz in celebration of the Prussian victory at Sedan with tax receipts, and openly acclaiming the Commune. Bringing the same instinct for confrontation to the congresses of 1876 and 1877 in Switzerland, he was soon recognised as one of the most vociferous proponents of propaganda by deed: a linchpin, the police services of Europe mistakenly thought, of a tightly coordinated international conspiracy.

There was certainly a pattern of connections for suspicious eyes to discover, if they so chose. Kravchinsky's period of residence in Naples seemed to connect the murder of Mezentsev and the attack on Umberto I; Kropotkin's influence during his travels to Spain linked the attempt on the life of Alfonso XII to Switzerland; Rochefort, though the outsider in Swiss circles, provided a direct link to the Commune; whilst Most was fingered as the link to Nobiling's attack on the kaiser. Then, sometime between the end of 1878 and beginning of 1879, that other great impresario of anarchism, Errico Malatesta, reappeared in the Jura. Having fled to the Levant following his release from gaol in Italy, his expressions of solidarity with opponents of western colonialism whom he had befriended there, appeared to extend the scope of the imagined conspiracy far to the east.

In comparison to the term 'anarchist', the phrase 'propaganda by deed' may initially have struck those who heard it as somewhat functional, but the events of 1878 had quickly lent it the character of a sinister euphemism. The blithe heroism it seemed to imply now began to appear more like a violent conspiracy to commit the terrorist outrages with which anarchism would soon become all but synonymous in the public mind. From exile, Johann Most would be at the forefront of those calling for vengeance against the oppressive powers of state and capital.

Although four years younger than Kropotkin, Most too was more closely associated with a slightly earlier radical generation than many of Bakunin's other political heirs. Moreover, having been won over to Marxism during a visit to a workers' festival in La Chaux-de-Fonds in 1874, he was perhaps still best known at this time as a populariser of Marx's philosophy. His earlier experiences, however, suggest a man for whom the anti-authoritarian International would always have offered a more natural home, and reveal the psychological seeds of his violent passion.

'Evils lurks deep in the breast of the child, but the whip drives it out,' Most's father would reassure his young son after administering frequent and ferocious beatings. Both the psychological and the physical scars of his mistreatment were enduring. Crude surgery to excise an abscess on the boy's cheek and jaw – itself the result of a punitive spell spent sleeping in a freezing storeroom – left half his face grotesquely twisted, and Most soon discovered in the injustices of society an insistent echo of those who had blighted his own childhood. 'I wanted neither to lead "the good life",' wrote Most of his young self, 'nor to earn a livelihood in the usual sense. I had to do what I did because in my brain an obsession pounded: *The Revolution must happen!*'

Thwarted in his ambition to be an actor by his facial disfigurement, Most grew a thick beard and transferred his aptitude

the disputatious search for an appropriate name by which to distinguish the movement, and to which adherents could rally.

Reclus, whose graveside eulogy for Bakunin had positioned him as a reliable bearer of the torch, had seized the ideological initiative that spring, proudly declaring himself an 'anarchist' during the anniversary reunion for the Commune at Lausanne. His statement echoed that by Italian delegates at a recent congress in Florence, who had embraced the theory of anarchist communism: common ownership of the means of production and distribution, but with every individual entitled to a share according to his needs. But what did Reclus intend the word to identify? In the original Greek, it meant simply 'without a ruler', and both Proudhon and Bakunin had borrowed casually in this regard. Concern was expressed in the émigré community, however, about its popular currency as a term of abuse for those whose actions created dangerous disorder. During the French Revolution, after all, the dictatorial Directorate had disparaged its enemies as proponents of 'anarchism'. James Guillaume, editor of the Jura Federation's newspaper and the man who had first introduced Kropotkin to the ideas of Bakunin, complained that the term contained 'worrying ambiguities … without indicating any positive theory' by way of counterbalance, and that its adoption would risk 'regrettable misunderstandings'.

In assuming the title of 'anarchist', however, Reclus was intentionally embracing the negative connotations with which the term was freighted. His own experience of the Commune's defeat had left him horrified and humiliated, and he longed to shake potential supporters of the anti-authoritarian movement out of their apathy. Attracting notoriety seemed an effective means to this end. Beyond this, though, he envisaged a revolution in pedagogy to generate the necessary groundswell in popular support, whereby children would be saved from the authoritarian tendencies of bourgeois education, and instead inculcated at the earliest and most receptive age with an appreci-

ation of the virtues of true freedom. Though Elisée Reclus habitualy used his second rather than first forename, Jean-Jacques, it was the pioneering educational theories of his namesake, Rousseau – who like Reclus had been an exile from France, and who had lived only a few miles along the lake a hundred years earlier – that underpinned his thinking.

Kropotkin, by contrast, was insistently espousing a fierce anti-intellectualism that may have reflected his own guilty conscience over the educational privileges he had enjoyed. According to his fundamentalist vision at the time, educational advancement alone was a distraction: a pure anarchist society could only be produced by a spontaneous and instinctual revolution of the peasant masses, whose current state was, he erroneously insisted, like that of a volcano ready to erupt. Even the new international campaign for a weekly day of rest and leisure – intended to provide workers with the opportunity to expand their minds and strengthen their bodies through culture, sport and contemplation – appears to have left him cold. It was a stance that put him squarely in the camp of Guillaume and his 'Jurassians' of the north, in clear opposition to the southern 'Genevans' who were looking to Reclus for leadership. Kropotkin's faith in such a revolution was, however, severely shaken in the spring of 1877 by the failure of Malatesta's peasant revolt in the Matese mountains.

At the Berne Congress of Bakuninists in 1876, Guillaume and the Jurassians had enthusiastically adopted Malatesta's and Cafiero's proposal for a policy of 'insurrectionary deeds' as the most effective means of promoting 'the principles of socialism', and a fortnight later, the French socialist Paul Brousse had even coined the striking phrase 'propaganda by deed' to express this new strategy. 'Everyone has taken sides for or against,' Brousse had once written of the Commune. 'Two months of fighting have done more than twenty-three years of propaganda', and the same logic was now simply to be applied elsewhere. But whilst there was near unanimity

Giovanni Passannante, demonstrated an almost ritualistic fervour: approaching the king's open carriage as it passed through Naples, he had lunged at him with a dagger drawn from the folds of a flag on which were the words 'Long Live the International Republic'.

Faced with such acts, even Switzerland had to reconsider its tolerance of revolutionaries. In the aftermath of the revolutions of 1848, Prussia had mobilised its troops on the Swiss border, insisting that the Swiss government render up those fugitives to whom it had granted political asylum. Germany's methods of persuasion in 1878 were subtler, though with the threat of harsher measures implicit, up to and including military action against its small neighbour. Switzerland needed a sacrificial victim. When Paul Brousse rashly used the December edition of his newspaper *L'Avant-Garde* to argue that it was the overly scrupulous methods employed by Nobiling and Passannante that had caused them to fail, when they should simply have thrown bombs at their targets without any care for the accompanying courtiers, the Swiss authorities were quick to act. His imprisonment and, latterly, expulsion were offered up to propitiate their angry neighbours.

In Germany itself, the crackdown was severe. The kaiser had survived the attack, but while rumours of his death were still circulating Chancellor Bismarck seized the national emergency he had long sought as a pretext for a draconian crackdown on Germany's socialists. Martial law was declared, and the city garrisoned, with the Tempelhof field converted to an army encampment. Censorship was introduced, with upwards of 1,000 books and periodicals outlawed; 1,500 suspects were arrested and others forced to flee abroad. Laws were speedily passed to suppress the burgeoning Social Democratic Party, which already boasted five million members. Stripped of parliamentary immunity, Johann Most, one of its most vociferous members, was given twenty-four hours to leave the country, prompting his ignominious rush to Hamburg, and thence to London.

'Just sometimes, when reminiscing, he philosophises about love with us and teaches Vera and me the wise rules of coquetterie, by which you can make someone fall helplessly in love with you,' wrote the other woman with whom Kravchinsky shared the mountain chalet. Yet, even the mountains could not distract Vera Zasulich from the true path for long, and within a couple of years of her arrival in Switzerland she would be immersed in the discussions that led to the foundation of the first Russian group with an explicitly Marxist agenda, the Emancipation of Labour; Kravchinsky, though more circumspect about such affiliations, continued to share her sympathies. But the fact that members of the Russian movement had distinct priorities of their own was no reason for the anarchists in the West to despair: not when the dramatic impact of the new Russian tactics was being felt too by the rulers of their own countries.

Perhaps inspired by the violent Russian spring and summer of 1878, a spate of assassination attempts closer to home now supplied the multinational exiles gathered in Switzerland with fresh inspiration. At the beginning of May, a young tinsmith with anarchist connections, Emil Hoedel, fired a pistol somewhat haphazardly at Kaiser Wilhelm as his carriage travelled along Unter den Linden in Berlin. Hoedel's motivation appears to have been a thirst for personal fame as much as idealism, but an apartment overlooking the same grand boulevard had been rented by Dr Karl Nobiling, an intellectual loner with a background in the minor German gentry and a more coherent sense of purpose: the decapitation of the social hierarchy as a prelude to revolution. Only a month after Hoedel's attack, Nobiling aimed a shotgun at the kaiser's head and discharged both barrels, leaving Wilhelm clinging to life, his face and arms lacerated by twenty-eight pieces of lead. Within the same year, Spain and Italy experienced failed attempts on their new young kings: Alfonso XII and Umberto I. Both were acts of class war, and in the latter case, the actions of the would-be assassin,

among socialists when it came to celebrating the glorious failure of 1871, the Matese debacle would not be treated so indulgently. Reclus' old Communard friend, Benoît Malon, even charged that 'to act in such a manner must be downright insane. No one will question how much harm these parasites of labour masquerading as internationalists have done.'

Nevertheless, the notion of 'propaganda by deed' was taking hold as a means for revolutionaries, who felt increasingly marginalised and persecuted, to advance their cause. By 1878, when events in Russia turned towards violence, Kropotkin would be caught in the bind of lauding the assassins who were targeting the tsar's government, whilst perhaps hoping that the anarchists' own call to action would elicit a response that eschewed the purely terroristic in favour of something more insurrectional.

The trigger for the attack that launched the wave of violence that swept over the tsarist regime had been a lapse in social etiquette. When General Trepov of the Third Section had visited the Peter and Paul fortress on a tour of inspection, Bogoliubov, one of the young radicals imprisoned there, had failed to acknowledge him with due deference. In contravention of all the unspoken rules of Russian society, which demanded that a veneer of civilised respect should be maintained between those of the better classes regardless of circumstances, Trepov had reacted by ordering Bogoliubov to be publicly beaten. Outrage among the radicals at his humiliation was extreme and widespread, but it was Vera Zasulich, amorously involved with Bogoliubov before his arrest and herself a veteran already of several years in prison and internal exile, who nominated herself his avenger.

Zasulich had waited just long enough to avoid prejudicing the Trial of the 193, at which many of the young radicals arrested in recent years were finally to be judged. Then, within a day of a verdict being delivered that dismissed the charges

against the mass of defendants, she had acted. Calmly awaiting her scheduled appointment with the chief of the Third Section, upon entering his office Zasulich, her hand trembling, had discharged her pistol at point-blank range. Trepov, though wounded, survived, but a bloodier sequel was not long in coming. Moved by Zasulich's courage, Kravchinsky was perhaps also relieved about her poor aim. He might still claim the footnote in the history books for which he had so earnestly prepared, as the first assassin of a high-ranking tsarist official.

Arriving in Switzerland from Italy, carrying the stiletto dagger given to him as a parting gift by his fellow prisoners, Kravchinsky had remained there for only a few weeks before setting off back to Russia, where a St Petersburg jury had just acquitted Zasulich, despite overwhelming evidence against her. Encouraged by the popularity of the verdict, on 4 August Kravchinsky approached General Mezentsev, the chief of police, as he was walking in a St Petersburg park, drew the stiletto from a rolled newspaper, and stabbed him dead. A carriage pulled by Dr Veimar's champion black trotter, Varvar, which had already given sterling service during Kropotkin's escape from prison, allowed the assassin and his accomplice to make a clean getaway. The shocking boldness of the attack was not lost on the public, nor the extent of the conspiratorial networks that must be active in St Petersburg for it to have been possible.

'A Death for a Death,' proclaimed the pamphlet already rolling off the secret presses, and in his memoir, published only a few years after the event, Kravchinsky would write that the assassination had ushered in the era of the ravening, moral superman. 'The terrorist is noble, irresistibly fascinating, for he combines in himself the two sublimates of human grandeur: the martyr and the hero. From the day he swears in the depths of his heart to free the people and the country, he knows he is consecrated to death … And already he sees that enemy falter,

become confused, cling desperately to the wildest means, which can only hasten his end.'

As brutal gestures of Slavic resolve, the attacks provoked widespread exultation among the exile community in Switzerland, and their perpetrators were lionised. When Zasulich returned to Geneva, smuggled out by Klements after avoiding rearrest for several weeks by means of concealment in an apartment over Dr Veimar's orthopaedic clinic in St Petersburg, Henri Rochefort himself was on hand to offer assistance. Having fed and housed her, however, the French anarchists revealed an ulterior motive: arrangements were already under way for her to travel to Paris, where it was planned that her celebrity status would draw a crowd of several thousand well-wishers, who might then be manipulated into a confrontation with the police.

The anarchists of western Europe longed to gild their own abortive endeavours through association with their accomplished Russian colleagues, but Zasulich was reluctant to be drawn into their game. Remaining in Switzerland, she followed Klements' example, filling her days with long mountain walks; the arrival of news of a friend's execution or other sorrow from the motherland meant a day on paths not listed in the Baedeker guide, with only the occasional goatherd or lowing, bell-tolling cow for company. Before long, though, the mood would be temporarily lightened by Kravchinsky's reappearance, still wearing the Napoleonic beard and grand style of the fictitious Georgian Prince Vladimir Ivanovich Jandierov that he had been using as his disguise in St Petersburg, ever since the assassination of Mezentsev. Ignoring the risk of arrest, Kravchinsky had been determined to stay in hiding in Russia. It had taken trickery on the part of his colleagues to persuade him that he would be of greater use to them abroad, where his wife had given birth to a premature baby who had since died.

A light drizzle was slanting down on the night of 4 May 1886, when Mayor Harrison arrived in Chicago's Haymarket Square to reassure himself that the demonstration he had authorised was passing off in good order. The city was on edge, but having satisfied himself as to the 'tame' character of the gathering, Harrison left at around half-past seven, advising the police to stand down. Ignoring the mayor's instructions, Bonfield merely withdrew with his men to positions of concealment in side streets nearby. Throughout the evening a steady flow of informants and plainclothes policemen shuttled between the demonstration and Bonfield's post, relaying updates on the speeches, right until the moment when the last speaker, Samuel Fielden, mounted the wagon that was being used as a podium. 'Defend yourselves, your lives, your futures,' he urged those anarchists who remained. 'Throttle it, kill it, stab it, do everything you can to wound it,' was his recommended treatment of the law and its protectors, who even as he spoke were lining up, 180 strong in rows four deep, just out of sight.

It was 10.30 when Bonfield ordered his formation to advance. The worsening weather had thinned the crowd gathered near the corner of Desplaines Street, from 3,000 at its peak to a hard core of a few hundred. 'We are peaceable,' protested Fielden, somewhat disingenuously, as the captain ordered the meeting to disperse. The moments that followed would ever afterwards define anarchism in America, and arguably socialism as a whole. A few who glanced upwards saw the glowing fuse of the bomb as it arced through the air above them into the uniformed ranks; most only registered what had happened after the noise of the explosion had passed and the air had cleared of debris, leaving the cries of the dead and dying. One policeman was killed immediately, six more were fatally injured; fifty others wounded.

Accounts carried by the scattering crowds varied greatly, setting off wild rumours that soon ticked along the telegraph wires. Law-abiding citizens of Chicago, hearing reports that

that particularly caught his attention was of an altogether more glamorous nature.

Dating from twenty or so years earlier, it involved his forerunner as prefect, Monsieur Lagrange, and the beautiful courtesan La Floriana, one-time mistress of the tsar. Having been deported from St Petersburg for some undisclosed offence, La Floriana had settled in London and fallen in with France's most dangerous revolutionaries. Lagrange had intervened. Contriving to take a seat next to her at the opera, he had introduced himself as a rich provincial merchant, and seduced her over dinner into believing that he wished to finance a conspiracy to assassinate Napoleon III. It was agreed that a miniaturised bomb would be constructed, small enough to be concealed in a lorgnette case. The risks were worthwhile, Lagrange had thought, for the insights that might be gained, but having been tipped off about his subterfuge, La Floriana had provided only false information, before absconding with 40,000 francs of the prefecture's money.

The case notes should have constituted a cautionary tale. The lesson that Andrieux chose to learn, however, was not that the dangers of provocation inevitably outweighed the potential benefits, but simply that Lagrange had been too easily duped. He, by contrast, was determined to be more cunning. By good fortune, the pragmatic deftness with which he responded to his first major challenge as prefect, involving a Russian émigré of a rather different kind, suggested that he might indeed have grounds for such self-assurance.

It was the gold watch, in exchange for which Lev Hartmann had finally persuaded the Moscow electricians to part with the battery needed for the People's Will attack on the tsar's train, that proved the terrorist's undoing. Within weeks of the failed bombing, the executive committee of the organisation had spirited Hartmann out of Russia on a steamship bound for Constantinople, insisting, as it had with Kravchinsky previously, that someone with so much to offer was of more use agitating

among the émigrés abroad than rotting in Siberian exile. Even before Hartmann had time to establish himself among the Russian student doctors, scientists and engineers of the rue des Lyonnais, however, the detectives of the Third Section had caught up with him, having assiduously traced the battery back to its suppliers, then the watch to the woman who had bought it for Hartmann, and finally Hartmann himself to Paris.

The intense pressure brought to bear by Russia on the French government to allow Hartmann's extradition placed Andrieux in the eye of the storm. The outcome, though, was not obvious. The two countries were by tradition ideological foes, the opposed principles of tsarist autocracy and republicanism affording scant common ground. Faced with increasingly undiplomatic demands from Prince Orlov, the Russian ambassador, Andrieux appears to have had little inclination to acquiesce, despite a barrage of penal-code citations and precedential arguments for Hartmann's provisional arrest. Although seen as dashing by some in France, the black silk patch worn by Orlov over the eye he had lost while fighting the Turks made it only too easy to cast him as an avatar of a piratical despotism who should be resisted at all costs.

The soul of the Third Republic was already tarnished, however, and political pragmatism demanded that other considerations, both domestic and geopolitical, be weighed in the balance. Foremost of these was continued concern about the rising power of the united Germany. Whilst France had largely succeeded in putting the Commune out of mind for some years, the country was perennially torn between fear of Germany and resentment over its appropriation of Alsace and Lorraine: in 1875, cavalry horses were even bought in preparation for an imminent renewal of hostilities. France needed an ally, and Russia's concern over their shared neighbour made her a promising, if unlikely candidate for the role. Secret meetings between generals Boisdeffre and Obruchov, contrived by Elie Cyon, had so far failed to produce concrete results. Andrieux's domain of police-

joining the bandwagon, if only to be in a better position to direct it.

The depth of the anger and alarm felt by the likes of Cyrus McCormick at the prospect of such solidarity across the working population should not be underestimated: the 71 per cent increase in profits since he had taken over could not be sustained in such circumstances. 'To arm is not hard. Buy these,' Herr Most told a meeting in New York's Germania Gardens, holding aloft a rifle, 'steal revolvers, make bombs, and when you have enough, rise and seize what is yours. Take the city by force and the capitalists by the throat.' The news that Most was due to be in Chicago on 1 May must have sent a shiver through the ranks of the city's businessmen, who hastily pledged $2,000 to arm the police with a Gatling gun, America's very own version of the *mitrailleuses* that had mown down the Communards fifteen years earlier.

When May Day arrived, of the 300,000 men who downed tools across the United States, a full fifth of them were in Chicago. Yet the day passed off without major incident. Steeled as they were for a showdown, McCormick, his colleagues and Captain Bonfield surely felt a certain sense of anticlimax, mixed with relief. Yet if their strategy had simply been to crush the demonstrators once the swell of popular support for the workers had subsided, they showed scant patience. It was only two days later, on 3 May, as Spies addressed a crowd gathered outside the McCormick works, that the rattle of rifle fire echoed out, as Bonfield's men intervened against pickets who were preventing strike-breakers from entering the gates. There was one fatality. Outraged, Spies rushed to the print room of his newspaper and, in the heat of the moment, set about compositing a call for vengeance: 'If you are men, if you are the sons of grandsires who have shed their blood to free you, then you will rise in your might, Hercules, and destroy the hideous monster that seeks to destroy you. To arms, we call you. To arms!'

long-standing fears of bloody confrontation appeared to be coming to a head.

Through the long, hard winter of 1885, the air of militancy intensified, with the anarchist newspapers publishing ever more bellicose statements in favour of dynamite, 'the proletariat's artillery', and even a letter purporting to have been sent by an army officer from Alcatraz Island, offering illustrated guidance on street-fighting tactics. The *Tribune*, in turn, demanded 'A Regular Army Garrison for Chicago', but had to be satisfied with the 300-strong police guard posted under Bonfield to enforce a lockout at the McCormick works, with orders that seemed conceived to provoke clashes with the strikers. Within weeks the ensuing violence led to the gunning down of four strikers. In April 1886, seven more were killed by police bullets in nearby East St Louis, and Chicago's *Arbeiter-Zeitung* was reporting that the forces of law and order were readying themselves for a fight on May Day: 'The capitalists are thirsting for the blood of workingmen.'

The battle would be precipitated, it was thought, by concerted demands for a watershed in labour relations. For many years, workers had campaigned for a mandatory eight-hour day, to counter the relentless demands of their employers. Recognising the importance of a single cause around which protest could coalesce, Albert Parsons had been collaborating with the Knights of Labor and other organisations for the past three years to press the case. Set against the reality of hundred-hour weeks in some industries, however, the campaign's true purpose had always seemed more symbolic than achievable: to assert the respect and humane consideration that the working class deserved. Then at the beginning of 1886, a new intransigence entered the campaign, and the sense of possibility was further encouraged by Mayor Harrison's decision in April to grant the new working terms, wholesale, to Chicago's public employees. Finally, Parsons was able to convince Chicago's hard-line anarchists of the benefit of

ing, however, appeared to offer a promising platform on which to build collaboration between the two countries, which would replace the strong links forged by Stieber between the political police forces in St Petersburg and Berlin.

A further factor in Andrieux's calculations was the impact that the terroristic methods being pioneered in the east might have closer to home, if they inspired France's own revolutionaries to similar feats. For most people in France the horrors of 1871 had bred not moral indignation at the crude strategies of power, but a kind of quiescence: an unquestioning contentment with the easy pleasures of bourgeois life, for as long as they lasted. That this complacency might be disturbed and the ball of history set rolling again was a source of dread to those in authority. In the aftermath of the Winter Palace bombing, French press reports of 6,000 troops being drafted into St Petersburg to reinforce the garrison stirred uncomfortable memories.

On 25 February 1880, Andrieux succumbed to pressure from above and abroad to take action. Whilst promenading with friends along the Champs-Elysées, the man purporting to be 'Edward Mayer of Berlin' was identified as Hartmann by means of photographs that the Russian Embassy had provided, and arrested. The Russian agent in his group was not required to break his cover. Victor Hugo and Georges Clemenceau, among others, complained vocally about the arrest, while Kropotkin, in Switzerland, organised a campaign against Hartmann's extradition. Recognising the hypocrisy of which he had been guilty, Andrieux is likely to have been stung most, however, by Hartmann's appeal to France's conscience. 'The Republic government has amnestied 1,000 Communards,' the renegade argued. 'Can they then deliver to Russia a political émigré who has come to France to seek asylum?'

The humiliating predicament prompted some French commentators to wish that Hartmann was England's problem rather than theirs, at a time when the British Empire was

already entangled with Russia in the Second Afghan War, and therefore had little to lose. Deciding to act as an agent of destiny, Andrieux deftly made the switch, before anyone could argue, and personally escorted his prisoner to the port of Dieppe, where he handed him a ticket for the boat train to London. 'I had hoped to find protection and security of the kind that was always to be found in France, as in all free states for political émigrés, but I was badly deceived in my hope,' Hartmann would reflect, but the prefect's pragmatism had almost certainly saved him from execution, had he been sent back to Russia.

The tsar withdrew Prince Orlov from Paris in protest at the subterfuge, but only for a few weeks. Despite marking a setback in the slowly developing trust between France and Russia it was an acceptable outcome for what had become a seemingly intractable problem. By the time the ambassador returned to his duties, it was once again the Communards who were Andrieux's main preoccupation.

An early warning of the problems that lay ahead came on 24 May 1880, the ninth anniversary of the massacres of Bloody Week, after the prefect had sanctioned a demonstration at the Mur des Fédérés in Père Lachaise cemetery. It was the wrong decision. Violence erupted on the streets, the police were required to use brutal tactics in its suppression; Andrieux became a scapegoat for the council of ministers, yet hung on to his position. Of equal concern to the prefect, however, may have been the challenge to a duel that he received from Henri Rochefort, who was enraged by the sabre wounds that his son had suffered during the melee. Although still an exile in Switzerland, Rochefort's imminent return seemed probable as part of the phased amnesty of the Communards, and he was notorious for his duplicitous swordplay, having once skewered an opponent's knee, supposedly by accident, *after* the fight's conclusion. Andrieux was probably even more alarmed, however, by the resurgent political irrationalism

past mansions decked out for the holidays, the anarchists paraded bearing the black banner of mourning and starvation, chanting and abusing the unearned privilege of those inside. They were the same benighted individuals who, when attending the annual Commune celebrations, had been described by the *Chicago Tribune* as being what might be found should one 'skim the purlieus … drain the bohemian socialist slums'. During a winter of mass unemployment, the same paper now urged farmers with land in the immediate environs of the city to poison their crops lest scavengers, left unfed by soup kitchens swamped by demand, steal crops from their fields. Whatever civil society had previously existed in Chicago no longer deserved to be dignified with the name.

For seven years, since his first election as Chicago's mayor in 1879, Carter Harrison had tried to treat his constituents, rich and poor, with an even hand, respecting the cosmopolitan make-up of the city, and even appointing socialists to his administration. In April 1885, when pressed by Cyrus McCormick to provide still more police to enforce the strike-breaking, he had chosen instead to support the labour movement's call for an arbitrated settlement. Captain Bonfield had first tested the mayor's authority three months later, when he led his men into action against a transportation strike: requisitioning a streetcar to drive through the crowds of protesters, policemen had swung their batons with abandon as they passed the strikers, cracking heads and breaking morale. But whilst the industrial action came to a swift end, the attitude of the city's anarchists stiffened in reaction, and the wafer-thin majority with which Carter Harrison was re-elected saw his authority wane. The first signs of a developing power vacuum in the city appeared. Union representatives began talking of their members 'buying $12 guns and playing soldiers', and the old socialist militias were said to be stepping up their training. With news that the industrialists were giving over their warehouses as drill grounds for their own clerks, the

concern than the size of the police force, however, was the reliability of its leadership, at least to such leading industrialists as Cyrus McCormick Jnr, the new Princeton-educated manager of the family's vast Harvesting Machine Company works in the south-west of the city, then planning to cut costs by wage reductions and mass layoffs. A disgraceful even-handedness had recently been noticed in the city's police officers. The ascendancy of Captain John Bonfield, a failed businessman himself before he had joined the force, offered some reassurance but the ruthlessness that he promised was yet to be tested *in extremis*.

McCormick had quickly made clear his managerial intentions by summoning the industrialists' most trusted friend the Pinkertons, who had their headquarters in the city. The agency's hard-boiled mercenaries garrisoned the McCormick Harvesting works, defending its periphery from incursions and guaranteeing the safety of strike-breakers shipped in from other states. With even the moderate Parsons claiming a core of 2,000 active anarchists in Chicago by the spring of 1885, and a hinterland of 10,000 supporters, the risk of escalation was only too obvious. It was heightened in December 1884 when the Pinkertons' role was extended to include the infiltration of anarchist meetings. Inevitably, the agency had a vested interest in exaggerating the threat it reported for its own commercial benefit, or even in provoking the kind of clashes that its clients dreaded. Alarmism cranked up the political temperature of the city, with both sides hardening their stance. It seemed ever more likely that the ghosts of civil war and revolution to which Parsons so often alluded would soon take solid form.

On Thanksgiving Day 1884, and again at Christmas a year later, Chicago's most affluent families were brought face to face with those on whose grinding efforts their comfortable existence rested. Down the millionaire's row of Prairie Avenue,

and volatility that Rochefort represented and his utter lack of compunction in manipulating circumstances to his own ends.

The crowd of 200,000 that gathered outside the Gare de Lyon to greet Rochefort on his glorious return to Paris that July, standing on one another's shoulders and breaking the windows of the station to get a better view, appeared to testify to his immense popularity. That a promoter hired by Rochefort had persuaded them to attend would have been scant reassurance to the prefect, and the marquis' ingratiatingly demotic interviews are likely to have sent a shiver down Andrieux's spine. 'One is bourgeois out of sentiment, not by birth,' Rochefort told one newspaper interviewer. 'When one sincerely marches under the same flag against the enemy, social classifications disappear.' At least Andrieux's suspicion of Rochefort's morals and motives was shared by many of the marquis' erstwhile Communard colleagues, and a similar sentiment also found its way into the two dramatic paintings of *The Escape of Rochefort* that Edouard Manet executed at the time.

Manet's intention had been to exhibit the final painting in the Salon of 1881, but prolonged exposure to his sitter may have caused the artist, who had witnessed the aftermath of Bloody Week, to revise his ideas. In Manet's first attempt at the painting, Rochefort sits erect in elegant attire at the helm of a small boat in wide and rough seas off New Caledonia, neither seasick nor staggering to keep his balance, and there is the unmistakable hint of mockery of a man who cannot or should not be taken seriously at his own heroic estimation. In a second version, the image represented is further cropped to remove the horizon, creating a vision of terrible, turbulent alienation: of a figure adrift from all the certainties of dry land, of religion and social hierarchy, just as Rochefort argued that life should be. What violent and egotistical extremes might not such a man embrace, the painting seemed to demand.

It was a different kind of egotism, ostensibly self-denying though just as dangerous, that Louise Michel presented on

arriving in France four months later. That she should be the last of the Communards to accept the amnesty, having refused offers of special treatment for years until the last of every one of her comrades was freed, told its own story. Where Rochefort had tried to milk the moment by being the first home, the turnout then had matched neither the size nor sincerity of the crowds that now greeted the Red Virgin, their exuberance at the station surpassing that for Rochefort's return, and threatening chaos around the barriers that Andrieux had thrown up. And while Michel's address showed magnanimity – 'We want no more bloody vengeance; the shame of these men will suffice' – there was also evidence of an undiminished zeal that must have further unnerved the prefect: 'Long live the social revolution!' she declared, then concluded, more ominously, 'Long live the nihilists!'

Her words sounded like a declaration of intent, and a letter she had written to Karl Marx shortly before leaving New Caledonia, chastising him for his armchair generalship, seemed to indicate the uncompromising activism she had in mind. Andrieux, it was clear, would need all the operational expertise he could muster to keep the threat of sedition under control, yet he failed to grasp the potential of the tools of physiological profiling being innovated under his nose by the young obsessive, Alphonse Bertillon. 'You have no scientific qualifications, and you produce an incomprehensible report which you cannot explain,' he told Bertillon, and withdrew support for his new-fangled ideas. Instead, he fell back on the kinds of methods that had cost his predecessor so dear in the La Floriana case, and used the prefecture's money to fund a new anarchist newspaper, *La Révolution sociale*.

Fortunately for Andrieux, whatever instinct Louise Michel may once have had for sniffing out police chicanery had been blunted by seven years on a desert island. Before making any important decisions, Michel would have been wise to reacclimatise to a country much changed in her absence, not least

inevitable: 'That name which was at first imputed to us as a dishonor, we came to cherish and defend with pride.'

Even before the Pittsburgh Congress, the more extreme Chicago socialists had embraced anarchist ideas. After it their revolutionary ambitions only expanded, fed by the publication in the summer of 1885 of Most's booklet, *The Science of Revolutionary Warfare*, whose detailed exposition of terroristic solutions was based on esoteric knowledge he had acquired while working for the munitions manufacturer. 'Rescue mankind through blood, iron, poison and dynamite,' he urged his readers: policemen could be done away with using dipped daggers and dosed cakes; dignitaries killed by grenades rolled under banqueting tables; miniaturised bombs enclosed in letters. Some months earlier, though, Spies' and Neebe's Chicago-based newspaper the *Alarm* had already been providing a steady stream of incendiary advice: 'One man armed with a dynamite bomb is equal to one regiment of militia, when it is used at the right time and place,' advised an edition from October 1884, while only a few weeks later another offered the view that 'In giving dynamite to the downtrodden millions of the globe, science has done its best work.' The same issue contained instructions for how to make a rudimentary pipe bomb for use against 'the rich loafers who live by the sweat of other people's brows'.

Faced with such threatening rhetoric, the businessmen of Chicago were inevitably shaken by the rapid radicalisation of their workers. Nearly 100,000 copies of the *Alarm* were printed in ten months between 1884 and 1885, most of which would have been handed from reader to reader, in homes or in such red clubs as the four-storey Florus Hall, to which bundles of the paper were delivered daily. Despite its recent expansion, Chicago's police force found itself overstretched in keeping the anarchists under surveillance, having to cover not only the indoor meetings but also picnics in the countryside, where dynamite demonstrations provided an added attraction. Of greater

in a local election. Invoking historical precedent once again in his address to the federation, this time he looked further back, to the insurrectionary example of America's fight for independence. 'By force our ancestors liberated themselves from political oppression, by force their children will have to liberate themselves from economic oppression,' Parsons reminded the delegates. ' "It is, therefore, your right; it is your duty," says Jefferson; to arms!'

Assisted by Spies, Most drafted the *Pittsburgh Manifesto*, setting down the principles agreed upon by the federation, and printing presses spun off hundreds of thousands of copies in English, German and French, for distribution. For all his egotism, Most had wisely decided to make common cause with Parsons and the others. 'A new era in America's labour movement has begun,' crowed *Freiheit*, 'The word is ALL ABOARD!' But what political species were the adherents to this new political configuration, and how should they be identified: as radical patriots, revolutionary socialists, or anarchists?

Inevitably, perhaps, it was the mainstream newspapers that would have the final say. During the 1870s, while the Commune was the greatest bugbear of the right, 'communist' had been the preferred term of disparagement for the socialists, but since around the time of the tsar's assassination, as a consequence of the usual legerdemain, 'anarchist' had become common, as an effective trigger for rousing middle-class ire and anxiety. As early as 1881, Parsons had written of how 'the capitalistic press began to stigmatise us as anarchists, and to denounce us as enemies to all law and government'. Quite apart from the undiscerning application of the term 'anarchist' to socialists whose sympathies lay with Marx, the development of a very different kind of individualistic American 'anarchism' by Benjamin Tucker made the label problematic even when used to refer to men like Spies and Schwab, who were inspired by the European tradition. Parsons, though, whilst conciliatory towards the diverse branches of socialism, accepted the

for women. For since the heady days of female emancipation during the Commune, every inch of political ground ceded had been clawed back; one interior minister of the 1870s had even banned meetings on the 'Female Question' out of simple distaste for the kind of women they would attract. Instead, impatient to assert her presence, Michel swallowed whole the account of the supposed anarchist sympathiser, Egide Serreaux, that he wished to invest a part of the fortune he had made in the pharmaceuticals business in the new publication, and readily agreed to become its star columnist.

It was like laying a telephone line direct to the heart of every anarchist conspiracy, Andrieux would delight in recollecting. When Michel's close associate, Sénéchal, expressed the opinion that 'There are a certain number of heads whose disappearance in France would singularly facilitate the solution of the social question', the cabinet was immediately informed. But whilst Michel had the greater popular support, before long a more insidious challenge emanated from Rochefort to threaten some of Andrieux's closest political friends. What was more, Rochefort's other activities seemed to make concrete the threats of international solidarity among the enemies of the state to which Michel had merely alluded.

Despite Gambetta's frequent kindnesses to him, not least his assistance when the military tribunal held Rochefort's life in the balance, Rochefort had come to loathe his old friend. Perhaps he didn't like feeling a sense of obligation. Certainly when Gambetta's brilliant political and journalistic protégé, Joseph Reinarch, took it upon himself to accuse Rochefort of ingratitude, the polemicist went on the attack. Using his newspaper *L'Intransigeant*, he inveighed against Gambetta for his willingness to reconcile himself to the spurious Third Republic, and poured scorn on the lawyer, Alfred Joly, hired by Gambetta on Rochefort's behalf in 1872, for the ineptitude with which he had defended him against transportation. The war of words escalated, Joly and Reinarch making public a

letter written by Rochefort from prison. Its pathetic pleading for leniency undermined all his past claims of steadfastness in the face of persecution. His pride dented, and his journalistic armoury empty, Rochefort reached for the crude but potent weapon of anti-Semitism, publicly addressing Gambetta through Reinarch, both of them being Jewish, in vicious terms: 'I send you sufficient expectorations in the face to admit of your honourable master receiving some of them.'

It was an astute if cynical move which tapped into a rich vein of French prejudice against Jews, and in particular, at the time, against Jewish bankers and their suspiciously clever financial practices. Having helped underwrite the Suez Canal a decade before, Jewish money was now paying for the continued remodelling of Paris, and there were those who worried that the Jewish appetite to invest and control knew no end. 'These dogs, [of whom] there are too many at present in Rome, we hear them howling in the streets, and they are disturbing us in all places,' the late Pope Pius IX had written in 1870, blaming the Jews in part for the withdrawal of French protection that had forced him to retreat into the Vatican City. Increasing numbers of French nationalists and Catholics agreed and in 1878 a bank, La Société de l'Union Générale, was established to counter the Jewish monopoly of loans. The myth of an international Jewish conspiracy had begun to take root, with all the old reactionary bugbears of Freemasonry and socialism mixed in. Rochefort would quickly acquire a taste for the demagogic popularity that the preaching of anti-Semitism could confer, but not before it had placed him in a somewhat paradoxical predicament.

Louis Andrieux must have observed the consequences of Rochefort's campaign with some distaste, if only for the tragic suicide of Albert Joly it caused, his reputation destroyed in the crossfire. It was barely two years since Joly's brother Maurice, author of *The Dialogues between Machiavelli and Montesquieu in Hell*, that had satirised the intrigues and ambition of Napoleon III, had also died by his own hand.

esteem'. 'Let us never forget', he wrote in characteristic style, 'that the revolutionists of modern times can enter into the society of free and equal men only over ruins and ashes, over blood and dead bodies.' To effect his vision in a foreign land, though, Most would need new allies.

Despite the willingness of the American socialist movement to confront capitalism on the picket line, it had hitherto shown notable restraint in seeking to revive the ideals of the American republic without recourse to the revolutionary methods espoused by its European comrades. By 1883, however, the blatant injustices of a society under plutocratic rule had led to mounting despair that the ballot box could ever bring about meaningful reform, causing many socialists to seek an alternative in anarchism. Less than a month after the Niederwald incident, Most took his place on the speakers' platform when the American Federation of the Working People's Association met in Pittsburgh to thrash out a new policy. His observation that America's capitalists had exploited their workers more in twenty-five years than had Europe's monarchs in 200 stiffened their resolve, but among the more familiar faces it was Albert Parsons, an excolonel in the Texas militia and now one of Chicago's leading socialists, whose ideas lent American radicalism a new, patriotic dimension.

Back in 1877, Parsons had implicitly linked the socialist cause of liberating the workers with that of the abolition of slavery, framing the strikers as a 'Grand Army of Salvation' after the Grand Army of the Republic from the Civil War. The intervening years, however, had taught him harsh lessons about the corrupt nature of power, not least when he had been hauled off the street in Chicago and thrown before a conclave of the city's business elite in the cellars of the labyrinthine Rookery, the makeshift police headquarters. These men had warned him off in the crudest terms. Far from being deterred by their intimidation, though, Parsons renounced his previously moderate position after witnessing votes being rigged

proxies in Europe, any hope that his American exile would be the short-lived prologue to a triumphal return seemed increasingly delusional. Although agents of the Imperial German Police continued to file compelling reports about his translation of Nechaev's *The Revolutionary Catechism* and the job he took in a dynamite factory in order to gain a first-hand knowledge of explosives, the ideas about which he only talked and wrote were being put into practice in Chicago.

For some time, police headquarters in Berlin had been preoccupied with the vast underground army of terrorists that Most's lieutenant, Johann Neve, was said to be organising on his behalf in Germany and around its borders, with the help of the Belgian Victor Dave. Alleged to number 7,000 members divided between eighty cells, it supposedly possessed a stockpile of bombs and poisoned daggers. But despite Neve's dedicated efforts, the threat from this 'army' was vastly overestimated. It would, in any case, be ruthlessly eradicated during 1884, when a further crackdown followed the failure of August Reinsdorf's spectacular attempt to blow up the kaiser, the crown prince and Chancellor Bismarck during the unveiling of a vast statue of Germania on the ridge of the Niederwald high above the River Rhine.

In Chicago, by contrast, the socialist militia was already a reality. The Lehr-und-Wehr Verein, or Society for Education and Defense, had been formed during the upheavals of 1877 to counter intimidation by paramilitary outfits in the pay of the bosses, and was now some 1,500 strong, grouped under nationality with names such as the Bohemian Sharpshooters. When Reinsdorf was sentenced to death, moreover, it was one of his old protégés, Louis Lingg, now living in Chicago, and not Most, who would lead the tributes, addressing a working population that had always proved unwilling to concede their rights or their livelihoods without a fight, yet was now facing the loss of tens of thousands of jobs. Left to catch up as best he could, Most dedicated his autobiography to Reinsdorf as 'a tribute of

Amidst the shock surrounding the assassination of Tsar Alexander II, however, it must have been with near disbelief that Andrieux read Rochefort's article in *L'Intransigeant* in which he proudly boasted of having received a letter from a Russian in Geneva, signed only 'D', inviting him to be the first to hear the full truth about the assassination. For whilst alarming reports flooded in from French police agents that Rochefort 'has gone to conspire with the nihilists', the popular impression being propagated by the Russian government was that the murderous conspiracy had a strongly Jewish flavour. Then again, Rochefort had never been known for principled consistency.

Despite assurances from the informant 'Hervé' that Rochefort had known 'D' for a couple of years and was simply touting a journalistic scoop, Andrieux must have feared that his visit to Switzerland signified something more sinister. Even 'Droz', usually among the more levelheaded police assets, reported proposals for the creation of a 'European revolutionary party', insisting that among those nihilists who had been frequent visitors to Rochefort's Geneva apartment, the details of the tsar's assassination were well known in advance. Most alarmingly of all, however, he warned that 'Alexander III will be no safer, and be assured that further blows will follow in Italy, Germany and Paris.'

Primed to swoop, it was frustrating for Andrieux when even his expensive infiltration of the Paris anarchists delivered merely reports of bluster, and none of incriminating action. 'Imitate the nihilists, and I shall be at your head,' Michel urged her comrades on 13 May 1881, in explicit contradiction of the eschewal of violence in her homecoming speech. 'On the ruins of a rotten society … we will establish a new social world.' Anarchist braggards talked of destroying the Palais Bourbon, the restored seat of the National Assembly, though no one volunteered for the hazardous task of planting the dynamite. Softer targets were then mooted – the Elysée Palace,

the ministry of the interior, the Bank of France, even the Prefecture of Police itself – but still nothing definite. Andrieux was growing impatient: 'it was necessary that the act was accomplished for repression to be possible', he later admitted. Finally, his agent provocateur coaxed the anarchists to choose a victim: they would strike at Monsieur Adolphe Thiers, the nemesis of the Commune.

The prefect's officers were already waiting in the shadows of the Saint-Germain district as the terrorists approached the stately figure of Thiers, who sat stock still and oblivious. Silently, in the moonlight, the conspirators unwrapped a sardine tin stuffed with gun cotton from its protective handkerchief, rested it on the old man's shoulder and lit the fuse. A flash, a bang, and the police emerged to make their arrests. But the damage was minimal: a smudge of carbon. Thiers himself had died four years earlier, and the bronze statue that the terrorists had targeted to make their statement withstood the blast. Such was the futility of the attack that the authorities decided not even to bring charges: an early, disregarded warning of how provocation could backfire.

There was, however, the consolation for Andrieux of a tip-off about the forthcoming London Congress at which all the leading anarchists would be present, and which would provide the prefect with a great opportunity for mischief-making. 'In three months,' Droz wrote, 'the congress which will take place in London will give you the secret of this vast organisation, but until then I can only urge you to engage a great deal of surveillance, because it is fascinating to see how the revolutionary spirit has become exalted …'

roff, the Russian scientist who speaks like an educated Irishman'.

Nowhere on his travels, however, either in Europe or in the United States, can Most have encountered such a developed socialist movement or such determined activism as on the shores of Lake Michigan. While the workers in the Chicago industries were among the most exploited in the country, the last great year of strikes had revealed the depth of their solidarity. In 1877, on the anniversary of the Paris Commune, upwards of 40, 000 had converged on the Exposition building to celebrate the 'Dawn of Liberty', and their unity had been maintained in the years since, with the annual event growing ever more elaborate, to include gymnastic displays, recitations and musical and dramatic performances.

Testimony to the participants' unshakeable optimism can be found in the plot of the play *The Nihilists*, performed in 1882, whose fourth act deviated from the historical account of the tsar's assassination by allowing the conspirators to escape while being transported to Siberia. The cast itself, unsurprisingly, provided a fertile recruiting ground for Most, with the ferociously theatrical style of his speech-making appealing to at least two of its members, the shopkeeper August Spies and salesman Oscar Neebe. Indeed, so taken with the notorious firebrand was yet another German from Chicago, Michael Schwab, that he joined Most as a warm-up act for his exhausting programme of 200 speeches in six months, during 1883.

The efficacy of dynamite and the bombing of police stations were recurring themes of their lectures, as Most glossed the idea of 'propaganda by deed' with his own terroristic interpretation. Yet for all the enthusiasm with which audiences received his bombast, Most seemed better able to provoke than to lead: a man of words rather than action; a cowardly braggard, according to some. While the flow of ships to and from Europe facilitated the smuggling of *Freiheit* and allowed Most to imagine that, based in New York, he presided over operations by his

of slavery consists in taking from a man all the fruits of his labor except a bare living, and of how many thousands miscalled free is this the lot?'

Since 1879, the cruellest blows had fallen on those workers brought up in a tradition of craftsmanship, whose skills were abruptly rendered obsolete by the advent of mechanisation: coopers who had served long apprenticeships, only for machines to crank out barrels in a quarter of the time, or cigar rollers who could generate barely a quarter of the profit of a factory-line process. The social cost was enormous. Cigar workshops had offered a model of labour solidarity and of self-advancement, appointing one of their number to read informative texts out loud while the others worked; now their representatives were reduced to crude scaremongering. 'More than half the smallpox patients in Riverside Hospital were inmates of tenement houses where cigars are made,' advised the *Paterson Labor Standard*; 'This ought to be a warning to persons who smoke non-union cigars.'

The New Jersey town of Paterson, where immigrant artisans from the highly politicised silk-manufacturing areas around Lyons in France and in north-west Italy had helped recreate the industry on American soil, proved especially receptive to Most's brand of socialism. 'Swiss workers coming to Paterson think it a paradise,' warned the *Standard*, 'soon they will realise it is a purgatory, and that their cheap labour will make it a hell.' And while it carried advertisements for the latest silk suits in the Paris style, and was wisely circumspect in its views concerning the attempt on President Garfield's life in 1881, the 'Best Family Newspaper in New Jersey' was not blind to the iniquities of the 'silk kings', nor to the more extreme position held by some in the community. Indeed, in the spring before Most's arrival, it was pleased to announce an instructive lecture entitled 'Dynamite and Freedom', to be delivered on the anniversary of Tsar Alexander II's assassination by 'Prof. Meze-

10. *Voices in the Fog*

England and France, 1881–1883

Aboard the *John Helder*, the last shipment of amnestied Communards from New Caledonia were in high spirits as they passed through the Channel in early November 1880, on their way to disembark in London. The fog awaiting them in the Thames Estuary, however, was so dense that even men whose families had navigated the river for generations refused to pilot the sightless ships to dock. Stranded vessels sounded their horns eerily though the smothering whiteness, and captains fretted over their cargoes, the produce of Britain's wide empire – Indian tea, exotic fruits from Africa and Caribbean cotton. It was something altogether rarer, though, that was sought by the French émigrés who had chartered pleasure launches and fishing boats and bobbed out through the mist. Denizens of the Charlotte Street colony of ex-Communards and the slums of Saffron Hill, they had spent long years in exile, but now they discerned a glimmer of hope. '*Bonhomme, bonhomme, il est temps que tu te reveilles*' they chanted, 'Good fellow, it's time for you to wake,' and through the fog Louise Michel replied in kind, her sun-wizened face barely visible over the ghostly gunwale that loomed above them.

It was an old Communard song, though it might have struck a chord with the exiles and political émigrés of other nationalities who had congregated in London: Russians, Germans, Italians, even the odd Belgian and Spaniard. For on arriving in the world's great entrepôt, most soon sank into the depressed and somnolent state that prevailed among those who had been

resident there for some time, the political activities to which they clung producing more noise than light. There were exceptions, of course. And among the many foreigners then enjoying Britain's hospitality, none took greater advantage of the liberties it afforded than the German socialist Johann Most.

It had been shortly after his expulsion from Germany in 1878 that Most had founded the newspaper *Freiheit* in London, to 'hurl', as he put it, 'a thunderbolt at that miserable state of affairs' created by Bismarck's suppression of the socialists. At the time Marx had dismissed Most as a weathercock, while Engels had gleefully predicted that his publication would last no more than six months. Yet with its calls for a 'revolution of the spirit' the paper had thrived, consistently outwitting attempts by the German police to infiltrate its distribution network: each edition was published under a different title to avoid censorship and smuggled into Germany inside mattresses exported by a factory in Hull. Most's audacity and outspokenness had made him something of a celebrity in Britain, not to say a tourist attraction. When the Belgian interior minister, Vandervelde, was in London, it was to observe the German firebrand in action that Sir Howard Vincent of the Metropolitan Police took him, the pair having disguised themselves to blend in with an audience that roared its approval of Most's attack on the iniquities of society and his pitiless solutions.

Their expedition was representative, in many respects, of the transformation in the methods and outlook of the British police that was then under way, as well as the factors that made it necessary. Vincent had spent time both in Russia, researching its military organisations, and with the French police in Paris, in his capacity as an unofficial assistant commissioner responsible for the creation of a central investigation department. He brought a new perspective to Scotland Yard, which had previously viewed its counterparts abroad with a certain liberal disdain. The reform of the old corrupt British detective branch had been necessitated precisely because of the oppor-

13. *The Making of the Martyrs*

London and Chicago, 1883–1887

'The king-killer is here for speeches and other radical mischief,' the *Chicago Times* proclaimed on Christmas Day 1882, warning its readers against Johann Most. His fingers sore from the hard labour of picking oakum, his eyes slowly readjusting to daylight after eighteen months in the gloom of Clerkenwell prison, Most had arrived in New York a week earlier, and despite a rough crossing of the Atlantic had immediately thrown himself into an ambitious lecture tour. His violent gospel of resistance drew eager audiences. For Most had a rich vein of discontent to mine among those workers who had lived through the recent depression and were now bracing themselves as the economy again began to founder, and among the tens of thousands of immigrants who poured into America every year, only to have their dreams broken on the brutal reality of industrial exploitation.

Seven years earlier, William H. Vanderbilt had received a $90 million inheritance from his father, a New York railroad magnate; that he had doubled his fortune since then was symptomatic of a society riven by obscene discrepancies in wealth. The period had seen the value of factory output rise exponentially, with 300 per cent increases in most years, as industrialists ambitious to secure monopolies had gambled carelessly with the jobs of their woefully underpaid workers, safe in the knowledge that they could sack them without compunction at the first sign of a downturn. 'Slavery is not dead, though its grossest form be gone' preached Henry George; 'The essence

And folk shall call it England in the days that are going to be.

tunities afforded by its collaboration with the Belgian police for racketeering: the operation of private surveillance services by officers, and their sale of alcohol to brothels. Now, though, a growing recognition of the international menace of political subversion provided a new imperative for cross-border cooperation, and the adoption of new methods of working.

Despite the recruitment of German-speaking detectives by Vincent's deputy, Adolphus Williamson, however, the British government was finally forced to take action against Most not by reports from its own officers, but by intelligence received from foreign agents. A 'virulent philippic', was how a French agent named 'Star' described the speech Most delivered to a rally in mid-March 1881, celebrating the assassination of the tsar. But whilst the Home Secretary, Harcourt, agreed that Most had preached 'the most atrocious doctrines', he insisted that he could do nothing without an 'authentic record' of what had been said.

To many, both in London and abroad, such a circumspect response was unacceptable. Bismarck was furious. Despite having allowed Most to slip through his grasp three years earlier, he now wrote in person to the British government, while his ambassador intervened directly with Queen Victoria, who added her voice to that of the Russian propagandist Madame Novikoff in urging the first prosecution in British history for a statement made in support of a crime committed abroad. Even the British public, which normally prided itself on supporting the liberal principle of freedom of speech, especially when under threat by foreign despots, was temporarily persuaded to view the old enemy, Russia, in a more sympathetic light. 'The old Russia with the Siberian mines in the background was completely obscured for a time by the much more attractive figure of young Muscovy shedding its heart's blood in the Balkans,' the influential editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, W. T. Stead, would later recollect. He had himself ruthlessly exploited the heroic death of Novikoff's brother in Bosnia

to help shift public opinion in favour of Russia; both he and Gladstone were regular attendees at Novikoff's salon.

Ultimately, though, it was probably domestic security considerations that precipitated Most's arrest. Following a Fenian attack on an infantry barracks in Lancashire in January 1881, the bombing campaign by those desiring Irish independence had continued with an attempt to blow up the Mansion House in London using 'infernal machines' imported from America in cement barrels. Three months later, with Gladstone's government in the process of petitioning the United States for the extradition of those responsible for the bombs' manufacture, it was considered politic for Britain to show itself amenable to similar requests from abroad. Johann Most, usually represented as the vulpine predator, was to be offered up as a sacrificial lamb on the altar of political convenience.

Most's own paper provided the requisite 'authentic record' of the incriminating speech, by publishing an article expressing the same views, and he was duly arrested. Whether by a quirk of court scheduling, or a clever contrivance to link terrorism and anarchism in the public mind, his trial coincided with the July congress of international revolutionaries of which agent 'Droz' had warned Andrieux some months before. The coincidence that the revolutionaries' conference room above a public house in Charrington Street, Euston, was next door to one booked for a meeting of Fenians must have simplified the surveillance operations of the British police.

The tense relationship between the neighbouring groups of insurrectionists did not augur well for the smooth running of what the congress organiser, the Communard Gustave Brocher, had advertised as 'the school of human dignity, the amphitheatre where one vivisects a rotten society and dissects the corpse of misery, the laboratory of the social revolution'. Only a few weeks earlier, the Catholic Fenians had clashed violently with the atheistic anarchists over an allegedly blasphemous banner

That Kravchinsky was being granted a platform for his propaganda in London – the *Commonweal* being one of several publications that was taking his articles – was provoking in St Petersburg 'an extremely sore feeling … in the highest circles'. Olga Novikoff strove to counter his popularity, shamelessly exploiting sympathy for her martyred brother, Nicholas Kireev, who had given his life in the cause of Balkan liberty; having fought there himself, Kravchinsky must have felt doubly aggrieved that it became a cause célèbre. For the moment, though, he was safe in Britain, one of those nihilists whom it was unthinkable to throw back into the clutches of his hosts' autocratic enemy: 'Imagine the consequences in England', a recent Home Secretary had reasoned, 'if such a man was a Kossuth or a Garibaldi.' While Kravchinsky was a prophet abroad, however, Morris was one in his own land; for him, the years of Establishment opprobrium were only just beginning.

'It is good to feel the coming storm' Morris wrote, as the growth of the reactionary Primrose League and other such organisations seemed to signal a refusal on the part of the ruling elite and the middle class to concede or compromise. Less than four years had passed since Morris decided to join the federation, when he had read More's *Utopia* and Butler's *Erewhon* out loud to his family and guests. Now, congregations in the churches of the East End listened rapt to socialist hymns written by Morris himself, and dreamed of an ideal future of their own fashioning:

> Come hither lads, and hearken, for a tale there is to tell,
>
> Of the wonderful days a'coming when all shall be better than well
>
> And the tale shall be told of a country, a land in the midst of the sea,

ris would address Carpenter in similar terms. Watching Carpenter's ease among the Sheffield factory workers, or in his small market garden, and envying the fact that his younger friend had put behind him the hierarchical prejudices of his middle-class upbringing, Morris must have doubted again his suitability for leadership of a movement whose commitment to equality he valued above all.

'I cannot stand all this, it is not what I mean by socialism either in aims or in means,' he wrote at the time, wrestling with his conscience, 'I want a real revolution, a real change in society: society a great organic mass of well-regulated forces used for the bringing about of a happy life for all.' Carpenter may well have steeled his friend's nerve with the thought that 'it seems to be admitted now on all hands that the social condition of this country is about as bad as it can be', and weighed the arguments for the necessity of a 'fierce parturition struggle' to see the new world born. And whilst Carpenter still felt bound by his original loyalty to Hyndman, it is clear that he already tacitly recognised the problem of egotism in a man who believed 'that it would be for him as chairman of [a committee of public safety] to guide the ship of the state into the calm haven of socialism.'

Morris returned to London fortified for the showdown. On 27 December, Hyndman was heavily defeated in a vote of the executive committee, and Morris led out the victorious dissenters. A new organisation was formed, the Socialist League, and according to Carpenter 'there was a widespread belief that [it] was going to knit up all the United Kingdom in one bond of a new life'. The first edition of the league's new organ, *Commonweal*, seemed to promise something more far-reaching still, with greetings from the Russians Peter Lavrov and Tikhomirov, and an early article from Kravchinsky offering a Russian perspective that resonated with Morris' undertaking as editor, 'To awaken the sluggish, to strengthen the waverers, to instruct the seekers after truth.'

the anarchists had been carrying during a Hyde Park demonstration against British rule in Ireland. The ructions within the Anarchist Congress threatened to be far more disruptive, however, caused as they were, in large part, by the participation of police spies. Having infiltrated the proceedings, the aim of such agents was to ensure that the image the congress presented to the world at large should be of a 'laboratory' dedicated solely to the development of explosives and terror tactics. It was as Kropotkin had feared. 'Let us go to London,' he had written with a scathing facetiousness to a colleague some months earlier, 'Let us cut a pathetic figure in the eyes of Europe.' Despite Malatesta's reassurances that he was overstating the problem, Kropotkin's misgivings about the advisability of the congress, and the scope for humiliating discord that it offered, seemed set to be borne out.

In the event, Kropotkin agreed to attend, playing along with the fiction by which delegates represented cities and countries from across the world, though most had only a tenuous link to the place in question. Chaikovsky joined him. Malatesta appeared as the delegate from Constantinople and Egypt, where he had participated in the fight against the colonialist British, as well as Turin, the Marches, Tuscany, Naples, Marseilles and Geneva. Taking time off from the ice-cream vending business that he had established since arriving in England a couple of months before, following his expulsion from Switzerland and France, he was accompanied by the Italians Merlino and Carlo Cafiero. John Neve, Most's publisher and right-hand man, was among the forty-five delegates, as were Frank Kitz and Joseph Lane from England; Madame LeCompte from Boston reported back to the *Paterson Labor Standard*, which was widely read by the émigré French and Italian factory workers in New Jersey. Louise Michel came too, back in London after her fleeting visit in the fog, as the delegate from the city of Reims. Also from France was Prefect Andrieux's plant, the provocative newspa-

per proprietor Serreaux, ready to exploit any fault lines that opened up.

The previous October, in Clarens, Kropotkin and Reclus had worked hard together to prepare a secret agenda for the congress that would emphasise the need to bring about the total destruction of all existing institutions before a genuine social revolution could take root. It was a triumph of hope over experience. Both believed that, after years in the wilderness, anarchism's day was fast approaching: that whilst hard evidence of a society in crisis was not yet to hand, the scent of trouble and opportunity was unmistakable. The moment must not be missed. And yet when Brocher was approached with their proposals, he showed infuriatingly little sense of urgency, merely asking whether it was 'really necessary to fix in advance the terms of a vote that might not take place?' The principles of anti-authoritarianism, it seemed, would govern the running of the congress as well as the content of the debates.

Malatesta's own behaviour in the weeks preceding the arrival of the international contingent hardly helped establish a mood of harmony: he had challenged his lover's adoptive brother Giuseppe Zanardelli to a duel for his vicious attempts to undermine the anarchists at the Ghent Congress four years earlier. But in the hothouse of the Charrington Street pub, differences quickly multiplied and the old resentments resurfaced. Blanquists from France, Germany and Belgium pressed their simplistic arguments for immediate revolution; Most's acolytes, Neve and Joseph Peukert, self-styled leader of the Autonomie group, wrangled in the background over their relative seniority during his imprisonment; while those with a lingering respect for Marx were ready to put their oar in, eager as ever to assert control over anything that might resemble a revival of the First International. While no minutes were taken of the congress, with even its delegates kept officially

mours of a plan to field candidates in the forthcoming parliamentary elections, and his overt jingoism in support of General Gordon's expedition to subdue Egypt. Whilst the former notion appalled all those who deemed representative government to be a fraud to perpetuate Establishment authority, the latter especially riled Morris, for whom Britain's colonial wars epitomised all that was worst about its exploitative commercial culture: the repression of the weak, abroad as at home, to prop up an economy that was faltering, as the second wave of the Industrial Revolution gave Britain's foreign competitors a novel advantage.

In the summer of 1884, Hyndman's ambition finally caused him to make a fatal strategic blunder, when he urged Joseph Lane to attend the federation's conference that August, eager for the mass of supporters he might bring with him. Moving swiftly, Morris outflanked him, inviting Lane to his home in Hammersmith where he persuaded him to help draft a new manifesto for the organisation, which would be renamed the *Social* Democratic Federation: a three-hour day of essential work would be promised for all, made possible by the common ownership of the means of production. When Hyndman refused to concede, a tense stand-off ensued. Approached by Marx's daughter Eleanor for advice, Engels backed Morris, despite having previously scorned him as an 'artist-enthusiast but untalented politician'. Morris, though, was reluctant to precipitate the circumstances that would oblige him to accept the leadership; it was with deep unease that he remembered how intoxicating was the sense of power he had felt, four months earlier, on finding himself unexpectedly at the head of a 4,000-strong procession to Marx's grave in Highgate Cemetery, on the anniversary of the Commune's declaration.

In December 1884, Morris headed for Edward Carpenter's home at Millthorpe in Derbyshire, 'a refuge from all our mean squabbles'. Reclus had recently reproved those who sought to withdraw from the struggles of the world, and before long Mor-

rary threat to civilisation by reference to the French Revolution, which he termed 'an awful example of how silently the great social forces mature, how they explode at last in volcanic fury, if too much or too long repressed'. For him, the greatest danger lay in giving concessions that were too generous. Charles Fairfield's alarmist novel of 1884, *The Socialist Revolution of 1888*, concurred, leaving its readers in no uncertainty about where responsibility for the predicted turmoil would lie. The novel evoked a society in which 'many desperate characters, including thousands of foreign anarchists, were abroad … preaching the duty of personal vengeance upon the middle and upper classes, and the nationalisation of women as well as of land.' Published in the wake of a Fenian bombing campaign that had struck at not only Scotland Yard and the Carlton Club, but the Underground trains in which ordinary citizens travelled, even the book's grossest exaggerations acquired a sheen of credibility.

In fact the threat may have been smaller than those responsible for its policing liked to maintain: before Scotland Yard had called in the contractors to clear away the debris of the Fenian bomb, the Metropolitan Police's internal journal, *Moonshine*, had managed to laugh off the Fenian threat by reference to the ease with which the perpetrators had been tracked down. Nevertheless, extraordinary measures were taken to reassure the British public. In an unprecedented invasion of intellectual privacy, police agents now proposed to scour ticket records from the British Museum Library for evidence of suspicious interests. Elisée Reclus, writing in the *London Contemporary Review* in May 1884, talked of 'devil raising' by the black propagandists and provocateurs deployed by the police. He may well have been right.

A bombing campaign was the last thing on the minds of those members of the Democratic Federation whose growing antipathy to Hyndman's dominance led them to coalesce into a libertarian faction. Their immediate anxiety concerned ru-

anonymous, the focus of the heated debates can be gauged from Malatesta's record of his own contributions.

Attempting to seize the initiative, Malatesta appealed to those 'who have no faith in legal methods and no wish to participate in political life, who want to fight with the greatest haste against those who oppress, and to take by force that which is denied by force'; there was no place for 'innocent utopianists' who favoured union with other socialist factions. He was not alone in recognising that victory would not come without struggle and sacrifice. 'Death by rifle: is it less terrible than death by explosion,' read a bullish letter from the anarchist miners of Belgium, whose friends had recently been shot by soldiers. Cafiero's manifesto would doubtless also have been heard: 'The bomb is too feeble to destroy the autocratic colossuses. Kill the property owners at the same time, prepare the peasant risings.' Serreaux's work was being done for him.

Although not intrinsically opposed to violence in a just cause, Kropotkin viewed such bloodlust as something like a mania, and there were others too who would have sought to temper the rush to terror tactics. Underlying even Malatesta's bellicose rhetoric, however, was the frustrated concern, expressed to delegates, that 'we are fast approaching the point where a party must act or dissolve and where, if it is neither victor nor vanquished, it will die of corruption.' And whilst Kropotkin may have struggled to communicate the subtlety of his and Reclus' ideas amid the welter of opinionated debate, he did somehow manoeuvre the congress around the most dangerous pitfalls.

On the ethical underpinning of anarchism, Kropotkin talked down Serreaux's demands that any mention of 'morality' be excised: 'Morality is to be understood in the sense that today's society is founded on immorality; the abolition of immorality, through any means, will inaugurate morality', he insisted on recording. But that did not imply any softening of anar-

chism's militant stance, as he had made clear in a pamphlet published only two months earlier. 'Acts of illegal protest, of revolt, of vengeance' perpetrated by 'lonely sentinels', may well be necessary, he had concluded, while as part of a wider strategy of popular agitation they might even advance rather than set back the cause of revolution, since 'by actions which compel general attention, the new idea seeps into people's minds and wins converts'. As to the paradox of leadership in an anti-authoritarian movement, while the hierarchical character of the People's Will displeased Kropotkin, Reclus had persuaded him of the advantages of small conspiratorial groups over pure collective action.

It was no accident, however, that the real business of the congress was ultimately settled in camera. While many delegates may have been emotionally inclined to fall in with his absolute advocacy of extremism, Serreaux had clearly sensed the suspicions of Kropotkin and Malatesta about his true identity, and had attempted to allay them by taking the pair to visit his venerable aunt in her long-established London home. Malatesta, however, recognised in the aunt's house furniture from a second-hand shop that he regularly passed, confirming the agent's subterfuge. Cunning rather than confrontation was deemed the wisest response, and mixed into the congress' final resolutions – the reaffirmation of the policy of 'propaganda by deed' in a moderated form, and the agreement to learn the handling of chemicals, for purposes of self-defence and revolutionary warfare rather than terrorist aggression – were concessions to Serreaux that could be quickly discarded.

The proposed creation of a central bureau of information, supposedly to channel communications and give focus to the movement's disparate activities, would provide the authorities with a convenient junction at which to intercept intelligence on anarchist plans, while allowing them to give substance to the notion of an international conspiracy whose tentacles reached around the globe. It was everything Andrieux must

caused by Johann Most's rabble-rousing in Vienna a decade earlier, was certainly in a state of perpetual exasperation with his fellow émigrés for 'passing bloodthirsty resolutions at the anarchist club under the leadership of tried agents provocateurs'. The influence of Kravchinsky may have been felt too, murmuring disparagingly about 'toy revolutionaries' when the anarchists who harangued the crowd in Hyde Park hailed him as a kindred spirit. Even Joseph Lane would complain at the imputation that the clubs he ran were anarchist 'just because we charged no entrance fee and no monthly contributions but [carry] out the doctrine "from everybody according to their ability".'

However, it is hard to see where either Lane or Morris, with their federated organisation of clubs, anti-parliamentary attitude, distaste for authority and belief in revolution, differed from anarchism's central tenets. And in such essays as Reclus' 'Ouvrier, prends la machine!', with its loathing of artifice, suburbs and spiritual deracination, and medievalist longing, there was surely much for Morris to approve. 'An end to frippery then!' Reclus had declared. 'An end to dolls' clothes! We shall go back to the work of the fields and regain our strength and gaiety, seek out the joy of life again, the impressions of nature that we have forgotten in the dark mills of the suburbs. That is how a free people will think. It was the Alpine pastures, not the arquebus, that gave the Swiss of the Middle Ages their freedom from kings and lords.' And whilst Morris was adamant in distinguishing himself from the 'anarchists', the difference between his view of revolution and that of Kropotkin or Reclus was a mere matter of nuance. For though he believed that violent upheaval might be avoided by middle-class acquiescence to the demands of socialism, he saw no realistic prospect of any such resolution.

Morris had to contend, though, with an increasing demonisation in Britain of the revolutionary impulse. Henry Maudsley, the evolutionary psychologist, had clarified the contempo-

public meetings around London, week in, week out, year after year, under the banner of the Manhood Suffrage League.

The Tory defeat in 1880 had raised hopes among many that Gladstone's new Liberal government would champion the cause of social justice, but despite moves to extend the franchise and provide universal primary education, many had been left disillusioned by the Coercion Act, and its suspension of civil rights in Ireland. Inspired by 'the propagandist zeal of foreign workmen' whom Kitz credited with the true genesis of the socialist movement in England, and having made common cause where possible with the Fenians, he and Lane began to generate interest and a growing following. From a base in the East End at the Stratford Dialectical and Radical Club, whose members had drifted from their secularist origins to outright socialism, the tireless Lane's recipe was simple: 'Take a room, pay a quarter's rent in advance then arrange a list of lecturers … then paste up bills in the streets all round … and [having] got a few members get them to take it over and manage it as a branch.' With Lane running two or three such operations at a time himself, the organisation's spread was rapid.

The street corners of impoverished London also provided Morris with the environment in which he was most at ease, evangelising from his soapbox like a Christian preacher. 'He bears the fiery cross,' observed his old friend, the artist Edward Burne-Jones, somewhat despairingly. Yet Morris, like many of the most radical of the English socialists, was instinctively averse to to the idea of anarchism, with its potent connotations of transcendence and its embryonic martyrology. There may have been some concern over how he might lose support among the general public by associating himself with something so notoriously foreign; after all, the federation's newspaper *Justice* had immediately been branded by its enemies as an 'incendiary … [work] by the hands of atheists and anarchists'. Andreas Scheu, his effective lieutenant in the federation, who had witnessed the ultimately pointless chaos

have dreamed of. After discussing its organisation with Lev Hartmann, however, Malatesta let the idea wither from neglect. 'It is not by an International League, with endless letters read by the police, that the conspiracy will be mounted,' of that he was certain, 'it will be mounted by isolated groups.'

The loss did not matter to Andrieux personally, however, who had resigned as prefect of police within a week of the congress concluding. Political interference and the removal of the prefect's independent power were the reasons cited, but his real concern may have been what might be revealed about his operational methods, once subject to political scrutiny.

On one subject, at least, the congress had been able to agree wholeheartedly: the injustice of Johann Most's trial. The English delegates in particular saw it as their duty to rally to his defence, inspired, perhaps, by Most's counsel, who claimed to have taken on the case in order to ensure that English rather than Russian law prevailed. Standing on the steps of the Old Bailey, when the congress was not in session, they peddled copies of *Freiheit*. Meanwhile, public meetings at the Mile End Waste provided delegates with an opportunity to let off steam, after hours cooped in a small and smoky room. Their efforts had no influence on the outcome, though. The jury's guilty verdict was delivered promptly, having needed little discussion, and its pleas for clemency in the sentencing, out of sympathy for all Most had suffered abroad, were just as quickly disregarded. In light of the Establishment's opprobrium of Most, the maximum sentence was a foregone conclusion. Condemned to two years' hard labour, the unfortunate Most was dragged off to pick oakum in the medieval conditions of Clerkenwell gaol: forced to split tarred rope down to its fibres, with bleeding fingernails, for ten hours a day.

If the aim of his prosecution had indeed been to influence the American policy on the extradition of Fenians, it failed: a week after the verdict, the State Department refused Britain's request point blank, leaving Gladstone to personally pursue

other, less orthodox methods of counterterrorism. Among the last letters that Allan Pinkerton would write on behalf of his agency, before it passed into his sons' hands following his death a year later, was one to the British prime minister, pitching for work in the delicate matter of disrupting the Fenian's fund-raising in the United States. Unsurprisingly, it was not only the European democracies who were prepared to deal with the Pinkertons: before long the tsarist police would be among the agency's clients.

It had been a significant achievement for so many anarchists to convene in London from so many distant countries, even while the aftershocks of the tsar's murder continued to reverberate. For those more rootless émigrés among the delegates who stayed on for some weeks after the congress, as Kropotkin did to address several public meetings, the risks entailed in their visit to the British capital grew. When the time came for them to leave, the climate across the Continent had become significantly more hostile to political troublemakers, and their destination a matter of doubt. In the more sensationalist French press, whose reports fed off propaganda out of Russia and the fears of its own population, the 'nihilists' who had killed the tsar were firmly conflated with native anarchists. In Switzerland, as Malatesta could have warned Kropotkin, a new intolerance was abroad. Yet it was nevertheless to Switzerland, through France, that he now travelled, drawn back by the presence of his young wife of two years, Sofia, whose medical studies tied her to Geneva.

Even since March, Russian pressure had been building on Switzerland to expel its anti-tsarist refugees, the threatened sanctions severe and escalating: diplomatic relations would be broken off, Swiss citizens expelled from St Petersburg and prohibitive tariffs imposed on trade. Failure to cede, it was implied, would ultimately incur the same penalty as had loomed after the revolutions of 1848: annexation by Germany, only

their instinctive friendship resulted in a strange transference of political perspectives.

By the time he reached England, Kravchinsky had already begun to distance himself from outright support for terrorism. 'The terrorists will be the first to throw down their deadly weapons, and take up the most humane, and the most powerful of all, those of free speech addressed to free men,' he had promised his readers, and memories of his youthful study of Henry Thomas Buckle's great unfinished *History of Civilisation in England* informed his hopes for his homeland's future development. Used to an oppressive despotism, the sheer relief of living in a functioning democracy, however flawed, drew him towards reformist liberalism more quickly than he could have expected. Morris, meanwhile, felt newly 'bound to act for the destruction of the system which seems to me mere oppression and obstruction; such a system can only be destroyed, it seems to me, by the united discontent of numbers.'

As to how to bring about that groundswell of popular support, Morris could draw upon the dynamic example of a small number of native activists, with the carter Joseph Lane and tailor Frank Kitz to the fore. During the boom years, as the British middle class prospered and capitalism crushed all in its path, Lane and Kitz had resolutely conserved the ideas of Chartism and then introduced those of socialism, first through the Manhood Suffrage League, which Kitz had founded in 1875, and more recently through the Labour Emancipation League. Kitz himself may have been half-German and fluent in the language, and have spent his youth gazing at illustrations of the French Revolution pinned to his bedroom wall, but it was the lost rights of the freeborn Englishman that both lamented: a Cockaigne of Anglo-Saxon justice and democracy, rather than bloody social revolution as formulated across the Channel. And it was with this Utopia as their touchstone that they organised

with tempting insights into the liberal character of the English. '[John Bull] is a strong person, very strong, and I confess that I like him very much for that reason … he does not like anyone to try to convince him of anything,' he wrote in 1882. Observing from a distance, it was clear to Kravchinsky from the surprisingly positive reception of his book the following year that London would make a congenial new home, as long as he could conceal his true identity. For only that May, Britain had been outraged when Fenian 'Invincibles' had stabbed to death Lord Frederick Cavendish, the newly appointed chief secretary to Ireland, and his undersecretary, in Dublin's Phoenix Park, in an attack that some thought was inspired by that of Mezentsev four years earlier.

'I think such a book ought to open people's eyes a bit here & do good,' was Morris' verdict on *Underground Russia*. He first met Kravchinsky – now universally known as Stepniak, his old identity completely set aside – in July 1883, soon after the Russian's arrival in London, and was impressed to find him more the humane radical than the guerrilla leader; a man capacious in his thinking, and generous in his interests. Their very physicality was consonant: Morris, with his shaggy mane of hair, having the 'same consciousness of strength, absence of fear, and capacity for great instinctive action' as a lion, Kravchinsky a brawny but kind-hearted bear, who prompted one English acquaintance to remark that 'I never met an artist who was so amiable and so gentle in his judgements.' The similarity of their literary personalities chimed too, as they reached for new modes through which to explore and make accessible the burden of political aspiration that weighed heavy on both, intuiting how fiction – sensationalist or utopian – could both shape and reflect the emerging ideologies of the age. Straightforward and candid men, neither had much truck with the kind of fads and factionalism that later prompted Kravchinsky's dismissive comment that 'In London, you must understand, "isms" have a curious tendency to segregation.' Yet in some respects

this time with Russian acquiescence. A small country, Switzerland was in no position to resist, and there were few fugitives whose presence was more likely to rile Russia than Kropotkin's. Barely had he arrived when a theoretical article published by him in *Le Révolté* concerning the tsar's assassination was seized upon as a pretext for his detention and expulsion. Dissuaded by friends from the suicidal madness of returning to Russia, where no one could be trusted and he would soon be betrayed, Kropotkin found himself adrift.

Events in France that autumn fuelled fears that a homegrown campaign of terror was imminent, when a young weaver called Florian murdered a middle-aged doctor, mistaking him for a politician; despite having no ostensible anarchist affiliations, he cited the ideology as justification for his act. The febrile atmosphere was exacerbated by growing political instability when Léon Gambetta, on beginning his first and long-awaited ministry that November, staked his political career on a policy of electoral reform, in a quest to end the factionalism that racked France's political life. When financial fears surrounding the viability of the Catholic Union Générale bank were added to the mix, the situation seemed highly volatile. In other circumstances, Kropotkin would surely have stayed to reap the revolutionary benefits when, within days of the New Year dawning, the bank crashed and Gambetta fell from office. As it was, the warning of a threat to his life by a secret society of diehard tsarist partisans, communicated to him through back channels by a high-ranking source in the Russian government, forced his return to London just before Christmas.

Though the threat was apparently real, the plot against Kropotkin might have sprung direct from the pages of an adventure story, and surely made for good telling during the festive season, as the émigrés moved between the Patriotic Club and celebrations with the old English radicals in Clerkenwell, and one another's homes. The tsarist assassins

meant to avenge the late tsar and defend the new by hiring a 'consummate swordsman' who would kill Kropotkin in a duel; Rochefort was to be similarly challenged, and if the strategy was successful then further swashbuckling assassinations were to follow, with Hartmann next on the hit list.

Hartmann would, at least, have been able to counter Kropotkin's party piece with a compelling tale of his own, concerning the Italian spies who dogged him and Malatesta during their studies in chemistry and mineralogy in the British Museum. But any laughter their stories evinced, nervous or otherwise, would have been tinged with sadness at the condition of one of their fellow guests. The aggressive paranoia that Kropotkin had detected in Cafiero during their dealings earlier in the year had begun to manifest itself in a peculiar new symptom: he was 'haunted by the notion that he might be enjoying more than his fair share of sunlight'. It was a tragic, if strangely appropriate ailment to afflict the anarchist aristocrat who had devoted years of strain and suffering to the cause, and one that marked the beginning of a slow and pitiful decline into insanity.

Against this sombre backdrop, and despite the sympathetic minds he encountered in Britain, Kropotkin could not help feeling enervated by the country's political stolidity, just as he had done on his first arrival. Two decades before, his compatriot and ideological forebear Alexander Herzen had called life in London 'as boring as that of worms in a cheese'. It was a sentiment that Kropotkin now echoed and acted upon, rashly announcing 'Better a French prison than this grave.' His wish would be answered all too soon.

Having left his story of the assassin-duellist in the safe hands of the British press, by way of insurance, Kropotkin next made directly for the epicentre of social conflict in France: the strike-bound second city of France, industrial Lyons, in whose recession-hit mines and silk factories workers had risen

around him. Having previously recoiled from the logical conclusions to which his developing beliefs led him, Morris felt such fury over the prosecution of Johann Most for freely expressing his mortal hatred of the assassinated tsar that it loosed his inhibitions; he had declared the condemnation of Most to penal servitude to be an open invitation for men of conscience to abandon all but revolutionary politics. It was a book by one of the Russians who had actually plotted and carried out assassination attacks, however, that provided Morris with what one of his old friends described as the 'inciting cause' of his intractable stance: *Underground Russia*, by the pseudonymous 'Stepniak', meaning 'man of the steppes'.

'The terrorist is noble, irresistibly fascinating, for he combines in himself the two sublimates of human grandeur: the martyr and the hero,' its author pronounced. 'From the day he swears in the depths of his heart to free the people and the country, he knows he is consecrated to death … And already he sees that enemy falter, become confused, cling desperately to the wildest means, which can only hasten his end.' The French police would persist for two years in supposing Lev Hartmann to be 'Stepniak'. In fact, *Underground Russia*'s evocation of the joys and fears of conspiratorial life in St Petersburg under the watch of the brutal Third Section – and of the strains and stresses of chasing the ideal of constitutional democracy by whatever means necessary in the teeth of ruthless suppression – was the work of Kravchinsky.

Holed up in Geneva, with the Swiss authorities slowly buckling under pressure for his extradition, Kravchinsky had for some time been keeping a close eye on London as a possible alternative base for his operations. In 1880, Hartmann had called for help with his proselytising mission in England and Chaikovsky, taking Kropotkin's advice that 'the goal is to influence the opinion of western Europe and through it the governments', had responded by moving to the English capital. Since then, Chaikovsky had supplied his old friend

spread of the contagion, and illuminate the possibility of a better future. Morris' fiery commitment might have been enough to daunt Carpenter, with his somewhat retiring ways and aptitude for composing yearning poetry in a Whitmanesque mode. The contents of his recent slim volume, *Towards Democracy*, were certainly a far cry from the chivalric lays and heroic Norse epics that had hitherto inspired Morris' verse. But each contributed as best he could, and Morris was more than happy to bank Carpenter's generous contribution towards the founding of the federation's newspaper, *Justice*, first proposed to Hyndman by Kropotkin two years earlier, when the two had met at the time of the London Congress.

The reward Carpenter took away from that first meeting in Westminster was of the sort captured by Morris' pen in 'The Pilgrims of Hope', a poem that transposed the excitement of the federation's early days on to that experienced by an English volunteer in the Commune:

> 'And lo! I was one of the band.
>
> And now the streets seem gay and the high stars glittering bright;
>
> And for me, I sing amongst them, for my heart is full and light.
>
> I see the deeds to be done and the day to come on the earth …
>
> I was born once long ago: I am born again tonight.

Morris too had been grateful for Hyndman's distillation of Marxist theory, having grappled with *Das Kapital* and found the economic sections particularly taxing. His socialism arose rather from his moral perspective on society than from economic pragmatism, and the policies he embraced were inspired by outrage at the injustices he saw and read about in the world

up in protest at their working conditions. Louise Michel, who had addressed the local silk workers on a number of occasions in 1881 and 1882, described their campaign as 'a savage revolt against management and church oppression', which had as its target the symbols of Church power: in night-time raids, crosses were stolen from religious sites and thrown down wells or otherwise desecrated. However, the wild, carnivalesque atmosphere had soon turned into something darker and more dangerous as the Black Band, as they became known, appeared to turn its ire on individuals.

Threatening letters to leading figures in Montceau-les-Mines were followed by physical attacks. The campaign of violence reached its highest pitch on 22 October 1882, with a bomb thrown into the Bellecour theatre in Lyons, fatally wounding one of its staff. It was a turning point in public perception of the strikers, who despite having had little contact with local anarchists were seen as terroristic conspirators. Cyvoct, an anarchist, was accused of the bomb-throwing but fled to Belgium before he could be apprehended, while claims that the bomb itself had been donated by the nihilists of Geneva further fed the myth of an international revolutionary party.

Interviewed by *L'Express* newspaper, Sophie Bardina, the 'Auntie' of the old Fritsche group of female medical students, tried to make clear the distinction: 'Yes, we are anarchists,' she said of the Russians who had recently killed the tsar, 'but, for us, anarchy does not signify disorder, but harmony in all social relations; for us, anarchy is nothing but the negation of oppressions which stifle the development of free societies.' Despite the scrupulous semantics of Reclus' definition that 'All revolutionary acts are by their very nature anarchical, whatever the power which seeks to profit from them', neither he nor Kropotkin, both of whom were in Thonon at the time of the Bellecour bombing, appeared eager to dissociate themselves from the violence. After the shooting dead of a minor industrialist in the French transportation hub of

Roanne by a disgruntled ex-employee in the spring of 1882, *Le Révolté* incautiously hailed the act as a laudable example of 'propaganda by deed', while Kropotkin's speeches to the Lyons strikers would be eagerly seized upon as evidence of incitement.

It was against the backdrop of the ongoing strikes that Emile Zola wrote *Germinal*. Set twenty years earlier in the fictional northern coal town of 'Montsou', its hyper-realist depiction of the landscape around the ravenous maw of the La Voreux coal mine, and its vision of poverty making animals of men, carry powerful echoes of the strikes of August 1882. The novel is interesting too, for the fictional portrait it paints of the Russian anarchist Souvarine: a cerebral, sensitive but outspoken opponent of the protagonist's Marxist 'balderdash', whose semi-detached advocacy of the need to tear down the old world and start afresh drip-feeds the violence that rages around him. Bakunin is usually thought the model, though the characterisation is perhaps closer to a demonic version of Kropotkin: indeed Souvarine's fondness for his pet rabbit echoes Kropotkin's passion for the species as 'the symbol of perdurability [that] stood out against selection'.

Whilst not culpable of the kind of gargantuan act of destructiveness ultimately carried out by Zola's Souvarine, Kropotkin found himself squarely in the frame for encouraging the violence of the current strikers. Following the arrests of close associates, he came under intense surveillance, pending the authorities' decision on how to deal with such a high-profile offender. 'Flocks, literally flocks of Russian spies besieged the house,' he wrote, 'seeking admission under all possible pretexts, or simply tramping in pairs, trios, and quartets in front of the house.'

With his wife's sick brother to nurse, and their new baby daughter to attend to, it was a testing, nervous time for Kropotkin, whose family was living in straitened circumstances. In the space of a few hours, however, overnight on 21 December 1882, matters were resolved in the saddest

barnacle, was on the brink of going into reverse, Francis Galton capped a lifetime of research into heredity by giving a name to his favoured solution to the problem: eugenicism.

Even if mankind might no longer be capable of scaling the heights of perfection, Galton argued, well-intentioned science could at least assist those specimens best suited to the uphill struggle of maintaining the current status of the species. For without a programme of selective breeding, the risk was that 'those whose race we especially want to have would leave few descendants, while those whose race we want to be quit of, would crowd the vacant space with progeny.' Of course, for Galton, there was the humane consideration too: that by neutering the parents he could save the unborn children of the poor and indigent from a lifetime of suffering.

It had been the absence of struggle in the nauplius barnacle's carefree existence that had led to its degeneracy, according to Maudsley, and Morris was determined not to allow the same fate to befall the English working man. Morris was circumspect regarding the claim made by Engels following Marx's recent death that 'Just as Darwin discovered the law of evolution of organic nature, so Marx discovered the law of evolution of human history', but in no doubt that it was 'upon the struggles due to this [class] conflict [that] all progress has hitherto depended'. Degeneracy was most apparent to him not in the slum-dwellers and factory workers, fighting for survival, but among the middle class, whose tastes and appetites required the corruption of 'imagination to extravagance, nature to sick nightmare fancies … workmanlike considerate skill … to commercial trickery sustained by laborious botching'. It was there that the morbid signs could best be discerned of an old world trapped in terminal decline, and of a new one straining but unable to be born.

As such, it fell to men like Morris and Carpenter, middle-class renegades with all the insights that their background afforded them, to awaken the world to the danger, prevent the

If Carpenter's identity as a sexual outsider gave him a clearer perspective on the iniquities of society, then Morris' position as a craftsman and artistic producer, and his awareness of the anachronistic nature of his practice and vision, had led him to an even more absolute position. In line with John Ruskin's philosophy, he believed that the pernicious effect of the division of labour deprived the worker of the spiritual benefits of real creative investment in his tasks. 'Art cannot have a real life and growth under the present system of commercialisation and profit-mongering,' he wrote in a letter to a federation colleague in late 1883, while telling his own daughter that 'art has been handcuffed by it, and will die out of civilisation if the system lasts'. The central position that Morris accorded to human creative fulfilment in his ideal society raised such statements above mere artistic pieties; they underwrote a passionate engagement with the most pressing debates of the day, and a growing commitment to 'the necessity of attacking systems grown corrupt'.

The challenges of degeneration and decadence were laid out in alarming fashion during 1883 by a flurry of publications in France, Germany and Britain; their shared thesis being that a dangerous pathology gripped industrialised society that was manifest too in the aesthetic of heightened artifice increasingly adopted by avant-garde culture. But whilst there was a certain consonance between Morris' diagnosis and that of the evolutionary biologist Ray Lankester, who asserted that 'Degeneration may be defined as a gradual change of the structure in which the organism becomes adapted to less varied and less complex conditions of life', he would have recoiled from the conclusions that many drew. The most acute symptoms of the decay that was gnawing at the very foundations of civilisation were to be found, they suggested, in the burgeoning underclass, whose existence was a necessary and permanent by-product of efficient capitalism. Following Henry Maudsley's assertion in *Body and Will* that human evolution, like that of the nauplius

fashion when the death of his brother-in-law was followed, at dawn, by Kropotkin's arrest. His friends rallied round: Reclus immediately offered to give himself up to the authorities, in the hope that it would shame those persecuting his friend. In the prevailing climate, though, even Reclus' intellectual status counted for little. With Switzerland slipping ever further towards political and moral intolerance, he had also recently come close to expulsion for the scandalous indecency of allowing his two daughters to marry their sweethearts with neither priest nor mayor in attendance.

Kropotkin's long, tightly controlled speech to the Lyons court was a masterpiece of anarchist oratory: 'We want liberty, that is to say that we reclaim for every human being the right and the means to do as he pleases, and not to do what he does not like; to satisfy fully all his needs, with no other limit than the impossibilities of nature and respect for the equal needs of his neighbours … we believe that capital, the common inheritance of all humanity, since the fruit of collaboration of past and present generations, must be at the disposal of all.' And when cross-examined he challenged the loose logic employed by the prosecution, setting a precedent of witty sidestepping for future anarchists on trial. The verdict and heavy sentence, though, had been widely predicted. Most of the sixty-five other anarchists with whom he shared the dock were imprisoned for six months or a year, on the spurious grounds of membership of the defunct International. Kropotkin was condemned to a full five years, incurred a 2,000-franc fine and was placed under official surveillance for a further decade. The tsar could scarcely have hoped for a harsher punishment had he dictated it himself.

Neither a grand petition from 'English savants', inscribed in fine calligraphy, and bristling with the names of professors, editors and luminaries of the Royal Societies, urging that Kropotkin's intellectual importance warranted special treatment, nor the intervention of Victor Hugo, made any

impression on the procurator general or the minister of the interior. The French authorities looked to Andalucia, where their Spanish counterparts were busy suppressing rural insurrections coordinated by what they took to calling La Mano Negra, the Black Hand, purely on the basis of the imprint of an ink-stained hand found on a wall near the scene of one crime. 'At a time when anarchism is on the march, we can see no reason to grant mercy,' they concluded, remarking snidely that the special treatment that Kropotkin received in Clairvaux prison, thanks to donations from well-wishers, had already aroused the resentment of his fellow inmates.

The next of the congress delegates to find themselves back behind bars was Louise Michel. After spending ten days in prison in January 1883 for commemorating the anniversary of Blanqui's death, she spent the rest of the year working tirelessly to help the amnestied Communards, even returning to London to try to raise funds for a Paris soup kitchen. Accepting all invitations to speak at meetings, she frequently had to disappoint audiences when she was accidentally double- or triple-booked. 'The cause of the revolution is not served by pointless murder', she told one packed hall, but was uncompromising in her threat that 'If they import the Russian system to fight us, we'll have the courage of the Russians to detroy it!' Shouts of 'Long live dynamite!' punctuated her speeches, and her pledge to march henceforth behind the black flag of mourning rather than the red of revolution did nothing to reassure the police.

It was under the black flag that she and Emile Pouget led a demonstration in March to the politically sensitive site of Les Invalides, the resting place of Bonaparte's sarcophagus, where Michel offered an impassioned defence of the people's right to bread. Roused by her speech, the marchers became a mob, ransacking the bakeries of l'esplanade des Invalides and rue de Sèvres, before heading off towards the Elysée Palace. Alive to how bread riots could presage revolution, the police speedily intervened, but apprehending Michel herself proved far from

while Engels remained intent on pressing charges of plagiarism against his rival populariser. For those who had struggled with the density of *Das Kapital*, however, Hyndman offered ready access to ideas that quickened their outrage and galvanised their activism, with the promise of social revolution and 'genuine communism' before the decade was out. 'The well-to-do should provide for the poor certain advantages whether they like to do so or not,' stated his audaciously titled essay 'Dawn of a Revolutionary Epoch', handed out to pioneering members at the federation's inaugural meeting in 1881. Such a doctrine of paternalistic compulsion was not to every member's taste, any more than were Hyndman's authoritarian tendencies, but in this embryonic phase in British socialism all could subscribe to the basic sentiment.

That was the position taken by William Morris, a recent recruit who had promptly been appointed treasurer of the federation, and whose burly presence and acknowledged status as a poet, artist and entrepreneur presented Hyndman with the only meaningful challenge to his primacy. 'I was struck by Morris' fine face, his earnestness, the half-searching, half-dreaming look of his eyes, and his plain and comely dress,' wrote one member, and there was certainly much to recommend a man whom others described as having the brusque and direct manner of a sea captain, instilling calm and confidence in his crew. For the moment, Morris denied any interest in leadership, and sincerely insisted that he had much to learn about socialism before contemplating any such responsibility. But prolonged disenchantment with the capitalist system had left him with a passionate longing for revolution, beside which Hyndman's rhetoric rang somewhat hollow. 'I think myself that no rose water will cure us,' Morris had pronounced five years earlier in reaction to Matthew Arnold's proposal to outlaw inheritance. 'Disaster & misfortune of all kinds, I think will be the only things that will breed a remedy: in short nothing can be done till all rich men are made poor by common consent.'

wards the theosophical beliefs being propounded by Madame Blavatsky and the current of enquiry into psychic phenomena and spiritualism. All were symptoms of a new, enquiring age.

Around Easter 1883, Carpenter set about creating his own miniature Utopia on a smallholding at Millthorpe in the Derbyshire countryside, funded by a generous inheritance from his father: over £20,000 of shares in the Pennsylvania Railroad, which had been at the heart of the strikes and violent clashes of 1877, of which he promptly divested himself. But as the year progressed, with the tide in the Thames surging and the sky tinted red from the August eruption of Krakatoa on the far side of the world, Carpenter felt drawn towards a more practical and outward-looking engagement with the socialism about which he had begun to lecture to the workers of Sheffield. And so it was that October of that year saw him crossing Westminster Bridge Road, in the shadow of the Houses of Parliament, to enlist in the cause.

Compared to the grandeur of Pugin's great Gothic palace in Westminster, the basement venue for the meetings of the Democratic Federation were far from salubrious. By the light of a couple of candles, propped in tin sconces, Carpenter encountered what seemed like a 'group of conspirators', but both the atmosphere of earnest debate and the considered bearing of the leading members of the movement's executive council reassured him that he was in the right place. Chairing the meeting with a proprietorial air was the federation's founder, Henry Hyndman, a recent candidate for Parliament as an independent Tory, now turned socialist, whose proselytising political work *England for All*, including one chapter neatly summarising the economic theories of *Das Kapital*, had attracted Carpenter's attention and helped him crystallise 'the mass of floating impressions, sentiments, ideals, etc. in my mind'.

The crotchety Marx, approaching death, had taken exception to Hyndman's interpretation of his theory of 'surplus value',

straightforward. For three weeks one of the most closely watched figures in the country simply disappeared. Posters bearing her iconic features were circulated internationally, with false sightings reported as far apart as London and Geneva. Then, out of the blue, Michel simply presented herself for arrest at her local Paris police station. Having all the while been holed up in a nearby flat, tending her sick mother, she revelled in having made fools of the prefecture.

'We amnestied the Communards: look where that's got us' complained *Le Figaro*, and was relieved when the error was to some extent rectified, in a sentence for Michel of six years in prison and a further ten under surveillance. Other more moderate publications, however, feared that the severity of the sentence might prove counterproductive, with even one normally hostile journalist going so far as to comment that 'Two more judgements like those, and the anarchist party might become a reality.' In fact, while Louise Michel served her time in Saint-Lazare, other factors would decide the matter.

11. *The Holy Brotherhood*

Russia and Paris, 1881–1885

Retribution against those who plotted the tsar's death in 1881 had been swift, coming while St Petersburg was still draped in the black crepe of mourning, and Alexander II's heir sheltered behind the counter-mining fortifications of the palace at Gatchina. Having shown their ineptitude in failing to prevent the attack, Russia's newly reorganised police department conducted the round-ups with striking efficiency. Rysakov, who had thrown the first bomb, broke under interrogation, and using information he provided, the police soon tracked down the leading plotters and apprehended them amid a flurry of shoot-outs and suicides. On 26 March 1881, seven of the conspirators were put on trial and, a week later, condemned to death. Many fled abroad and by the middle of May, Vera Figner alone of the executive committee remained at liberty in Russia. Thirty-six conspirators would appear in court, eighteen were condemned to death, five executed and the rest sent to prison for a total of 500 years.

The new tsar was adamant that there should be no commutation of sentences, nor the slightest display of mercy. Sofia Perovskaya was hanged alongside her lover Zhelyabov on the Semyonovsky parade ground, a placard naming them as regicides around their necks. Rysakov was one of the three others who died the same day, spurned by his comrades for his treachery; Kibalchich another, his tragic struggle having failed, not only for the social justice which the tsar had appeared to impede, but for the right to intellectual self-fulfilment too. Having spent

a more effective education in the 'rude unaccommodating life below'. Unlike the majority of Russian peasants, the workers he taught were enthusiastic for the insights he could offer into materialism, Darwin's evolutionary theories or Beethoven's life and works, and responsive when he challenged them with the notion that 'Science has strode into the slumbering camp of religion and stands full armed in the midst. Some even brought their own makeshift telescopes to his lectures on astronomy, 'a curious subject in these towns where seldom a star could be seen'.

Carpenter's gruelling exposure to working-class poverty and hardship sharpened his sense of social injustice, while a growing consciousness of his own sexuality lent a powerful personal impetus to his political development. As much as Paris' status as a centre of social revolution, it was the promise of experimentation with male lovers that appealed: he visited occasionally 'to see if by any means I might make a discovery there!' He would soon realise that the answer was to be found closer to home, and that 'my ideal of love is a powerful, strongly built man, of my own age or rather younger – preferably of the working class … not be too glib or refined.'

In Sheffield, Carpenter joined the nearby community that had recently been founded by John Ruskin's St George's Guild, to pursue his creed that 'there is no wealth but life'; its failure to meet Carpenter's expectations did not stop him from embracing other experiments in living. A vegetarian, he welcomed the foundation of the anti-vivisection movement, along with a society to promulgate the virtues of a meat-free diet; having dispensed with his dress clothes in favour of a more fustian style, he would surely have been intrigued by the arrival in England of the tight-fitting, rough woollen clothes inspired by the writings of the German hygienist Dr Jaeger with their bold claims to let the body and the spirit breathe. Fascinated by eastern mysticism, he initially kept an open mind too to-

12. *A Great New Tide*

England, 1881–1885

The year 1881, noted one British observer, 'marked the oncoming of a great new tide of human life over the western world … It was a fascinating and enthusiastic period … The socialist and anarchist propaganda, the feminist and suffrage upheaval, the huge trade-union growth, the theosophic movement, the new currents in the theatrical, music and artistic worlds, the torrent even of change in the religious world – all constituted so many streams and headwaters converging, as it were, to a great river.'

The words were those of thirty-seven-year-old Edward Carpenter who, after a decade of committed grass-roots engagement with the education of the working man, could claim a closer affinity with those making waves across the Continent than most Englishmen. In 1871 he had abandoned his life as a curate to visit Paris in the terrible aftermath of the Bloody Week, and had been arrested on the outskirts and interrogated by Stieber's police on suspicion of being a Communard refugee. By the time he returned to France two years later, for a rest cure on the Riviera, he had settled on a new vocation: to 'somehow go and make life with the mass of the people and the manual workers'. It was the same impulse that was then sending the Chaikovsky Circle on their campaign 'to the people'.

Although the Cambridge graduate did not face anything like the same hazards as his Russian peers in his work as a lecturer for Cambridge University's Extension Scheme, his frequent tours of northern industrial towns arguably afforded him

his last days scrawling plans for directional rocket engines, the specialism he had neglected while at liberty, Kibalchich had entrusted a document describing his vision of an aeronautic machine to the chief of the gendarmerie. His final wish was merely that his scientific peers confirm the practicality of his design – a first step towards space travel – so that he might 'meet death calmly, knowing that my idea shall not die with me but will benefit the human race for which I am willing to sacrifice my life'. But as the trapdoor opened beneath his feet, his ideas had already begun to gather dust in the archives of the police department. Its director had concluded that 'To give this to scientists for consideration now would hardly be expedient since it could only encourage wanton talk.' Scientific genius and terrorism were disquieting bedfellows.

Alone among the main conspirators in being Jewish, only Gesia Gelfman was spared the noose, on account of her pregnancy. On top of her life sentence, her punishment was to have her child taken from her the moment it was born for an Orthodox Christian upbringing, and shortly after she died of grief. That the authorities considered her much-publicised involvement in the attack insufficient incitement to racially motived revenge was demonstrated by the description that was circulated of another of the conspirators, not as a typical Slav, as he had been referred to in the immediate aftermath of the assassination attack, but an 'Oriental [with a] hooked nose'. For some, it seemed, the desire to galvanise anti-Semitic sentiment was of at least equal importance to identifying and catching the assassins.

Alexander III's mentor Pobedonostsev was perfectly sincere in his belief that the Jews were a 'great ulcer' eating away at Russia: at once a threat to its spiritual and racial purity and the secret force behind any foreign diplomacy that threatened the national interest. In his ideal world, the five million Jews already restricted to the Pale of Settlement in the west of the country would be reduced by two thirds, half of whom would

die and half emigrate, with the remaining third converted to Orthodoxy.

On 15 April 1881, Orthodox Easter, the first pogrom had broken out. Surprisingly, no firm evidence has ever come to light that the attacks on Russia's Jews had been incited from above. Pobedonostsev, procurator of the Orthodox synod, would have understood all too well, though, how the conflation of the murdered tsar with Christ, the paschal lamb sacrificed by the Jews, might fuel the avengers' anger. Two hundred and fifty separate outbreaks of violence followed in the next two years, the pogroms spreading, as if spontaneously, along the recently laid railways, leaving dozens dead, hundreds more badly beaten and Jewish property in ruins. The migration of seasonal workers, rather than any more sinister agency, is the preferred explanation. However, there was an uncanny uniformity to the attacks, with victims knowing that when the pogrom arrived, a three-day carnival of terror and humiliation was in store.

The origins of the supposedly secret society that was formed as the elite's response to the assassination of the tsar are unclear. Intriguingly, though, the chief of the south-western railway, Sergei Witte, was later keen to claim the germ of the idea as his own. Having written to his uncle General Fedeev in the immediate aftermath of the tsar's assassination, proposing that loyalists should combat the terrorists using their own methods, he was summoned to meet the commander of the emperor's bodyguards, Count Vorontsov-Dashkov, and Count Peter Shuvalov, the ex-head of the disbanded Third Section, who there and then instructed him to swear an oath of allegiance 'to the society formed on the basis of my letter.' If it is true that the Holy Brotherhood was established with such speed, it makes it implausible that it was anything other than a long-cherished project for which a pretext had been found. The retired Colonel Stieber, a long-time ally of Shuvalov, now near-

involved two notable encounters. The first was with the novelist Leo Tolstoy, converted some years earlier by another ex-resident of Cedar Vale to a life lived according to the literal interpretation of Christ's Sermon on the Mount – a religious form of anarchism – since when he had been regularly harassed and censored by the police. 'Yes, my friend … you are quite right. Thanks, thanks for your wise and honest words!' the author of *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina* told his sage visitor, having listened to him speak for some time. The utopian insight Frey had offered? The suitability of fruit and nuts to the human diet.

Frey's second, more fleeting encounter was with a brilliant young zoology student who attended a lecture by Frey. Neither Alexander Ilyich Ulyanov, nor his younger brother Vladimir Ilyich, would have any truck with vegetarianism, but in the years to come first one, and then the other – under the *nom de guerre* 'Lenin' – became the most deadly of all the tsar's enemies.

delights. Rachkovsky persuaded him to work for less than a third of that sum, and to immediately return to Switzerland under cover, this time as 'Landesen', a name borrowed from an influential Latvian family. But there were benefits to sweeten the pill: direct access to the dossiers Rachkovsky had already compiled on those émigrés Hekkelman would encounter, and a well-financed cover story, setting him up as the son of affluent parents. Landesen's fictitious private income, drawn as necessary from the Okhrana coffers and available to fund whatever schemes he dreamed up to entrap his targets, was a sleight of hand typical of Rachkovsky.

For once, the Paris Okhrana chief could write in something like good faith to Fragnon in 1885 that 'all my internal agents are of deep conviction and … receive no salary but to enable them to live and proceed actively among the émigrés, never on a lucrative basis!' For Rachkovsky to make any further claim to virtue or honesty, however, would have been wholly disingenuous: prominent among his early initiatives were provocations designed to lure credulous émigrés into the most heinous crimes of which they may never have otherwise conceived.

The burden of responsibilities that Rachkovsky had assumed since coming to Paris made it hardly surprising that his original objective slipped through the net. As the ship returning the failed colony-builder William Frey to London in the autumn of 1884 crossed the Atlantic, it might have passed the one carrying a disguised Sergei Degaev in the opposite direction. And by early 1885, when the tsar handed the tsarina her first fabulously jewelled Easter egg, wrought by his favourite French goldsmith Peter Carl Fabergé, Degaev was already making a new life for himself in America. Reborn as Alexander Pell, he would in time become head of the mathematics department at the University of South Dakota. He would never return to Russia.

Frey, having established a business in London selling tooth-breaking wholewheat rusks, and with it a tiny cult following, did go back to his homeland on a brief trip that spring, that

ing the end of his life, would surely have nodded his grizzled head in approval.

Credulous as to the existence of a vast, international terrorist network, comprising myriad small self-sufficient cells in order to inhibit enemy penetration, the progenitors of the Holy Brotherhood structured their own organisation on the same model, with an added dash of the Masonic occult. At the apex of the Brotherhood stood a five-strong council of elders, each the designated contact for a subsidiary group of five, and so on, down to the sixth and eighth tiers of more than 3,000 cells, boasting such assertive or esoteric names as Talmud, Success or Genius. 'I dedicate myself entirely to the protection of His Majesty the emperor and to the persecution of sedition which casts shame on the name of Russia,' swore initiates, including the composer Peter Tchaikovsky: 'Brother number 6, Assistance.' They then received a macabre symbol of membership: a gold disc enamelled with the image of St Alexander Nevsky, his legs shattered as those of Alexander II had been by the fatal bomb.

Members of the Holy Brotherhood must have been intoxicated by its promise of state-sanctioned conspiracy but the confidence instilled by the supposed fraternal support of twenty thousand kindred spirits, the unseen members of nearly 4,000 cells, was wholly illusory. That the Brotherhood numbered scarcely more than 700, even at its peak, most of who were drawn from the idle rich of St Petersburg, including many members of the city's Yacht Club, was one secret it guarded with particular care. Nevertheless, lavishly funded by state and private donations, the Brotherhood launched a torrent of initiatives, mostly illegal and ill-judged, that were in reality little more than the superannuated adolescent fantasies of men who should have known better. There was the swashbuckling plan to challenge both Kropotkin and Rochefort to duels, that the former denounced to the press in London, and another to dispatch femmes fatales to marry

and then eliminate such troublesome figures as Lev Hartmann. And then there was the revolutionary journal it founded in Switzerland to disseminate provocative falsehoods, brazenly titled *Pravda*, or 'Truth'. The inclusion of an article advocating the eradication of the landowning class, but specifically urging activists to blow up their cattle with explosives as an initial practical step towards revolution, however, took nobody in. Only the blue pencil of the censor shielded the Brotherhood from satire; the French Sûreté, however, felt no compunction about describing it as 'a complete joke', and it was not alone in finding its activities abroad to be a serious nuisance.

Within a short time, prominent figures of all persuasions were recoiling at the organisation's notoriety. 'The agents of the Brotherhood are compromising us everywhere,' complained the interior minister, Count Ignatiev, to Pobedonostev, who himself wrote to the tsar to disown any association with the failing project. How the ousted Loris-Melikov viewed its activities was best illustrated by his willingness to use the exiled Peter Lavrov as a conduit for the secret warning he passed to Kropotkin of the Brotherhood's murderous intentions. At a hazardous time for the new tsar's government, when clarity of message was essential, the Brotherhood was fostering chaos and confusion. Mindful of how the aristocratic and officer-class profile of the Brotherhood's membership resembled that of the groups which had cultivated troublesome court intrigues against past tsars, Pobedonostsev settled on drastic action and chose the fast-rising Lieutenant General Grigori Sudeikin as the ideal man to bring the dangerous farce of the Brotherhood to an end, appointing him to the new position of inspector of the secret police.

A slim and elegantly bewhiskered thirty-five-year-old of good breeding, with a scintillating, subtle mind and a ruthless dedication to his job, Grigori Sudeikin was said by some to have his eyes on the highest political prizes. His ticket to the top, the destruction of the Brotherhood, became a personal

In developing his own stable of operatives, Rachkovsky learned from the mistakes that had cost Sudeikin his life. Even the security of the *agentura*'s offices was reinforced, with the addition of a second locking door and bars on the windows; the three clerical assistants and code-breakers who worked behind these fortifications were of proven loyalty, while a member of the Barlet Brigade, Riant, was bribed to spy on his colleagues. When it came to the kind of clandestine and provocative operations in which Rachkovsky would specialise – in particular those requiring deep-cover agents – it was impossible to exercise too much caution: he knew only too well how prolonged periods immersed in deception and betrayal could eat away at a man's psyche and corrode his loyalty.

It was Police Councillor Zvoliansky who had initiated the recruitment of Abraham Hekkelman to the Paris bureau, suggesting to Rachkovsky that 'he could be one of our most useful agents'. Amongst those in the know, Hekkelman's sangfroid was legendary, having consistently turned the tables on any colleague in the People's Will who had accused him of being an informant: even his old university friend, Burtsev, had been tricked into leaping to his defence, in the face of compelling evidence of his guilt. No exception would be made, however, to Rachkovsky's fastidious vetting of recruits and Hekkelman underwent four days of intense probing and indoctrination. Debriefed over and over again about past examples of carelessness in both Russia and Switzerland, his psychological resilience was tested and tempered. The intensive process paid off, its primary product an operative of steely ruthlessness who was impervious to suspicion and, as a by-product, a relationship was forged between agent and controller of constantly affirmative intimacy that would make both men rich and powerful.

Hekkelman must have recognised straight away that something special could come out of the promised partnership. When approached by Zvoliansky, he had demanded 1,000 francs a month and a posting to Paris, with all its fleshly

incriminating list of those who might rebuild the movement; Tikhomirov, the other key figure in exile, was 'surrounded by shipwrecked men, the debris of every imaginable circle and grouping', his psychological state becoming ever more fragile.

Nevertheless, Rachkovsky was far from complacent. Writing to Fragnon, the recently appointed chief of the Sûreté, he explained his strategy: 'I am endeavouring to demoralise [the émigrés] politically, to inject discord among revolutionary forces, to weaken them, and at the same time to suppress every revolutionary act at its source.' It was an attitude which paid professional dividends when, late in 1884, Police Councillor Sergei Zvoliansky, who had been sent to assess progress at the Paris *agentura* and smooth its relations with the French government, reported back that Rachkovsky should be given the time and space to build up his team without interruption or interference.

Since its inception, the Paris Okhrana had depended on the assistance, official and unofficial, of the French Sûreté, the investigative arm of the prefecture of police. Indeed its first detectives, known as the Barlet Brigade after their leader, Alexandre Barlet, had been hired from the ranks of the Sûreté's ex-officers. The Sûreté was, however, an unreliable organisation, staffed by those on punitive redeployment from elsewhere in the French police service and prone to leaks; staff were even known to moonlight for *La Lanterne*, writing articles attacking their own colleagues. The very ease with which Sûreté files found their way on to Rachkovsky's desk must have alarmed him, while the poor quality of much of the intelligence would have sounded a further warning. And on those occasions when Rachkovsky went to meet the incumbent prefect of police, Gustave Mace, in person, the tiny waiting room that visitors had to share with prostitutes and drunkards – sometimes squeezed in beside the hereditary state executioner, Louis Deibler – must have left a poor impression. The Paris Okhrana clearly needed fresh blood.

obsession: 'The revolutionaries are people, they have ideals,' he wrote, 'but this lot are a mob! A mob under protection! They are annoying me no end.' With a keen grasp of the black arts, he ruthlessly identified the back channels that the Brotherhood had opened for negotiation with the terrorists as the salient point for his attack. All that was needed to seal its fate, Sudeikin realised, was to exaggerate the degree of collusion, and so he arranged the forging of a document that purported to originate from the executive committee of the People's Will, discussing its coordination of strategy with the Brotherhood. Within weeks, recruitment to the Brotherhood was indefinitely suspended, and before long the organisation withered; certain members, however, may have internalised its principles.

Among the Brothers who were left searching for new fields in which to employ their morally dubious talents was Peter Rachkovsky. Since his exposure as a police infiltration agent in early 1880, he had drifted from assignment to assignment on the north-western periphery of the Russian Empire, first in Vilnius, then Cracow. His career stalling, due to his superiors' concern that he might be recognised, the advent of the Holy Brotherhood had offered Rachkovsky a timely opportunity, and he had promptly asked permission to return to Moscow and enrol. Quick-witted and calculating, he would have relished the Brotherhood's cavalier attitude to the law when plotting its intrigues, while the slosh of the millions of rubles in the Brotherhood's coffers would have appealed to his mercenary side and reaffirmed his fading belief in the personal profit he might derive from his chosen trade. There had been useful contacts to be made too, including perhaps Matvei Golovinsky, who would prove accomplished at contriving fraudulent evidence of heinous Jewish conspiracies. What Rachkovsky really needed, however, was a mentor to ease his professional advancement.

Colonel Sudeikin had been watching and assessing Rachkovsky for some time prior to May 1882, when he

finally decided to overlook Rachkovsky's poor judgement in joining the Brotherhood and approached him with an offer of employment in the St Petersburg Okhrana. Rachkovsky accepted and it was not long before he had risen to become Sudeikin's invaluable lieutenant, a position that put him on a higher career trajectory than he could possibly have realised.

Determined to infiltrate the ranks of the People's Will that Vera Figner was striving to rebuild, Sudeikin needed informants. It was to this end that in late 1882 he targeted Captain Sergei Degaev, a recent recruit to the executive committee of the People's Will from among the disillusioned officers of the naval base at Kronstadt, whose character flaws of egotism and vanity suggested him as a likely candidate for 'turning'. Tracked down to Odessa, on leads supplied by his captured brother, Degaev was arrested in a raid on the underground printing workshop that he had been assigned to establish there. Flattered by Sudeikin's attention and the discussion of how they might help each other achieve their ambitions, Degaev became a paid agent of the Okhrana. What followed, however, would provide Rachkovsky with a masterclass in the subtleties and, ultimately, the fatal risks of psychological manipulation.

Exploiting the trust placed in him by the leading exiles in Switzerland, Degaev caused havoc among his colleagues, luring them into Okhrana traps and gathering information to assist Sudeikin in his raids. Vera Figner, the leading figure of the movement, was betrayed to Sudeikin in short order, arrested on re-entering Russia and handed a life sentence. Tikhomirov was more circumspect, however, refusing to take Degaev's story at face value. Doubts remained even when Degaev revealed the identity of a prominent police informant in the ranks of the People's Will, an asset deemed expendable by Sudeikin if his exposure bought his new agent's credibility.

Under interrogation by his colleagues on the executive committee of the People's Will, Degaev broke down and re-

D'Alveydre was an evangelist of 'synarchy', a political philosophy conceived explicity to counter the anarchist threat of revolution, advocating a strict, caste-like social hierarchy and transcendent authority as the path to the new society. It was an aim that he tried to realise through his personal friendships with the crowned heads of Europe. And as with Blavatsky, who was, it has been suggested, recruited on to the Okhrana payroll at this time, he brought with him into Rachkovsky's orbit a coterie of devotees: men like Gérard Encausse, a physician then working with hypnosis in Charcot's psychiatric experiments at the Salpêtrière hospital, who was temporarily in thrall to d'Alveydre's reactionary teachings. Inevitably, however, rivals too lurked in the Parisian shadows, the most prominent being Elie Cyon, or 'de Cyon' as the ex-professor of physiology now called himself, the aristocratic prefix intended to add lustre to his honorary position as a privy councillor to the tsar. But while de Cyon had already staked his place as an international deal-broker, the novelist Turgenev, for one, considered him a 'great scoundrel', and his reactionary views had led to the rejection of his application for a chair at the Sorbonne.

Rachkovsky's priority, however, was to make himself indispensable to any in St Petersburg who doubted his abilities, which above all meant the new director of police, Vyacheslav von Plehve, who was soon to become deputy minister of the interior. When de Mohrenheim had the temerity to prompt Rachkovsky, over a tip-off claiming that Alexander II's widow was plotting with the émigrés and funding their activities, Rachkovsky's response to his interference was stinging. If the Princess Yurievskaya were channelling money to the group, he tartly replied, he would certainly have heard of it. There were solid grounds for his growing confidence. German Lopatin, elected as leader of the meagre remnants of the People's Will that were still at liberty, at a meeting of the executive in Paris early in 1884, had been apprehended in St Petersburg before the year was out, having just returned from France with an

in the deadly and secret games being played out. The contacts that Rachkovsky could draw upon from his time in the Holy Brotherhood stood him in good stead.

His 'Trojan Horse' appears to have been a young woman by the name of Yuliana Glinka, the granddaughter of a colonel whose Masonic affiliations had led to his arrest for involvement in the Decembrists' plot of 1825 against Tsar Nicholas I. Glinka had inherited her forebear's fascination with mysticism along with his taste for conspiracy. Recommended by a high-ranking family friend, she plunged into the city's occult subculture as Rachkovsky's proxy. In this she was helped no end by the sponsorship of Juliette Adam, the feminist wife of an ex-prefect of police and senator, who had been the doyenne of literary-political Paris for the best part of two decades, and was now editor of the influential *Nouvelle Revue*. It was perhaps no coincidence that three years earlier, when visiting St Petersburg, Adam had dined in the homes of some of the most generous funders of the Holy Brotherhood.

By the end of 1884, when Glinka's lover arrived from Russia, she was fully immersed in a demi-monde of dizzying complexity. Madame Blavatsky, who Glinka now numbered among her friends, was the cousin of Sergei Witte, and her works were published in Russia by the arch-nationalist journalist and ideologue Mikhail Katkov; Adam was in correspondence with Louise Michel, through whom she had sent clothes to the prisoners in New Caledonia, and was a friend of Henri Rochefort, who some even suggested had been her erstwhile lover in the 1860s, and the father of her child. Endless permutations of intrigue opened up to Rachkovsky, and when Ambassador de Mohrenheim's own contacts were factored in, the possibilities became even more elaborate. Of particular note, in this respect, was Alexandre Saint-Yves d'Alveydre, the French occultist, whose marriage to the Danish Countess Keller, a close friend of the new tsarina, had made him the favoured guru of the Russian court.

vealed his treachery, pleading for forgiveness. The request was granted but at the price of a deadly penance: he must murder Sudeikin. Degaev appeared genuinely discombobulated: torn between envy and duty, loyalty and ambition, from this point on his actions appeared to be calculated solely by short-term personal advantage. As such, Degaev acceded willingly, at first, to Sudeikin's suggestion that he act as an agent provocateur in inciting the assassination of two key figures of the reactionary Establishment, Grand Prince Vladimir and the interior minister, Count Dmitri Tolstoy. It was a devious plot meant to elevate the frustrated policeman to a ministerial post, while cutting the ground from beneath the feet of Degaev's critics in the People's Will, and he dearly wanted to believe that it might work. It was with great reluctance, therefore, that in December 1883 Degaev finally gave in to pressure and fulfilled his promise to the executive committee.

A gruesome scene would have confronted Rachkovsky in the apartment to which Degaev had lured his mentor the day before. Shortly after Sudeikin's arrival, two People's Will accomplices had emerged from hiding: one had fired the pistol shot that entered his abdominal cavity and burst the tissue of his liver, another had repeatedly bludgeoned his skull with a crowbar. The agents of the Okhrana did not take long to identify the main culprit and put his associates under surveillance, but Degaev had gone to ground and it took until the end of the year for them to catch his scent, when his wife was sighted in Paris. Immediately, Rachkovsky was dispatched to locate Madame Degaev and track down Sergei himself.

As the thirty-two-year-old Peter Rachkovsky closed the carriage door behind him on a cold, bleak St Petersburg and settled into his seat for the long journey to the west, he must have felt a certain sense of satisfaction. The Russian Embassy in Paris had been told to cooperate with him for the period of his inquiries, and he had been sanctioned to conduct the investiga-

tion according to his own initiative. It was the opportunity of a lifetime. When he stepped out on to the platform of Gare du Nord in Paris two days later, where censers puffed out smoke to fumigate the germs of the cholera epidemic that was sweeping the southern part of the Continent, he was surely resolved to make his mark in the world's most glamorous metropolis.

The Imperial Russian Embassy on the rue de Grenelle would have made a grand impression as Rachkovsky crunched across the gravel of its courtyard and under the broad glass canopy that sheltered its entrance. But in the two rooms of the wing occupied by the Okhrana's foreign agency, the director of the Paris bureau, Peter Korvin-Krukovsky, was running a shockingly ineffectual operation. A minor wordsmith with connections in the French literary world, whose personal fame rested on his co-authorship with Alexandre Dumas of the 1877 play *Les Davicheff*s, Korvin-Krukovsky had originally been employed by the Russian government to help soften French press attitudes towards Alexander III at the time of his coronation. How this stopgap public-relations officer had since been so over-promoted was a mystery to everyone and a source of ongoing interest, both professional and prurient, for the surveillance agents of the Sûreté. The complexity of his romantic life alone was sufficient to explain any inattention to his job: having married Stella Colas, star of the Odéon theatre, he had since moved in with her sister, who happened to be the ex-mistress of his own brother-in-law, Baron de Foelckersahmb. But even the need to counter the runaway success of Victorien Sardou's new revenge drama, *Fedora* – with Sarah Bernhardt returning to the Paris stage to play a heroine inspired by Figner and Perovskaya – could not justify his continued dabbling in theatre.

The prefecture's 'Agent Arnold', keeping watch over Korvin-Krukovsky's activities, struggled to conceal his contempt for the dilettante's affectations. Of greater interest to his superiors, though, were observations concerning the huge sums of

money paid monthly into his bank account by figures linked to the Orléanist claimant to the French throne. As far back as the autumn of 1881, the Sûreté had noted the apparent use of agents provocateurs by the Russians in Paris. Such intrigues might be overlooked as long as they were confined to flushing out the remnants of the People's Will among the émigré community, but became intolerable if they intruded into the volatile domestic politics of France. At a time when the previously unknown League of French Nihilists was boasting in a leaked manifesto of its secret three-year campaign to poison hundreds of bourgeois families, that certainly now appeared the case.

In April 1884, the end of Prince Orlov's tenure at the embassy provided the occasion for Korvin-Krukovsky's recall on the pretext of financial laxity. The new Russian ambassador to France was Baron de Mohrenheim, the very man who, as a lowly consular attaché in Berlin nearly thirty years earlier, had arranged for Wilhelm Stieber to be smuggled across the city in a laundry basket and offered a job working for the Russians. Now an austere senior statesman with cropped grey hair and a waxed moustache, de Mohrenheim enjoyed the lasting favour of Alexander III for having facilitated his courtship of the Danish Princess Dagmar, now the tsar's wife, during his posting to Copenhagen in the 1870s, and yet he remained acutely aware of his vulnerability to the vagaries of court politics. Now that Stieber had quit the stage, de Mohrenheim was eager to recruit a new spymaster to take up the baton, and Rachkovsky appeared a promising candidate: one sufficiently independent of any faction, yet adept at feigning friendship and allegiance wherever necessary.

In the heady atmosphere of bohemian Paris in the 1880s, myriad rival sects flourished that cut across the clearly demarcated battle lines of reaction and revolution in the Russian émigré community. To understand their agendas, even to insinuate oneself into their trust, was to gain a powerful advantage

stead argued for a divergence in the evolutionary paths of the pure and the atavistically sinful: a notion dismissed by their rivals as mere pseudoscience. A comparison of the skulls of criminals and non-criminals would reveal the validity of their claims, they asserted, but the French disdained the suggestion, and the congress ended in acrimony. At least the Italians could have consoled themselves before they left Paris, with an excursion to the quai de Branly, in the shadow of the Eiffel Tower, where the first in a series of tableaux representing the progress of man featured Neanderthals made up with just the heavy brows, misshapen ears and thick lips that they assigned to the atavistic criminal.

In all likelihood, absolute unanimity reigned at only one congress: that of the Freemasons. Outrage was what brought them together, in the face of seemingly well-attested accusations that their secret rites entailed the raising of the devil and human sacrifice. The document that formed the basis for these accusations was published – on the very day that Pini and his accomplices were arrested – by a certain Leo Taxil, who claimed to have received it from a mysterious and elusive woman called Diana Vaughan, purportedly the child of the goddess Astarte by her mystical union with the seventeenth-century alchemist Thomas Vaughan. Smuggled from America to Europe by Vaughan, who was resolved to expose the diabolical heart of Freemasonry, it laid bare a Masonic cult called Palladism, based in the American city of Charleston where the Grand Master of the order spoke to the rulers of hell by means of telephonic apparatus. Taxil himself was an ex-Freemason who had turned against the brotherhood in a spectacular way. During his days as an initiate he had been fiercely anticlerical, writing pornographic satires against the Pope that his fellow Masons had considered so far beyond the pale that they had pressured him to resign. Since then he had switched his allegiances dramatically, being granted an audience with the Pope he had previously maligned.

hundreds of policemen had died, formed defence groups in the expectation of imminent civil war, while apocryphal stories that the bomb had been followed by salvos of anarchist gunfire into the ranks of the police led them to believe that an insurrection had already broken out.

The police department itself was divided over how to respond. While Police Chief Ebersold tried to reassure the public, convinced that his priority must be to prevent panic, his junior officers set about undermining his strategy by stoking the pervasive sense of fear. Bonfield having played his part, Captain Schaak now took the lead in championing the reactionary cause. Seventy anarchist suspects were rounded up in short measure and brutally interrogated, without access to water or legal representation. Witnesses were bribed, informants retained, reports forged, guns and bombs planted in the anarchist headquarters. Schaak was the sledgehammer of those with a wider anti-socialist and xenophobic agenda, as those around him at the time would later reveal. 'He saw more anarchists than hell could hold,' wrote one eye-witness to his excesses; 'in the end, there was no society, however innocent or even laudable, among the foreign-born population that was not to his mind engaged in devilry.' Nevertheless, Schaak's tall tales of secret conspiracies were swallowed without question by most of Chicago's middle class, who preferred to blame Mayor Harrison's policies for giving comfort and encouragement to the anarchists, than question who had really thrown the bomb, and on whose orders.

Spies, Neebe, Lingg, Fielden and Schwab were among the eight men charged for the attack, though few of them had been present in the Haymarket, or could be linked to the event. Since they were the city's leading anarchist speakers and journalists, their removal struck the movement a critical blow. Albert Parsons, having gone into hiding, voluntarily turned himself in, in the hope that his presence in the dock would allay the risk of the trial making scapegoats of the immigrants. The

man suspected of throwing the bomb, Schnaubelt, had fled, never to reappear. If Johann Most had visited Chicago for May Day, he had made a quick getaway, but was nevertheless indicted by a grand jury. When eventually arrested, he was humiliated in front of fifty policemen who watched as he was photographed, familiarising themselves with his features for future reference and shouting out threats that 'If you show your teeth, or open your yap, we'll shoot you down like a dog.' Ironically, had Most not kept a certain distance between himself and Parsons, whose policies he still considered too moderate, he would almost certainly have joined those who now stood trial.

The atmosphere in which the eight Chicago anarchists appeared in the dock resembled that of a witch-hunt, and the prosecuting state attorney made no pretence as to the purely political and exemplary nature of the judgement that would be passed. 'Law is on trial. Anarchy is on trial. These men have been selected, picked out by the grand jury, and indicted because they were leaders. They are no more guilty than the thousands who follow them. Gentlemen of the jury: convict these men, make examples of them, hang them and you save our institutions, our society.' The gentlemen, and the judge, duly obliged, sentencing five to the death penalty and three to a life term of hard labour.

In Britain, as throughout Europe, the Haymarket debacle galvanised both extremes of the political spectrum. While those on the left rallied to the accused during the trial and afterwards, collecting petitions and addressing public meetings, the Tory press inveighed against the defendants, in a displaced expression of the loathing it felt for the immigrant and native socialists closer to home. For William Morris, the event exposed at a stroke the hypocrisy surrounding the vaunted ideal of Anglo-Saxon liberal democracy, on both sides of the Atlantic. 'Will you think the example of America too trite?' he asked an audience of moderate Fabians, challenging their willingness to operate within existing political structures. 'Anyhow consider

that the robberies were carried out solely for propaganda purposes. Reclus too came down decisively in favour of those driven to seek restitution from a bourgeois society whose own wealth had been iniquitously acquired. For interwoven with his deep benevolence was the same steely pragmatism that, ten years earlier, had insisted that the young would have to be prepared to lay down their lives to achieve the social revolution, and who in 1885 was said to be advising his acolytes on how to ensure the success of any repeat of the Commune uprising by seizing the Bank of France and the major rail companies.

The moral issues at stake were less complex for the man who had become chief of the Service for Judicial Identity at the prefecture of police, Alphonse Bertillon. It had been a rapid rise. Having had his 'anthropometric method' dismissed by Andrieux eight years earlier, and only tolerated by Mace, Bertillon was now able to introduce it across the French police force. When Pini and the Schouppes were taken into custody, their heads, faces and limbs would have been measured at eleven points to ensure they could be identified again (no expert in calculating probability, Bertillon omitted the twelfth measurement which would have made his system to all intents infallible). But outside the police force the belief in a physiological difference between the law-abiding citizen and the criminal was more hotly debated. Indeed, at a congress of criminal anthropologists, which also took place during the Exposition, leading experts from France and Italy were at loggerheads.

To the French, drawing on the imagery of Louis Pasteur's discoveries in the field of microbiology, the most scientifically plausible explanation for criminal degeneracy lay in cultural influences: the social and economic context in which extremists – the equivalent of microbes – lived was the *bouillon* or 'soup' from which their wrongdoing emerged. The Italians, devout followers of Darwin, with Lombroso their high priest, in-

the modern nation-state that has progressively annihilated an invaluable legacy of decentralised, communal institutions.' Yet it was perfectly palatable to the followers of Marx who, as Félix Fénéon observed, preferred 'the complexity of a clock to that of a living body', and longed for 'a society in which every citizen carries a number'. The struggle to realise anarchism's dream of society in an organic state of harmony nevertheless raised profound ethical challenges along the way. Reclus's position, in particular, midway between the anarchist-communists and the pure Bakuninists, left him struggling to square a number of circles, foremost among which was the issue of 'conscientious' criminality, which believed in its right to flaunt the rules of a corrupt society, despite causing injury to others.

'Equality is the ensemble of social facts which permit each man to look another man in the eye and to extend his hand to him without a second thought,' Reclus had written to Louise Michel in 1887, and it was with the same saintly attitude that, in 1889, he revealed the secret of his equanimity: 'to love everyone always, including even those whom one must fight against with unflagging energy because they live as parasites on the social body.' But could violence and mutuality coexist? Was it possible to draw a moral distinction between theft from the rich, and the exploitation of others that had made them so? Where should the limits of acceptability be drawn for acts of 'propaganda by the deed'?

Events only a fortnight before the opening of the congress had brought these issues into sharp focus, when an anarchist group calling itself the Intransigents, though with no connection to Rochefort's paper, was revealed to have emulated the spree of burglaries committed by the Panthers of Batignolles. The Italian Pini, already a wanted man for his murderous escapades in Italy with Parmeggiani, and two Belgian brothers called Schouppe had been arrested after a police raid had found them in possession of a sizeable hoard of goods from homes in France and *La Révolte* defended the crime, insisting

it! A country with universal suffrage, no king, no House of Lords, no privilege as you fondly think; only a little standing army, chiefly used for the murder of red-skins; a democracy after your model; and with all that, a society corrupt to the core, and at this moment engaged in suppressing freedom with just the same reckless brutality and blind ignorance as the Tsar of all the Russias uses.'

After visiting the condemned men in prison, Marx's daughter Eleanor returned to England on the eve of their execution to report the belief, common among the working men of Chicago, that the true guilt for the bomb-throwing lay with a police agent. Subsequent investigations never settled the matter, though the corruption in the Chicago police and judiciary at the time was eventually laid bare and officially acknowledged. Foreign powers also had a hand in manipulating the aftermath of the Haymarket Affair, however, and the possibility of their prior involvement in provoking the bombing cannot be discounted; certainly, the most vociferous calls for vengeance came from a certain Heinrich Danmeyere, a deep-cover agent of the Imperial German Police.

It may well have been Danmeyere too who, in the guise of an American-based inventor known as 'Meyer', played a supporting role in a police plot of 1887 to entrap Most's accomplice Johann Neve. The bait offered was a new terror weapon he had supposedly devised, called the 'scorpion': a poisoned needle resembling that which Jules Allix had proposed during the Siege of Paris as an effective means for Frenchwomen to kill Prussians. The key figure in the plan was a certain Theodore Reuss: one of the more flamboyant émigrés in London, where – on behalf of the Imperial Police – he had been making mischief among the socialists for the past couple of years, repeatedly evading exposure.

Even before the London Anarchist Congress, when the French spy Serreaux had required such careful handling and

Malatesta had almost fought a duel with his lover's brother Giuseppe Zanardelli over attempts to discredit the movement, there had been considerable unease about police infiltration of the émigré communities in Britain. When Theodore Reuss joined the Socialist League in 1885, the sincerity of his conversion should immediately have been in doubt: a Wagnerian tenor who claimed to have taken a lead role in the world premiere of *Parsifal* at Bayreuth and to have re-founded the mystical Order of the Illuminati in Munich, his shared interest in medievalism with William Morris was insufficient by way of explanation. As it was, however, neither his decision to enrol under the pseudonym of Charles Theodore, nor the generosity with which he funded the league's propagandist activities at a level far beyond his ostensible means, appear to have caused any initial suspicion.

Within a few months, however, with Reuss installed as 'Lessons Secretary' for the League, coaching recent arrivals in the English language and cultivating the most extreme of them, his more cautious colleagues intuited a troublesome presence, and when he convened a conference to propose that an international centre should coordinate the league's activities, veteran delegates surely recalled Serreaux's ruse in 1881. Perhaps when Eleanor Marx lamented the vulgarity of the songs Reuss chose for a recital, or a German colleague contradicted the verdict of the music critics by declaring Reuss to have 'a harsh voice', they were giving vent to a deeper-seated but unspoken unease. While the German émigrés could deal with traitors ruthlessly – a spy who had revealed details of the operation to smuggle *Freiheit* to the Continent had been 'accidentally' shot during a picnic on Hampstead Heath – for the moment a lack of evidence against Reuss saved him from a similar fate.

Those who doubted Reuss' integrity would soon regret their scruples. Insinuating himself into the trust of Joseph Peukert, who had established the Autonomie group as a means of dis-

At the heart of the factional differences, though rarely explicit in discussions, was the contested interpretation of the Revolution that was being celebrated. For many, even the year chosen for the centenary was wrong. The Marxists viewed 1789 as the date of significant rupture, when the destruction of the feudal system laid the ground for the next stage on the long journey to a socialist Utopia. It was one that would be brought about by the inherent contradictions of the new, capitalist economic system which, under pressure from a growing class consciousness among the industrial proletariat, would tear itself apart in a second revolution. To those of the anarchist persuasion, by contrast, Marx's Hegelian vision of historic forces slowly shifting like tectonic plates to reshape the landscape of society denied the power of individual will to effect change. For them 1789 was merely a moment of half-hearted compromise, and it was from the subsequent, genuinely populist achievements of the revolutionaries that contemporary socialists should draw their inspiration.

Above all, the anarchists should look to the brief moment before the Terror turned cannibalistic, when the sans-culottes, hungry for justice, gloriously demonstrated the potential of the workers to strike out against the tide of history. The blood shed so copiously by the guillotine should not be allowed to obscure that simple truth. By this logic, some even considered Robespierre a martyr to the anarchist cause, having advocated the continuation of the Revolution to its just conclusion, before his excessive zeal had provided the inadvertent catalyst of reaction. The anarchist's highest esteem, however, was reserved for Gracchus Babeuf, the inspiration behind Sylvain Maréchal's *Manifesto of Equals*, the first coherent expression of the anarchist creed, who had lost his life conspiring in bloodthirsty fashion against the Thermidorian Reaction of the mid–1790s.

To accept the version of 1789 promoted by the Third Republic was misleading, Elisée Reclus warned, and it was especially 'important to see how the Revolution helped establish

time and effort at each was devoted to the question of whether to fuse.

Edward Carpenter, whose friendship with William Morris had led him to the congress of International Socialist Workers in its crowded, smoky music hall, reported back to his friends in Sheffield on the chaos of the debate: 'The noise and excitement at times was terrific, the president ringing his bell half the time, climbing on his chair, on the table, anything to keep order.' But with figures of the stature of Vera Zasulich, Plekhanov, Kropotkin and Kravchinsky from the Russian contingent, Liebknecht from Germany, Malatesta's friend Merlino from Italy, and Louise Michel and Elisée Reclus from France, the cacophony was strangely rewarding to those who had previously only read their heroes' words. 'All this', enthused Carpenter, 'was to feel the pulse of a new movement extending throughout Europe, and emanating from every branch and department of labour with throbs of power and growing vitality.'

The eventual vote accepted a compromise resolution, expressing a desire for union with the members of the other congress but coyly postponing action until it had expressed a preference. Fusion of a kind was swiftly achieved, however, by the arrival of a wave of defectors from the 'Possibilists'. For many of those who had travelled as representatives of their own small clubs – among the British, Frank Kitz from the Socialist League, Eleanor Marx's husband Edward Aveling from East Finsbury, Joseph Deakin and Fred Charles from Walsall and North London, and even Auguste Coulon from Dublin – it was a chance to meet their foreign counterparts, and form international relationships that held the promise of future grass-roots cooperation in building the new world. The small army of translators struggled to keep pace, in the hall itself and as the debates overflowed into the more convivial surroundings of the Taverne du Bagne.

tancing himself from Most's influence, Reuss cultivated the tensions between Peukert and his rivals, in particular Neve's Belgian assistant Victor Dave. Before long each was accusing the other of being a police spy. On a secret visit to the Continent by Dave, the ease with which Reuss was able to address letters to him raised further suspicions that he was in league with the police. These appeared to be confirmed when Dave tested Reuss by providing him alone with information about an imaginary visit to Berlin by Neve, to which police in the city responded. Peukert merely accused Dave of attempting to frame Reuss, and the mutual recrimination continued.

It was now that the agent provocateur Meyer offered Peukert the 'scorpion' as a means by which he could regain Neve's esteem, and when Neve agreed to meet in Belgium, Reuss eagerly tagged along. 'Now I've got him,' crowed Kruger, the director of the Berlin police, certain that 'this time he would not escape my grasp.' But the elusive Neve failed to appear, and the police agents to whom Reuss had signalled his movements returned empty-handed. Then, two days before Reuss was due back in London to perform in a concert, Neve offered to meet him alone.

The rendezvous was arranged for Luttich station. The minutes dragged by in the waiting room, the appointed time came and went, and just as Reuss was about to leave, the door creaked open and Neve entered. He had no real interest in secret weapons; only in reprimanding Reuss for his malicious slanders of Dave. 'You are a man without character,' Neve sneered, before making a cautious exit. Leaning on the bar, watching in the mirror, the only other man present was Kruger's agent, who had got a good enough view of Neve's reflection to be able to circulate a description.

At the meeting arranged by Reuss a fortnight later in the Autonomie Club in London to debate the expulsion of Dave, the accused read out a letter from Neve detailing how he was now under surveillance. A month later Neve was snatched in

Belgium, bundled over the border and thrown into a German prison from which he would never emerge, abandoned to scratch out the days until his death a decade later. Having served his purpose, Reuss was lucky to escape merely with expulsion from the Socialist League; a shredded document from a meeting in May 1887, now held together by many strips of Sellotape, testifies to the red heat at which tempers ran. Confrontations between the Metropolitan Police and league members, including Morris, during mass demonstrations at Dod Street in the East End and Trafalgar Square, had left even the British socialists with little tolerance for traitors or turncoats.

Now that Neve had been eliminated, almost the only trace that remained in Europe of Johann Most's revolutionary ambitions took fictional form: while plotting *The Princess Casamassima* in 1886 Henry James struggled to accommodate Most's demonic personality, in the end deciding to share his unappealing attributes between three characters: a bookbinder, a chemist and a professional German revolutionary. In November 1887, though, America provided the world with an iconic image that for some provided a counterpoint to the diabolical reputation that anarchism was acquiring: that of four gowned men on a gallows, below ropes noosed ready to stretch their sacrificial necks – the Haymarket martyrs.

The actual scene was witnessed by 200 spectators seated in the high, narrow execution chamber at 11.30 on the morning of 11 November. Of the five men sentenced to an exemplary death, Lingg had already cheated the hangman by biting down on an explosive cartridge smuggled into his prison cell, only to die in prolonged agony. The remaining four awaited their fate; while Parsons stood with a semblance of calm, Spies spoke through the hood that had been placed over his head. 'There will be a time when our silence will be more powerful than the voices you strangle today,' he began, but before he could finish the trapdoor crashed open beneath him.

the hearts of all believers in social revolution: the Great Globe, of which Reclus had dreamed since his days in London almost forty years earlier. A statement of universal brotherhood and promise of enlightenment, the design on which he would shortly begin work would pay homage to the ideals of the Revolution, referencing the vast domed 'Temple to Nature and Reason' that the visionary Etienne-Louis Boullée had planned in the 1780s, barely escaping the Terror after being named one of the parasitical 'madmen of architecture'. Even Reclus, however, might have acknowledged that a tower rather than a globe offered a better symbol of the myriad congresses under way in 1889: a tower of Babel.

Two years earlier Louise Michel had embraced the putative new lingua franca of Esperanto, certain that linguistic innovations could facilitate the unity of mankind. 'Everything leads to the common ocean, solicited by the needs of renewal,' she wrote, adopting Elisée Reclus' favourite aquatic metaphor. 'The human species which since the beginning of ages had ascended from the family to the tribe, to the horde, to the nation, ascends again and forever, and the family becomes an entire race.' Yet in the absence of any gathering of Esperanto evangelists, the rival followers of Volapük set new standards of confusion by insisting that delegates to their congress communicate only in the notoriously complex invented language.

Elsewhere in the city, the ideological incompatibility and barely suppressed factionalism of the socialists produced a similar effect, with the sects refusing even to accept temporary coexistence under the same roof. The International Socialist Workers, with their collectivist tendency, convened on 14 July in a tiny music hall, the Fantaisies Parisiennes in the rue Rochecouart, while another congress nearby for the 'Possibilists' was attended by the likes of Henry Hyndman of the Social Democratic Federation, who were committed to operating within the existing framework of politics. Much

phallic assertiveness wrote to Eiffel that 'it makes me quiver in all my emotions', and anecdote suggests that in this she was far from alone.

Among the Expo's thirty-two million visitors that summer, though, seditious elements lurked. Workers descended on Paris in their thousands from the industrial heartlands of Europe, including a sizeable contingent, conspicuous only to the surveillance agents detailed to spy upon them, who had come for the socialist congresses convened to commemorate the revolution of 1789. For residents and visitors alike, the recent launch of Emile Pouget's scabrous newspaper *Père Peinard*, modelled on the revolutionary *Père Duchesne* that had thrived from 1790 and through the Terror, offered a crude call to arms against contemporary injustice, written in the argot of working-class Paris, which its critics claimed to be symptomatic of moral decay. It was with very different eyes that its readers viewed the tower, and the celebrations that surrounded it.

Many of the anarchists from Belgium carried in their minds images glimpsed in the studios of the radical artists' group Les XX, that tore up the rulebook of artistic propriety. James Ensor's depiction of *Christ's Entry into Brussels*, above all – which usurped the Church's monopoly on the most potent icon of spiritual renewal by taking the figure of the Messiah and submerging him in a carnivalesque crowd of self-satisfied bourgeoisie, fringed by vignettes of scatological satire – was an image so shocking that even his colleagues in the group suppressed its public exhibition. The crazed mood that Ensor captured, however, must have seemed close to quotidian in the Paris of the Exposition: a city whose facelift extended far beyond the public monuments to include even the '*maisons closes*', all redecorated in anticipation of the surge in business.

For Elisée Reclus, meanwhile, whose vast and widely acclaimed *Universal Geography* was nearing its nineteenth volume, Eiffel's tower represented a missed opportunity. For in its place might have stood a symbol that would have gladdened

14. *Decadence and Degeneration*

Paris, 1885–1889

'The city and its inhabitants strike me as uncanny,' a young Sigmund Freud wrote home from Paris in late 1885, during his visit to observe the experimental work that the neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot was conducting with hysterics at the Salpêtrière hospital. 'The people seem to me to be of a different species from ourselves; I feel they are possessed of a thousand demons.' Parisians were given, he believed, to 'physical epidemics, historical mass convulsions'. And if France's century-long history of revolution did not offer justification enough for Freud's thesis, the tumultuous events that had taken place in the French capital the previous May would have confirmed his impression.

For almost three decades, Victor Hugo, the towering figure of the republican left, had woven a mythology of heroic resistance to injustice in which he played the leading role. Even as his powers as a novelist declined, his privileged position in French society, latterly as a senator, had allowed him to remain a solitary if somewhat ineffectual voice of opposition to the rulers of the Third Republic during the Communards' exile. His death on 22 May 1885, two days short of the fourteenth anniversary of the Bloody Week, left his thousands of admirers bereft and disorientated. 'The Panthéon is handed over to its original and legal purpose. Victor Hugo's body shall be carried to it for burial', the Chamber of Deputies declared, hopeful

that the honour might encourage a dignified and orderly laying to rest. Instead, a spirit of crazed carnival was released in the city that, for the bourgeoisie, echoed with their nightmare imaginings of a recrudescent Commune.

The strangely heightened mood of the city was first apparent in Père Lachaise cemetery, where the annual commemoration for those slaughtered there in 1871 coincided with the period of mourning. Confrontation with police had become a regular feature of the occasion, but this time its ferocity left several radicals dead, and over seventy others injured. When rumours spread that the anarchists meant to channel the emotion around Hugo's funeral into a popular uprising, three army regiments were drafted in, at significant expense, to accompany the cortège. As it was, the true melodrama on the route to the Panthéon had been scripted by the author himself, in specific instructions that his body should be carried in a pauper's hearse. Never averse to a sentimental *coup de théâtre*, the paradox of a state funeral stripped of all the usual trappings tipped Hugo's public straight from solemnity into the wild abandon of his wake. With the brothels closed for the day, the parks and boulevards hosted scenes of debauchery decried as 'Babylonian' by Hugo's enemies in the Catholic press. But it was not only the whores who offered to celebrate this most priapic of authors with open arms; 'How many women gave themselves to lovers, to strangers, with a burning fury to become mothers of immortals!' marvelled one spectator of the night's revels.

Behind the bars of the Saint-Lazare prison, Louise Michel paid tribute to her mentor, Hugo, in characteristically stormy verse. Her second major bereavement of the year, following the death in January of her beloved mother, Hugo's death inspired poetry that seethed at the butchery of the defeated Communards, and the terrible weeks that those who escaped the immediate slaughter had spent in the concentration camp at Satory. This wasn't, however, the only writing that Michel's incarceration had inspired. Throughout the two years she

chief of police, Louis Lepine, to bundle him and his mistress on to a train to Belgium, and into exile.

'Not a man, but a wet rag,' Duchess d'Uzès said of her ex-protégé. To all practical purposes, Boulangism was finished, the general's sudden departure seen by most as an admission of guilt. Rochefort's faltering influence over French public opinion could no longer ensure his safety from arrest, and he soon followed his hero into exile. To Louise Michel, the threatened trial and Boulanger's departure were 'just another burlesque, signifying a society in its slow death throes', but the opportunists in government could, for the moment, breathe a sigh of relief. For the few months of the Expo, it was hoped the simmering discontent of the past few years might be contained, or else subsumed in the ferment of artistic creativity that was its correlative. And what better symbol of their optimism than the edifice that had won the competition to be the centrepiece of the Exposition: Eiffel's extraordinary iron pylon, which for the past two years had been gradually rising skyward over Paris, its four great feet held steady by the use of pneumatic props as it grew.

The Panama project may have collapsed, deeply compromising Gustave Eiffel, who had designed the locks needed to lift the boats over the mountains of the isthmus through which dynamite could not blast a path, but his tower now stood as alternative proof that French ingenuity could raise a monument of an unprecedented scale. Conservatives railed against it on aesthetic grounds, filling the letter columns of the press with attacks on how its brute presence overshadowed the elegance of Haussmann's boulevards. To the bourgeoisie, however, Eiffel's great feat of engineering, together with the vast Gallery of Machines, offered conspicuous reassurance that the process of industrialisation that had driven their rising affluence was again gathering pace after years of recession. The tower even held something for all those women who had been such strong adherents of the cult of Boulanger: one admirer of its sheer,

ple had impressed Grand Duke Vladimir, commander of the Russian Imperial Guard, might only be for 5,000, if every member of the Russian army received the weapon, as their French counterparts had, it would facilitate military coordination between the countries. But Rachkovsky was stretching himself thin. If he was to be effective in pursuing his other interests, it was essential that he maintain the indispensable nature of his counter-subversive work as the Okhrana's spymaster.

With the centenary of the French Revolution in 1889 fast approaching, when Paris was to host a Universal Exposition, there would be abundant opportunities for him to work his wiles. That Russia would not officially attend – having used Kropotkin's release as a pretext to announce its withdrawal from a celebration of democracy that the tsar would, in any circumstances, have found distinctly uncomfortable – need not impede his intrigues.

One thing was certain, as the great Exposition prepared to open in May 1889: it wasn't going to be Boulanger who brought about a Franco-Russian coalition. Ironically, it was an eccentric Russian religious adventurer by the name of Ashinov who helped precipitate the final collapse of the Boulangist project, when his missionaries mistakenly occupied the fort in the small port of Obock, a French colonial possession in the Gulf of Aden. The new French minister of the interior, Ernest Constans, indicated that he was inclined to treat the incursion as a declaration of war. Perhaps, too, he saw the political potential of the situation, for when the journal of the Boulangist League of Patriots accused the government of betraying the national interest by its hostility to Russia, Constans promptly announced that its editor would be charged with treason, with Boulanger and Rochefort implicated by association. Boulanger promptly took fright and, rather than lead the crowds who were once again baying for a march on the Elysée Palace, allowed the crafty

spent in Saint-Lazare, her pen provided a consistent safety valve for her frustrated idealism and the resulting rage. In overwrought novels written in Vernian vein, she explored the possible futures of mankind. *Les Microbes humaines* offered a robust riposte to those who applied the new language of virology to the slum-dwelling underclass, promising the emergence of a new race that would carry forward the ideals of the social revolution; *L'Ere nouvelle* conjured a vision of nature's power harnessed for the common good, with whirlpools directed to drive tunnels through mountains, and submarines colonising undersea continents. Then, quite suddenly, in the January after Hugo's death, the new government of Charles de Freycinet, whose cabinet included four radicals, made an immediate demonstration of its reformist intentions by pardoning both Michel and Kropotkin.

The unexpected move, and Kropotkin's release in particular, provoked international outrage. 'I have never had ill feelings towards France, for which I have always felt great sympathy,' Tsar Alexander III told the departing ambassador General Félix Appert in January 1886, after Appert had been expelled from Russia in protest, 'but your government is no longer the republic, it is the Commune!' Appert, who had headed the military tribunal that judged the Communards at Versailles, may well have sympathised with Russia's decision to announce its withdrawal from the forthcoming centenary celebrations of the Revolution. Yet the consequent *froideur* between the two nations once again set back hopes of cooperation in confronting the power of Bismarck's Germany. The delivery of any future alliance, it was clear, would require a cunning and resourceful midwife.

Typically Michel had stood on principle when news of her release came through and reacted to the interior minister's order – 'Extreme urgency Stop Liberate Louise Michel immediately Stop' – by refusing to leave her cell. Since there had been no pardon for either her colleague Emile Pouget or the strik-

ers from Montceau-les-Mines, Michel insisted, she could not accept privileged treatment. Increasingly desperate messages were exchanged between the prison and the ministry of the interior in search of a solution until, Michel would later claim, her pity for the painfully perplexed gaoler finally persuaded her to go.

The political climate she discovered outside the prison walls was much changed. Continuing arrests and trials in Lyons and the suppression of the émigré population in Switzerland had transformed Paris into the new heartland of a strengthening French anarchist movement. Groups clustered in the old Communard areas to the north and east of Paris – Belleville, Ménilmontant and Batignolles – with others scattered across the city and its suburbs. But it was in Montmartre that radical sentiment was to be found in its most concentrated form, with clubs on nearly every corner in the maze of streets that clung to the hillside, and the new bohemian bars and cabarets as congenial neighbours. 'If there is a thing to be mocked, a convention to be outraged, an idol to be destroyed, Montmartre will find the way,' wrote one observer of the bohemian demi-monde.

Nowhere epitomised the bonfire of deference better than the great cabaret Le Chat Noir, founded in 1881. Outside, bouncers dressed parodically in the uniform of the Pope's Swiss Guard saw off the gangs of youths that roamed the area; inside was a topsy-turvy world of misrule. Waiters were dressed in the regalia of members of the Académie française, and the patron, Rodolphe Salis, accompanied visitors to their seats with mocking servility, while in the murals behind them, the skeletal figure of Death led a troupe of Pierrot clowns in a *danse macabre*.

Fuelled by wine, consumption of which soared during the 1880s, and the mind-altering absinthe for which France had acquired a taste during the years when the phylloxera virus had decimated the country's vines, the denizens of Montmartre seemed to inhabit a permanent party. From the Hydropathes to Les Incohérents, the Hirsutes to the Zutistes, myriad groups

pragmatic Rachkovsky must have known that it served his purposes well.

Now married to a Frenchwoman, Rachkovsky had recently moved to a grand villa in the western suburb of Saint-Cloud: a property to which his salary from the Okhrana is unlikely to have stretched, even with bonuses for his continued success. In the Paris of the late 1880s, anyone well connected and with an iota of cunning could create a fortune; kickbacks were so easy to come by. The Russian ambassador, de Mohrenheim, certainly took advantage of the opportunities, accepting vast secret donations from the Panama Canal Company for his connivance in its deception, and was also said to be in receipt of a regular slice of the interest paid by the Russian government on the huge French loans arranged by his friend, the Franco-Danish financier Emile Hoskier, so that Russia need no longer be in such deep debt to Germany. During the winter of 1888, 640 million rubles of debt were transferred from Berlin to Paris, and collecting the crumbs from the table made de Mohrenheim a rich man. It seems likely that Rachkovsky feathered his own nest too, safe in the knowledge that, at a time when Russia's goodwill was so valued, for the French press to investigate the financial interests of its embassy staff would have been nothing short of unpatriotic. And yet to those with a vested interest in the transactions, the corruption appeared brazen. For his attempts to mediate a rival loan deal, Elie de Cyon received a cool million francs, but at the cost of what remained of his tattered reputation, being labelled as one of the greatest 'rascals of our age' by the French, and 'a mendacious and venal Jew with revolutionary tendencies' by the Germans.

Rachkovsky's diplomatic and propagandist sidelines were proving ever more absorbing to him. Besides lobbying for the French foreign ministry to decline to take Bulgaria's side in a disagreement with Russia, there would soon be the delicate matter of the rifles manufactured by the French company Lebel on which to keep an eye. While the initial order, after a sam-

of his equally able younger brother, Vladimir Ilyich, to be in everything 'like Sasha' was now translated into the revolutionary field. Thanks in part to Rachkovsky's suppression of the People's Will, the young man looked for leadership to Plekhanov, who had scorned Tikhomirov's book.

Among the Russian elite, however, Tikhomirov was greeted as the returning prodigal: there were even private dinners with Pobedonostsev, who arranged for him to do penance in a monastery and placed his writings on the school curriculum. Once back in Paris, Tikhomirov was welcomed into the most fashionable salons, the firm friend of Juliette Adam and Madame Olga Novikoff, who now divided her time between London, Paris and the Riviera. His response to personal attacks in the left-wing press testified to the influence of the company he was keeping, but perhaps also to the elusive nature of the double standards by which they lived: 'The Jews! The scum!' Tikhomirov cursed, unaware of the strange hypocrisies that allowed the arch anti-Semite Novikoff to carry on an affair with the Jewish author of *The Conventional Lies of our Civilisation*, Max Nordau. ('We can only snatch an occasional moment,' she panted, in one letter to him of December 1888. 'I can't believe I am trusting what a woman says, but you are not a woman in spirit' he replied, somewhat ungallantly.)

Rachkovsky's long manipulation of Tikhomirov had finally defeated the man responsible for the murder of Rachkovsky's mentor, Colonel Sudeikin, and who had described the members of the Holy Brotherhood as 'political savages and adventurers, parasitically sucking the people's lifeblood'. Unlike the funding for most of the 'perception management' that Rachkovsky was engineering in the French press, the money for discrediting Tikhomirov had come not from the Okhrana coffers, but his own pocket. But if Rachkovsky, bitter that Degaev had slipped through his hands, craved his enemy's complete destruction, the rehabilitation of a chastened, pious Tikhomirov was a great propaganda coup in the eyes of those who mattered, and the

of revellers and entertainers proclaimed their proud devotion to the sybaritic cause. They found a welcoming home in the newly deregulated cafés, many of which were owned and run by refugees from Alsace and Lorraine, after they had been ceded to Germany following the war. The refugees had nothing to live on but profits from long hours of opening and a dipsomaniac clientele. On the once bucolic slopes of Montmartre, only the nascent sect of Naturiens held true to the pastoral ideal. Self-righteous vegetarians whose extreme ecological conscientiousness had grown out of a Proudhonist anarchism, the Naturiens eschewed all the fruits of progress, protested at the noxious smoke and effluent of factories, and longed for a return to a state of subsistence.

Louise Michel, who had little truck with either the frivolity of the cabaret or the triviality of the proto-ecologists, reserved her greatest disgust for the church of Sacré-Coeur, a work in progress that loomed from the top of the hill as 'an insult to our consciences'. At least the anarchists of Montmartre could appease themselves with the thought that, eleven years after the first stone was laid, the walls had only just begun to peep above the scaffolding, while unexpected modifications to the design had added close to 500,000 francs to its cost. It was just such profligacy and poor management in the civic sphere, all too often accompanied by an undertow of corruption, that had begun to rouse even the docile citizens of the Third Republic to indignation. Such discontent afforded the anarchist movement a rare opportunity to reach out and embrace a new section of society. However, the chances of this happening appeared dim while the movement remained so partial to factionalism that the proudest announcement made by one congress, meeting at Cette on the Mediterranean coast, was that 'We are anarchists because we can't agree.'

'Take away Louise Michel and her party would collapse,' wrote *Le Figaro* in a backhanded compliment. 'She is far and away the most interesting figure of the Third Republic.'

Tirelessly she toured the clubs in the years after her release, always passionate in her outrage, but increasingly anxious to persuade her audiences that the disparate strands of the radical left should rediscover the solidarity they had shown at the time of her arrest. Her approach won few friends. Barbed comments from erstwhile colleagues, and their vicious innuendoes of collusion with the police, now augmented the usual loathing directed at Michel by moderates and reactionaries. Beyond the doors of the anarchist clubs, however, the alienation that underwrote much of the movement's appeal was finding new and purposeful expression in the artistic field, where the desire to destroy and renew assumed tangible form.

The French Establishment might scrutinise and disparage the radical left as morally and even medically degenerate, but as the editor of *Le Décadent*, Anatole Baju, made clear, the suspicion was perfectly mutual; the school from which his publication took its title had 'burst forth in a time of decadence, not to march to the beat of that time but "against the grain", in opposition to its time'. Two years earlier, Joris-Karl Huysmans had published his stories alongside Kropotkin's essays in a short-lived publication called the *Revue Indépendant*, founded by Félix Fénéon, a tall, lean and dandified twenty-three-year-old. Since then Huysmans had won notoriety for the elegant evisceration of the corruption and banality of the contemporary world in his novel *A Rebours*, which charted its protagonist's withdrawal into a world of absolute artifice. Now the writer was a leading contributor to Baju's magazine, together with Laurent Tailhade, Mallarmé, Rimbaud and Verlaine. And when Louise Michel lectured a gathering of decadent writers in Montmartre that 'Anarchists, just like decadents, want the end of the old world … Decadents are creating an anarchy of style', it was in its pages that Verlaine returned the compliment in the form of a paean dedicated to the Red Virgin, with the refrain '*Louise Michel est très bien.*'

With feline cunning, in the autumn of 1887 Rachkovsky had moved in for the kill, targeting Tikhomirov's innate elitism, which vainly saw the utopian dreams of the Chaikovskyists as having been squandered by the actions of the ignorant. The approach Rachkovsky made was surprisingly solicitous, proposing that the Okhrana sponsor Tikhomirov to the tune of 300 francs to pen an account of the intellectual journey that led him to renounce revolution and terrorism: an opportunity to settle his account with the merciful God who had saved his son. The result was a triumph for Rachkovsky. On its publication, *Why Did I Stop Being a Revolutionary?* created a sensation. Uninhibited not only in its denunciation of terrorism, but its refutation of the entire rationale of the author's past life, it was the product of a nervous breakdown, yet deftly projected its psychological origins on to the subjects of its critique. 'Our ideals, liberal, radical and socialist, are the most enormous madness,' he wrote, 'a terrible lie, and furthermore, a stupid lie.' Tikhomirov's unconditional regret that his 'misguided former colleagues' had failed to recognise autocracy as the most fitting form of government for Russia led Rachkovsky to suggest that he seek the path of atonement, and petition the tsar – God's holy representative on earth – for forgiveness.

Tikhomirov's appeal to the tsar in late 1888 was timely. The first attempt on Alexander III's life little more than a year earlier had served as a reminder of the continuing terrorist threat, while the execution of those responsible had stoked the outrage and resentment of a new generation of revolutionaries. In quick succession new radical circles were formed by Blagoev, Tochissky and Brusnev, only to be as speedily suppressed by the Okhrana, which was operating with a new professionalism from its base on the Fontanka Quay in St Petersburg. The death of one of the People's Will's assassins who was hanged, however, lit a fire that would burn quietly for many years before flaring up to consume the country. When Alexander Ulyanov, a brilliant law student, went to the scaffold, the childhood desire

out, had backfired by focusing the Okhrana's attention even more ruthlessly on the émigrés abroad. He now found himself unable to avoid the more fundamental question of whether his entire revolutionary career had been a terrible mistake.

Rachkovsky's agents tracked every shift in Tikhomirov's mood, and noted his every movement: the gradually lengthening walks in the garden at Le Raincy with his convalescent child, their picking of berries, conversations with local children, even his patting of dogs. Back in Russia it had been Rachkovsky himself, while operating undercover among the revolutionaries, who had identified Tikhomirov to the police, and knowing of his psychological fragility, Rachkovsky may have always considered him susceptible to turning. After a second raid on the Geneva press in early 1887 turned up fragments of paper bearing Tikhomirov's despairing scribbles, Rachkovsky stepped up the pressure.

Crucial assistance was provided by the journalist Jules Hansen, recently added to the Okhrana payroll on a retainer of 400 francs a month. A small, bespectacled man with a retiring demeanour, Hansen's lack of physical presence had earned him the nickname 'the shrew' in his native Copenhagen; to those in the know, however, the quality of his contacts at the Danish and tsarist courts and his powers as a propagandist fully warranted the more respectful sobriquet of 'the president'. Under Hansen's guidance, such esteemed journalists as Calmette of *Le Figaro* and Maurras of *Le Petit Parisien* turned their fire on the revolutionary émigrés, with Tikhomirov their prime target. Fodder was provided by an incriminating pamphlet entitled *Confessions of a Nihilist* – published under Tikhomirov's name, but in reality forged at the embassy. Rachkovsky also engineered the publication of an anonymous attack on the 'uncontrollable rule' that Tikhomirov and Lavrov allegedly exercised over the émigrés. Caught in a pincer movement, Tikhomirov had scant emotional resources left to deal with the attacks.

It was not only in the avant-garde salons, however, that Michel found encouraging signs of creative destruction, but among the most downtrodden and deprived in society. As a writer and poet she understood the power of words to liberate or subjugate, and in prison had relished hearing the argot of the prostitutes with whom she lived, whose improvised words 'mixed up together like writhing monsters and yet sometimes assuming charming shapes, for slang is living language. Its imagery either touchingly innocent, or violently bloody.' Predictably, the criminal anthropologist Lombroso adduced such private languages, with their primal rhythms and squawking, rumbling use of onomatopoeia, as evidence of atavism: 'They speak differently because they feel differently; they speak as savages because they are true savages in the midst of our brilliant European civilisation.' To Michel, however, the energy of argot offered simple proof that 'there are geniuses among the people who speak slang, they're artists and creators', and that its challenge to bourgeois proprieties was of no less value than the more self-conscious efforts of the Decadents.

Among Félix Fénéon's most notable discoveries of the period, as the journalistic champion of avant-garde art, were two young painters who, in their daring experiments with colour and brushwork, were pushing the earlier experiments of Monet and his fellow Impressionists to startling new levels of control and refinement. Having first met in 1884 as exhibitors at the Salon des Indépendants, Georges Seurat and Paul Signac had become familiar faces in Le Chat Noir, which was within spitting distance of their studios next door to one another on the boulevard de Clichy. They were habitués of the decadent literary circles and, in Signac's case especially, sympathisers with the anarchist cause and admirers of its leading theorists, though their work was not yet overtly political. Both artists were concerned, above all, with the attempt to confer on nature 'an authentic reality' through their development of a method they called *la division* – the pointillist application of discrete touches of

paint, inspired by the researches of the colour theorist Michel Chevreul. Nevertheless, the style they innovated made possible a revelatory critique of society of a kind that Kropotkin can scarcely have imagined when calling upon artists, in his 1885 book *Paroles d'un révolté*, to create an 'aesthetic socialism'.

Seurat's *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte*, displayed at the last Impressionist exhibition in May 1886, was the product of four years of preparation, as he edged his way through a multitude of sketches and oil studies towards a *mise en scène* in which nearly fifty figures stand in a frozen evocation of the bourgeoisie at leisure. There is nothing in the painting to suggest social upheaval. Seurat's gaze is averted from the tawdry bars and dance halls that covered La Grande Jatte at the time, and the factories on the far banks of the Seine, just as his Impressionist precursors had turned their eyes from the effects of Prussian shelling when they painted the same location a decade earlier. Human forms dressed in the height of contemporary fashion are freed from time in the grid-like fixity of a classical frieze, their life a world apart from the vitality and hardship of Montmartre. The result, however, is unnerving: the optical mixing of the tiny points of colour creates a strange and luminous evocation of a sterile society, blind to itself and trapped within a straitjacket of artifice. Intentionally or not, in its own quiet way the painting offers a critique of the belle époque as devastating as Huysmans' *A Rebours*, with its closing sentiment 'So, crumble away society! Perish old world!'

It was a no less innovative, if more obviously acerbic, examination of the contemporary social malaise that could be seen at Le Chat Noir on those nights when the projection apparatus invented by the cartoonist Caran d'Ache lit up a shadow play of images drawn by Alfred Robida. A guidebook illustrator by trade, Robida's true genius lay in the narrow field of satirical futurology. In the panoramas and vignettes of Paris depicted in his book *The Twentieth Century*, the city has one foot in the mundaneness of contemporary bourgeois life, the

friendly visitor had felt obliged to call the doctor. At Le Raincy, Rachkovsky's agents were still in attendance, loitering at the end of the overgrown garden, but the nature of the siege was at least clear.

The tense, still atmosphere in the house had another explanation. For weeks on end, after his son fell ill with spinal meningitis, Tikhomirov had tended the boy as others despaired, forcing open his mouth to spoon in the medicine that no one else believed could save him. And while the outside world of the belle époque looked to General Boulanger to fill its hollowed-out soul with military glamour and nationalism, it was the old mystical religion that poured into the spiritual void felt by Tikhomirov. A positivist atheist, he had found himself praying, albeit in 'an unconventional way', offering whatever bargains he could to the Almighty in exchange for his son's life. Miraculously, the boy survived.

An intellectual and a writer, Tikhomirov had never been suited to the life of an active revolutionary and his nerves had long been frayed. Imprisoned during the round-ups of the Chaikovskyists a decade earlier, he had witnessed at first hand the vicious beating administered to Bogoliubov by General Trepov: an object lesson in the powerlessness of the outsider. After his release, Tikhomirov's more robust companions in the People's Will had tried to insulate him from situations requiring physical courage, but his vulnerability had been confirmed when the police were tipped off about his subversive activities. Attempts to lie low after the tsar's assassination only brought further fears of exposure: he was haunted by the memory of watching those convicted of the killing drawn on carts beneath his apartment window, while he nearly fainted with fear lest the maid recognise them as his friends. Then, exiled in Geneva, he had made the catastrophic decision over how to deal with Degaev's confession of treachery that resulted in Vera Figner's arrest. Even the murder of Colonel Sudeikin, which he had instructed Degaev to carry

16. *Deep Cover*

Paris, 1887–1890

From the centre of his web of operations in the Russian Embassy, Peter Rachkovsky's operations against the émigrés continued, his methods becoming ever more subtle and various. The psychological game he played during 1887 with Lev Tikhomirov, the effective leader of the rump of the People's Will in exile and among his highest priority targets, called for particular patience and self-restraint. By forgoing the simple gratification of eliminating the man who had ordered Sudeikin's murder, he hoped to achieve an altogether more profound reward.

It had been on Clemenceau's suggestion that Tikhomirov had disappeared to the echoing seclusion of a rented house in Le Raincy to the east of Paris, during the commotion caused by Kropotkin's release from prison and as the Russian government pressed for all revolutionaries harboured by France to be expelled. At first, the solitude came as a relief, after years of unrelenting anxiety and unpleasantness. It had been a torment for a refined and fastidious man of considerable intellectual accomplishment such as he to live cheek by jowl with cruder companions among the émigrés of Paris, eating his meals direct from the paper in which the food came wrapped. Worse by far, though, had been the surveillance agents whose perpetual presence tightened the screw on his insecurity. 'In the street he is constantly turning round. He is in a half-trembling state,' wrote a journalist who interviewed him at the time, while so grave had been his disturbed mental state that at one point a

other in the furthest corners of an imagination stranger even than that of Jules Verne. And yet preparations for war lurk in nearly every picture. While the skies teem with airship taxis, and genteel bus passengers listen to music pumped through pipes into headphones, barricades and gun emplacements intimate imminent international conflict and civil strife. It was an astute extrapolation of the flaws of the Third Republic, peopled by a complacent bourgeoisie lulled by luxury and leisure, whose anxiety that war or revolution might not be far away would render them highly susceptible to unscrupulous manipulation.

'Two thousand men who smoke, drink and chat, and seven or eight hundred women who laugh, drink, smoke, and offer the greatest gaity in the world,' marvelled one Russian aristocrat after his first visit to the Folies-Bergère. It was a world in which Peter Rachkovsky had made himself at home, a spider at the heart of his expanding web of spies and informants, alert for the slightest sign of weakness or insecurity that he might exploit, yet utterly insouciant. 'Nothing in his appearance reveals his sinister affairs,' one acquaintance of the time would recall. 'Fat, restless, always with an ever-present smile on his lips, he made me think of some genial fellow on an excursion.' The perfect disguise in a city where, it was observed, 'pleasure is a social necessity'. It is all too easy to imagine Rachkovsky sweet-talking international dignitaries at such nightspots, between indulging his well-attested appetite for the petite young women of Paris. And while the hedonistic Russian aristocrat concluded his letter to his mistress in the St Petersburg ballet by joking that 'We must annex Russia to this capital city, or else for preference this city to Russia', Rachkovsky treated the proposition more seriously.

In the three years since his arrival, Rachkovsky had transformed a Paris bureau whose operations had lagged far behind the 'excellent and conscientious' work being carried out

in Berlin and Vienna. Brushing aside rivals with a mixture of cunning and sheer dedication, Rachkovsky had made Paris the main bastion of 'the systematic and covert surveillance of the Russian emigration abroad' which Plehve, then overall chief of the police department and now deputy interior minister, had declared to be his top priority.

Nevertheless, the changes came at a price. As well as the basic running costs of the outfit, which included payments to freelance agents and to traitors in the revolutionary ranks for information rendered, there were the *portiers* and postmen to bribe for turning a blind eye to the perlustration of letters (copied and returned within the day) and fees to pay to prostitutes, whose reports of pillow talk afforded Rachkovsky access to the intimate thoughts of the émigré community. And whilst he had managed to negotiate an increase in the bureau's budget, first to 132,000 francs and then by a further 50 per cent, there were fresh mutterings in St Petersburg about the lack of any conspicuous return on its investment, with Kropotkin's release and Tikhomirov's continued propaganda activities causing particular unease. Hampered by the bureaucracy of the Sûreté that impeded any cooperation, Rachkovsky had been playing a clever game, designed to ensure steady rather than spectacular results. It was now becoming clear, though, that to secure his position he needed a sensational success. The opportunity finally presented itself at the end of 1886.

'On Saturday night printing press in Geneva successfully destroyed by me, fifth volume of the *Herald* and all revolutionary publications. Details by post,' Rachkovsky telegraphed to St Petersburg on 11 November, signing himself off as Monsieur Léonard, his wife's maiden name. And he was more than happy to oblige when the reply came through from Interior Minister Dmitri Tolstoy breathlessly requesting 'the technical details of the operation, how you infiltrated, at what time, how long was needed for the destruction, what measures were taken not to be noticed'. The enterprise, Rachkovsky informed his superiors,

post-revolutionary organisation, but also Morris' belief that medieval man had accepted limits on his freedom willingly because they were 'the product of his own conscience'.

Whilst Morris moulded his ideal society of the distant future from the best of the past, the proximate cause of the revolution out of which it was born was drawn from his own experience: a massacre of demonstrators in Trafalgar Square by troops serving the military dictatorship of 'a brisk young general'. Conflating Boulanger and Bloody Sunday, along with strong echoes of the Paris Commune, Morris demonstrated how in minds permeated by socialist education such brutality from the authorities would provoke revulsion and a successful general strike. Aided by 'the rapidly approaching breakdown of the whole system founded on the world-market and its supply; which now becomes so clear to all people', and a food supply guaranteed by the revolutionaries, the logistics of which Kropotkin was also researching and would present in his *The Conquest of Bread*, power would shift from the privileged to the workers with relatively little bloodshed.

Dynamite would be held in reserve as a last resort: the passive resistance of unarmed protesters would win the day. Sailing up the Thames at the end of the book, and back into the reality of 1890, the narrator expresses the hope that 'if others can see it as I have seen it, then may it be called a vision rather than a dream'. There were darker visions at work, though, beside which Morris' promised Utopia would struggle to take root.

occasion, terminated a meeting in Hammersmith by throwing red pepper on the stove: an event observed and noted by a Special Branch informant. 'Morris, who used to walk up and down the aisles like a rather melancholy sea captain on the quarterdeck in his nautical pea jacket was forced to flee uttering passionate sneezes that jerked his white hairs backwards and forwards like the waves of the sea,' Ford would remember.

'Agitate! Educate! Organise!' Morris had written only a few months earlier. 'Agitate, that the workers may be stirred and awakened to a sense of their position. Educate, that they may know the reasons of the evils they suffer. Organise, that we and they may overthrow the system that bears down and makes us what we are.' But for Morris socialism had always been about the imagination: the capacity to inhabit, in prospect, a better world of spiritual and artistic fulfilment. When he started writing *News from Nowhere* in late 1889, it was not simply out of the need to reconcile his practical and ideal politics, nor to answer the ugly, mechanised and corporatist version of socialism predicted in the American Edward Bellamy's 1888 book *Looking Backward*. It was to present a cogent vision of the world as he wished it to be, as a means to inspire hope and courage.

'There were six persons present, and consequently six sections of the party were represented, four of which had strong but divergent anarchist opinions,' the narrator tells us in the preface, preoccupied with the factionalism of the league. A night of tossing and turning, however, propels him into a twenty-first century in which the nuisances of the 1880s have vanished, replaced by the communism of which Morris dreamed, realised down to the last detail: a federalised society, living in simple harmony, its craftsmanship underpinned by technology that supported the relative leisure enjoyed by its citizens rather than alienating them from the creative pleasures of work. It was a neo-medieval Utopia, informed perhaps by Kropotkin's research into guilds as a model for

had been initiated following the receipt of high-quality information about the location of the press from a disgruntled ex-associate of the People's Will. Based on this, Rachkovsky had drawn up a plan of the building, subsequently refined by enquiries carried out by his agent Wadyslaw Milewski in Geneva, whose powers of persuasion had convinced the caretaker that he was the rightful owner of the presses and secured access to the premises.

Milewski, Henri Bint and another man, quite possibily the agent Cyprien Jagolkovsky, had embarked on their methodical destruction of the works at nine in the evening and had continued through the night. The personal risk to them was great, since under Swiss law anyone who killed an intruder on their property was immune from prosecution, and as they moved from shelf to shelf the agents allowed themselves only the light of matches to work by, to avoid detection from the street. Gallons of acid, brought from Paris for the purpose, were poured on to the type, melting several hundred kilograms of metal beyond use or repair; a similar quantity of type would be scattered in the streets as the intruders left. Hundreds of copies of the *Herald* too were destroyed, past and present editions, along with editions of Herzen's and Tikhomirov's works due for clandestine delivery into Russia; Rachkvosky's agents tore them up, page by page, until knee-deep in shredded paper and barely able to move.

It was half-past four in the morning when they finally left, breaking the lock to indicate forced entry and protect the caretaker from retribution, and planting false evidence to suggest that the crime was the direct responsibility of a rival political group rather than simple vandalism. As they travelled back to Paris that morning on separate trains, their blistered hands testified to a gruelling and nerve-racked night, but the rewards were considerable, both for them as individuals and for Rachkovsky's organisation. Amidst much rejoicing in St Petersburg, Rachkovsky received 5,000 francs and the Order

of St Anna, Third Class; his agents got 1,500 apiece, while any questions that had remained over the effectiveness of the Paris *agentura* were, for the moment, answered.

Such an audacious cross-border incursion may well have been without precedent in the history of policing, and owed its success to the operational shortcomings of the Sûreté. Its ex-director, Gustave Mace, was one of those frustrated by the Sûreté's inefficiency, explicitly citing its overly laborious process when pursuing fugitive criminals to the frontier. He described how a report filed in the early morning had to pass through the municipal police, the first bureau of the first division to the local *commissaire* where 'after a respectable sojourn in various offices, [it would be] examined by a clerk, who draws up a memorandum some lines long in which there does not always appear all the information of value in seeking the suspect', before finally returning to the Sûreté for action late in the evening. Had French policing been more efficient, things could have been different: *Le Journal de Genève* might have been printing news of the Russians' arrest, rather than lapping up stories planted by Rachkovsky to feed the internecine squabbles of the revolutionary exiles.

There was relief in St Petersburg that the Geneva venture had passed off without an international incident. Eager to avoid anything that could prompt further questions about the raid, Count Tolstoy declined Rachkovsky's request to be allowed to press his advantage by planting further forged documents apportioning blame for the press' destruction that would undermine both Plekhanov and Tikhomirov. Rachkovsky was not easily deterred. Having proved to himself how a maverick approach to the niceties of policing and diplomacy could reap results, he set about harrying the revolutionaries in both Switzerland and France with even greater vigour, and scant regard to propriety.

In Russia, surveillance units strove to be inconspicuous, assisted by the extensive wardrobe of disguises held by the police

seemed less as though anarchists were sloughing off the repressive dictates of society by illegal action, than that those disposed to criminality were adopting anarchism as a political figleaf.

Prominent among the Italian émigrés, Parmeggiani and Pini were so outraged by the suggestion of a socialist newspaper in Italy that their political espousal of expropriation was merely a cover for robbery, and that their pernicious influence suggested them as police agents, that they had travelled across Europe to attempt the assassination of its editor, Farina, by stabbing. After Pini's arrest in Paris during their return journey to London, Malatesta would frequently meet with Parmeggiani, but it was an uneasy relationship. Jean Grave, since Kropotkin's imprisonment, the effective editor of *Le Révolté*, renamed *La Révolte* since its move to Paris, came out in favour of the individualists' position among the French, arguing that each man must act according to the dictates of his conscience, though the suggestion that this might extend as far as pimping his wife or turning police informant suggests a certain irony. When Grave in turn was imprisoned, however, the newspaper's line would further harden under the caretaker editorship of Elisée Reclus' nephew, Paul. Meanwhile, 1888 had seen hardliners and outspoken firebrands take over the Socialist League, among them Henry Samuels, Charles Mowbray, David Nicoll and even Frank Kitz, all of whom drifted ever more towards the individualist extreme.

William Morris strived to maintain the organisation as a broad church, but the strain was growing. 'He disliked the violence that was creeping into his meetings,' Ford Madox Ford would recollect, wryly adding that 'He had founded them solely with the idea of promoting human kindness and peopling the earth with large-bosomed women dressed in Walter Crane gowns, and bearing great sheaves of full-eared corn.' But there was a growing swell of resentment towards Morris among the more headstrong anarchists who, on one

machine by which five million people are fed and clothed will come to a dead stop, and what is to be the end of it all?' wondered the *Evening News and Post*. 'The proverbial small spark has kindled a great fire which threatens to envelop the whole metropolis.' And it seemed it would rage on. Just when a lack of funds threatened to force the dockers back to work, a huge donation arrived from their colleagues in Australia to save the strike. Solidarity seemed to stretch around the globe.

It was a moment of the kind that the leading anarchists of the last decade had long awaited, brimming with the potential for revolutionary change. Yet the most outspoken foot soldiers of the Socialist League remained on the fringes of the strike, preferring to exploit the holiday atmosphere that engulfed the East End to propagandise rather than engage with the more reformist agenda of those trade unionists who had devoted so much time and effort to preparing the ground among the dock workers. 'Members of the league do not in any way compromise their principles by taking part in strikes,' pronounced the *Commonweal*, whose editorial policy William Morris could no longer effectively steer. When the strike ended with the dockers settling for their initial pay demands being met, Malatesta, Kropotkin and others, though unsurprised, could not hide their disappointment. The scale of the popular protest had changed the political game in Britain, radically altering any calculation of how best the transformation of society might be effected. But the strike had also underlined just how cripplingly close the internal divisions within the anarchist movement – between 'associationists' such as Malatesta and the firebrand 'individualists' – came to being an outright schism.

Among each nationality to be found in London, the differences were writ large, with the 'individualists' eschewing the hard work and onerous compromises of practical politics and collective endeavour in favour of the untrammelled egotism of the criminal. So absolute was their position, indeed, that it

department in Moscow. Among the émigrés abroad, however, the aim was to intimidate rather than simply to gather intelligence, and Rachkovsky's agents made their presence known in the most sinister of ways, generating the illusion of ubiquity. So effective were they in this that many émigrés succumbed to paranoia that a vast network of *mouchards* was on their tail, rather than the few dozen that Rachkovsky actually employed. Once again Rachkovsky's policy was vindicated when, in 1887, contrary to all previous policy, the Russian government formally requested that France actually desist from expelling any further nihilists, realising that whilst under the keen eyes of the Paris *agentura* they would pose far less of a threat than if they were sent to England or Switzerland.

Intoxicated by his successes, Rachkovsky began to seek even greater prizes. Strolling out of the embassy building in the rue de Grenelle in 1886 and 1887, he would have heard newspaper vendors tickling the interest of passers-by with news of an anarchist bomb thrown into the Paris Bourse, or the dramatic theft by 'The Panthers of Batignolles' of money and jewels from a socialite painter's apartment 'in the name of Liberty'. Meanwhile, wherever he looked, the freshly rebuilt architecture of the area around the embassy would have provided a visual reminder of the fatal last days of the Commune, when cannon fire from the rampaging Versaillais had devastated the nearby Croix-Rouge crossroads. The latent anxieties of the French were transparent to Rachkovsky, as they were to the futurological artist Robida, and would provide a broad canvas for his psychological games. A dab of terrorism here, a flick of anti-Jewish incitement there, all mixed in with a spot of warmongering, and the spymaster might just be able to bring Russian autocracy and French republicanism into the improbable alignment that had proved elusive for so long. For the moment, though, his usual duties had to come first.

To judge by the circulation of anarchist newspapers in France in the mid-1880s, the movement could claim at most a few tens of thousands of followers, including casual sympathisers. Yet circumstances could hardly have been more propitious for the growth of an ideology that was internationalist and egalitarian. In the vexed area of labour relations, the troubles around Lyons in which Kropotkin had been caught up had migrated to Anzin, on the Belgian border in the north-east, then flared up too at Decazeville in the Aveyron, hundreds of miles to the south-west, where the government was obliged to station troops in the spring of 1886 to deal with the violence. Meanwhile, following France's occupation of Tunisia in 1881, its overseas activities once again became a source of shame and anger to the socialists. Since 1883 Jules Ferry's government had pursued a policy of colonial expansion in South East Asia, to offset the effects of economic recession at home and help assuage the loss of Alsace and Lorraine to Germany. War with China was the result: a piece of adventurism that enjoyed only fragile support at home. When faulty intelligence reported that the Battle of Bang Bo was a defeat for the French expeditionary force in Tonkin, the belief in Paris that the force was in an irredeemable position precipitated the fall of Ferry's administration.

The leading figures of the radical left were quick to trace the common thread between the diverse iniquities of the age. 'We didn't want to send troops to Tonkin and Tunisia,' Louise Michel raged to audiences who were easily roused. 'High finance becomes high crime.' Rochefort spoke out tirelessly for the oppressed of Tunisia, arguing for the release of those who had resisted French rule, and when a subscription in *L'Intransigeant* raised funds to help strikers arrested in confrontations at the Anzin colliery, he delivered the money in person. France's industrial workers and her young soldiers were victims alike, he proclaimed, sent to die for the profit

John Creaghe, Malatesta realised how militant trade unionism might advance his ideas of social revolution, and in four manifestos published in the space of two years he refined his ideological position. Whether or not his return to London in 1889 was due to pressure from the vexed Argentine authorities, there was no doubt that in the time he had been away both Britain and Europe had become more receptive to his ideas.

Industrial action continued intermittently in the French mining regions, and in Italy there were the first signs of the *fasci* groups of radical syndicalists challenging landowners over their mismanagement of agriculture. Meanwhile, the frequency of anarchist meetings and weight of anarchist publications in Belgium surpassed that of any other socialist group, and recent years had seen strikes and protests tend towards insurrectionary violence that the Catholic government had struggled to quell. In Spain too, where Malatesta had travelled on a mission for Bakunin more than a decade before, anarchism had taken deep root, unifying the peasantry of Andalucia and the industrial workers of Catalonia with uncommon success, setting the stage for a long-lasting struggle against the clerical and political authorities. From a base in London, Malatesta could reach out to this diffuse body of support, through frequent forays to the Continent and the regular publication of a new paper, *L'Associazione*. But as Kropotkin had found before him, the British capital could now afford inspiration of its own, even to a veteran anarchist.

Trade with the empire was the lifeblood of Britain, and London's docks its fast-beating heart. Only a few weeks after London's gas workers had won themselves an eight-hour day by striking, a walkout by 500 men from one dock in the summer of 1889 caused it to miss a beat. Then, almost immediately, 3,000 stevedores, nearly the entire workforce, followed suit. Within a fortnight, they were joined by 130,000 more Londoners from all trades and industries, omnibuses abandoned in the streets as their drivers and conductors flocked to protest. 'The great

Charles Booth's investigators were just beginning their survey of London, pounding the streets to collect data for the Poverty Maps that would first appear in 1889, coloured to represent the life experience of the capital's inhabitants according to a seven-point scheme: a firelight glow of oranges and reds for ease and affluence, chilly blue for those slums whose inhabitants suffered the greatest deprivation. The areas from Whitechapel out to the docks of Limehouse and Wapping were coloured like a great, sprawling bruise.

For Malatesta, though, back from four years in South America, the workers of the East End, immigrants and indigenous alike, possessed an energy to force change that impressed him.

Since his sojourn in England after the 1881 London Congress, Malatesta had seen a lot of the world. In Egypt he had fought the British in the cause of independence; returning to his homeland of Italy he had evaded a police hunt for the perpetrators of a bomb attack by hiding in a container of sewing machines; then in Patagonia he had laboured for three months in subzero temperatures prospecting for gold to fund anarchist propaganda, only to have the few nuggets he had found confiscated by the Argentine state. In Buenos Aires, though, he had discovered something more precious still: with 60,000 peasants from Mediterranean Europe arriving in the city each year, at a rate higher even than those of eastern Europe pouring in to London and New York, he found a receptive audience for his ideas.

Working in a range of industries to win his colleagues' trust, Malatesta had galvanised their belief in anarchism. In January 1888, the Bakers Union in Buenos Aires, whose members had previously satisfied their anti-authoritarian urges by turning out dough-based products with names such as 'nun's farts' and 'little canons', staged its first strike, and later in the year the Shoemakers Union followed suit. Learning from those he taught, and under the guidance of the older Irish anarchist Dr

of their masters, whether killed in the fighting for Tonkin or mangled in machinery, as many hundreds were every year.

There were others, though, Rochefort told his readers, who were prepared to go far further in their opposition to colonialism, revealing that Olivier Pain, his companion in the escape from New Caledonia and his secretary since, had been executed by Lord Kitchener in the Sudan as a spy for the Mahdi, the mystical Arab leader who besieged the British in Khartoum and shook Britain with the killing of General Gordon. And once again, Verne seemed to echo the experiences of those associated with his occasional co-author, Paschal Grousset, when in 1886 he presented the eponymous *Robur the Conqueror* to the world. A pioneer adventurer of the skies, the hero's fearsome vessel the *Albatross*, a heavier-than-air equivalent of Nemo's *Nautilus*, serves the cause of liberation by turning its firepower on the exploiters of Africa. Rochefort himself, ever the egotist, would have been more likely to see in Robur's adventures a metaphor for his own contrarian campaigns.

Having been elected to Parliament as a Blanquist in 1885, and having then resigned in high dudgeon to publicise the crimes of colonialism, Rochefort was now eager for a new tub to thump. Edouard Drumont, whose father had hired Rochefort thirty years earlier for his first job at the department of architecture, was championing one promising cause with his newly founded *La France Juive*: a periodical that was sworn to expose the undermining of French society by cosmopolitan Jews. The subject, already close to Rochefort's heart, had additional appeal at a time when the uncle of Joseph Reinarch – the object of Rochefort's personal loathing over the exposure of his special pleading to the tribunal that had tried the Communards – was among three Jewish 'promoters' mounting a public-relations whitewash on behalf of the Panama Canal Company. For bubbling under the surface of the company's reassuring message were rumours about delays

and mismanagement in the construction of the canal and fears of economic scandal and collapse.

The first issue of shares in the Panama project in 1881 had been quickly taken up, with those who had missed out on the 300 per cent profit made by the early investors in Ferdinand de Lesseps' Suez project determined not to do so again. Eight years was what they had been told it would take for de Lesseps, the universally acknowledged genius of the age and France's national treasure, to reshape the world by cutting a forty-five-mile canal through mountain ranges 800 feet high to link the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. Five years on, however, the proceeds of that first feverish sale of stock had been all but spent on barely one sixth of the construction, necessitating further investment, with a lottery loan the proposed means of raising it. De Lesseps was brazenly dismissing concerns and again promising completion by 1889, in time for the centenary of the Revolution, but the newspapers were unearthing buried reports about delayed progress and the story refused to die. Anti-Semitism and the merry-go-round of political folly and incompetence alone, however, were not sufficient to boost either Rochefort's profile or the languishing circulation of *L'Intransigeant*. In desperate need of a cause to promote, fortune now brought him General Boulanger.

It had been Georges Clemenceau's idea to appoint the glamorous Boulanger as minister for war in de Freycinet's reformist government of 1886, with a brief to deliver an army reformed on truly republican lines. The choice was an odd one for an old radical to make, given that Boulanger was an ex-Versaillais officer. Louise Michel remembered only too well Boulanger's part in the savage defeat of the Communard soldiers who had set out for Versailles on Gustave Flourens' *grande sortie* in a spirit of fraternity. The memory of most on the left, though, appeared to be shorter, and the wounds that had prevented Boulanger from participating personally in the Bloody Week continued to provide him with dispensation from any linger-

beginning of November, Madame Novikoff, eager to find an angle on the Ripper story for propaganda purposes, contacted the Okhrana in Paris to request additional information on another political extremist, this time Russian. Where the rumours about Nicholas Vasiliev started is uncertain, but as stories of his involvement bounced between newspapers in France, Britain, Russia and America, the biography of this elusive – and quite possibly non-existent – character received an interesting spin: he was 'a fanatical anarchist,' both the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Pall Mall Gazette* reported, who had emigrated to Paris in 1870, shortly before the Commune.

With even the *Illustrated Police News* depicting Jack the Ripper as a vicious caricature of the eastern European Jew, thick-nosed and with large crude ears, Rachkovsky, now back in Paris, could surely not have been more satisfied had he planned the whole gruesome sequence of murders himself. Coming at almost the same time as the publication by his erstwhile agent Madame Blavatsky of *The Hebrew Talisman*, which claimed the existence of a Jewish conspiracy for worldwide subversion, such prejudiced reporting of the Whitechapel murders was more grist to the mill.

Before long the press was peddling fresh rumours and proposing new criminal types – the butcher with the bloodied apron or the aristocratic dandy – for their readers to chew over and, by early 1889, with no new murders to report, interest in the Ripper began to wane. Nevertheless, the brutal myths that the killings had generated seeped into the fabric of the East End, adding their hellish stench to what was, as three contemporary observers commented, 'a kind of human dustbin overflowing with the dregs of society', or a 'vast charnel house' whose denizens lived 'in such artificial conditions as practically to be cut off from the natural surface of the earth' and from which, it was predicted, a plague would soon spread across the city.

There were suggestions that the strangely spelled 'Juwes' might imply Freemasonic connotations, while contemporary commentators variously construed the double negative as indicating that a Frenchman or Cockney was the Ripper – if indeed the message had been chalked by the murderer. Fascinating and unfathomable, the hideous deeds of the serial killer generated, then as now, a myriad of possible perpetrators to haunt the imagination. Special Branch ledgers of the period have been construed to suggest both that the killings were carried out by the Branch itself, to cover up Jenkinson's employment of Catherine Eddowes and her husband John Kelly as agents, and that Anderson and his officers suspected it to be a Fenian plot conceived to humiliate the Metropolitan Police.

That Anderson, a religious zealot, might have been keen to promote the notion of Irish involvement is quite credible. Soon after his appointment as assistant commissioner that summer, he had been sent away to Switzerland for an extended rest cure, where he must have hoped to remain for the duration of the Parnell Commission's inquiry into the letters he had secretly helped forge to incriminate the Irish leader. Having viewed the Whitechapel murders, from a distance, as a useful warning to immoral women to stay off the streets, and one that the authorities should not go out of their way to prevent, he was certainly indignant at being recalled to deal with the continuing killings.

For a period after 30 September, however, most observers expected that the murderer would be found among the local population of immigrant Jews and political extremists. As far away as Vienna, the British ambassador Augustus Paget was persuaded by an informant that the killer was Johann Stammer, a member of the anarchist International operating under the alias of Kelly, and when Scotland Yard refused to pay for the informant to travel to London to present his evidence, Paget personally provided £165. The Paris Embassy's refusal to meet the informant's demands for another £100, en route, brought an end to that avenue of enquiry: but at the

ing blame. Eventual victory in the colonial war for control of Tonkin, achieved while he was director of the war office, had burnished the general's prestige, but it was his attitude towards those two bugbears of the left – colonial occupation and the treatment of strikers – that helped extend his appeal beyond the usual constituency for a military hero. His expressions of unease over the French strategy in North Africa had cost him his command of the garrison there, while as the minister responsible for troops sent to pacify strike-racked mines in the Aveyron, he had announced to the Chamber of Deputies in April 1886 that 'at this very moment, every soldier is perhaps sharing his rations with a miner'.

Soft soap it may have been, but the sentiment endeared Boulanger to those for whom an army commander with the common touch, alive to the suffering of the hungry masses and to their deeper emotional need for a sense of national purpose, was a most appealing prospect. Moreover, he was handsome and dashing, with an elegantly styled beard, handlebar moustache and an impressive black steed, on which he regularly rode out in public; and what France truly craved in late 1886, with the most wanton part of her soul, was the immediate glory of the cavalry charge: the chance for revenge on Germany. At the Bastille Day celebrations at Longchamp in July 1886, President Grévy was left waiting in vain to receive the salutes of the column of soldiers who, rather than looking right, towards him, as they passed, instead turned left to Boulanger.

Rochefort had always had something of a soft spot for a man in uniform, especially one who could combine the smack of firm leadership with liberal tendencies: during the dying days of the Commune in 1871 he had, after all, pressed the young General Rossel to assert himself as a military dictator. In Boulanger the ideal was made incarnate: a tribune of the people who had not flinched when it fell to him to inform his old mentor, the duc d'Aumale, that as an Orléanist claimant to

the throne he was to be discharged from the army, yet who would equally readily speak hard truths to the tired old professional politicians in the council of ministers. And during the winter of 1886, mounting military tension with Germany allowed Boulanger to establish a reputation as 'General Revenge', a national saviour who strengthened frontier fortifications and sought to even ban performances of Wagner's operatic paean to Teutonic chivalry, *Lohengrin*.

With conflict in the air, the anarchists saw an opportunity for revolution. Elisée Reclus came under suspicion from the French police of planning 'a seditious movement whose aim is to thwart the efforts of the French armies'; so too did Kropotkin, who proposed that each French city should declare itself a revolutionary commune as a focus for resistance. Friedrich Engels, meanwhile, demonstrated his usual perspicacity in military matters by warning the German high command that, were hostilities to break out, the conflict would rapidly turn into a continent-wide conflagration, as deadly as the Thirty Years War and bringing in its wake 'the collapse of countless European states and the disappearance of dozens of monarchies'.

Seventy thousand troops were mobilised across the border, in response to Boulanger's bellicose statements, with the result that nearly every other continental power stepped up its military preparations. Rochefort weighed in to fuel war fever, revealing in *L'Intransigeant* that Bismarck had warned the Red Cross to prepare field hospitals, and had offered Provence, Nice and Savoy to Italy if it would join the attack: a Boulanger dictatorship, the newspaper proposed, was France's only hope. That he was providing Bismarck with the pretext to rouse nationalistic support in the weeks before the German elections did nothing to dent the general's rising popularity. Yet wiser heads, fearing what might happen if actions were allowed to match the rhetoric, held France back from mobilisation, and once the elections in Germany had passed, the situation began

quickly general unease could turn to terror when popular attention was focused through the prism of violent crime, and the monstrous 'Kraken' given shadowy, human form.

Violence was an everyday hazard in the notorious area, and the desperate poverty that drove its female inhabitants to prostitution made them more vulnerable than most. What distinguished the murder of Mary Ann Nichols, whose body was discovered in a backstreet during the afternoon of 31 August 1888, was the brutal nature of the attack and the mutilation of the corpse: the neck severed through to the spinal cord and the torso half eviscerated. A week later, when Annie Chapman was found similarly butchered barely half a mile away, the crimes became national news. A further fortnight after that they became an international story, when the taunting predictions of further deaths in a letter received by the Central News Agency from 'Jack the Ripper' were realised: two more mutilated women were discovered on the night of Sunday, 30 September.

As journalists competed with the police in speculating as to the Ripper's identity, the circumstances of the two most recent murders allowed those with a political agenda to suggest that the killer might come from the underworld of revolutionary immigrants. The body of Elizabeth Stride, the first of the two to die, was found close to the rear entrance to the International Working Men's Club on Berner Street, one of seven revolutionary clubs set up by Joseph Lane in the east of the city, where lectures and classes were held on Sunday evenings with such prominent figures as Kropotkin frequently in attendance. Then, on a door jamb close to where the second body, of Catherine Eddowes, was found, a message had been freshly scrawled in white chalk: 'The Juwes are (not) the men that will (not) be blamed for nothing'. Witnesses disputed the position of the '(not)' after a policeman had hastily rubbed out the words, fearing that they might incite a pogrom.

'John' suggests that he may even have been a moonlighting Met officer. If the Okhrana had indeed decided to retain the services of an insider, no one would have been a better investment than the rising star of Special Branch, William Melville; his long service in France, liaising with the Sûreté and handling informants and provocateurs with an interest in Fenian affairs, may well have brought him into contact with the Paris Okhrana. Years later, Rachkovsky would hint at some pecuniary relationship, but Melville would always make a point of officially distancing himself from the Russian.

The priorities that Rachkovsky detailed for Milewski in London, too, can only be guessed at, though it is safe to surmise that they entailed at the very least the demonisation of Russian émigrés, who had so scrupulously distanced themselves from violence. Would a strategy of intimidating surveillance prove as effective in subjugating the old nihilists here as in France, or might the strategy used by Jenkinson against the Fenians, and Anderson against Parnell, work better? Anti-Semitism and the fear of anarchism were two promising routes in France, if linked to nihilism in the popular imagination, but would England be so responsive?

Rachkovsky's visit to London in the summer of 1888 would have coincided with the matchgirls' strike at the Bryant and May factory in the East End. Three weeks of protest led by Annie Besant, with whom Kravchinsky had lodged on first arriving in the country five years earlier, extracted an undertaking from the management of wholesale improvements in the terrible working conditions. For the Labour movement it provided important evidence of what might be achieved through concerted action, even when carried out by those with no prior organisation. Such moderate methods offered lean pickings for the Okhrana if they wished to demonstrate to the British public the threat from Russian Jews and extremists among the East End immigrants. Before the summer was out, however, the Whitechapel slums would throw up an exemplary case of how

to cool. Clemenceau now realised, however, that in underestimating 'Boulboul' he had loosed on to the political stage a man of dangerous charisma.

For Rachkovsky, a brinksman and provocateur by instinct, the situation must have held a fascination that was far from disinterested. Although Boulanger's belligerence made him an unnerving figure for the Russian government, which knew itself to be in a parlous state of military unreadiness, the Okhrana chief deployed his propagandists in the French press to publish spuriously alarmist assessments of German intentions. For whilst not in Russia's national interest, by encouraging heightened tension in the Franco-German relationship Rachkovsky could promote his own importance as a conduit for key intelligence, and he doubtless drew on the contacts he had made among Boulanger's associates to monitor and influence the general.

Keeping track of Boulanger's alliances was a complex business, though, since the 'man on the horse' acted as a magnet for malcontents from across the political spectrum. The Blanquists, still in thrall to the myth of their own revolutionary chief who had died in 1881, eagerly gravitated to the general's camp in the hope of causing the kind of social crisis from which they might profit. Ambitious men like Louis Andrieux, the ex-prefect of police and bitter antagonist of Rochefort, were lured by the hope that working with Boulanger would propel them into power. And crucially, the funding for Boulanger's political insurgency came from the likes of the fabulously wealthy Duchess d'Uzès, inheritor of the Cliquot family's champagne fortune. An arch-monarchist, who under the pseudonym 'Manuela' pursued an artistic sideline sculpting statues of saints for the Sacré-Coeur, it seemed scarcely credible that d'Uzès should bankroll the atheist populist that Boulanger appeared to be. Everyone had their reasons, though, and agendas of their own to advance.

While Juliette Adam handed over the editorship of *La Nouvelle Revue* to Elie de Cyon, in order that he might better coordinate with Katkov's *Moskovskie vedomosti* over their campaign for a Franco-Russian alliance, others in her circle took a more purely esoteric approach to international affairs. The occultists' first foray into geopolitics had been to court the maharajah Dalip Singh to stage an insurrection against British rule, offering the inducement of a Franco-Russian alliance that they were in no position to deliver. Their fanciful aim then may have been to facilitate access to the technologically and spiritually advanced Holy Land of Agartha, buried deep under the mountains of Asia, from whose Grand Pandit their own guru d'Alveydre claimed to have learned the secrets of synarchy. In 1887, however, they turned their attention to matters closer to home.

Gérard Encausse, the scientific hypnotist at the Salpêtrière who was now beginning to establish himself as a mystical visionary under the name 'Papus' had, together with Paul Adam, a bon viveur, Boulangist and literary acolyte of Fénéon's decadent movement, been engaged for some time in the investigation of consciousness, and the possible interpenetration of times past, present and future. History as it was experienced, they had come to understand, was merely an echo of strife and turmoil in the spiritual realm, and France's defeat at the Battle of Sedan was the clear consequence of the superior invocatory powers of Prussia's scryers. At a personal level, Encausse fought duels over accusations that he had attacked his enemies with volatised poison, but was alert too to conflict on a larger scale. If Boulanger was going to wage war, they must have concluded, then it was the patriotic duty of France's psychic brigade to be in peak condition and free of earthly distractions.

It was Encausse who remarked at around this time on the feline cunning that Rachkovsky concealed beneath his jovial exterior, but as 'Papus' he too knew how to bear a grudge, and whilst his revenge would be slow in coming and far from

it seems, was clear about where the new challenge for Special Branch lay. It was around the time of the Jubilee, he would later recollect, that the anarchists 'began to grow restless. They held frequent meetings; there was quite a small boom in the circulation of revolutionary periodicals. Then, as now, England was a dumping ground for bad characters, and London thus received several rascals who had been expelled from the Continent as being prominent propagandists.' Such sentiments were echoed in a Home Office internal communication, which described the émigrés as 'a violent set and utterly unscrupulous'.

In other countries, too, eyes were turned towards London as a seedbed for violent activity. From early 1887, reports had been sent to the Paris prefecture suggesting that instructions to what remained of the terrorist underground in Russia were no longer coming from France but London and even New York, with Hartmann and Kropotkin strongly implicated, and anarchists across the Channel said to be seeking gelignite for the assassination of the tsar. The claims, though confused and far-fetched, were summarised for the French cabinet, and may have found their way on to Rachkovsky's desk. However, it was on the advice of his agent Jagolkovsky, who had assisted in the raid on the People's Will press in Geneva, that the Okhrana chief now turned his attention to London and the anti-tsarist groups coalescing there.

A keen empire-builder, Rachkovsky straight away set about establishing an Okhrana presence in Britain following a possible personal visit in June 1888. The man he hired for the job was an old freelancer with the Russian police department, Wladyslaw Milewski, who had served as the case officer in Paris for those non-Russian agents and informants previously run by the Barlet Brigade. And as when the Okhrana had originally established itself in France, it is likely to have been from ex-officers of the native police that Milewski recruited his agents in England, while the air of secrecy around the pseudonymous

sturdy Briton is expected to fly,' Edward Carpenter told a reporter from the *Pall Mall Gazette* immediately afterwards, 'but in our case I suppose it was not fast enough, for in a moment my companion (a peaceful mathematician, by the way, of high university standing) was collared and shaken in the most violent – I may say brutal – manner. I remonstrated, and was struck in the face by the clenched fist of "law and order".' 'Running hardly expressed our collective action,' according to Shaw, cornered in nearby High Holborn: 'we *skedaddled*, and never drew breath until we were safe on Hampstead Heath or thereabouts.'

Bloody Sunday was, the *Pall Mall Gazette* declared, 'a Tory *coup d'état*', though such was the lack of organisation and mettle among those would-be insurrectionists attending the demonstration that the infantry had been unused and the cavalry never ordered to draw their sabres. As a consequence of this restraint, only three protesters had died, though 200 attended hospital while many more were afraid to present themselves for treatment. That the list of casualties was not much longer was a clear indication of the complete absence of the spirit of revolution that Morris, Hyndman and so many others had convinced themselves was abroad. 'I was astounded at the rapidity of the thing and the ease with which military organisation got its victory,' Morris admitted, having calmed his nerves, though not yet ready to face the crushing reality of the socialists' failure. A more honest account of the disappointment of the day, though, was offered by Shaw: 'On the whole I think it was the most abjectly disgraceful defeat ever suffered by a band of heroes outnumbering their foes a thousand to one.'

Yet the forces of law and order would not become complacent. One of Melville's colleagues in the new Special Branch was a man named Sweeney, an ardent reactionary who had joined the Metropolitan Police a few years earlier having been too short in stature for the Royal Irish Constabulary. Sweeney,

ethereal, the Okhrana chief ignored him at his peril. In the present circumstances, though, Rochefort must have seemed to offer Rachkovsky a more reliable means to influence the international situation. After all, he had predicted with suspicious clairvoyance the next flashpoint in the stand-off with Germany: a border incident involving espionage, such as was triggered by the arrest in German Alsace of the French police superintendent, Schnaebele. Moreover, with the secret documents in question concerning Bismarck's intrigues in the Balkans, the situation had a Russian angle that de Cyon and Katkov were quick to exploit. Russia and Germany squared up in a war of words, with the Russian government rejecting Bismarck's offer of a free hand in the East in return for being allowed to act with impunity in the West, asserting that if Europe was to be the theatre of war, then it was ready.

After the new French foreign minister, the late Gustave's younger brother, Emile Flourens, finally secured the release of the spy a week later, Boulanger recklessly taunted Bismarck with having run scared of the Russian press, while from the sidelines Rochefort lambasted the Jewish financiers of Germany for their supposed role in orchestrating the crisis. With forgery, intrigue, nihilists, anti-Semitism and geopolitical manipulation all involved in the debacle, if Rachkovsky did not have a hand in it, then he would surely have had sleepless nights calculating how he might claim this territory as his own.

Concerned by the rising tide of popular acclaim for Boulanger, the general's colleagues in the cabinet finally realised that they must act to curb his power, but when ousted from his post, Boulanger immediately received 100,000 write-in votes at the next by-election, and had to be hurriedly 'promoted' to command the army division based in Clermont-Ferrand, deep in the Auvergne. Unfortunately, sending an idol into the wilderness wasn't so easy. Tens of thousands of grief-stricken Boulangists turned out to block the path of

his train in July, before at last letting it roll with plangent cries of 'You'll be back! You'll be back!' And return he did, sooner than the crowds might have expected. A corruption scandal involving the sale of state honours by Daniel Wilson, the son-in-law of President Grévy, led to the fall of Grévy's government and a power vacuum just waiting for the general to fill. From November 1887, throughout the following year, France was a frenzy of Boulangism.

Such was the extremity of emotion around Boulanger that it had even begun to attract the attention of researchers at the Salpêtrière and elsewhere, for whom the psychology of the crowd rather than the individual posed interesting new challenges. Their studies diagnosed Boulanger's fanatical supporters as suffering from hysteria, a symptom of which, as Encausse knew very well, was the susceptibility to hypnosis. As Jules Liégeois, of the rival Nancy school of psychologists, would write, 'Nihilists, anarchists, socialists, revolutionaries – all kinds of political and religious fanatics – don't they become … criminals by the force of suggestion? On days of popular agitation, the crowd – composed of many good individuals – turns fierce and bloodthirsty … the beast is unleashed.'

From her magnificent town house on the Champs-Elysées, plumply louche in black gown and diamonds, the Duchess d'Uzès pumped out money to the general's campaign in the vain hope of seeing the republic brought down, while the general himself seemed ready to horse-trade his principles for monarchist support. It was a vision of anarchy, in its most pejorative sense: of myriad factions each hell-bent on destruction and chaos in the search for power; and a Boulangist campaign without even the self-respecting consistency to decline contributions from rich Jews, despite its overt anti-Semitism. And within this broad church, there was even a place for the anarchists themselves, whose affections were bought with some part of the campaign's three million francs of champagne money.

that kept men and women in economic and spiritual bondage, Special Branch would be ready: watching and waiting, Jenkinson's methods never quite forgotten.

The scene in Trafalgar Square on Sunday, 13 November 1887 was so dramatic that William Morris 'quite thought the revolution had come'. For the previous few months, unemployment in Britain had been rising rapidly, and Trafalgar Square had again become the venue for those without work to express their discontent, as well as housing a permanent contingent of the dispossessed. Up to 600 men and women slept rough in the square every night, to be joined during the day by thousands more who had walked in from the East End, for whom the People's Palace remained an irrelevance as long as their basic needs were not met. When, two days after the execution of the Haymarket martyrs on 11 November, Hyndman's Social Democratic Federation staged a protest rally against the Irish Coercion Act recently passed by Lord Salisbury's government, the scene was set for confrontation. Thousands of constables from the Metropolitan force lined up four deep to enforce the ban on public meetings in the square which had been pronounced the previous week; large reserve units of infantry and cavalry from the army regiments stationed in the capital were present as backup. It was precisely the kind of situation that Salisbury's two-year-old government knew it might precipitate, by passing the draconian Coercion Act, which suspended civil rights without time limit: an ideal opportunity for the government to present itself as the guardian of law and order.

The circumstances were unnervingly reminiscent of those in Chicago's Haymarket two years earlier when the fateful bomb had been thrown, but it took only the first police advance for Morris' bold assessments of the left's readiness for revolution to be exposed as naïvety. The retreat soon became a rout, with those at the front and stragglers left behind beaten ferociously by the police, with fists and batons. 'I don't know how fast the

cavalier disregard for both his loyalties to the Metropolitan Police and the basic principles of law enforcement, as he coached them to twist their testimony to suit his own agenda.

Reprimanded, Jenkinson nevertheless persisted in his clandestine activities, trimming his strategy to the prevailing political wind at Westminster, where Salisbury's Conservative government had now come to power. Only after it was revealed that the ringleader of the conspiracy to import dynamite from America for the Jubilee Plot was in fact a veteran British agent operating out of Paris and New York, and now being run by Jenkinson, was action taken to remove him from his position. As much as the risk Jenkinson's actions had posed, however, by toying with catastrophe, it was the lack of coordination that was most hazardous, as he maintained what Munro described to his superiors as 'a school of private detectives working as rivals and enemies of Scotland Yard'. For Anderson too had embarked on a simultaneous intrigue of his own, forging documents that supposedly revealed Parnell's links to terrorism and leaking them to *The Times* for its 'Parnell and Crime' exposé, that had begun early in 1887.

Henceforth the Metropolian Police's counter-subversion activities would be unified under a single Special Branch, supervised by Munro, its brief now widened beyond the Irish threat alone. Heading the Branch was Chief Inspector Littlechild, whose officers included the impressive young tyro William Melville, who had done sterling service as a liaison and surveillance officer in France, and others who brought with them valuable skills acquired under Jenkinson's tutelage.

In the past, Britain had always viewed with disdain the kind of political police that Continental tyrannies relied upon to enforce their will. In Special Branch, however, Britain now had the makings of just such a department, ready to turn its attention to fresh fields of investigation. As the fight to free Ireland took its place alongside that to liberate Britain from the capitalist yoke, and to raze the institutions of state rule across Europe

Louise Michel herself, who had previously disdained the general, discovered enough cynicism to see how Boulanger might serve her political purposes, and finally agreed to accept donations from Duchess d'Uzès on behalf of her various charitable interests. 'She confirmed that the extreme left will ally itself with the right,' wrote one police informant, seemingly well placed to know her mind. 'She believes that the demonstrations being organised by Rochefort will be extremely effective, and will help spread anarchist ideas.' Michel even allowed herself to be drawn into involvement with the Ligue des Femmes, established by d'Uzès, who had charmed her by requesting a copy of Kropotkin's *Paroles d'un révolté*.

Then, at the end of the year, the Panama Canal Company went bankrupt. The tens of thousands of bourgeois who had staked their savings on an engineering project so strongly tied to national pride, were devastated. Little in French national life, it seemed, could any longer be believed in; everything was a fraud, an illusion, a sleight of hand. 'One can no longer mistake that what is taking place today, what the coming year has in store, is the decisive crisis of the republic, coinciding, by a singular irony, with the ostentatious celebration of the French Revolution,' wrote one veteran political commentator at the turn of the year. It seemed that the general's time had truly come.

A fortnight later, Boulanger won a crushing victory in a Paris by-election. 'A l'Elysée, à l'Elysée,' tens of thousands of his supporters cried as they massed outside the Café Durand where their idol was dining, sensing that the *coup d'état* they had so often called for was now inevitable. Fatally, though, Boulanger hesitated. He would, he told the gathering of his political intimates, rather win power legitimately at the next election; then he promptly disappeared into the night, to celebrate his success in the arms of his beloved mistress. Had Rochefort been right all along in lauding his fundamental modesty and honesty, or did the general merely suffer a loss of nerve?

The acerbic wit of the professional politicians who had stayed up late to gauge the threat to their careers left no doubt as to their disdain: 'Five-past twelve, gentlemen,' remarked one, consulting his watch, 'five minutes ago Boulangism started to fall on the market.' 'He's set us a good example,' said the president, Sadi Carnot, 'let's all go to bed, too.' But behind the relief and the jokes, those in government must have still felt disquiet: they had come to grips with Boulanger and Boulangism, but what of the deep currents of popular disenchantment on which his rise had depended? Remove the lightning rod, and who might then be struck down?

Louise Michel was made for suffering and martyrdom, wrote the publisher Monsieur Roy in his preface to her memoirs. 'Born 1,900 years earlier, she would have faced the wild animals of the amphitheatre; born during the Inquisition, she would have died in the flames.' Others in thrall to Louise Michel's magnetism reached for similar images. In his ballad Verlaine depicted her as Joan of Arc, perhaps thinking of the 'exalted' state Michel entered in moments of political passion: the anarchist equivalent of the religious ecstasies that the Church believed were being blasphemed in Charcot's public experiments involving his hysterics. Alternatively, Verlaine may simply have been hinting at the fate she courted, at a time when the nationalistic right was erecting a rash of statues to the Maid of Orleans, while the left countered with effigies of its own freethinking martyr, Etienne Dolet. And indeed, only two months after the hanging of the Haymarket martyrs, little noticed for the moment in a Paris caught up in its own drama, Louise Michel did come close to a kind of martyrdom of her own.

She was addressing a meeting in the Channel port of Le Havre, challenging her bourgeois audience to see the light before the revolution overwhelmed them. The mood was hostile to her, but not more so than in most of the provincial towns

The origin of the provocation lay in the rivalry between two men, Edward Jenkinson and Robert Anderson, both ambitious to make their name in the policing of Fenianism, and with an arrogance that led them to believe that they could play politics too. Three years earlier, Jenkinson had been transferred to London, where Anderson, an Irishman by birth, was already working alongside Adolphus Williamson, the chief of the Metropolitan Police's counter-subversion division, Section D. Expertly manipulating interdepartmental tensions, the newcomer had outflanked the heir apparent to claim Section D as his own fiefdom, with thirty agents at his disposal and a direct line of accountability to the Home Secretary.

'The four essentials for a policeman are truthfulness, sobriety, punctuality and tremendous care as to what you tell your superiors,' 'Dolly' Williamson advised those who worked for him. Jenkinson ignored the first point and embraced the last wholeheartedly. Indeed, such was the secrecy with which he ran his operations that whatever suspicions his colleagues may have harboured about quite how he landed such a remarkable tally of arrests during the Fenian bombing campaign of 1883 to 1885 were almost impossible to prove. Something catastrophic would have to happen for more serious questions to be asked.

'The sands of destiny, they are almost run out, is the crash of all things near at hand?' was the kind of question that Anderson, a strong believer in Christian millenarianism, liked to ponder in his spare time. When a bomb placed beneath the urinals used by the Special Irish Branch demolished part of Scotland Yard, it must have seemed to those in the building that the End of Days had arrived. But for Anderson it heralded a fresh start. The new head of the CID, James Munro, who shared Anderson's Unionist politics and religious leanings, recalled him from the Home Office backwater to which he had been posted and together the pair set about tracing the underground Fenian networks active in mainland Britain. Time and again their investigations exposed unknown agents run by Jenkinson with a

unlovely district'. Neither Kropotkin nor Morris could have questioned the nobility of its stated aim of providing all with opportunities previously open only to the aristocracy; Oscar Wilde even applied unsuccessfully to serve as its secretary. The education it promised, though, watched over by the busts of England's greatest poets, was unlikely to be one that would cultivate revolutionary sentiments in the tens of thousands who passed through its doors every week. If they were in any doubt about how it would reinforce the existing social order, the socialists need only have looked at the guest list for the opening of the People's Palace on 21 June 1887. The German kaiser was present, dressed in the silver and white livery of a Teutonic knight, while the honour of opening the Queen's Hall, its centrepiece, went to King Leopold II of Belgium, whose private army was then embarking on its campaign of terror against the natives of the Congo Free State.

Queen Victoria also attended, though she had very nearly been indisposed. Twenty-four hours earlier, a ceremony of thanksgiving for her reign had been held in Westminster Abbey, during which it had been the intention of Fenian militants to blow up both her and her ministers. Only a delay in the ship carrying them from the United States had intervened, according to the press reports of her merciful escape. In fact, the truth was rather different. The plot itself had been initiated and guided over a period of many months by agents of the British police, with the acquiescence of Lord Salisbury's Conservative government; the decision to allow it to progress so far was a risk calculated to heighten popular outrage when the danger was finally exposed. Furthermore, the indirect target of the provocation was Charles Parnell and the other moderate advocates of Home Rule, whose names it sought to blacken. Had any of this been known, it would have provided a sharp warning to Britain's socialists that they might expect similar treatment at the hands of the police.

she visited. Then, without warning, a young man approached the stage. He proudly declared himself a Breton before raising a pistol and firing twice. One bullet lodged in Michel's hat, the other deep in her left temple.

'I'm fine, really fine' she wrote to a solicitous Rochefort the next day, but she was putting on a brave face. Despite the game attempts of a local doctor to extract the bullet from her cranium with his pen, it had lodged too deep to be easily retrieved. Journalists were issued with accounts dismissing the wound's severity, but the police in Paris soon learned the truth from their agents: 'she is fainting frequently and the problem with her sight gets worse every day,' wrote one. Yet somehow she survived. The wound would not kill Michel, an expert confirmed, but the long-term effects as the bullet wandered through her brain were unpredictable.

Forgiving to a fault, Michel swiftly turned her attention to her would-be assassin, whose acquittal she was determined to secure. He was a 'subject of hallucination', she informed the readers of *L'Intransigeant*, 'a being from another age' made brutal by living in a tumultuous era of transition, and like the patients in the Salpêtrière, not to be held responsible for his actions. A week after the attack, she even wrote to Charcot himself, pleading for science to come to the defence of her assailant. In the era of the freelance assassin that was now dawning, of the terrorist armed with his bomb and revolver and a mania to make his voice heard, the sanity or otherwise of those convicted would assume a new political significance. For was anarchism itself a form of madness, or was it the rest of the world that was insane?

15. *The Revolution is Postponed*

London, 1887–1890

So sweeping had been Peter Kropotkin's dismissal of England as a 'land impermeable to new ideas' after the anarchists' London Congress of 1881 that the transformation in its radical life in the six years that had passed took him aback. Addressing the Socialist League's anniversary commemoration of the Paris Commune in March 1886, he left his audience at the South Place Institute in no doubt of his conviction that they were meeting 'on the eve of one of those great uprisings which periodically visit Europe'. George Bernard Shaw, who was probably present that evening, would later remark of Kropotkin that 'his only weakness was a habit of prophesying war within the next fortnight', with revolution to follow in its wake. Few could have denied, though, that the period between Kropotkin's imprisonment in 1883 and his release from Clairvaux prison in January 1886 had seen tensions rise across the Continent and beyond, with Britain no exception.

'How to promote the greater happiness of the masses of the people, how to increase their enjoyment of life, that is the problem of the future,' Joseph Chamberlain, the reforming Liberal mayor of Birmingham had recently diagnosed. By extending the franchise to all working men, his party had already fulfilled the key demand of the Chartist movement twenty years earlier but times and expectations had moved on. The Liberals' failure to adopt his proposals to guarantee the property of the

Instead Carpenter threw himself into opening the Commonwealth Café, an enterprise inspired in part by the small-scale Utopia described in Walter Besant's novel of 1882, *All Sorts and Conditions of Men*. In Besant's story, a communal workshop is established by a brewery heiress, Angela Messenger, where the seamstresses were kept entertained by edifying readings, and kept healthy by leisure breaks for tennis and gymnastics. On visiting Carpenter's café, one local journalist was overcome with religious emotion: 'One could not help thinking of another upper room of considerable importance in history, where not many mighty and not many learned were present … there was another Carpenter not a bit more exclusive: one who had nowhere to lay his head; who wore the purple only once and then in mockery.' To those caught up in the political factionalism of the capital, the Christlike Carpenter offered calm conciliation in his 1887 book *England's Ideal*, with the advice to 'Think what a commotion there must have been within the bud when the petals of a rose are forming! Think what arguments, what divisions, what recriminations, even among the atoms!' By then, though, William Morris was already doubting that he could keep up the 'pig-driving' necessary to hold the league together for even a few more months.

External factors too were putting pressure on the movement. The work of philanthropic and religious organisations such as the Salvation Army in the East End increasingly offered practical benefits to the poor of a kind that the anarchists could only promise in some nebulous future. And the year of Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee would see a monumental expression of their presence rise up in the Mile End Road.

Three storeys high, with a swimming pool, cast-iron galleries, vast hall and rib-vaulted library inspired by the medieval Prior's Kitchen in Durham, the East End's 'People's Palace' was, proclaimed *The Times*, a 'happy experiment in practical socialism' that would 'sow the seeds of a higher and more humane civilisation among dwellers and toilers in [that]

the league poured scorn on those who grouped themselves around Kropotkin's *Freedom* newspaper. 'We looked upon them as a collection of middle-class faddists', he wrote, 'who took up with the movement as an amusement, and regretted that Kropotkin and other "serious" people ever had anything to do with them. But they called themselves "Anarchists!" and that had great influence with many of our international comrades.' The ideological differences were minimal, with the key exception of the violent methods advocated by the opponents of the *Freedom* group. 'If the people had only had the knowledge, the whole cursed lot would have been wiped out,' was the punishment for scabs proposed during one strike by Henry Samuels, a militant figure from Leeds with a high opinion of his own abilities, who had married into the émigré French community. 'Fire the slums and get the people into the West End mansions,' fulminated Charles Mowbray, an ex-soldier and tailor from Durham with a widow's peak and drooping moustache, whose controlling presence as an orator had seen him among those charged after the Dod Street riot.

'The noblest conquests of man are written on a bloodstained book,' wrote Joseph Lane in his *Anti-Statist Communist Manifesto*, a clear and well-argued response to the more moderate socialists who had left the league. 'Why evade the fine old name which for years has rung out in the van of the socialist movement throughout the world?' Charlotte Wilson reprimanded him for failing to embrace the term 'anarchist' in favour of a 'clumsy' alternative. Her criticism must have rankled deeply with a man who had devoted his life to a cause, fostered by him from the grass roots up. His circumspection about simplifying his political beliefs with catch-all labels that seemed to cause only contention, and signified an adherence to the worst aspects of the individualist creed, was surely wise.

In Sheffield, for the moment, Carpenter kept such unpleasant bickering at bay, thanks to a modesty and self-effacement that the city's *Weekly Echo* newspaper evoked in awestruck terms.

rich in return for welfare protection for the poor, led the working masses to question whether the cosy duopoly of political parties, whose alternating rule Morris would liken to a politely fixed football match, could ever deliver effective representation for their views.

For such opinions to be proclaimed in public, however, was profoundly unnerving for those in authority, and the police were called upon to intervene. Dod Street in the East End had seen the first concerted action against the Socialist League, when socialist street preachers had been driven from their pitches while trying to address a crowd of 10,000 demonstrators against the curtailment of free speech. Then, when the packed public gallery of the courtroom shouted its fury at the sentences passed on eight men arrested, who included Frank Kitz, the police waded in with sticks and fists. Attempting to shield Marx's daughter Eleanor from the fray, William Morris was among those beaten and taken into custody. But in the spectacle of violence deployed to protect the interests of a complacent middle class, Morris saw similarities with pre-revolutionary France and declared that by dragging this hypocrisy into the open the socialists had 'gained a complete victory over the police'.

If Morris' optimism about a British revolution had seemed fanciful in the autumn of 1885, within a few weeks of Kropotkin's release from prison early in the New Year, events in London appeared a harbinger of class war. The occasion, at which Morris was not personally present, was a march from Trafalgar Square to Hyde Park by those who had lost their jobs in the difficult economic circumstances. An initial blow would be delivered the following February when, in Morris' absence, another meeting of the unemployed marched the same route. Ten thousand strong, as the crowd passed the Tory Carlton Club and the Liberal Reform Club, insults and missiles were hurled, with one army veteran memorably raging that 'we were not the scum of the country when we were fighting

for bond-holders in Egypt, you dogs!' Peering from their windows, outraged members jeered back that the mob needed the smack of firm discipline, although the sound of breaking windows in Piccadilly, where the indigent of Whitechapel, Shoreditch and Limehouse were looting the shops, may have made them tremble that they might rather be on the receiving end of physical chastisement.

In the aftermath of the riot, even *Blackwells Magazine* had written of 'Black Monday' as the germ of a British revolution, while for days London had quaked at rumours that an army from the East End was preparing to attack under cover of the thick fog that had descended. Seeing a middle class 'so terrified of the sight of the misery it has created that at all hazards it must be swept out of sight', Morris looked forward to further repression that would feed the fires of popular discontent. Readiness, though, was essential. 'We have been taken over unprepared by a revolutionary incident,' he wrote in the *Commonweal*, urging his readers to become quickly 'educated in economics, in organisation, and in administration' so as to be ready when such an opportunity presented itself.

Sentiment may have led Kropotkin to esteem France as the cradle of revolution, but improbable as the situation must have seemed to him, in early 1886 Britain held out the riper promise. Although thousands turned out in Paris to hear him speak after his release from prison, hungry for words of guidance and inspiration from anarchism's lost leader, he had no further taste for the rough hospitality of the Third Republic. Weakened by illness and with a wife and young child to support, the idea of a secure refuge clearly appealed; news of the suicide of his brother Alexander in Siberia, unable to face the prospect of release after fourteen years' internal exile, would shortly confirm his own determination to avoid further spells in prison. Moreover, Britain promised him a vehicle for his developing ideas, for during the latter months of Kropotkin's incarceration in Clairvaux he had been approached by Charlotte Wilson, the

anarchists', and readily accepted the principle that 'the centralised nation would give place to a federation of communities' with Parliament of use only to facilitate the latter stages of the transition. Even the Fabian Society toyed with anarchist ideas for a while, with Shaw, a leading light, admitting that 'we were just as anarchist as the Socialist League and just as insurrectionary as the federation'. When Morris visited the Glasgow branch of the league, soon after Kropotkin had addressed them, he appeared pleasantly surprised to find his colleagues turned 'a little in the anarchist direction, which gives them an agreeable air of toleration'. It would not be long, though, before Morris discovered that his positioning of the league 'between parliamentaries and anarchists' could only aggravate the hard-liners on either side, and Shaw came to see the Fabians as suffering 'a sort of influenza of anarchism': a more deadly and rampant form of the 'children's ailment' on which Engels had poured scorn.

The summer of 1887 was marked by the withdrawal from the league of Bax, Eleanor Marx and her husband, Edward Aveling, angry at what they thought had come to be a 'swindle' that used their support for ends that they could not endorse. Neither this, though, nor the bloodletting in the 'brothers' war' between the German contingent, in the form of Reuss' resignation that May and the *Commonweal*'s subsequent publication of a list of suspected spies and informants, helped settle matters. Accusations continued to fly and recriminations simmered, with the fault lines increasingly drawn in intractable terms of class. The ownership of 'anarchism' itself was also perversely contested, and Kropotkin found himself stranded in the middle of the factions.

David Nicoll, a strange young man who until recently had styled himself an aesthete, frittering away a sizeable inheritance on theatrical speculation and extravagant velvet outfits before his unstable mind led him to extremist politics, recollected how his hard-line 'individualist' associates within

lotte Wilson's newspaper *Freedom* in October 1886, which was printed on the presses of Morris' *Commonweal*. In the narrow lecture hall created out of the old stables at Kelmscott House, Morris' home in Hammersmith, west London, the path to the future was thrashed out in meetings attended by the leading lights of socialism in Britain. Kropotkin was 'amiable to the point of saintliness, and with his full red beard and loveable expression might have been a shepherd from the Delectable Mountains,' Shaw would write, and it may well have been he too who wrote the report of the first, halting speech that a self-conscious Kravchinsky attempted, after months of persuasion, in his broken English.

It was an environment that encouraged cosmopolitan participation. Kropotkin entertained his audience with apocryphal stories of Russian settlers in the United States outwitting the Native Americans and stolid frontiersmen alike. And along with Shaw, William Butler Yeats and Oscar Wilde added an Irish flavour to the proceedings, the latter organising a petition against the execution of the Haymarket martyrs, and working out the ideas that would eventually appear in his overtly anarchist essay 'The Soul of Man Under Socialism'. Ford Madox Ford, then known as Hueffer, and a young H. G. Wells comprised the core of the English literary contingent, though many other writers and artists put in an occasional appearance. But amidst the ferment of amicable debate, the distrust and animosity that had torn apart the Social Democratic Federation and seemed to poison socialist unity at every turn, in England as abroad, could not be laid to rest.

'The anarchists are making rapid progress in the Socialist League,' Engels remarked wearily in the spring of 1886. 'Morris and Bax – one as an emotional socialist and the other as a chaser after philosophical paradoxes – are wholly under their control for the present.' Morris clearly saw the atmosphere of toleration as a source of strength, considered himself to be 'on terms of warm personal friendship with the leading London

Cambridge-educated wife of a stockbroker and sister of a Liberal Member of Parliament, with a proposal to establish an anarchist newspaper in London. Crossing the Channel in March, he settled his family as temporary guests in the home of his old friend Kravchinsky.

The intellectual environment of London to which Kravchinsky introduced Kropotkin was highly congenial: one peopled by men who were at least intrigued by his ideas, like William Morris, and often wholly sympathetic to them, and women who were frequently as smitten by the charm of the unlikely revolutionary as by his impressive and enquiring mind. Coming in the immediate aftermath of the Black Monday riot, the annual commemoration of the Paris Commune had special piquancy, and the following months witnessed a slew of works that engaged with the unfulfilled promise of 1871 and its continued relevance to the political life of Kropotkin's new friends. Eleanor Marx led the way, with her translation of Lissagaray's ten-year-old magisterial work of myth-making, *Histoire de la Commune*; William Morris and Belfort Bax revisited the subject, yet with the same romantic desire to cast the victims of the Bloody Week as having chosen 'to bury themselves in the smoking ruins of Paris rather than … allow socialism and the revolution to be befouled and degraded'. Then, in 1887, Henry Hyndman drew out the urgent relevance of their historical accounts in his provocatively titled pamphlet *A Commune for London*. 'It is in the power of London', he wrote, 'to lead the way in the great social revolution which will remove the crushing disabilities, physical, moral and intellectual, under which the great mass of our city populations suffer at the present time.'

For all his personal antipathy to Hyndman, his old sparring partner from the Social Democratic Federation, Morris undoubtedly shared his sentiments. 'The East End of London is the hell of poverty,' John Henry Mackay would write. 'Like an enormous black, motionless, giant Kraken, the poverty of London lies there in lurking silence and encircles with its

mighty tentacles the life and wealth of the City and of the West End.' Venturing frequently into the maw of the monster for speaking engagements in Shoreditch and Whitechapel, or simply to research and more fully understand its misery, Morris was shocked by what he found. Commenting on the hovel in which the Socialist League stalwart Kitz lived, he confided to a friend: 'It fairly gave me the horrors to see how wretchedly off he was; so it isn't much wonder that he takes the line he does.' Affluent London society was, he believed, 'so terrified of the misery it has created that at all hazards it must be swept out of sight'. And yet, all the while, the finely appointed homes of the wealthy, some furnished from Morris' own interior design shop on Oxford Street – which had itself narrowly escaped the Black Monday window-breaking – offered the dispossessed a tantalising, infuriating glimpse of warmth, satiety, ease and comfort. 'If you want to see the origin and explanation of an East London rookery you must open the door and walk in upon some fashionable dinner party at the West End,' remarked Edward Carpenter, whose absence from the capital gave him an outsider's clear perspective on its iniquities.

Despite criticising Carpenter for his withdrawal from the political fray, Morris clearly found the simple life at Millthorpe in Derbyshire deeply appealing, with its sparse furnishings and meals of home-grown vegetables shared from a single wooden plate. It was during a visit in 1886 that he read the newly published novel by Richard Jefferies, *After London*, a vision of a post-apocalyptic Britain returned to the state of untamed nature that its countryman author so cherished. 'Absurd hopes curled around my heart as I read it,' Morris wrote and the book's premise lodged in his imagination. A country lapsed into barbarism and dominated by feuding warlords was scarcely what Morris aspired to, but the notion of beneficent erasure – of a London reduced to ruination and submerged in swampland, and a society purged of all the corrupt influences

that had led mankind astray since the Middle Ages – spoke directly to Morris' deepest political and imaginative instincts.

The affinity between Kropotkin and Morris was apparent to both, even though their political positions remained distinct, and frequently at odds. The Russian found in his new friend a shared aptitude for viewing contemporary issues with a long historical perspective, and this would lead to a fruitful cross-fertilisation of ideas in the years to come. For the moment, however, Morris allowed himself to indulge his taste for fantasy – whether dreaming of revolution tomorrow, or the distant prospect of Utopia – while Kropotkin's attention was drawn to concrete planning for the day after the existing authorities and institutions had been toppled.

During his years in Clairvaux, experimental gardening had provided Kropotkin with a seemingly harmless occupation. And though the scurvy from which he had suffered suggests he lacked green fingers, tilling the soil had focused his thoughts on the necessity of ensuring tangible benefits to the masses in the immediate aftermath of social upheaval, in order to cement their loyalty and avoid the problems of starvation that he mistakenly saw as having helped defeat the Commune. 'To what should the two million citizens of Paris turn their attention when they would be no longer catering for the luxurious fads and amusements of Russian princes, Romanian grandees and wives of Berlin financiers?' he pondered. His proposals would not be published in book form until some years later, as *The Conquest of Bread*, but it was already clear to him that the equal distribution of food was key. He imagined parklands and aristocratic estates handed over to smallholders as common land, along with the credible promise of 'a more substantial well-being than that enjoyed today by the middle classes'.

'We are living at the close of an era, during which the marvellous advance of science [has] left social feeling behind,' an article asserted in the first edition of Kropotkin's and Char-

the difficulties but also the promise and potential of the tens of thousands of new arrivals who were pouring through London docks at an unprecedented rate, and prized the social example that they set.

It was a process that the Fabian Beatrice Webb charted with brio. 'Let us imagine ourselves on board a Hamburg boat steaming slowly up the Thames in the early hours of the morning,' she began her lengthy account of the journey of one exemplar of the 45,000 émigrés from Lithuania, Russia and Poland to disembark in 1891, to the point where 'In short, he has become a law-abiding and self-respecting citizen of our great metropolis and feels himself the equal of a Montefiore or a Rothschild.' The social reformer Olive Schreiner might not have appreciated the capitalistic aspirations imputed to the Jewish families with whom she worked and wrote, but she too felt a passionate admiration for how the tight bonds of the family provided the necessary support and security in a largely hostile environment for members to undertake, with a high frequency of success, a relatively rapid rise through the established society.

For Kropotkin, a regular speaker at the Jewish anarchist clubs of the East End, the social solidarity of the eastern European immigrants represented the idea of 'Mutual Aid' in action: evidence to support his alternative theories for the factors shaping evolution. Infuriated by the publication in 1888 of Thomas Huxley's essay 'The Struggle for Existence', he had immediately set about giving systematic expression to his belief that 'fitness for survival' was best determined not by competition but by cooperation. By working together, rather than striving for dominance, a particular group or species might win an advantage in the search for resources and, thereby, in the perpetuation of their genes. The culmination of a lifetime of study and observation, the series of long essays in the *Nineteenth Century* magazine in which he articulated these ideas during the first half of the 1890s predicted much that the science of genetics would prove about the mechanism of

That the Catholic hierarchy proved so receptive to his claims of Masonic devil worship was due to the embattled position in which the Church felt itself to be. Displaced from its traditional role shaping young minds by the French educational reforms of the 1870s and 1880s, pinned back into the Vatican by the encroachments of state power in Italy and stripped of its control over clerical appointments in Germany by Bismarck's *Kulturkampf*, across Europe the Church was having to cede power to the state. To explain its difficulties, however, the Catholic Church needed an enemy in its own form: one against which it could pit itself in a Manichaean struggle for which the rhetoric was ready-made. To this end, Leo XIII had dug out an old foe and dressed it up in frightening new clothing: his encyclical *Humanum genus*, of April 1884, painted Freemasonry as a black sect, the progenitor of the evils of the modern world, with socialism, anarchism and communism its evil cohorts, against which his clergy were instructed to fight back with all the weapons of the Congregation of the Inquisition.

Taxil's revelations furnished this ravening monster with witches to hunt, at the very moment when the opinion-makers of a decadent society were themselves demonstrating a growing interest in the occult. Little wonder then that Archbishop Meurin of Paris, one of Taxil's many correspondents in the Church hierarchy, fell for his tales of the satanic Pope in Charleston. All it would have taken for the story to crumble was for Meurin or someone else to unearth Taxil's true name – Gabriel Jogand-Pages – and to look back beyond his Freemasonic days to earlier deceptions: the shoal of killer sharks that harried the coast near his home town of Marseilles, in the nervous weeks after the fall of the Commune, or the submerged Roman city sighted beneath the waters of Lake Geneva. But nobody thought to do so. As a result, with no support but invented witnesses, and no one with the nerve or desire to expose his fraud, Taxil pursued his fiction to ever

more vertiginous extremes. 'Compared with the tugboat I had dispatched to hunt for sharks in the coves near Marseilles,' he would later marvel, 'the boat of Palladism was a true battleship … the battleship turned into a squadron … the squadron grew into a whole navy.' When that time came he would reveal the genuine nature of his enterprise, but for the moment he continued to play the part of Freemasonry's scourge with glee, furnishing his fearful, foolish society with a diabolic scapegoat on to which it could project its many anxieties. Indeed, it is hard not to see the goat-headed devil that is illustrated presiding over the rites in Taxil's pamphlets as yet one more of his in-jokes.

Even setting aside the contribution made to the ongoing struggle between progressives and conservatives by Taxil's great fraud, Peter Rachkovsky would surely have followed the career of such a kindred spirit keenly. The manipulation of the credulous contemporary masses was increasingly the spymaster's stock in trade, after all, and the Russian pogroms of 1881 had revealed to him how susceptible the late nineteenth century remained to the superstitious manias of the Middle Ages. Doubtless to his chagrin, he had not yet managed to pull off a coup on anything like the scale of Taxil's, despite having planned a spectacular of his own during the centenary celebrations.

In plotting an outrage to take place against the backdrop of the Expo, Rachkovsky may have remembered that his forebear as de Mohrenheim's pet intelligencer, Wilhelm Stieber, had achieved his most significant success at the 1867 Paris Expo when the near death of Tsar Alexander II at the hands of would-be assassin Berezowski had poisoned Franco-Russian relations. Rachkovsky, though, desired the opposite effect: the yoking of France and Russia together against the common enemy of revolutionary terrorism.

hopes for a geopolitically crucial alliance, but that they were simultaneously in league with those who sought the destruction of their society. Such at least was the drift of an article in Drumont's *La Libre parole* headed 'Rothschild and the Anarchists … An International Conspiracy'. The malign influence of the Jews was, it seemed, truly ubiquitous, corroding western civilisation from above and below.

Following the demise of Boulanger and the disgrace of the aged Lesseps, sentenced to prison for five years in 1893, the subject of the most popular souvenir photographs in France would be Louis Pasteur. And it was all too easy for those with half a grasp of his bacteriological ideas, or those of his German rival and colleague Robert Koch, to extrapolate from their findings metaphors for the spread of alien stock by emigration, especially that of eastern European Jewry. Known vectors of disease, with cholera a particular problem that caused a devastating outbreak in the transit port of Hamburg in 1893, the Jewish refugees from the pogroms began to be perceived as a disease themselves, whose virulence must be addressed. In 'The Invasion of Destitute Aliens' of 1892, the earl of Dunraven had written of 'the superiority of the lower order over the higher order of organism – the comparative indestructibility of lower forms of animal life', with veiled reference to the influx of immigrants to the East End. The same year, quarantine officials in New York came under pressure to weed out 'the diseased, defective, delinquent and dependent'.

Even without the learned contribution of such criminal anthropologists as Lombroso, the same principle could be readily extended to foreign subversives entering Britain or America, many of whom were Jewish. Indeed, Sir Basil Thomson, later head of the CID, would look back on the early 1890s with the lamentation that 'if the pharaoh Memptah had been given an efficient intelligent service, there would have been no exodus'. There were, though, other perspectives on the teeming immigrant world of London's East End, which saw not only

two colleagues, had been found dead the day after his nephew had tipped him off that he was to be prosecuted, and with many doubting the official account of suicide, must have doubly delighted Rochefort, coming as it did within days of the rue des Bons-Enfants explosion.

'Gradually the land is passing from the native to the foreigner. Jews are becoming the proprietors of the finest farms mortgaged to their advantage,' complained a character in Jules Verne's novel *The Carpathian Castle*, published in 1892, fifteen years after the chief rabbi in Paris had felt compelled to write to Verne's publisher to complain against racial stereotyping. Such anti-Semitism was pervasive in French society in the period, however, and rarely remarked upon. Now, though, a dangerous confluence of circumstances, further excited by some propagandist contrivance, raised the level of anti-Semitic rhetoric to an almost hysterical pitch. An impression of conspiracy was being woven around the Panama scandal with little regard to the collateral damage: the burial of Reinarch's body without an autopsy raised suspicions of foul play, while almost the entire political Establishment, including even Clemenceau, were seemingly implicated in a five-year-long deception of the French people.

The conspiracy had an international angle too with 'X', described as 'the ambassador of a very great power friendly to France – a dashing gentleman, actually, whose financial embarrassments [have long been] a matter of common knowledge in Paris', said to be a beneficiary of bribes on a vast scale. Nor were comments on the recent ostentatious affluence of Baron de Mohrenheim limited to the French press: in a letter to Pobedonostsev, de Cyon calculated the sum total of the kickbacks de Mohrenheim had received at half a million francs, while the same sum had been paid to the late Katkov's Russian newspaper. Most unnerving, though, for the French was surely the queasy sense that not only had the Jewish financiers got their hooks into the ambassador, on whom they pinned their

For the past four years the turncoat revolutionary Hekkelman, still operating under the name Landesen and Rachkovsky's most prized undercover agent, had been living in Switzerland. There he had wormed his way into the core group of People's Will policymakers by claiming a sympathetic 'uncle' prepared to pass on profits from the family firm to finance any special projects the nihilists had in mind, most particularly bomb-making. But then, in February 1889, a bomb being tested on the slopes of Mount Uetilberg by two philosophy students, both leading members of the new generation of the People's Will, exploded prematurely: Dembo was mortally wounded, his Polish companion Dembski seriously so. As a result, a number of prominent Russian activists were expelled by Switzerland and Germany, but, like the exploding bomb itself, the reaction was a little too early and not quite damaging enough to serve Rachkovsky's purposes.

The chance that the Expo presented for a publicity coup may have been missed, but it also afforded new opportunities, for it was in the bustling bars of Paris that Landesen, generous to a fault in buying drinks for those who hung on his words of provocation, first encountered an impressionable Russian medical student by the name of Reinstein. He quickly inveigled his way into the young man's life and trust.

'The revolution is not advancing; the energies are asleep; the consciences are dead,' Landesen complained to Reinstein and his friends, repeatedly urging them during the coming months to join him in a bomb-making operation on French soil. Or rather, to undertake the actual production themselves, since Landesen, a dapper, scented and well-suited young man with floppy blond hair, preferred not to remove his gloves. Reinstein at first resisted the provocation, cleaving to Kibalchich's notion that the movement would be dishonoured if it did not make all the materièl it needed within the motherland; but by March 1890, Landesen had persuaded him of the legitimacy of testing explosives outside Russia, with news of a proposed visit to

France by the tsar later in the year perhaps providing a practical incentive. The next two months were spent in preparation, bringing into the conspiracy several other violent opponents of the Russian regime, including a number of women with dramatic, first-hand experience of tsarist persecution.

Still only twenty-two years old, Sofia Fedorova had first been arrested five years earlier, when caught taking food and clothing to her imprisoned parents in St Petersburg. Escaping detention, she then set up an underground printing press which was raided and her female colleague seized, but again Fedorova escaped the police, leaping from a window, only to be recaptured and sentenced to eight years of hard labour. For her final escape she slipped over the gunwales of a convict barge in western Siberia, and crossed the 3,000 miles back to St Petersburg, alone and hunted, before making her way to Paris where she heard that the current cause célèbre in the émigré community – the suicide of five women in the prison camp at Kara after one of them had been viciously beaten – involved her old colleague from the printing press. Others in Reinstein's group – some proposed by Landesen, some by Rachkovsky – had reasons of their own for joining the conspiracy, and particular talents to contribute: Lavrenius the inventor; Nakashidze the technician, summoned from London to assist; the brilliant Suzanne 'Tauba' Bromberg, a poor Jewish girl and gold medallist medical student; Dembski, who had survived the accidental blast in Switzerland; and Stepanov, a relative veteran of the revolutionary underworld. Not even Stepanov, though, quite had Fedorova's fiery motivation.

The grenades Landesen advocated were in the shape of tubes and spheres, and featured a novel design: highly explosive panclastite, with a fragile serpentine tube of glass placed at the heart of each bomb to trigger the reaction when it cracked on impact. After gathering to test the devices in woods at Bondy, each member of the group was sent away by Landesen with samples wrapped in newspaper to store until required, along

might die too. Having used a meeting across town as cover for his murderous expedition, Henry returned to his workplace confident that the ghost of Ravachol would soon once again be stalking the streets of Paris. By then, however, the bomb had already exploded, with a rather different effect from that intended.

Alerted by the mining company, police officers had taken the infernal machine to the station on rue des Bons-Enfants for inspection; three of them had lifted it carefully upstairs. Shortly afterwards, Henry's ingenious detonator had triggered. Four officers and the office boy died in terror and agony, their flesh and scraps of uniform spattered over the walls and dangling from the fixtures. It was an act of terrorism quite different in scale and effectiveness from any of the copycat squibs that had followed in the wake of Ravachol. Two days later Henry packed his bags and departed Paris for the safety of London, and the welcoming bosom of his anarchist family. He left behind a France racked by anxieties.

It was the nationalistic newspaper *La Libre parole*, published by the notorious anti-Semite Edouard Drumont – with its motto 'France for the French' – which had broken the story of the Panama scandal in September 1892, filling the pages across which it had previously splashed reports of Ravachol's arrest and trial. Its revelations were surely the outcome of the neo-Boulangist and anti-Semitic campaign against the French authorities that Rochefort had been reported as formulating that summer. The outrage over Panama felt by the French public made Rochefort a serious political player once again, visited in London by the ex-prefect of police, Louis Andrieux. He was courted too by those with something to hide, including Cornelius Herz – one of the three Jewish 'promoters' who had arranged the Panama scandal bribes – who offered him 300,000 francs to moderate the follow-up attacks in *L'Intransigeant*, without success. News that Baron de Reinarch, one of Herz's

painful a thwarted love for mankind could be, watching his father, an elected member of the Commune, live out his final years as an exile in Catalonia. Emile himself, a brilliant and diligent student at school despite all the disadvantages of his upbringing, had just missed out on the place at one of Paris' *grandes écoles* that might have allowed him to participate in building the bright future to which he aspired. As it was, rejection had set in motion a train of events that over several years would crystallise his sense that 'only cynics and sycophants get a seat at the feast'.

After fleeing his call-up papers, as a criminal deserter every step that Henry took seemed to lead deeper into the political underworld. Seeing Emile in search of a political purpose, his brother Fortune had introduced him to the moderate anarchist teachings of Kropotkin, but when Emile's new interest was discovered, it cost him his job. Then, despite Emile's own rejection of Ravachol's methods as inhumane and counterproductive, Fortune's outspoken support for the bombings led his brother to be arrested in his own apartment and briefly taken into custody. It was a rapid process of radicalisation, accelerated by the sense that he was being persecuted and marginalised. Hard-line veterans of anarchism, the likes of Malato, d'Axa, Fénéon and Constant Martin were now the only friends on whom he could rely, and thrilling discussions about how destruction was the purest form of artistic expression surrounded him.

The bomb that Emile Henry left outside the door of the offices of the Carmaux Mining Company on avenue de l'Opéra on 8 November 1892 was intended to cause the maximum loss of life. An inversion device made according to a design of his own, it was aimed primarily at the bosses of a business that had, in the course of the previous few months, brutalised the striking workers at its mines in the Aveyron. But Henry's definition of economic guilt had become wide enough for him to feel no disquiet that the bourgeois residents of the nearby apartments

with written details of the part they were to play in the conspiracy. Not all were so naïve as to accept the dangerous gift at face value. Stepanov had nurtured suspicions about Landesen since before the demonstration in the woods: he would later reveal that he considered Rachkovsky's provocateur to be 'a real boulevardier' who knew 'the whole of Establishment Paris'. Vladimir Burtsev, absent on an expedition to smuggle revolutionary literature into Russia, wrote from Romania to warn his friends in Paris: he was being tailed by the local Okhrana agents and had finally realised that it must have been Landesen who, having waved him off from the station in Paris, had given Rachkovsky details of his itinerary.

Burtsev's warning arrived too late, though; the die had been cast. Even the handful of plotters who reluctantly approached the French police with their concerns found themselves cold-shouldered for several crucial days. Landesen went to ground, and Rachkovsky's factotum, the journalist Jules Hansen, delivered a complete dramatis personae for the plot to a grateful minister of the interior, Constans, who immediately ordered their arrest. Before dawn on 29 May, French police battered down the doors of the conspirators and the word 'arrested' was written in quick succession next to all but one of the twenty-seven names on their hit list. The four days that the warrant for Landesen's arrest was held up in the system gave him enough time to disappear.

'At last!' cried the tsar, when informed of the interdiction of a revolutionary plot on which he had been continually briefed, 'So France has a government at last!' The contribution made by the arrests to the establishment of friendly relations between Russia and France was, Hansen believed, 'immense', and de Mohrenheim was effusive in his letter to Goron, the prefect of police: 'Your Excellency, Monsieur le Préfet and, permit me to add, my dearest, truest and great friend! … I hope to shake your hand in the near future with the greatest, most sincere and unchanging affection and friendly devotion.' The indignation ex-

pressed by the French security services when some of the less tractable and more influential powers suggested that they had merely been carrying out orders from St Petersburg soon evaporated in the warm light of such appreciation, and Rachkovsky was more than happy to concede that he had known little of the explosives until informed by Monsieur Loze of the Sûreté. Any lingering awkwardness or unease over the disappearance of Landesen, the leading conspirator, was washed away in a rush of rewards for French functionaries, from police officers to the president. 'They have reached the point of making the republic the *mouchard* of the world,' one old deputy was overheard remarking. 'Ferry bends his knee to Bismarck, but Constans kneels before the tsar.' The world at large, however, accepted the story of the plotters at face value.

Nothing the accused could say in court carried any credibility. 'How many of the bombs did you make?' asked the defence counsel; 'None,' replied Reinstein, 'I received them all from Landesen.' 'Always Landesen,' the lawyer shrugged, dubiously, suggesting that it was too easy to lay all the blame on the one conspirator who got away. And when it was put to Reinstein that neither he nor his companions in the dock required any provocation, he merely replied with resignation, 'Oh! How that would suit the Russian ambassador!' With half the French press in Rachkovsky's pocket, nobody was listening, its readership distracted by reports of Lavrenius' improbable claim that the 'bomb' in Stepanov's possession was in fact an experimental version of a propulsion engine for manned balloons: one that not even the testimony of his old professor and the production of a patent application could persuade the court to accept. Only the sentencing of Landesen to five years *in absentia* roused a degree of unease.

It was left to Rochefort's *L'Intransigeant* to voice its founder's bitter disillusionment, from his exile across the Channel: 'Really, the only punishable fault of the nihilists, so viciously sentenced last Saturday, is to have believed that the

the midst of all this suffering … who are driven to despair,' had long been Kropotkin's default position with regard to those anarchists who lashed out at society, as Ravachol, Meunier and the others had done. Personally, though, he was quite explicit that he hated the explosions, concerned that as well as damaging the movement's reputation, they risked attracting criminal elements with no higher purpose, or else young men who craved the easy adrenaline rush of terrorism but lacked the stamina and dedication for the arduous task of building a broad and popular movement. Worse still, he feared that the effects of such violent acts might contaminate the revolution, when it happened, and propel it not towards a Utopia of freedom but instead into the hands of an oppressive dictatorship.

Both he and Malatesta were wary of the Autonomie Club anarchists, men and women of all nationalities who drank and talked amidst a fug of smoke, reclining on the comfortable chairs and sofas beneath portraits of such heroes as Ravachol and the Fenian, O'Donnell, and a poster proclaiming 'Death to Carnot', the French president. 'It is no longer a love for the human race that guides them, but the feeling of vendetta joined to a cult of an abstract idea, of a theoretical phantasm,' Malatesta wrote of Ravachol's disciples in his 1892 essay 'Nécessité et bases d'une entente', in what was an attempt to guide the young, headstrong anarchists away from the doctrine of dynamite. But the new generation of French anarchists, many of whom had flocked to London, were not so easily persuaded.

That summer, before handing over the onerous editorial duties on *L'EnDehors* to Félix Fénéon, the twenty-year-old Emile Henry used the pages of the newspaper to challenge Malatesta's argument. Taking issue with the Italian's assertion that 'hate does not produce love, and by hate one cannot remake the world', he replied that 'To those who say that hate does not give birth to love, I reply that it is love, human love, that often engenders hate.' From an early age Henry had seen how

may seem far-fetched, but it was standard practice for the Okhrana, at least, to secure two sources or more in every key group it was monitoring, in order to guarantee the reliability of their reports by means of comparison. As to Henry Samuels, future events would prove the pernicious nature of his influence. What, though, did it say about the effectiveness of Special Branch and Inspector Melville, if a large proportion of the most incendiary figures in the anarchist movement were indeed in their employ? Handled with skill and integrity, the level of information such informants could provide would certainly vindicate official claims, offered in part as reassurance to foreign forces, that any action the anarchists planned would almost immediately become known to them. It could be counted a success too if they could seed uncertainty and dissent in the movement. Beyond that, though, there were obvious risks.

Even Chief Inspector Littlechild would soon have to admit that 'the "nark" is very apt to drift into an agent provocateur in his anxiety to secure a conviction'. Melville, by secretly offering his services to Rachkovsky, head of the foreign intelligence of Britain's foremost recent enemy on the international stage, had surely come close to treasonable behaviour. So far he had been lucky. The worst result that Walsall had produced was the conviction of hotheads on charges that, unprovoked, their behaviour is unlikely to have warranted: a gross abuse of the justice system but no more. However, were a repeat of the provocation that had brought about the arrest of the Walsall men to result instead in death or injury, the full moral obscenity of the strategy would surely be revealed. Certainly it was one with which neither the people nor the political leaders of the country Melville was meant to serve would have had any truck.

'We who, in our houses, seclude ourselves from the cry and sight of human sufferings, we are no judges of those who live in

France of today is the old France, a refuge for the proscribed and friend of the persecuted.' In fact, the manner in which the bomb plot was presented to the public cleverly struck a number of populist chords, and in other circumstances might easily have persuaded the fickle Rochefort to swing behind the government position. The conspiracy had been Israelite in origin, and backed by Jewish money, announced polemics published in the Russian newspapers *Novosti* and *Grazhdanin*, which emphasised the ethnicity of a number of the plotters and demanded reprisals against Jews throughout the empire. Such an interpretation was promoted in France too, where Edouard Drumont, editor of *La France Juive*, had just founded the Anti-Semitic League of France as 'an instrument of national resurrection' that would 'fight the pernicious influence of the grasping Jewish financiers, whose clandestine and merciless conspiracy jeopardises the welfare, honour and security of France'. And only days before the arrest of the bombers, threats against Baron Adolphe de Rothschild himself had raised fears of an anti-Semitic terror campaign.

'Are they affiliated to our anarchists?' asked *Le Petit Parisien* during the trial of the Russian conspirators. 'It is hardly likely, since their views are not the same and their methods of action are quite different.' The prefecture was furious, and expeditiously presented a summary of its reasons for disagreeing with the line taken by the newspaper to Constans at the ministry of the interior. The police rooted their thesis in the congress of the Anarchist International in Switzerland of 1881, when the Russian delegates had taken it upon themselves to serve their foreign friends at dinner, in expression of brotherhood; 'All true Russian nihilists are anarchists,' one had ingratiatingly told the company, proposing that they should 'act hand in hand in their strikes'; the Lyons bomb attack of that year was said also to have been a joint effort with nihilist technicians; Kropotkin's straddling of the two movements was adduced as evidence, with Elisée Reclus fingered as the fulcrum of

their cooperation. Since then, it was erroneously implied, the movements had grown closer together. Memos flew within the government, and a strategy to make anarchism and terrorism synonymous started to take shape.

Rachkovsky should have basked in the success of his enterprise. Within weeks of the tsar's conversion to a new respect for the French government, secret negotiations for a Franco-Russian alliance had been initiated. As a practical gesture, the Russians, after toying with the idea of equipping their army with the British Enfield rifle, upped their order to the Lebel factory at Châtellerault. With Sarah Bernhardt rousing French patriotism to new heights with her portrayal of Jeanne d'Arc at the Théâtre de la Porte Saint-Martin, and Admiral Colomb predicting in his speculative book *The Great War of 189—* that hostilities could break out at any moment, and might be precipitated by an event such as the assassination of a crowned head in the Balkans, both sides were adjusting to the need for amity. A squadron of the French fleet was even invited to visit the port of Kronstadt the following summer, at the time of the annual Russian manoeuvres – a gesture of friendship that would be overshadowed only by the tsar peremptorily declaring 'Enough, enough!' after a single verse of the revolutionary hymn the 'Marseillaise' – and audiences at the opera stood for de Mohrenheim, cheering '*Vive la Russie!*'

Yet still Rachkovsky could not rest. It had been Landesen's own choice to go into hiding and then flee to England, rather than stay and prove to the revolutionaries that he was truly one of them, as Rachkovsky had planned. Now, holed up in the Grand Hotel in the English seaside resort of Brighton, the eight years that Hekkelman had spent under deep cover as Landesen had left him close to a state of mental breakdown. If Rachkovsky was going to ensure that his agent remained safely in the fold, he needed to act decisively, and did so in a letter that was a masterpiece of manipulation. 'Regard an informant as you would a beautiful woman with whom you are having an

Since William Morris' withdrawal from the editorial board of the *Commonweal* in 1890, the tight-knit group of 'individualists' whose wearisome advocacy of violent means forced Morris' depature, had gradually turned on one another. Accusations of treachery flew, with Samuels, Mowbray and Coulon all the object of Nicoll's suspicions. What plots were 'Lady' Mowbray and Melville concocting when they were seen drinking together? And what was Henry Samuels thinking of, using his impressionable young brother-in-law, Martial Bourdin, to circulate pamphlets filled with slanderous attacks on Nicoll that Coulon had printed? Inevitably, those Nicoll accused turned the tables on him with counter-accusations, and Frank Kitz's uncharacteristic decision to embezzle the newspaper's funds and flee town left Nicoll isolated and vulnerable.

Already psychologically fragile, the pressures plunged Nicoll into a state of mental turmoil, engendering a paranoia that provided his double-dealing colleagues with a convenient cover. Nicoll's suspicions about Coulon were, of course, well founded, but Mowbray too, Special Branch ledgers reveal, was 'organising secret shadowers of anarchists', while a French agent reported rumours that Mowbray had been involved in the Walsall provocation, working for Russia. Quite when Mowbray was recruited is unclear, but it appears to have been after his arrest by Melville, and may have been a condition of his early release. What, though, of Nicoll himself? Lacking in self-awareness to a painful degree, his own writings seem to hint at some buried connection with the Branch: the nervous crossing out of sensitive passages concerning Melville, or the reference to the inspector's advice that he should recognise in Coulon and Samuels his truest friends, in letters to those he thought he could trust. For all his denunciation of others, had he too, then, at some point been turned, as was suggested, and was he then victimised for betraying Melville's trust?

The notion that the entire *Commonweal* editorial team should, unbeknownst to one another, have been informants

to drown their sorrows, was prone to being impounded as a potentially explosive concoction.

Nor were the English anarchists excused Melville's rougher methods. After rejecting his offer of £500 to reveal the whereabouts of Meunier ('and that's just for starters'), Charles Mowbray's wife received a sinisterly worded warning from Melville that 'It'll be no joke when your children are howling from hunger.' He was true to his word a few weeks later when, hours after her death, he arrested Mowbray, leaving the infants alone in the house with their mother's corpse. The grounds for Mowbray's arrest were provided by an article published in *Commonweal* concerning the miscarriage of justice in the Walsall case, which asserted that 'Jesuit Home Secretary Matthews, Inspector Melville, and Coulon are the principal actors and two of them must die'. Melville's primary target, though, was the newspaper's co-editor David Nicoll, whom Sergeant Sweeney of Special Branch would testify to having heard deliver the threat verbally during a public meeting in Hyde Park.

Not only had Nicoll dared to challenge the official account of Special Branch's activities in Walsall but he also took every opportunity to publicise his suspicions of provocation and entrapment. In a likely attempt by Special Branch to intimidate him into stopping the dissemination of uncomfortable truths, he had already been arrested shortly after the Walsall debacle for defaming the queen: a charge so ludicrous that a local councillor had felt compelled to stand bail for him. But in court this time neither Sweeney's admission that he had noted down Nicoll's speech from memory only, half an hour after the event, nor Nicoll's insistence to the jury that 'anarchists in the country [are] quiet, peaceable people. Anarchism [does] not necessarily spell dynamite' cut any ice. The eighteen-month sentence he received must have come as a relief to Melville, who may have had more personal reasons for his vindictiveness towards Nicoll.

affair,' the senior St Petersburg policeman, Zubatov, had been in the habit of telling his junior officers. 'Dote upon her. One false move can lead to her disgrace.' Rachkovsky's letter, preserved in a barely legible draft in the Okhrana archives, veers between tenderness and a tone of bullying with an astonishing nimbleness.

'I was so sorry to learn from your last letter how much you are suffering,' he writes to Landesen:

> What is it that *drags* you back to that *suffocating* place, from which you so long to escape? Why, instead of allowing your *wounded soul* to heal in peace, do you *let it fester*?
>
> … Of course, had you been arrested together with some others (which is what I recommended), then after a few *interesting* days in gaol, you would have been a free man once again … But you were tired of this old game. To regret anything now is not only too late but also will not do you any good.
>
> … There is no hard legal evidence against you, but suspicions could grow, which, aided by a set of indisputable facts, might lead to a reasonable conclusion. This, as you well know, is more than sufficient, under the revolutionary code, to *sentence you without appeal* … Your attackers will no doubt be totally demoralised [when you fight back against] those repulsive, maddened Jew-cries of 'crucify him!' If someone should attack you, try to write something along the lines of the following:
>
> 'It is with indignation that I perceive the continuing slanderous attacks on my person at the hands of my *dear* comrades. Like a mob of the possessed, you have lost your common sense and do nothing

but howl fiercely to the pleasure of certain … Pharisees in our midst … Forget my personality and my past and forget how you led me out of Paris after the arrests. Continue to publish articles about me claiming that I had a horde of lovers and a weakness for roulette. Now, having sold out that "nihilists' plot", I can open my own harem and spend my days promenading the boulevards of Monaco like some golden cloud?! Oh, you are not revolutionaries, you are nothing but filthy human waste!'

… In my opinion, you have terminated relations with the revolutionaries once and for all, and having anything to do with them, even on a purely personal level, would mean betraying your convictions and do terrible injustice to yourself: you invested all your energy … your whole self into the last job. Enough! Try to view your past as nothing more than an unpleasant dream, bring your nerves in order, and try to focus your mind on the future, rather than looking back and torturing yourself over this memory or that. You certainly deserve to live an honest life and do a dignified job – not only as far as [your service to] the government, but also as far as your own conscience is concerned. So enjoy yourself, have some fun and rest until the autumn as the Lord guides you, fully unshackled from your own past and from all obligations. In the meantime I shall be in Petersburg, but on my return we will raise our glasses *to the new tracks along which your life will run.*

This was the head of the Paris Okhrana acting as psychotherapist, priest, life coach and consoling barman rolled into one,

'Biscuit', now going under the name of 'Quesnay', by posing as a *Figaro* reporter looking for an interview. Needless to say, his target failed to show: that Quesnay was the name of the French procurator general should have warned Houllier that he was being led a dance. But the French inspector appeared oblivious to how farce followed him around.

Turning their attention to Théodule Meunier, Houllier and Melville descended on Victor Richard's grocery store in Charlotte Street with the deputy director of the Sûreté, Fedée, in tow, chasing up a tip-off. Their informant, it seemed, was in on the joke. When the crack police team emerged empty-handed, a mob was waiting, and it took uniformed reinforcements to extract them, in scenes played out to the accompaniment of Zo d'Axa's barrel organ. Subsequently, Houllier and his Special Branch colleagues would chase around London after the vans belonging to a removals company mistakenly linked with the fugitives, while Melville donned the disguise of a hygiene inspector for some unsavoury undercover work, though dressing up seems always to have appealed to him. That the French took to calling Special Branch's favoured son 'Le Vil Melville' points to a more intimidating and nefarious side to his methods, however, confirmed by the decision of Richard, the grocer, and Brocher, who had convened the congress of 1881, to put the inspector himself under surveillance by the anarchists.

Melville's harassment of the anarchist émigrés in London did not stop after Meunier's flight to Canada and Houllier's departure, or with François's return to France, where he was soon arrested. Special Branch agents, often themselves 'in a state of beastly intoxication', according to anarchist accounts, resorted to bully-boy tactics, bribing gangs of 'corner boys' to attack speakers at public meetings before themselves weighing in with 'kicking and thumping'. Even the banana wine that the old Communard exiles to New Caledonia brewed as ersatz champagne, and then drank to their undying comradeship and

expropriation, attempted murder and incitement to terroristic slaughter were all too tangible.

'Enough of organisation … let's busy ourselves with chemistry and manufacture: bombs, dynamite and other explosives are far more capable than rifles and "barricades" of destroying the present state of things, and above all to save our own precious blood.' Such was the cowardly and vicious doctrine preached by *L'International*, established in London by Parmeggiani with Bordes, the ex-manager of *Père Peinard* who would shortly be revealed as a provocateur in the pay of the French police. Yet despite the newspaper's pillorying of Kropotkin and his ilk as 'papacy', 'flatfoots' and 'orators of the philosophical class', Louise Michel, Malatesta and others rallied to Parmeggiani's cause, protesting against his extradition to Italy and fund-raising to pay for a visit by his wife, with Rochefort a generous contributor.

'Oh great metropolis of Albion,' wrote Charles Malato in *The Delights of Exile*, a bittersweet evocation of the anarchists' life in London, 'your atmosphere is sometimes foggier than reason allows, your ale insipid and your cooking in general quite execrable, but you show respect for individuality and are welcoming to the émigrés.' With anarchist visitors like Parmeggiani to contend with, though, it was doubtful how long Britain could remain so tolerant. 'Be proud of these two qualities and keep them,' Malato urged Albion, but the warm welcome and the respect would soon run thin and cold.

The dispatch of the Sûreté's finest, Inspector Prosper-Isidore Houllier, to assist Scotland Yard in the hunt for Ravachol's accomplices had, for a while, provided the anarchists with some levity. Seemingly pursuing a personal mission to seek out the best of Britain's much-derided gastronomy, Houllier's fancy was particularly taken with the whitebait served at the Criterion, though he was partial as well to lunch in the gilded surroundings of the Café Royal. At least he could claim that they were both close to Piccadilly Circus, where he had tried to lure

and it was a compelling performance. Rachkovsky gently reprimands, then straight away soothes. Indulging Hekkelman's delusion, he appears genuinely to accept that Landesen is innocent in the whole affair, stepping into the dangerous territory where fact and fiction blur. A dose of anti-Semitism is injected to rouse the self-hating Jew in Hekkelman, but swiftly followed by a riposte intended to sting the shy, louche agent into indignation.

More than ever, as Hekkelman, or Landesen – or Arkady Harting, as he would soon become – listened to the sea wash the Sussex beach, he would have known himself to be Rachkovsky's creature. When he later wrote from London to request that noblest of prizes – conversion to the Orthodox faith – Rachkovsky would see to it that his protégé's christening was conducted with aristocrats and diplomats as guarantors: the stigma of being a Jewish boy from Pinsk would be forever erased. A pension of 1,000 francs a month was also agreed. And though there is no record of what services, if any, 'Arkady Harting' performed for his master during his sojourn in England, it was there that a new front was about to be opened in the Okhrana's battle with the revolutionaries, whose propagandist activities were now better organised and more vexatious to Rachkovsky than they had ever been in Switzerland.

Even as the Okhrana chief congratulated himself on his ever growing power, however, one man aboard a ship passing through the Straits of Gibraltar threatened to become Rachkovsky's nemesis. Cursed never to have his warnings about Hekkelman's treachery believed, Vladimir Burtsev's failure to prevent the framing of his comrades in Paris had been followed by the arrest of his travelling companion, again on a tip-off from Landesen, as he attempted to cross into Russia. Under surveillance in Romania, Burtsev had fled to Bulgaria where, again harassed, he had embarked on an English merchantman at the port of Galatz, bound for London.

Then, while the ship was anchored in Constantinople, a flotilla of Turkish police vessels had attempted a blockade, telling the captain he must hand Burtsev over to the authorities and the Russian officials who accompanied them. 'I will not,' the captain of the SS *Ashlands* replied, 'this is English territory! And I am a gentleman!'

It was a story the British newspapers would relish repeating on the ship's arrival in London, along with accounts of how a burly Turkish hireling had insistently remained on board, awaiting an opportunity to grapple Burtsev into the sea, to be picked up by the Russian vessel that had followed them out of Constantinople harbour. The myth of English liberalism remained alive, but soon enough even the British press would fall prey to Rachkovsky's wiles.

19. *Wicked Laws*

London and Paris 1892–1894

Rochefort's trips from London to Belgium in 1892 ran against the tide. Until recently the boat train from France had often carried artists and activists on '*un go back*', or day return to London, the police crackdown in Paris following Ravachol's bombings had now made single fares the rule. Meunier, a wanted man for the Lobau barracks and Café Véry bombings, and Jean-Pierre François, who had been named as his accomplice, on flimsy grounds had already gone to ground in the British capital. Now anyone who feared being swept up in the prefecture's broadening search for co-conspirators and the missing dynamite, or who had got wind of the French government's decision to adopt the old plan drawn up by Boulanger to intern 100,000 suspected anarchists in the event of war, planned their escape to England.

Prominent figures like Zo d'Axa, the founding editor of the avant-garde cultural and political magazine *L'EnDehors*, departed as early as April 1892, hastily handing over the running of the magazine to an inexperienced office junior called Emile Henry. With Charles Malato tempting others with the idea that they could 'jump on the train illegally at Bougainville – buy a Dieppe–Newhaven ticket', the only anarchists left in Paris by the late summer were those who did not have so much as a guilty conscience to hide. And even some of them may have been persuaded to think again by the arrest and imprisonment of Parmeggiani, caught on a clandestine foray to Paris that August, although his crimes of

officers Rochefort was said to tip off in advance of any duel that might threaten his health, that Rachkovsky's star agent Landesen had set about establishing himself under a new identity: Arkady Harting.

After many more twists and turns in his extraordinary career, years later Harting would take over the ownership of one of the casinos where, in the early 1890s, Rochefort played the roulette wheels and laid his bets at baccarat. Now, though, Harting was running a game with far higher stakes, in which he could doubtless have found a seat for the polemical French aristocrat with the anarchist friends.

17. *The Russian Memorandum*

Great Britain, America and Russia, 1890–1893

The news of General Seliverstov's assassination reached the Russian ambassador, de Mohrenheim, while he was attending the premiere of the new comedy *Dernier Amour* at Paris' Théâtre du Gymnase: a whispered word in his ear that must have caused him to blanch. The ex-head of the St Petersburg police had been found dead in a room at the Hôtel de Bade on boulevard des Italiens, executed by a single shot to the head. It was December 1890, twelve years since Seliverstov's predecessor in the job had been stabbed to death by Kravchinsky. Was the same assassin again at work? A news blackout on Seliverstov's death was imposed, but the garrulousness of de Mohrenheim's entourage soon had the press scrambling to uncover the whole sordid story. The French police agent 'Pépin' reported having heard from an old Communard that, ten years earlier, a revolutionary tribunal in Switzerland had indeed assigned Kravchinsky the task of carrying out the sentence of death that it had passed on Seliverstov. It soon became clear, however, that the alleged perpetrator, now calling himself 'Stepniak', had a watertight alibi, and one rather alarming to the Okhrana: he was, it was said, in America.

Rachkovsky must have been furious that Kravchinsky, who since the conversion of Tikhomirov had become his greatest headache, had slipped through the net. The revolutionary's popularity among the bohemian intelligentsia of England was

irksome, but it was the widening scope of his propaganda activities that was most troubling, and which urgently required suppression. Having fled Russia a decade earlier, Kravchinsky had pledged 'to win over the world for the Russian revolution, to throw on the scale the huge force of the public opinion in the most advanced countries'. Recent years had seen the pace of his propagandist effort accelerate and his audience grow ever more receptive.

The acclaimed publication in 1883 of his account of the struggle against the tsar, *Underground Russia*, had opened the way for three further works examining the parlous condition of his homeland. Then, in 1889, his first novel *The Career of a Nihilist* had been published, at a time when his name was being mentioned as a possible compromise leader of the English socialist movement. It was a runaway success. Kravchinsky's talents 'would have made his … fortune if turned into the profitable channel of sensation novel writing,' raved *Science* magazine of the book's dramatic narrative, and others concurred. As much as any literary merit the book may have had, though, it was the shocking reports from Russia then appearing in the headlines that ensured its popularity with the circulating libraries that dominated English reading culture. And the impact of those reports was felt on both sides of the Atlantic.

On a tour of Russia in the mid-1880s with the Western Union Telegraph expedition, the American explorer George Kennan had been impressed by his official hosts' apparent cooperation. The result was a book, *Tent Life in Siberia*, which described the exemplary penal colonies he had been shown. Kravchinsky and Kropotkin had both chided him for his credulity. As a consequence, when Kennan secured a commission from *Century* magazine to revisit the tsarist prison camps at Siberia in 1887, he was more thorough in his investigations. His shocking accounts of the abuses endured by the political prisoners overshadowed even the efforts of such esteemed apologists for

The clear identification of Rochefort with the sinister 'Comrade X' in Joseph Conrad's short story 'The Informer' surely came close to breaching Britain's libel laws. 'A revolutionary writer whose savage irony has laid bare the rottenness of the most respectable institutions', the character is a cynical, nihilistic coward, described as having 'scalped every venerated head, and … mangled at the stake of his wit every received opinion and every recognised principle of conduct and policy'. Comrade X is described as having been born into the nobility and 'could have called himself Vicomte X de la Z if he chose', collects exquisite antiques and works of art, eats bombe glacée and sips champagne in the finest restaurants. Conrad might as well have mentioned the marquis de Rochefort-Luçay's recent endorsement of a proprietary brand of bath salts.

Steeped in the underworld of the London anarchist émigrés, Conrad had published his early poems on the presses of the *Torch* newspaper, while his friend Ford Madox Ford was close to Kropotkin, Kravchinsky and Morris. The impressive factual detail that Conrad included in his stories of this milieu makes his insistence that he drew purely on his imagination, understandable in a novelist, demonstrably disingenuous. When his narrator claims to know about Comrade X 'as a certainty what the guardians of social order in Europe had at most only suspected. Or simply guessed at', his insight need not be dismissed as simple authorial invention. The great secret? That 'this extreme writer has been also … the mysterious unknown Number One of desperate conspiracies, suspected and unsuspected, matured or baffled'.

What, though, was the nature of the conspiracies in which Rochefort may have played such a role? Events would soon enough reveal their terrible outcome, but beyond the marquis himself and the anarchists to whom Malato introduced him, it was his trips to the Belgian coast that may provide the best clue as to the third man. For it was there, with the full knowledge and cooperation of the Belgian Sûreté, whose

to cover up its losses, one of whom was Baron Jacques de Reinarch, uncle of Rochefort's bête noire, the scent of an anti-Semitic scoop had him salivating. But more than that, as the Third Republic teetered on the brink, nothing could have delighted him more than to harness his countrymen's disaffection in order finally to drive it to destruction. It was an ambition shared, of course, by the anarchists, to whom he now reached out.

Money supplied by Rochefort to Louise Michel, which trickled down to those in the colony she deemed most worthy, accompanied perhaps with an acknowledgement of her affluent friend's largesse, may have helped restore his reputation with anyone willing to take a pragmatic view of his past unreliability and egregious Boulangism. Michel, though, while still voluble in her denunciation of injustice and calls for revolution, had increasingly retreated from the intractable human mess of the here and now, for which she could offer only the same old angry nostrums, into a world of animals and the imagination. Her home provided a sanctuary for a menagerie of unfortunates, including a parrot that was reputed to squawk out a parody of her choicest invective; meanwhile she conjured Verne-like visions of the world to come: a global federated society, inhabiting 'underwater cities, contained in submarine ships as large as whole provinces; cities suspended in mid-air, perhaps orbiting with the seasons'. Rochefort indulged her but she was of little use to him. Instead, by hiring Charles Malato as his secretary, Rochefort bought himself direct access to the core of the 'individualist' faction of anarchists. His memoirs are uncharacteristically reticent on the subject, the extent of his dealings with the extremists only glimpsed from police reports, and the reason for them even then obscure. Rather, it is a work of fiction published fifteen years later but looking back to the early 1890s that most vividly evokes Rochefort's clandestine activities at the time.

the tsarist regime as the English editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, W. T. Stead.

Despite having shown his guest considerable hospitality, Constantine Pobedonostsev was dubbed by Kennan 'the Russian Torquemada' with reference to the notorious leader of the Spanish Inquisition. Graphic illustrations punctuated articles in a wide range of magazines, bringing home to readers the abject misery endured by Russia's internal exiles. In blistering rain and snow, with guards on either side, columns of the dispossessed were described marching out of St Petersburg, their lanterns swinging forlornly as family members reached out in vain with last letters; then the journey across thousands of miles of wilderness, hard and dangerous, by barge, road and sledge; the overnight stops, shoulders jammed against the barred windows of their compounds as they strained to hand over precious pennies to an old woman in exchange for the scant rations in her basket; and, at last, the godforsaken clapboard towns where they were expected to make a life, labouring under guard, amidst the relentless ice of the tundra.

Since Kennan's return, matters in Russia had deteriorated still further. A crackdown on discipline among the convicts had caused protests, leading to further repression. The mass suicide of women prisoners at Kara, in protest at one of their number dying two days after being given a hundred lashes, was followed in April 1889 by what became known outside Russia as the Yakutsk massacre. An angry demonstration by thirty-four exiles against their ill-treatment had led to reprisals that left four dead, two fatally wounded, and three others condemned to death.

For some time, Kravchinsky had been lobbying influential figures in the English political Establishment in an attempt to coax them away from their liberal complacency and adherence to peaceful protest. 'It is very easy for Alexander III to allow himself to be persuaded that he is doing his sacred duty in maintaining a political regime which is causing such awful misery

and sufferings,' he wrote to Mrs Spence Watson, the wife of one of the leading Liberals outside Parliament, insisting that 'in Russia, as everywhere else, freedom will be won by fighting and not otherwise'. Soon afterwards, her husband Robert proposed a society that would raise public awareness of Russia's despotism through a regular series of pamphlets.

Kravchinsky insisted that neither he nor Kropotkin should be named as instigators of the scheme, which he thought would be best publicised as a fundamentally English affair. But questions of presentation were not allowed to delay the launch of the Society of Friends of Russian Freedom on 30 April 1890. Two days later, May Day saw the best attendance yet in a series of Free Russia rallies in Hyde Park, at which speakers included George Bernard Shaw, Marx's sons-in-law Aveling and Lafargue, and the Member of Parliament Robert Cunninghame Graham; as William Morris had advised, the English were not patronising the Russians, but standing as their friends and equals in the struggle. And by the summer the first edition of *Free Russia*, featuring a full exposé of the Yakutsk massacre, was in the hands of readers.

When the Russian ambassador to London, Yegor de Staal, informed St Petersburg that 'the agitation raised against Russia on the grounds of the exaggerated rumours of merciless treatment of prisoners in Siberia has still not subsided', Rachkovsky could offer no immediate answer and several months later was still writing of Britain as 'alien and not at all conducive to the agency's work'. Even Olga Novikoff, with her bulging book of contacts in London high society, was impotent to shift public opinion, grousing to the turncoat Tikhomirov about how 'That accursed Stepniak is inciting each and all in England against all that is dear to Russia. It's a terrible, terrible disaster.' Events in Russia, though, would soon compound their problems, and further boost the circulation of the society's newspaper. When news filtered through of

and an idea; two forces that nothing can withstand', Rochefort longed to see a more cataclysmic fate befall a French Establishment that he held responsible for his persecution and exile.

'He dreams of the death of Constans,' his hireling editor on *L'Intransigeant* had written in 1891, 'and all his letters say that he wants to kill the minister [of the interior], no matter how, or by what means.' Stewing in paranoia, with an infinite capacity for delusional self-righteousness, Rochefort was convinced that his enemy Constans would arrange his murder if ever he set foot again in his homeland, and considered his own murderousness a just and reasonable response. But the shame and humiliation produced by a journalistic exposé was Rochefort's favoured means of attack, and his hand can surely be detected in the revelations about the scandalous sale by Constans, for personal profit, of Indo-Chinese antiquities that had been purloined during France's recent colonial adventures in the Far East.

As the French political Establishment struggled to suppress the far greater scandal of the widespread corruption surrounding the collapse of the Panama Canal Company, which had already seen official investigations begun into Gustave Eiffel and the ninety-six-year-old national hero Lesseps, it was little wonder that agents of the French police watched Rochefort so closely on his surreptitious trips to Belgium. The marquis' ostensible purpose there was to gamble in the casinos at Ostende or else to fight duels, banned in England and France but possible in the nearby sand dunes, against those whom he had defamed or who had slandered him. And whilst spies noted the packet of documents slipped to him at Boulanger's funeral in Brussels, Rochefort himself would later boast that he regularly shook off those who tailed him to make secret forays to Paris, no doubt in search of damning evidence to use against his enemies.

With three Jewish promoters in the frame for organising the gargantuan bribes paid out by the Panama Canal Company

Charles Malato, the son of a New Caledonian exile who was well acquainted with Ravachol's co-conspirators.

Reclus derived hope from Ravachol's death. 'I am one of those who see in Ravachol a hero with a rare grandeur of spirit,' he wrote to Félix Nadar, the photographer and balloonist, telling his old friend that 'We live from day to day, happy and confident, listening to the great blast of the revolution which is advancing.' A striking feature of many opinions expressed about Ravachol, though, was the appropriation of religious language and symbolism, echoing that applied to the terrorists in Russia a decade earlier, but coming carelessly close to blasphemy. 'In this time of cynicism and irony, a saint has been born to us,' wrote Paul Adam, the Symbolist novelist and amateur mystic, expressing a common sentiment, while others eulogised Ravachol as a 'violent Christ'.

The defining image of the moment was provided by an iconic ink sketch by Félix Vallotton for the *Revue Blanche*, which depicted Ravachol in a muscular refusal to submit to his tormenters, his hair wild and eyes staring, white shirt stripped from his shoulders as the prison guards force his straining neck down towards the board of the guillotine: the anarchists' answer to a meek Jesus stumbling under the weight of his cross, on the way to Calvary.

'The old world is collapsing under the weight of its own crimes, and is itself lighting the fuse on the bomb that will destroy everything,' Mirbeau wrote in the anarchist literary and artistic newspaper *L'Endehors* on the day of Ravachol's execution, warning that 'There are certain corpses that walk again.' The phrase was an exact echo, whether unconscious or not, of that written by Henri Rochefort about Boulanger the previous September, after the putative dictator had shot himself dead on the grave of his recently deceased mistress. But while the terrible 'bomb' to which Mirbeau referred would 'contain neither gunpowder nor dynamite … [but] comprised compassion

the country's widespread famine, British public opinion was outraged by the Russian government's shameful response.

Fear and pride had conspired to create a climate of denial around the tsar. 'There are no famine victims. There are merely regions suffering from a poor harvest,' he declared when a group of officers proposed cancelling their regimental dinner and donating the cost to the starving, while a subscription by the French people in aid of the famine victims was also rejected. 'Russia does not need charity,' Ambassador de Mohrenheim insisted to the French press while on vacation in Aix-les-Bains, but the fraudulence of the official line was exposed when aid sent secretly by the émigrés, via Leo Tolstoy, was received with pitiful gratitude. And to ensure that the message of tsarist incompetence reached those suffering from it most directly, a lithographic copying centre was set up in St Petersburg to reproduce *Free Russia* for domestic distribution.

Meanwhile, Kravchinsky, previously nervous about his poor spoken English, was finally prevailed upon by Kennan to visit the United States on a lecture tour and, unlike his co-editor Felix Volkhovsky who habitually spoke to audiences wearing chains on his ankles and wrists, he would rely on his verbal powers to make an impact.

Establishing a base in Boston, just as Bakunin had thirty years earlier, Kravchinsky used literary discussion of the novels of Tolstoy and Turgenev as a Trojan Horse to gain him entry into the society of America's literary opinion-makers. 'One of the most important things I ever heard … large, bold and massive to an extraordinary degree,' enthused the critical luminary William Dean Howells of Kravchinsky's lecture on novels that were known more by repute than in translation, and took the revolutionary under his wing. After dining with the Russian at home and in his club, and even taking him on a visit to a local fire station where Kravchinsky slid down a brass pole, the American critic's initial impression was confirmed: 'One

of those wonderful clear heads that seem to belong to other races than ours.'

But whilst Kravchinsky's message that the pogroms against the Jews in Russia had been propagated by the government struck home, concerns persisted about the violence that underpinned the revolutionaries' own strategy to force constitutional change, with Howells reluctant to lend his name to support for such methods. Others, though, had no such qualms and were happy to sign up, including the author Mark Twain.

'If such a government cannot be overthrown otherwise than by dynamite, then thank God for dynamite!' Twain had proclaimed the previous year, leaping to his feet in the audience at one of Kennan's lectures on the Kara outrage. As an angry sentimentalist, with an outspoken antipathy to that most 'grotesque of all the swindles invented by man – monarchy', Twain was perfectly receptive to Kravchinsky's message, believing that America, having received the support of France in its struggle to overthrow despotism during its own revolution a century before, was beholden to remember its origins and lend its support to those now engaged in the fight for political justice.

The endorsement of such prominent moral arbiters gave Kravchinsky good reason to hope that the idea of Russian freedom would fall on fertile ground, and plans were made to establish an American branch of the Society of Friends of Russian Freedom. Before Kravchinsky could see the project realised, however, a message arrived from Volkhovsky summoning him back to London to assist in resolving tensions with colleagues in Europe that had unexpectedly become inflamed. Under intense pressure to stem the tide of anti-tsarist propaganda, Rachkovsky may have been finding it hard to land a clean blow, but he had been far from idle.

In Paris, the rumours about Kravchinsky's involvement with the murder of General Seliverstov had refused to go

in the police cells to any would-be cop-killer. When Alphonse Bertillon appeared with a camera to snap a '*portrait parlé*' for his anthropometric collection, Ravachol resisted fiercely. 'Why?' asked Bertillon, with a disingenuous professionalism that made his later tractability to corruption all too plausible, 'I have to do this. It is part of my duty.' 'Well, my face is not such a pretty sight, is it?' replied Ravachol, and Bertillon relented, realising perhaps that the prisoner's bruised features would not reflect well on the police who were holding him.

When the official photograph was eventually produced, its subject did indeed appear more presentable: dangerously so, to those looking for an anarchist icon. Artistic impressions published in the anarchist press and elsewhere, alongside extraordinary encomiums from the literary world and transcriptions of the prisoner's own eloquent invective, fixed his public image as the self-sacrificing hero of a society that had lost its way. 'Judge me, members of the jury,' Ravachol told the court, 'but if you have understood me, in judging me, judge all the unfortunates that destitution, allied with natural pride, has made criminals and whom wealth, even just ease, would have made honest people.'

His sentence was surprisingly lenient: hard labour for himself and an absent 'Biscuit' and acquittal for the other three defendants. The novelist Octave Mirbeau, already an eager contributor to the anarchist press, wondered whether the jurors had been afraid 'to kill a man whose mysterious vengeance will not wholly die with him'. The assizes court of provincial Montbrison, however, promptly rectified the error, providing the French anarchists with the martyr denied them by the Paris judiciary. That Ravachol ultimately went to the guillotine for the murder of an ancient hermit did nothing to hinder his lionisation, and the anarchism that he preached until the very moment the blade fell was immediately taken up by myriad other voices. 'After three quarters of a century of dreams, should the last word be left to Deibler [the executioner]?' demanded

the air of menace. Then, the day before the trial of Ravachol and 'Biscuit' began, Meunier unleashed the most deadly attack yet. His target was the Café Véry, crowded with diners; his purpose to punish the friends of the waiter, Lhérot, who had betrayed Ravachol to the police. Sauntering in for a drink at the bar, the fuse of a bomb already smouldering in a bag that he discreetly deposited, Meunier had only just paid and left when a huge explosion tore the establishment apart, killing both the patron and a customer, and seriously injuring many others. A self-generating cycle of official repression and anarchist retribution was now in motion.

The views of the veteran anarchists became markedly more muted. In conversation with Coulon about the merits or otherwise of nitroglycerine for 'social therapy', Louise Michel was persuaded to admit that 'in principle, yes, it is possible to use force for good purposes. That's how the revolution will come about.' Judged by her usual standards, however, it amounted to disapproval. Kropotkin too was increasingly critical, insisting that 'a structure built on centuries of history cannot be destroyed with a few kilos of explosives'. Previously he had deferred to the conscience of the perpetrators of terror, often victims of a corrupt society. Yet faced with an angry young Frenchman called Auguste Vaillant – who in order to escape from servitude in South America as an indentured *peon* had braved the muddy shallows and violent eddies of the River Salado on a raft of his own construction, chancing his luck against the paramilitaries posted along the banks to capture any fugitives – the mild old Russian was said to have spoken 'with great emphasis against physical force and even against revolution brought about by violence'.

Ravachol himself, however, had grasped better than others that in the service of anarchist propaganda nothing carried a greater currency than his own image. A handsome, manly but slick-haired dandy, he was conscious of the effect upon his looks wrought by the inevitable rough treatment dealt out

away merely because it had been shown that he could not have carried out the attack in person. Agent 'Pépin', who had originally pointed the finger at Kravchinsky, quickly came up with a variant account, based on information supposedly received from an anonymous source. The true culprit, he asserted, was a young, London-based Pole called Stanislaw Padlewski, whom Kravchinsky had instructed to kill the general.

There were sightings of Padlewski in Spain and Italy, but no one stopped to enquire further about the real reason for the assassin's frequent trips, in the past, to Paris and Italy, or his unexplained connection with Rachkovsky's old agent, Yuliana Glinka. Nor did anyone give much credence to the lonely voices daring to claim that Padlewski was himself mixed up with the Okhrana, and that the killing was a false-flag operation. It would be more than a decade before one of Rachkovsky's agents, Cyprien Jagolkovsky, revealed his role in Seliverstov's murder, and another ten years before the notion was publicly aired that the Okhrana chief himself had organised the hit to rid himself of a possible threat to his position.

In the meantime, Rachkovsky had doggedly pursued his agenda of demonising the Russian émigrés in the eyes of the British public, in the hope of facilitating political action against them. January 1891 had seen him meet the Russian interior minister, Durnovo, in Nice, to discuss his proposed strategy and his request to be posted to London, since his efforts to date had effectively driven the key émigrés across the Channel. Durnovo's immediate reaction was to report to St Petersburg what Rachkovsky had told him of the ease and affluence that the London émigrés enjoyed thanks to their 'ghastly agitation of the English'. The eventual outcome, however, was the drafting of what would become known as the 'Russian Memorandum' that laid out the argument for why the British government should take action against those

enemies of the tsar to whom it had granted asylum. Sent by the Russian foreign ministry to Ambassador de Staal in London, it was then passed on to Her Majesty's Government. Neither Lord Salisbury's tacit support, however, for surveillance of Russians entering through English ports, nor the redoubled lobbying efforts of Madame Novikoff produced the desired effect. 'This is not a very reassuring result,' would be Tsar Alexander's terse reaction to the lack of progress.

There were, however, other weapons in Rachkovsky's arsenal, not the least of which was his seasoned tactic of sowing dissent. Kravchinsky's great talent, well attested by those around him, was his skill as a conciliator, working to bring into alignment the disparate groups of Russian revolutionaries spread across Europe. That ability was put to the test. Even before the first edition of *Free Russia* hit the news-stands, co-editor Felix Volkhovsky had been attacked by Plekhanov's group in Switzerland for his high-handedness in ignoring all those who did not share the newspaper's relatively liberal agenda, and by Peter Lavrov for emphasising the search for political over economic freedom. Thanks in part to Kravchinsky's past kindnesses to Plekhanov, whom he had subsidised to take a rest cure when he was suffering from tuberculosis, the flurry of accusations temporarily abated. But then, during Kravchinsky's absence in America, a series of black operations orchestrated by Rachkovsky, and implemented by the expert forgers at rue de Grenelle, stoked the fires of mistrust and resentment.

First to appear was a pamphlet entitled *A Confession by an Old Revolutionary Veteran*, which accused Kravchinsky and the other London émigrés of having sold themselves to the British police; then, an open letter purportedly written by Plekhanov further denounced the London group. After Lavrov's 'Group of Veterans' had re-established contact between the old People's Will organisations in Russia's major cities, his name too was put to a forged document which lamented that there was no prospect of a social revolution in Russia, announced that its

was the home of the public prosecutor in the Clichy case, the explosives were hidden in a suitcase, and the injuries and devastation caused by the larger bomb far more extensive. For a brief moment, as the evening newspapers appeared on the stands, Parisians must have felt that terror had become endemic: the new condition of their lives. Already, though, Ravachol's campaign had been doomed by his own pride and boastfulness. Taking lunch in the Café Véry on boulevard Magenta, he had been overheard by a waiter bragging about his recent exploits; when the waiter next caught sight of him in the street, he tipped off the authorities. In the ensuing chase Ravachol injured one of his police pursuers with a shot from a revolver, before eventually being wrestled to the ground.

Yet even with Ravachol in custody, the fear did not abate. With some reports claiming that up to 1,000 pounds of dynamite were still unaccounted for, it was now the turn of the Parisian bourgeoisie to feel besieged in their own city, as the defenders of the Commune once had. 'They dared not go to the theatre, to restaurants, to the fashionable shops in the rue de la Paix, to ride in the Bois where there were anarchists behind every tree. The most terrible rumours ran round every morning: the anarchists had undermined the churches and … were robbing and murdering rich American ladies in the Champs-Elysées,' recalled one English visitor, while Goncourt commented that, so empty was the city, it might 'have been devastated by a plague'. Communards and anarchists, powerless and marginalised for so long, could not help but feel a secret pleasure at the effect Ravachol had created. As a personality cult began to develop around him, even Elisée Reclus would write admiringly of Ravachol's 'courage, his goodness, his greatness of soul, and the generosity with which he pardons his enemies, and indeed those who informed on him'.

The same could not be said for those of Ravachol's friends still at liberty, whose silence since his capture had maintained

weeks later, a half-cocked explosion, set by one of the Soisy band, blackened the front of Princess de Sagan's town house: either her association by birth with Spain, or by marriage with the glittering world of French high society, had placed her in the firing line. For the start of the real campaign of terror, however, Paris had to wait another fortnight, while Ravachol and 'Biscuit' carried out planning and reconnaissance of targets deemed culpable in some manner for the fate of France's May Day martyrs.

Ravachol's first bomb exploded outside the apartment of Monsieur Benoît, the judge who had presided over the case brought against the Clichy demonstrators; the ground momentarily shook on boulevard Saint-Germain and a few windows shattered, but without causing injury. Then, four days later on 15 March, a second device, planted by Meunier, struck the Lobau barracks near the Hôtel de Ville, home to the troops who had suppressed the Clichy demonstration. It was also the base from which Thiers' troops had marched out to Versailles, almost exactly twenty-one years earlier, precipitating the creation of the Commune.

It would be another ten years before the painter Maximilien Luce could dredge up and place on canvas the image of Bloody Week that had haunted him since he had witnessed its horrors at first hand as an eight-year-old: the corpses piled in uncannily desolate streets. Already, though, his anarchist friends were retracing the old battle lines in stark new terms, justifying the persistent fear in Paris that, just beneath the surface of everyday life, the old insurrectionist spirit was threatening to rise again. Where a generation before the Communards had faced death together on the barricades, chemistry had now made the means of waging war against authority readily available, and martyrdom had become a matter of individual choice.

As if to allow time for the Parisians to confront their own darkest imaginings, Ravachol paused for nearly another two weeks before committing his next outrage. This time the target

author was to retreat to a monastery, and signed off with an implausible 'Amen'. Those impugned were quick to scorn the ruse, roundly denying any involvement, while *Free Russia* left its readers in no doubt about the documents' true source: 'The spies are dancing a jig,' it confirmed in a note to its readers. Yet for all the inconvenience caused to Kravchinsky, and despite Rachkovsky's boast of the previous autumn that by infiltrating agents into the London émigré community he had brought it 'under our full control', in early 1892, the Anglo-Saxon world remained largely impervious to the Okhrana's wiles.

'S—, I have been given to understand, had been concerned in some very dreadful affairs indeed. Perhaps he would blow me up. Perhaps he would convert me,' wrote one journalist, approaching an interview with the notorious revolutionary with trepidation, only for his fears to be assuaged by an evening spent at Kravchinsky's St John's Wood house. Though the furnishings were somewhat exotic – 'couches and settees had the places that in mere bourgeois homes would have been occupied by stiff-backed chairs' – the man himself was thoroughly congenial: 'capable of enjoying a good dinner', and irresistibly charming as he sat sipping spiced tea and languidly smoking a cigarette. Conversation flowed easily around the sceptical Kravchinsky's adventure of the previous evening, ghost-hunting in Westminster Abbey, and the intriguing prospects raised by psychic research. Always, though, it returned to his perennial theme: the brutality of tsarist Russia, the degradations experienced by its people, and the just cause of revolution in the quest for democracy. So powerful was Kravchinsky's evocation of Russian misery that even his dire prediction that 'when the peasants do wake up, their revolution will put the French one into the shade' was recorded by his rapt interviewer without demur.

Nor was it only the press that Kravchinsky and Volkhovsky courted with their Slavic charm, as they insinuated themselves ever deeper into the supportive sympathy of their British

hosts. The Garnett sisters, Olive and Constance, epitomised the susceptibility of literary and artistic bohemia to the Russian émigrés' radical chic, and the strong erotic appeal that they exercised. Constance's decision to live in Fitzroy Square, in the heart of the French anarchist colony, had already singled her out as a woman with a taste for adventure beyond that offered by her timid, bookish and sexually inhibited husband, Edward. Her head was turned first by Volkhovsky and his compelling history of twelve years spent in Siberian exile following the Trial of the 193 and his subsequent escape down the River Amur to Japan, who set about teaching Russian to the sisters. By turns intellectually austere and vainly sensuous, his very unpredictability seemed to draw in Englishwomen. 'One day he was a pathetic broken down old man, the next he would look twenty years younger, put a rose in his buttonhole, and lay himself out very successfully to please and entertain,' Constance's sister commented, and would marvel that, when he left, 'It is so curious to awake from Siberia to a Surrey Lane.' But if Volkhovsky had been intriguing to the sisters, Kravchinsky was much more so. On being introduced to him when visiting his new home in the model Arts and Crafts suburb of Bedford Park, Constance found him barely resistible. With doting friends like the socially well-connected Garnett sisters, Kravchinsky's respectability was firmly underwritten.

Rachkovsky was not to be deterred. The agents who followed Kravchinsky home on his nightly walks out to the suburbs of West London may have been easily paid off by their mark with the price of a beer, glad to avoid the antagonism from the locals that the presence of shady foreigners evinced, whatever side of the political divide. No similar solution was available, though, when it came to the professional cracksmen paid to burgle the homes of known associates of the émigré revolutionaries, or the thugs hired to beat up young women who worked on the society's stall in Hyde Park, and a general air of intimidation prevailed. Most damagingly of all for the Society of Friends

mit in the tiny Loire town of Chambles, had sated Ravachol's appetite for spectacular revenge on a society that had, he believed, deeply wronged him. The spur to fulfilling his destiny seems to have been provided when an insurrection in the wine-producing Spanish city of Jerez on 8 January 1892 had seen around fifty peasants descend on the prison there to liberate friends who had been hideously tortured during interrogation over the bomb attacks of the previous year. The response ordered by Prime Minister Canovas was brutal and widespread, culminating on 10 February with the garrotting of four supposed ringleaders: strapped to seats, facing a crowd of soldiers and spectators, a rod was inserted into a cord looped around their neck and slowly rotated to strangulate them. Slower than hanging, far less clinical than the guillotine, it was a punishment that spoke of a governing elite who viewed the anarchists as little better than vermin, fit for extermination.

Outrage greeted the news in radical Paris, with one anarchist conclave agreeing that between two and five million deaths and ten to twenty years of warfare were necessary to bring about a revolution. With thoughts of the Clichy confrontation fresh in his mind too, Ravachol could wait only four days, until the feast of the early Christian martyr St Valentine, on 14 February. Then, together with his eighteen-year-old acolyte Charles Simon, known as 'Biscuit', along with the humpbacked anarchist Théodule Meunier and two or three others, Ravachol led an expedition to raid an arsenal at Soisy-sous-Etiolles to the south of Paris, from where the band succeeded in carrying off a sizeable haul of high explosives.

The motive had now found the means, and on a scale that made possible a campaign of terror to rock the French state and its neighbours and shock even the least alarmist prognosticators in the press. Far out into the suburbs, police raids scoured known anarchist hideouts, but without success. Ravachol, having gone to ground just outside the city, bided his time while fabricating the raw materials into timed or fused devices. Two

Ever since May Day 1891, an appetite for vengeance had taken a firm hold among the most militant French anarchists, inspired by the example of their colleagues in Spain, who had exploded two bombs in the port city of Cadiz. Alongside the fifteen black flags of anarchist mourning paraded in the funeral procession for those killed at Fourmies had been thirty-two coloured red for revolution, while deeper grievances too were resurfacing. A month later, the inauguration of Sacré-Coeur reopened old wounds, as the French Federation of Free Thought indicated by condemning the ceremony as 'an odious Jesuitical comedy played out on Montmartre in honour of the 35,000 victims of May 1871'. Only the intervention of baton-wielding police prevented a carnivalesque protest featuring a great red crown carried by horsemen from reaching its climax: the draping of a vast red flag over the half-finished basilica. It would not be long before a loosely affiliated band of young anarchist discontents would translate the symbolism of the blood-red banners into violent retribution.

François Koenigstein, better known as Ravachol, had carried out his first known criminal act only a fortnight after the fateful May Day, and it had been a macabre affair. A spurious gesture against authority, the only rational explanation for the twenty-three-year-old's exhumation of Countess de la Rochetaille's rotting corpse was the hope of retrieving jewels buried with her. It was a chilling act that seeped into the public consciousness of a morbid and moribund society. The Café du Néant, opened in Montmartre a few months later, would allow its clientele to sample mortality, sipping absinthe while seated at a coffin lid in the Room of Intoxication, or watching a live human turned to dust in the Room of Disintegration by means of a Pepper's ghost trick. By then, though, the real terror generated by Ravachol would be too immediate for easy sublimation.

Neither the desecration of the countess' grave, nor his subsequent murder of Jacques Brunel, a ninety-five-year-old her-

of Russian Freedom, Okhrana agents were also targeting the movement from within.

Alexander Evalenko had first offered his services to the police in St Petersburg in early 1891, when he and his wife had decided to emigrate from Russia to the United States; Rachkovsky's decision to recruit him on a generous salary, under the cover name of Vladimir Sergeyev, was quickly vindicated. Money supplied from the Okhrana purse bought 'Sergeyev' ready access to the Society of Friends of Russian Freedom, on both sides of the Atlantic, and his dedication earned him both a trusted position as the movement's librarian in New York, and the friendship of the ambitious Yegor Lazarev, then the leading figure of the American movement. It took Evalenko's talent for cool dissimulation to allay suspicion of his extravagant donations, but as contributions from genuine well-wishers slowed to a trickle, his funding became ever more crucial, whilst tempting the society into a dangerous dependency upon him.

It was a slow-burn strategy, but one that would ultimately prove hugely effective. Curtailing positive propaganda for the revolutionary cause, however, was only half of the task. Even if weaned away from their sympathy for the anti-tsarist movement, the British and American governments still had to be made to understand the need to take firm action themselves against the 'terrorists' in their midst. America's own industrial unrest, however, would spawn violence of a kind that, whilst directed at plutocrats rather than princes, would powerfully illustrate the nature of the threat.

Years later a friend would recollect that Kravchinsky had never appeared happier than during the time he spent teaching impoverished black children whilst on a visit to America. Having come to ask for support from a nation founded upon freedom, he had been taken aback by the levels of inequality he saw, claiming never before to have witnessed such a dis-

parity of wealth in a society. Nor was he alone in viewing the United States as a country much in need of a new revolution of its own. 'When the Americans start, it will be with energy and violence. In comparison we will be children,' Engels himself had recently remarked, and Kravchinsky, on friendly terms with the German, may well have tailored his tone of address with such perceptions in mind. For whereas in England he had always been at pains to offer assurances to the Friends' supporters that 'the only help we shall ever ask … is that of bringing the public opinion of free countries to bear on Russian affairs', in his written appeal entitled 'What Americans Can do for Russia' he revealed a far greater and more militant dream: 'to see one day … an army spring into existence – not a host, but a well-selected army like that of Gideon – composed of the best men of all free nations, with unlimited means at their command, fighting side by side … [for] the supremacy of the triumphant democracy.' The summer of 1892 revealed the germ of what might become such an army among the downtrodden steelworkers of Pennsylvania.

In June 1892, Henry Clay Frick was appointed chairman of the vast Carnegie Steel Company, which amalgamated Frick's own business interests with those of Andrew Carnegie. Having made an extraordinary fortune, Carnegie was now getting on for sixty years old and was content to take a back seat, burnishing his image as a philanthropist and rediscovering his Scottish roots, while Frick brought to bear the same ruthlessness he had shown while building his own fortune as the 'King of Coke'. But the steel workers of the Homestead plant, the centrepiece of Carnegie's empire, presented a challenge. They must, it had been made clear, accept an 18 per cent pay cut and the loss of union rights, or face the sack. But after almost twenty years of deep recession, during which America's leading industrialists had continued to accumulate almost inconceivable wealth, workers labouring long hours for already pitiful wages were in no mood to compromise. Nor did the libraries

it was the leading anarchists who experienced the antagonism most fiercely.

Louise Michel had been contentedly teaching her classes, 'sitting in the midst of a group of very intelligent-looking but dirty children,' as shocked visitors remarked, with the single word '*L'Anarchie*' written across the blackboard for a history lesson and drawn below it graphic representations of the hanging of the Chicago martyrs and the massacres of the Bloody Week. According to Michel, and to her obvious distress, their enlightened education, free of capitalist indoctrination, came to an abrupt end when bombs were discovered in the basement. 'There is nothing so terrible as to feel oneself surrounded by enemies, without being able to guess either their identity or purpose,' she confided to a friend.

But not even her closest friends could be trusted: the Special Branch ledgers recorded a tip-off from someone intimate with her that 'there is dynamite in London', while a French agent confidently reported that Michel's companion, Charlotte Vauvelle, was an Orléanist spy. And although Coulon was probably responsible for the planting of the bombs at the school, Special Branch knew of a Russian informant among the teachers. Curiously, not long after Rachkovsky informed St Petersburg that the next stage of his agitation was to involve incriminating the nihilists in London as counterfeiters of money, a package of counterfeiting equipment was deposited with Michel, which she and Vauvelle wisely threw on to a rubbish tip. In the unlikely event that the Okhrana was indeed targeting Michel directly, the explanation may have lain in vindictiveness on Rachkovsky's part towards a woman who sneered at France's developing relationship with Russia, insiting that 'you can't have an alliance between free people and slaves'.

Insofar as Rachkovsky hoped to use terrorism to inflate popular opprobrium of the Russian nihilists, however, in Paris the anarchists appeared intent on doing his job for him.

'to arrive at a complete emancipation of humanity, brutal force is indispensable … it is absolutely necessary to burn the churches, palaces, convents, barracks, police stations, lawyers' offices, fortresses, prisons, and to destroy entirely all that has lived till now by business work without contributing to it.' No one seemed to care that at least two of the publications were widely said to be incitements funded by the French police; all were taken as proof that Walsall was part of what *The Times* termed 'a great system' of terroristic activity, stamped with 'the lust of bloodshed'.

It was clear who gained from Coulon's subterfuge. Special Branch's funding was restored and Melville's ascendancy assured; excused by the judge from answering questions relating to his relationship with Coulon, his high-stakes gamble had paid off. Rachkovsky, meanwhile, prepared to publish a pamphlet lambasting the English for allying themselves with the nihilists. 'Bearing in mind … the general indignation about the "dynamiteheroes", into which category the nihilists fall,' he commented gleefully to Durnovo, the interior minister and his ultimate superior in St Petersburg, 'our pamphlet will cause a great stir; and it will be the first step of my agitation.' Coulon himself received an immediate bonus from Special Branch of £4 with his weekly pay raised to £2, and was able to continue his double life, suspected by some among the anarchists but not wholly ostracised, yet giving anonymous interviews to the press from his office in Balham in which he claimed to be in the service of the 'international police'.

There were losers too, with the greatest damage surely suffered by the British sense of justice and fair play, in which the public took considerable if often misplaced pride. In a stark example of the abuses that the hysteria surrounding the Walsall trial made possible, a completely innocent inventor from Birmingham spent several weeks in a police cell on account of an innovative device he had designed for blowing up rabbit warrens. Corrosive precedents were being set. Inevitably, though,

and meeting halls that Carnegie was busy erecting across the country persuade them otherwise. Evidence of plutocratic vanity as much as genuine philanthropy – whatever the moral message propounded by Carnegie in his 1889 apologia for the 'robber barons', *The Gospel of Wealth* – they were funded by a small portion of company profits that, every year, exceeded the entire wage bill for his workforce. They certainly did not appease the Homestead workers, who came out on strike.

'We think absolute secrecy essential in the movement of these men,' wrote Frick to the Pinkerton Agency, 'so that no demonstration can be made while they are en route.' The paramilitary organization he was referring to comprised 300 freelance security contractors: a tiny proportion of the 30,000 that the Pinkertons could mobilise, which amounted to a force greater than the whole standing army of the United States. While some of the mercenaries sent to Homestead were veterans of past confrontations, most were thuggish greenhorns, hired off the streets of New York, Chicago, Kansas City or Philadelphia, and loaded on to one of the two huge roofed-in barges that had been readied to transport them down the eight miles of the River Monongahela from Pittsburgh with no foreknowledge of their task or destination. It was hoped that what they lacked in experience would, however, be compensated for by the daunting defences that they would garrison: a three-mile palisade around the industrial site, twelve feet in height, topped with barbed wire, with holes drilled at regular intervals to allow concealed rifle fire, water cannon and even a system of piping to spray boiling water at assailants: 'Fort Frick', as it had become known to the thousands of locked-out steelworkers who watched its erection.

The tugs pulled the barges crammed with Pinkertons upstream under the cover of thick fog, but as the men crowded into the boats' dark bellies held their breath, they could hear the voices of striking pickets along the banks on either side. It was two days after the anniversary of the Declaration of Inde-

pendence, and having celebrated it as patriots, the steelworkers were resolved to defend the town and works that they had built up over the past decade: Carnegie might be the owner, but they were stakeholders whose moral rights were manifest.

It took a single shot, from an unknown source, for violence to erupt. The crates of Winchester rifles stowed on the barges were broken out and distributed to the Pinkerton employees, and a great fusillade followed. The crowd of strikers, dragging their dead and wounded with them, retreated only so far as a series of makeshift barricades on higher ground; the Pinkertons hastily sawed loopholes into the wooden flanks of the barges, through which to level the muzzles of their rifles.

For two days the Homestead workers laid siege to the floating redoubts. Dynamite charges were thrown, exploding on the roof of the barges and causing consternation within; a flaming rail hopper was rolled down the incline towards the river, but stuck in the muddy strand before it could reach its target. All the while, telegrams arrived from around the country pledging support for the workers; their Texas colleagues even promised the loan of cannons. Yet when the Pinkertons finally surrendered and were forced to run the gauntlet of beatings, the strikers' leaders intervened in the name of justice to prevent summary executions. Eager to dissociate themselves from violence, they laid the blame for the uglier behaviour at the door of the plant's Hungarian workers but, above all, on anarchist outsiders who had come to advance their own ideological struggle against capital. Three anarchists were even attacked by the strikers, who recognised that association with the sect that was blamed for the Haymarket Affair would lose them much of the goodwill they had accrued. They were right, but powerless to protect themselves from the inevitable propangandist attacks.

Hardly had the smoke cleared on the Battle of Homestead than the anarchist Alexander Berkman set off from New York for Pittsburgh, armed for action. A Russian Jew from Odessa, Berkman had arrived in America in 1888. Aged eighteen, he

neighbour in Fitzroy Square assigned the role of 'Degnai', had arrived in Walsall to collect the 'infernal machine' earlier in December, the Special Branch surveillance team had to watch him return empty-handed. Their frustration must have been compounded by the announcement at the end of the month of a reduction in the unit's budget that would entail the loss of four constables' jobs. Assistant Commissioner Anderson expressed the view that further cuts would be rash, but he needed evidence. Then on 6 January, Deakin caught the train to London to probe whether the conspirators were being observed. Melville's men pounced as he left the station for the Autonomie Club, a brown paper parcel containing chloroform that he was carrying sufficient to warrant his arrest under the Explosives Act of 1882. His Walsall associates were promptly apprehended too, along with the foundry worker charged with fabricating the device, while Battola was taken into custody a week later. Coulon was left untouched.

A week earlier, on the last day of 1891, a young anarchist poet and friend of Oscar Wilde called John Bartlas had fired a pistol at the Houses of Parliament. It was a futile gesture of the kind that seemed set to characterise anarchism in Britain: a movement full of men who had often been known to take off their jackets but never to fight, as David Nicoll would later remark of one of his colleagues at *Commonweal*. That perception was changed at a stroke by the Walsall bomb plot. Anarchist terror had come to Britain, and if anyone was in any doubt about the scale and reach of its ambitions, they need only have listened to the reading material that came to light at the trial as having been in the possession of the accused.

The Feast of the Opera offered a description of how to plant a bomb that would bring down the house, and then there were the blood-drenched ravings of Parmeggiani's short-lived *L'International*, or the rough imperatives of *Fight or Starve*. There was even the document entitled *The Means of Emancipation* that Cailes himself had written, or at least transcribed:

attempts to disperse a demonstration drove the mob into the town's bars where the seditious toasts raised to the spirit of revolution provoked the police to initiate a shoot-out; the three ringleaders arrested were promptly sentenced to a total of eight years in prison. Meanwhile at Fourmies, a mining town close to the Belgian border, twitchy troops opened fire during a stand-off with marching strikers, killing at least nine, four of whom were women – including the first to die, while pleading with the troops – and only three aged more than twenty-four. Finding himself a wanted man after delivering an incendiary speech in Nantes on the same day, Cailes, a stoker by trade, fled to London.

Ascertaining his new friend's vengeful state of mind, and perhaps supplying Cailes with the copy of the bomb-making manual *L'Indicateur Anarchiste* that was later produced as evidence against him, a solicitous Coulon promptly arranged work for him as a brush-maker at Westley's Factory in Walsall. A foreigner a long way from home, Cailes could not have been more grateful, all the more so for the introduction to Charles and Deakin, and over the summer the three new anarchist friends went about their usual business until, in October, the time came for them to repay Coulon's kindnesses.

The letter came from a mysterious source calling himself 'Degnai' and was addressed to Cailes, but the enclosed design for an egg-shaped bomb was to be realised at the foundry where Charles worked. Deakin was clearly concerned about the new turn of events, and somewhat suspicious, but a letter from Coulon in London soothed and reassured him. The bomb, as Coulon appeared already to have made clear to Charles and Cailes, was for use in Russia, against whose despotic rulers such methods were surely warranted.

None of the three Walsall anarchists, it must be presumed, had heard of Landesen's epic provocation of 1890, although as the time approached for the bomb's completion they did show some wariness. When Jean Battola, Coulon's and Michel's

was part of the great wave of refugees from the tsar's anti-Semitic policies, fleeing the fear of pogroms to pour through the port of Hamburg and across the Atlantic. Like many of his more radical compatriots, he had quickly gravitated towards the anarchist politics of Johann Most, who subsequently hired him to work as a compositor on the newspaper *Freiheit*, in its grime-encrusted offices down by the Brooklyn Bridge. The relationship between the two men was complicated, however, by their shared passion for a young Russian divorcee, Emma Goldman; she, for her part, was happy to reciprocate the affection of both men. 'Something gripped my heart,' Goldman later wrote of her first meeting with Most, 'I wanted to take his hand, to tell him that I would be his friend. But I dared not speak out. What could I give this man – I, a factory girl, uneducated; and he, the famous Johann Most, the leader of the masses, the man of magic tongue and powerful pen.'

Goldman provided Most with a rare exception to his gruff rule that, other than Louise Michel and Vera Zasulich, all women were 'stupids', and he encouraged her to study and develop her natural talent as a political speaker. Meanwhile, Berkman suffered agonies of jealousy in silence, laboriously setting type, while the woman he loved mounted the stairs to Most's office, not to descend again until dawn. The young compositor's commitment to the doctrine of free love that Goldman advocated was sorely tested, and when Most gave his beloved protégée a bouquet of violets in the middle of winter, Berkman could not help but protest at the indulgent expense, when so many around them were short of food. Most, for his part, simply dismissed his rival as a figure of no consequence. But it was with Berkman that Goldman chose to make a home, and after Most was dragged off to the penitentiary on Blackwell's Island in the spring of 1891, for the second time in three years, the pair set up an ice-cream parlour together in Worcester, Massachusetts, to support their continued work in the anarchist cause.

When Berkman checked into the Merchants Hotel near the train depot in Pittsburgh on 13 July, in the guise of Mr Rakhmetov, an employment agent, it is not known whether he was motivated by pure idealism, or the desire to prove to Goldman that unlike the loquacious Most he was a man of action. The stated purpose of the attack on Frick that Berkman had in mind was propaganda: to demonstrate where the true guilt for the Homestead debacle lay, and to show that, however forcefully the strikers might reject the anarchists' involvement in their affairs, 'the proletariat had its avengers'. Berkman had come armed with a bomb, constructed according to the instructions in Most's booklet *The Science of Revolutionary Warfare*, but Vera Zasulich's famed shooting of General Trepov in St Petersburg seventeen years earlier would ultimately prove the closer model. Having twice been turned away by Frick's receptionist at the Carnegie Steel Company when he requested a meeting, eventually Berkman marched straight past her and into the chairman's office. Dazzled for a moment by sunlight falling through the window, Frick turned from his desk to squint at Berkman who, levelling his pistol, fired three times. Frick hauled himself to his feet, blood pouring from two wounds to his neck, in an attempt to grapple with his assailant, only to be stabbed twice in the side with a stiletto before the belated appearance of his security staff.

Berkman was sentenced to twenty-two years; his accomplices, Bauer and Nold, received five, on evidence that included the distribution of anarchist literature at Homestead. A soldier by the name of Iams, serving with the federal troops deployed to keep the peace around the steelworks, spontaneously shouted 'Three cheers for the man who shot Frick!' His reward was to be hung by his thumbs until unconscious, and drummed out of camp. A legal case brought by Iams' barrister cousin against the army officers responsible caused a minor stir. This time, though, no one dared delineate anarchism's long heritage, right back to Jesus, the great 'Redeemer of

where Coulon, no less, had helped find him work as a clerk and translator at Gameson's iron foundry. He was back visiting Sheffield in May and was perhaps still there a few weeks later when Creaghe and his acolytes tricked their way into a public meeting addressed by the African explorer and colonialist Henry Morton Stanley, heckling him and selling satirical pamphlets to the jingoistic crowd. But it was the darkening tone of Creaghe's pronouncements, and of those who visited him in Sheffield, rather than brief moments of frivolity, that characterised the following months.

'If you can find 15 or 20 to join me,' Creaghe wrote in an article for *Commonweal*, 'I promise you we will make an impression on the enemy and do more to make recruits to our cause than all the rest who only preach and write verses'; in the same edition, Charles Mowbray referred to the 'determined men' needed, and clarified that they must be 'acquainted with the power which nineteenth-century civilisation has placed within their reach'. It was a clear call for dynamite, which made nonsense of Creaghe's pretence of taking offence at William Morris' belief that anarchists were all advocates of conspiracy. The only questions were when exactly the conspiracy would come to a head, and who would direct it.

During the latter months of 1891, Mowbray, the equally incendiary Henry Samuels and Coulon himself were all frequent visitors to Sheffield; in all likelihood, only Carpenter's return prevented the city turning into a centre of violent action. Coulon, though, had been quietly building his influence in Walsall too, with Deakin and Charles already in place. Soon after Melville had made his clandestine offer to collaborate with Rachkovsky, Coulon would find the final piece to complete the puzzle and his provocation would be ready to be set in motion.

It was events in France on May Day 1891 that delivered Victor Cailes into his hands. At Clichy, a western suburb of Paris,

had heard when serving as a special constable policing the crowd in his home town, he had begun his transformation by joining the local branch of the Socialist League. The political education it offered broadened his horizons and the trip to Paris opened his eyes to a wider world of international brotherhood and possibility. The next step on his journey of self-discovery was to Sheffield, under the saintly tutelage of Edward Carpenter, whom he had met at the congress. Whilst there, though, most notably during Carpenter's lengthy absences on winter vacation to warmer climes, his ideological drift towards 'individualist' extremism had accelerated, thanks in part to the paternal influence of Malatesta's friend from Buenos Aires, Dr John Creaghe.

Having seen too many Europeans arrive in Argentina full of hope, only to be ruthlessly exploited, Creaghe arrived back in England declaring that 'at last the emigration fad is thoroughly played out', and promptly established the *Sheffield Anarchist* newspaper. Its first edition called for a general strike the following January. The policy was consistent with his past work in South America, but the rhetoric soon began to shade into something rather different. 'They'll all be making final arrangements for the revolution! Which Brown [another of the group] says is to come off some time in January next,' wrote Carpenter's lover, George Hukin. There was little Carpenter could do, however, as he cruised through the Suez Canal, admiring the local talent: 'These darkies are very taking – some of them, very good-looking and lively – though you have to be careful as some are regular devils.' And his visit to India and Ceylon was essential, he had written, 'to renovate my faith, and unfold the frozen buds which civilisation & fog have nipped!'

Whilst Carpenter's weekly visits to the guru Gnani Ramaswamy were doubtless enlightening, the susceptible Fred Charles was left to the tender mercies of the hardliners. Sacked from his job for unpunctuality, the spring saw Charles move on to Walsall, in the industrial heart of the West Midlands,

Mankind', as Bauer's defence lawyer had done, to the horror of the presiding judge.

The greatest impact of Berkman's attack, though, was on the status and credibility of the leading voices of European anarchism. Only a few weeks earlier, Johann Most had been released from his most recent spell of incarceration on Blackwell's Island. It had been a traumatic experience. On his arrival at the penitentiary, his hair had been cropped close to the skull and beard shaved off, revealing the hideous scar that disfigured his cheek to the mockery of the wardens. The twelve months he had then spent subject to 'the Spanish Inquisition to the United States' had further broken him: endless hours in a cell so small that he had to stoop, under strict orders to do nothing and make no sound, even when members of the public visited to peer in at the inmates. Now at liberty, Most promptly seized the opportunity to demonstrate to the authorities that he was a reformed man by openly criticising Berkman to a reporter from the *New York World*; envy of his romantic rival may have also played a part in the decision to break ranks.

It was a betrayal too far by Most. In Goldman's eyes, nothing could excuse his cowardice and hypocrisy, and the blustering German was finally exposed as the empty vessel that many had long suspected him to be. Goldman, by contast, emerged as a model of candid loyalty and would be named 'Queen of the Anarchists' by the press: a sudden elevation that was nevertheless borne out by popular support within the movement, which only increased when she publicly took a horsewhip to Most. It had been Italian anarchists from the 'Carlo Cafiero Group' who had first inspired the Russian radicals in New York, and Most to whom they had rallied as the 'Pioneers of Liberty', but in Emma Goldman they now found a brave and vocal figurehead of their own race, who would soon attract the attention of Peter Kropotkin and Louise Michel, and international recognition.

Any hope that the Haymarket martyr August Spies had taken with him to the gallows – that the anarchist creed

would fire the imagination of the American worker at large – was dead and buried, however. Not even the posthumous pardoning of three of the Haymarket martyrs by Governor Altgeld of Illinois, in 1893, could reverse the surging victory of capitalism, industry and commerce. For even as he took the brave step, the city of Chicago, where radicalism had been rampant only seven years earlier, was busy welcoming up to 700,000 rapt visitors, including many Europeans, to the Columbia World's Fair, and its celebration of the dawning age of 'conspicuous consumption'.

At the time, the novelist Vladimir Korolenko was visiting America in Kravchinsky's footsteps under cover of a journalistic commission, in order to discuss with Yegor Lazarev and other leading figures of the Friends how best to import *Free Russia* into Russia itself. Whilst there, Pinkerton agents in the pay of the Okhrana were constantly on his tail, but their presence was not what most dispirited him about New York and Chicago. His horrified impressions were expressed through the narrator of his novel *Sofron Ivanovich*, who felt himself 'besieged by simple, repetitive advertising which wears its way hypnotically into the brain: Stephens Inks, Stephens Inks, Stephens Inks … Pears Soap, Pears Soap, Pears Soap'. During the Fair, not even the heavens above the city were spared, with advertisements projected on to clouds in grim realisation of Alfred Robida's fanciful predictions. Off site, the Marshall Field's department store offered a cornucopia of goods, while on display at the Fair itself were prototypes of products to tempt even the wariest shopper of the future: the high-frequency phosphorescent lighting with which the visionary Nichola Tesla was experimenting, the electrotachyscope and even the first electrical kitchen, complete with washing machine. The latter would actually attract Kropotkin's approval, as an example of technology that would create leisure for the working man and woman.

'Business fever here throbs at will,' wrote a French visitor to Chicago, 'it rushes along these streets, as though before the

years would have made him amply aware of the machinations of Rachkovsky and others.

Calculating, perhaps, that his actions if successful, would receive the tacit approval of his superiors, in April 1891 Melville took matters into his own hands. Eschewing the usual diplomatic channels, and apparently keeping both Chief Inspector Littlechild and Assistant Commissioner Anderson in the dark, he wrote to warn the Italian police that Malatesta had left with a companion for Rome, to involve himself in the disturbances planned there for May Day. Then, only a few weeks later, he went much further in conniving with a foreign force. 'I have made the acquaintance of Inspector Melville of the political police,' wrote the Okhrana go-between, an expatriate French journalist named Jolivard to his contact 'Richter'. 'He has offered me his services complaining that his superiors at Scotland Yard act too feebly with regard to the nihilists. *Do not pass up on this chance*, my friend, it will not come your way again.' It was, indeed, a proposition that 'Richter', in reality none other than Rachkovsky himself, could not afford to decline.

In Auguste Coulon, Special Branch had an informant whose activities over the previous few years might have been conceived with the very purpose of effective provocation. His involvement with the Socialist League had begun with the Dublin Branch in the mid-1880s, and he had cemented his position among the hard-line 'individualist' members during the Paris Congress of 1889, when anarchism's moment of glory had seemed near at hand. It was then, presumably, that he had met Louise Michel, but it was the impressionable young anarchists from provincial England that were most beguiled by his outspoken beliefs: men such as Joseph Deakin of Walsall, and Frederick Charles Slaughter, a native of Norwich.

The latter, known by 1891 simply as Fred Charles, having dropped his surname as too sanguinary, offered an object lesson in the career of a new breed of British anarchist. Won over to anarchism by one of Mowbray's speeches, which Charles

The Continent provided clear examples of how the need for their involvement might be made apparent. In 1887, just as a series of general strikes in Belgium was about to force concessions from a strongly Catholic and deeply corrupt government, the high moral ground occupied by the socialist leader Alfred Defuisseaux crumbled beneath him when an associate called Léonard Pourbaix persuaded him to write an ultimatum to the government. The document was manipulated for publication so as to appear to threaten civil war and, following a series of bomb attacks, the socialist party was utterly discredited. Pourbaix himself, it would transpire, had supplied the dynamite, after a secret midnight consultation with the chief of the cabinet. Similarly in France, an escalation of violence around strikes and demonstrations on May Day 1891, provoked by police heavy-handedness, helped create a general sense of emergency, while Landesen's contrivance of the bomb plot in 1890 had stiffened the case for French police action against foreign émigrés.

That the British government should be inhibited about such an approach was unsurprising, in light of its past experience with Jenkinson and the Fenians, but concern for public opinion and its patriotic belief in the virtues of liberalism in matters of policing was a more decisive factor. Lord Salisbury's administration felt obliged to proceed cautiously, while the prime minister himself appeared sceptical about the true extent of the danger laid out in the Russian Memorandum and the reliability of information of conspiracies forwarded from the Okhrana. There were those in Special Branch, however, who felt a visceral antipathy towards anyone or anything that challenged the status quo in Britain, or even the authority of despotic foreign states, and found their own government's timidity deeply frustrating. The most capable and determined among them was William Melville, the rising star of the Branch, whose knowledge of the French language and postings to Paris and the Channel ports over the previous few

devouring flame of a fire.' The pursuit of money seemed unstoppable, immune even to economic crisis: the collapse of the New York stock market, the unprecedented bankruptcy of the United States treasury, and the run on banks that would see 500 of them go to the wall before the end of the year, with even greater hardship in store for the country's poor.

Korolenko was not a man who lacked perspective, or one given to easy hyperbole. An ex-internal exile to Siberia in 1879, he had been the only one of his party of convicts to survive the first winter in the freezing wasteland, thanks to the kindness of the women of the local tribe who had taken pity on him. Hardship and suffering were second nature to him, and his writer's eye was drawn to scenes of humanity at its rawest, as in his account of a night-time visit to the slaughterhouses and meatpacking factories of Chicago. But it was the injustices of American society more than any nightmarish scenes of cattle being sledgehammered that horrified him during his month-long stay. By the time he sailed out of New York, the torch borne by the new Statue of Liberty that had shone with such hope on his arrival, seemed to 'illuminate the entrance to an enormous grave'. He said he would rather be back in the Yakutsk penal colony than stay a day longer in the benighted Land of the Free.

The recent arrests of Johann Most and Emma Goldman, in separate instances but both on trumped-up charges, may have influenced his distaste for America, along with the signs of spiritual corruption that he saw in its economic life, but there were more immediate and personal reasons for his stance. Support for the Society of Friends of Russian Freedom had begun to haemorrhage as popular sentiment turned further against politically troublesome immigrants of all hues. And in February 1893, after two previous 'no' votes in recent years, the Senate had finally acquiesced to the tsar's demands that the United States strip his opponents of their privileged 'political' status,

ratifying the treaty that would allow them to be extradited as common criminals.

Aghast at the result, Mark Twain challenged the very 'Americanism of the Senate' with its 'bootlicking adulation' of 'tsarist tyranny', while in London Spence Watson thought it 'the saddest news which any lover of liberty can receive'. There too, though, concern was mounting over how long Britain's resilience could last in the face of similar pressures.

Europe had not experienced anything quite like the armed confrontation seen at Homestead, but earlier bloodshed during strikes and May Day demonstrations in France and Spain, in 1891, had helped prompt anarchist revenge attacks that generated far more general alarm than Berkman's attempt to assassinate Frick. Britain itself had not been immune from terrorist scares, with anarchists rather than Fenians now bearing the responsibility, and when troops opened fire on rioting strikers at the Featherstone colliery in September 1893, acts of vengeance seemed possible. Furthermore, as in America, immigrants rather than indigenous socialists were seen as the likely source of any trouble; those in the French and Italian colonies primarily, but the Russians too, supposedly by association.

'Known to the outside world as the Terror … [the Brotherhood of Freedom] is an international secret society underlying and directing the operations of various bodies known as nihilists, anarchists, socialists – in fact, all those organisations which have for their object the reform or destruction, by peaceful or violent means, of society as it is presently constituted.' The words come not from an Okhrana report, nor the imagination of a Sûreté informant, but from *The Angel of the Revolution*, published in 1893 by the first-time novelist George Griffith, one of an emerging generation of sensationalist writers who would fuse the genres of Vernian science fiction with future war prophecy to create something thrilling but fundamentally reactionary. Verne's *Robur the Conqueror* had become, in

She should perhaps have taken the ship's fate as an omen, and looked for the unseen hazards in her own project, for Coulon had been on the British Special Branch payroll for three months under the code name 'Pyatt', a curious approximation of the name of Rochefort's great journalistic rival of twenty years earlier, Félix Pyat, who had died in 1889. As to his possible relationship with foreign forces, there would later be much speculation. One thing is certain: during Coulon's breaks from teaching, when he stepped out into Fitzroy Square to chat with the neighbours such as the Battolas or perhaps greet Constance Garnett, his actions were rarely disinterested.

The Special Branch of the Metropolitan Police had been founded specifically as a corrective to the kind of provocative intrigues and manipulation in which Edward Jenkinson had engaged as head of Section D during the mid-1880s, with near-catastrophic consequences. Since then it had become a victim of its own success, the threat from Fenianism greatly diminished by its efforts in that area, with home-grown socialism hardly a compelling enough replacement to justify the cost of the Branch's work to protect against subversion.

Already, in the previous four years, Special Branch had lost a fifth of its staff, its numbers falling from thirty-one to twenty-five at a time when Britain's foreign spy networks were also being scaled back. Investment in the apparatus of state security was falling across Europe, with the 'secret funds' assigned by the French police cut by half in 1890, and only a belated sleight of hand by the Belgian interior minister preventing a three-quarters reduction in the budget of its Sûreté. Further cuts in Special Branch funding were imminent, unless a pressing danger could be identified. In the Britain of the early 1890s, the greatest risk of sedition appeared to lie in the gathering tide of strikes, but unless labour activism could be shown to entail some element of violent conspiracy, a force such as Special Branch had little legitimate role in its supervision.

botsholme, the moment seemed propitious for the creation of a truly libertarian institution. It would serve those who wanted 'to keep their children out of the hands of those professors of the modern school divinely inspired and licensed by the state, who teach, consciously or unconsciously, the doctrine of popular sacrifice to the power of the state and to the profit of the privileged class'. And who better to partner her than Coulon himself, who boasted scholarly credentials as the co-author of *Hossfeld's New and Successful Method for Learning the German Language*?

A prospectus was printed, and premises were taken at the heart of the French enclave, in Fitzroy Square, whose grand houses, which had been prime addresses for the aristocracy a century earlier, were now subdivided into a maze of cramped rental rooms and workshops or else occupied by affluent British bohemians. Walter Crane provided the woodcut for the school's letterhead, and a quotation from Bakunin was prominently displayed: 'The whole education of children and their instruction must be founded on the scientific development of reason, not on that of faith; on the development of personal dignity and independence … and above all on respect for humanity.' Morris served on the five-man steering committee along with Malatesta, Kropotkin's involvement assuaging any unease Morris felt at the involvement of Coulon, who was becoming known as one of the more inflammatory contributors to the *Commonweal* for his 'International Notes'.

Michel would teach the piano, Coulon classes in French and German, while among other members of staff was listed a young Margaret McMillan, who in years to come would become the great pioneer of progressive schooling in England. There appeared to be good cause for optimism. Yet on the very day that Michel wrote out the order for the new school's stationery – '6 boxes of pens; 4 bottles of ordinary ink; 6 dozen pen cases' – the British steamer SS *Utopia* sank off Gibraltar with catastrophic loss of life, after hitting submerged rocks.

Griffith's hands, 'Natas the Jew', his airship no longer a lone sentinel of liberty, but the flagship of a fleet being readied over the horizon to seize the revolutionary moment when the opposing sides in a continent-wide war had fought themselves to exhaustion.

For Kravchinsky and his colleagues, struggling to maintain support for the Society of Friends of Russian Freedom in England and to unify opposition to the tsar's rule among the disparate émigré groups across Europe, the conflation of their endeavours with the apparent anarchist threat to democratic society, as it filtered through into fiction, posed a severe challenge. Their friends remained supportive, expressing intense frustration towards the troublemakers. 'As for anarchism we utterly and entirely condemn it, all of us, Stepniak as much as anyone,' Olive Garnett confided to her diary. 'The blind folly of it makes one lose patience with & account blameable even such a man as Krapotkine.' There were further violent shocks in store, however, in the midst of which, just days short of the end of 1893, a pair of articles by 'Z' and 'Ivanov' would appear in the *New Review* entitled 'Anarchists: Their Methods and Organisation', which drew heavily on the content of the Russian Memorandum, mixing in with their many and varied calumnies the unambiguous assertion that 'Stepniak' and Kravchinsky, the assassin of General Mezentsev, were one and the same.

The allegations that Mezentsev's killer had hesitated several times, for 'psychological reasons', and then 'plunged the knife into the wound again and again' were inaccurate yet graphic and unpleasant. Almost as distressing to Constance Garnett, though, may have been the pointed reference to Kravchinsky's 'shallow theories of free love' and the imputation that his friends in literary circles were being duped. 'Selfishly I feared that I might lose my Stepniak – the artist – in the Stepniak I do not know, the nihilist, the terrorist and —' she would remember, unable to write the word 'assassin'. It was doubtless one effect which the true authors of the 'Ivanov' article,

Rachkovsky and Madame Novikoff, had hoped to achieve, though their aim in associating past and present acts of terror, in Russia and France, and potentially in Britain too, was far wider.

When the Russian Memorandum had first been presented to the British government nearly two years earlier, it had emphasised the danger posed by the anti-tsarist émigrés in relation to 'military conspiracies … bombs and dynamite'. It was certainly convenient for Rachkovsky that events since had brought home to the western democracies the nature of the threat, on their own territory, reinforcing the message sent out by the 1890 bomb plot that he had contrived with his agent Landesen. But his growing skill in 'perception management' saw to it that appearances were accepted and inconvenient questions suppressed. During the trial of those entrapped in that sting operation, the defence lawyer had tried to expose the Okhrana's role but with scant success, and the possible involvement of the organisation in subsequent acts of 'anarchist' terrorism was scarcely hinted at in print.

Yet while Rachkovsky was forthright in denouncing the conspiracies of his enemies, the scope of his own conspiratorial skulduggery during those years had been far more ambitious. How he had succeeded in keeping his activities concealed for so long is a story in itself.

tentious release from prison on the same date in 1886 forming a further bond. It was to him that she now turned, requesting an introduction to the agency that arranged his lectures, under the impression that Kropotkin was considered almost a god by those around him, and his influence irresistible.

In reality, Kropotkin's affiliation with his old Russian comrades was already becoming attenuated. 'Is it even possible to write the history of our objectives, convulsions and errors, of the egotism of our comrades and their shortcomings?' would be his acerbic reply when asked to contribute to a series of memoirs of leading figures in the nihilist movement. He despaired of Russia being ready for the onerous honour of leading the revolution, as Marx had predicted it would, in his dying years. And when the editors of the newly revived journal of the People's Will approached him to participate in 1891, he would excuse himself on the grounds that he was committing all his strength and attention to the international anarchist cause, in the firm belief that 'every step forward towards the coming revolution in western Europe also hastens the revolution in Russia'. Before long, though, in private he would be laying the same charge of egotism against the anarchists of the West.

Eventually, Kropotkin would secure Michel representation for her lectures, but only by undertaking to be present as her translator; for the moment her English was too accented to be readily intelligible. In the next scheme for which Michel solicited his help, however, his prestige and that of the other prominent names in English socialism that he brought on board could provide an immediate benefit.

The suggestion that Michel found a school to be run on anarchist principles came initially from Auguste Coulon, a half-French, half-Irish member of the Socialist League. It appealed to her immediately as a project that would allow her to reconcile the political engagement and nurturing sentimentality that formed the two poles of her identity; a year after the first progressive private school in England had been founded at Ab-

mere figure of speech. Perhaps the bullet still rattling around her skull had triggered something; more likely, the failure of the demonstrations, in a Paris heavily garrisoned for the occasion, was too much for a woman perpetually tormented by the bitter memory of past defeats to bear.

Michel fitted in easily in London, bringing with her Charlotte Vauvelle, her long-time companion from New Caledonia. A living legend to many, Michel would gossip in the grocery shop of the old Communard Victor Richard, an unofficial clearing house for newly arrived *compagnons*, or drink and curse the republic in the notorious Autonomie Club, which had recently moved to Windmill Street from its previous location only a few doors down from Michel's own home. And when it came to the younger generation of immigrants – for whom the Commune was no longer a source of personal trauma but rather a mythic horror, known only from the sad eyes and gaunt features of those who refused to speak about the past – they adored her. Michel's threat of 'little engines' to be used against the police in the speeches that had prompted her most recent arrest would have been a passport into their hearts.

Commanding the respect and affection of her countrymen was one thing; earning enough to supply even her modest needs, and fund her generosity to the anarchist community, quite another. Michel could, if necessary, rely on the kindness of wealthy friends, with Duchess d'Uzès an obliging patroness, but it was not enough. In her search for financial independence she found herself coming into the orbit of a very different set of Russians from those with whom Rochefort socialised, and indirectly into contact with a Russian government agent of a very different kind to Madame Novikoff.

Michel had met Kravchinsky in Paris during the congress of 1889, and kept his calling card, in the corner of which she had made a tiny sketch in ink; whether of a fizzing bomb or a blossoming tree it is hard to tell. Kropotkin, though, she had known far longer, since the London Congress of 1881, their con-

18. *Dynamite in the City of Light*

London and Paris, 1890–1892

Almost two decades after their passage to New Caledonia aboard the *Virginie*, Henri Rochefort and Louise Michel again found themselves exiled together on an island, though on this occasion the journey had merely required them to buy a ticket for the boat train across the Channel. Rochefort had arrived first in Britain, in the summer of 1889, fleeing the sentence of transportation to a fortified enclosure that hung over him for his involvement in Boulanger's plot to seize power. Unlike Michel, whose circumstances would be very different when she arrived in July 1890, he lived in considerable comfort. Having sold his Paris home for a reported million francs, and dabbling in the antiquities trade to supplement an income from the newspaper *L'Intransigeant*, still run out of Paris but left in the safe editorial hands of his appointee Edward Vaughan, he soon established himself in a grand town house in Clarence Terrace, overlooking Regent's Park.

He had not, however, left behind in Paris his appetite for either politics or status, and was busily ingratiating himself with his British hosts. To oil his admission to the salons of London he donated a Landseer painting to the National Gallery, but was helped too by introductions from Madame Olga Novikoff, the 'MP' for Russia, as one English wag termed her. A propagandist and diplomatic coquette, Novikoff's relationship with both Rochefort and the English Establishment raised intriguing questions about Russian foreign policy.

Through her friendship with Gladstone and other leading figures in the Liberal Party, Novikoff had long teased Britain with the possibility of rapprochement with Russia and continued to do so; now Salisbury's Conservative Party was showing interest. Yet Britain was increasingly fretful over maintaining its naval pre-eminence and the possibly re-entry of the Russian fleet into the Mediterranean. One naval reform followed another in quick succession; fiction such as *The Taking of Dover* predicted an inevitable war with a Franco-Russian alliance as soon as 1894. As Elisée Reclus had astutely remarked in his *Universal Geography*, whilst seemingly at the height of its power, a lack of geographical cohesion left the British Empire vulnerable to attack. As to Russia and her relationship with France's Boulangists, the press had caught Ambassador de Mohrenheim out paying a visit to the general during Boulanger's spell in the wilderness in Clermont-Ferrand, three years earlier, but since then discretion had ruled. The Third Republic and Alexander III's Russia were, after all, prospective allies, and Boulanger now an enemy of the state.

And yet whilst Boulanger himself was a liability, bellicose and unpredictable, what he represented continued to appeal to Russia as much as it did to Rochefort: a strong nationalism and latent anti-Semitism. Boulanger was no longer a useful cipher, distracted by his love for his mistress, who was now dying: Rochefort had remarked the change, observing that the general's 'thoughts, ears and eyes were elsewhere' when he visited London and the Covent Garden Opera in 1890. Even before Boulanger shot himself dead on his lover's grave the following September, Russia may have been looking for an alternative instrument through whom to shape and shake up republican France.

Were Rochefort a candidate for the role, his supporters could comfort themselves that he had put his radical past behind him: an old Communard had recently leaned into Rochefort's carriage on Regent Street and slapped him with a glove, challenging him to a duel for his betrayal of the cause. Anarchists and Boulangists, though, had joined together against the republic, and distasteful as it was, Novikoff may have hoped that the two extremes of French politics might once again be harnessed in the future. If Rochefort found himself in need of help to build bridges with his old friends on the left, the presence of Louise Michel in London would have been useful. She lived scarcely ten minutes' walk away from his grand house in Clarence Terrace. But that short distance spanned the extremes of London society.

A stone's throw further on from Charlotte Street, where Michel was staying, lay the sheer destitution of the slums of Seven Dials and the St Giles rookery, home to the 'stink industries' whose squalid labour underpinned the glamour of the nearby West End; in these slums 'you burned the stair rails and banisters, the door jambs, the window frames for fuel', and bobbies on the beat were few, being loath to venture in. The enclave north of Soho was one notch better, 400 French households crowding the terraced houses, the pavements walked by what the Baedeker guide charmingly described as 'a motley crowd of labourers, to which dusky visages and foreign costumes impart a curious and picturesque air'.

It had been the May Day demonstrations of 1890, designated at the Paris Congress of 1889 as a date for mass protests demanding an eight-hour day, that had condemned Michel to a spell living in the streets where so many Communards had settled long before. While she was campaigning in the provinces, predicting her own martyrdom in incendiary speeches, the police had swooped to take her out of circulation for the day itself. When told she would be freed, the shameful anticlimax drove her to smash anything to hand in her cell. The doctor who ordered 'her immediate removal to a special asylum for treatment', recorded a diagnosis of 'auditory hallucinations that provoke her to violence'. Michel had long claimed to hear the 'voices from below', but that had been a

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evolution a century later. Nor were the political implications of his research lost on him.

Despite taking on a heavy workload of reviewing and lecturing to meet his family's bills, concurrent with his work on 'Mutual Aid', Kropotkin was developing a practical blueprint for the creation of a society similar to that which Morris had evoked in *News from Nowhere*. Except that whereas Morris the craftsman had shown aesthetic discretion by keeping the electrical cables out of sight, Kropotkin's *Fields, Factories and Workshops* explained how technology could provide for the basic needs of human existence, freeing men and women to lead a just and fulfilled life.

Any such anarchistic paradise was premised on an optimistic view of human nature that appeared increasingly fanciful in the face of the brute, competitive realities of a capitalistic, industrialised world. And yet Kropotkin could now adduce scientific support for a notion that the political realities of the world appeared to belie. For according to the theory of 'Mutual Aid', evolution offered clear, natural validation for the principle of social solidarity both as the means to achieve the ideal communistic future, and as the proof of mankind's inherent perfectibility.

The cause of the East End immigrants was unsurprisingly, then, close to his heart. Whilst on holiday on the Isle of Wight in the summer of 1891 he had written a long letter of reproach to the usually sympathetic French sociologist and author Auguste Hamon, for the indifference Hamon and others on the political left showed to the growing anti-Semitism around them. Putting himself in the position of the hundreds of Jews who supported the Berners Street anarchist club with their subscriptions, he imagined how they must hate those who 'cannot admit that the exploited Jew is a revolutionary just as often (more often, I'd say) than the Russian, the Frenchman, etc., and that the Jewish exploiter is no more nor less than the German exploiter'.

Kropotkin himself, however, would suffer from more than his fair share of prejudice as anarchism became ever more demonised in the popular imagination, the subtleties of his thinking lost on the mass of his contemporaries who failed to differentiate between the political ideals he espoused and the simpler impulse to destruction which so many younger colleagues in the movement were eager to indulge. 'There must be no destruction,' he confided to Ford Madox Ford, in the softest of voices, as they sat in an alcove off the grand Grill Room of the Holborn Restaurant, the dishes clattering around them. 'We must build, we must build in the hearts of men. We must establish a kingdom of God.'

This was the Kropotkin whose soul Oscar Wilde described as being that of a 'beautiful white Christ'. Even the budget fifteen-shilling dinners that the Holborn Restaurant offered to feed a father, mother, governess and four children were so far beyond the vast majority of anarchism's adherents, though, as to evince prejudices of another kind against him too. Seen from outside the movement as being tarred with the brush of violent anarchism, from within it Kropotkin's voice increasingly appeared anachronistic in its moderation. His attitude towards Britain might be premised on a clear understanding that it shared the fundamental authoritarian shortcomings of all nation states, but he could enthuse to Jean Grave that 'Parliament has voted (on the 2nd reading) the 8 hour law for the miners. The Old Gladstone was superb … the young want it: I am with them!' It is unlikely that Parmeggiani, for example, would have felt the same.

That Kropotkin's anarchism was sincere and resolute was never in doubt, but increasingly the radical left was tempted into a closer relationship with the political mainstream. In 1893, the tide of strikes that had been building for several years across Europe would reach its high-water mark, and the general election in France saw a huge swing in favour of the socialists with their vote rising to 600,000, twelve times its

level a decade earlier. At the same time, a socialist congress in Brussels voted to work within a constitutional framework to achieve representation for labour. With socialism's leaders once again acquiescing to the status quo, just when the prospect of worker-led revolution seemed in sight, anarchism, as embodied by a new generation – many of whom were little more than adolescents – reacted by becoming increasingly egotistical and shrill. The People's Will of the 1870s had been similarly preoccupied by violence, but at least it had possessed a genuine, practical sense of its political goals.

Emile Henry had first visited the Autonomie Club soon after his arrival in London in late 1892, high on his recent murderous exploits. No one outside his immediate circle took seriously his boasts of responsibility for the rue des Bons-Enfants bomb. Nevertheless, the devil-may-care attitude that Henry cultivated led one French informant to speculate that he was destined for the guillotine, and appears to have made him a focal point around which the most restive and impetuous of the international émigrés now coalesced, in their unscrupulous quest for profit and excitement. There was talk that he might set sail for a new life in North America, as Meunier had now done, but after tasting the fruits of straightforward criminality with an ambitious extortion scam in January 1893, Henry set aside such plans. From idealist to extortionist was a giant step for Henry to take, but the five lives he had claimed, albeit inadvertently, had hardened his attitude, and London provided a convenient base from which to launch lucrative forays across the Channel.

Among the most seasoned expropriators in the émigré underworld from whom Henry could learn the trade were many anarchists he would have known from Paris: the old Communard Constant Martin, Henry's original mentor in the ways of anarchism; Louis Matha, a hairdresser and vehement militant, who first helped Henry find his bearings in London;

Placide and Rémi Schouppe, who had been on the longlist of suspects for the Bons-Enfants attack; the Mexican burglar and propagandist Philippe Leon Ortiz, known to his colleagues as 'Trognon' (his wife was 'Trognette'); and Alexandre Marocco, a thick-set fifty-one-year-old Egyptian and veteran of Pini's and Parmeggiani's gang, who as 'Mademoiselle Olga' acted as a fence for stolen goods, while running an umbrella shop in an unlikely gesture to British respectability. Henry, with his baby-faced charm, new-found confidence, and a knack for disguise, soon defined a role for himself within the gang, acting as a trustworthy lure for its bourgeois French marks, or distracting them while their goods were liberated. For the best part of a year, the gang plundered the Continent from the Channel coast to Montpellier in the south, from Paris to Brussels and over the border into Germany. Or so, at least, seems likely. For such was the skill of the robbers that even the weight of police resources committed to placing the anarchist demi-monde under surveillance could not confidently keep track of them or their crimes, as they crossed and recrossed the Channel, and followed smugglers' rat runs across borders.

The job of gathering evidence against them was far from easy. Whether experience had taught them discipline and patience, or their claims to be motivated by ideology rather than greed were genuine, few of the stolen goods came on to the open market to be traced. Whilst the occasional bag of gemstones might be offered quietly to the jewellers of Hatton Garden, or an *objet d'art* discreetly sold, perhaps to Rochefort or through the antiquities shop opposite the British Museum in which Parmeggiani had invested his own ill-gotten gains after returning from his prison term in France, not enough of the loot turned up to give the police the clues they needed, allowing Henry and his companions to lead them a dance across France.

In England, though, the anarchists now faced a Special Branch under the direction of William Melville himself, with

only Anderson as his superior to keep him in check. There is pathos to the formality of his predecessor's last entry in the accounts ledger: 'Ch. Insp. Littlechild left office on 18 March 1893 on three weeks' leave, having his resignation in so as to expire with his leave viz 9 April.' In all his previous entries to the ledger, Littlechild had referred simply to 'self'. Poor health was the explanation given for the forty-five-year-old's departure, though he was well enough to establish himself promptly in a private detective practice. Perhaps he had simply seen which way the wind was blowing. Although debate continued to rumble on concerning the treatment of the Walsall men, with Irish Members of Parliament tabling further questions in the House of Commons, the choice of Melville as Littlechild's successor suggests that those appointing to the post approved of his methods, even if they could not openly condone them.

Seated at his new desk, his broad moustache bristling, Chief Inspector Melville must have felt himself master of his world. Like the telephone apparatus that the mysterious anti-Masonic campaigner Leo Taxil, actually the hoaxer Jogand-Pages, had described Satan using to communicate with his minions from beneath the Rock of Gibraltar, speaking tubes sprouted from the walls of Melville's office, connecting him to every point of the compass. The latest warning of threats could be received and orders issued, insights communicated and intrigues planned. Since 1891 a cable laid beneath the Channel had provided a direct line to Paris, and unlike awkward written records, telephone conversations left no incriminating paper trail. There were other conduits too that he could use to pass information to his foreign colleagues: among the most reliable and productive of the French police informers was 'Jarvis' and it is clear that he and Melville frequently met to exchange information; Lev Beitner, embedded in the Society of Friends of Russian Freedom, may have performed a similar role for Rachkovsky. And should the need arise, on Duck Island in the lake of St James's Park, only a stone's throw from the royal

palaces, stood the bombproof bunker of the Home Office's explosives expert, Colonel John Majendie, on whose services Melville might call.

With everything in a state of readiness, a week before he officially took up his new role Melville celebrated by donning a mask and outfit to attend a fund-raising programme of revels staged at Grafton Hall in Fitzroy Square by Emile Henry's dangerous friend, Louis Matha. After the mockery that had accompanied Inspector Houllier's visit to London, the event would have allowed Melville an inward chuckle in revenge. First the foreigners' unpunctuality delayed the curtain rising on 'Marriage by Dynamite', a crude vaudeville scripted by Malato. Then their demonstrations of the cancan left the native English shocked, their mood already soured perhaps by having to sit through Louise Michel's lecture on contemporary art, with its unfavourable comparisons of Hampstead to Montmartre. At the time, Degas' *The Absinthe Drinkers* was on show in the city, depicting a disreputable couple huddled over a cloudy glass of the intoxicating liquor: the press reaction, reviling it as 'a dirty French picture', articulated the growing unease felt in London towards such foreigners. Whether Melville was a follower of the fine arts is not known, but squeezed in among such characters in the fug of the Grafton revels he would undoubtedly have concurred with the critics.

The population of the anarchist enclaves had further swelled in the course of the year, to such an extent that the sudden and unexpected arrival of thirty Spaniards from Buenos Aires was reported to have merely 'caused a stir among anarchists here'. Having docked at Liverpool and then travelled by train to Euston station, they marched down the Tottenham Court Road to the Autonomie Club, where billets were arranged for them in hostels or on the floors of already overcrowded homes. A further half-dozen from Italy – whose anarchists comprised the most noxious 'pests to society' and scroungers, according

Russia was only foiled by the lack of transport, although the head of the police department in St Petersburg was tempted to dispatch a warship from the Black Sea fleet for the purpose.

The gifts and intimate notes exchanged between Bullier and Rachkovsky hint that he too was in thrall to her charms, perhaps exacerbating his antipathy to Burtsev. When in 1897 the revolutionary finally overstepped the line, publishing a newspaper called *Narodovolets* that advocated a resumption of the old terror tactics of the People's Will, Rachkovsky was certainly ready to pounce. The first signs were not encouraging. A demand from Russia's chargé d'affaires in London that Lord Salisbury's government take urgent action against Burtsev was diplomatically dismissed. 'I could not answer for it that upon that jury some person might not be found, whose prejudices might prevent him from recognising the heinousness of the offences with which the prisoner has been charged,' the prime minister explained. His authorisation of a secret payment for Hilda Czarina, a 'speciality dancer' from Brighton, to change her name, at the request of the Russian Embassy, scarcely made amends. Rachkovsky, though, knew someone who shared his disdain for the 'pedantic concern' that the English displayed towards ancient legal tradition, and could help him negotiate the obstacles.

For the benefit of his superiors, Chief Inspector Melville grumbled at having 'to play the part of host to the Russian secret service' during the tsar's visits to Queen Victoria at Balmoral, but the time he spent there with Harting and Rachkovsky appears to have been perfectly convivial, and in private correspondence with the latter he sang to a very different tune. Burtsev and his associates were 'common murderers', Melville informed Rachkovsky, whom he would like to 'chase from one end of London to the other' and whose prosecution, he thought, would help 'alert the public and the government to the menace posed by th

to Special Branch officer Sweeney – were lodged in the offices of the *Torch* newspaper, where the children of William Michael Rossetti, Her Majesty's secretary to the Inland Revenue, were thrilled to host them.

'Poor children,' Olive Garnett had remarked not long before, 'they want so much to know some desperate characters and no one will introduce them': tea with Kropotkin in the refreshment room of the British Museum had been as close as they got. Now she was appalled at the hypocritical blitheness with which the eldest sibling, Helen, was prepared to print articles calling on readers of the *Torch* to commit bombings of the kind that she would never contemplate undertaking herself. The unsurprising result of their folly, according to Madox Ford, another family friend, was that their home was subsequently 'so beset with English detectives, French police spies and Russian agents provocateurs that to go along the sidewalk of that respectable terrace was to feel that one ran the gauntlet of innumerable gimlets'.

After the fogs and harassment that ground the anarchist émigrés down in London, those who dared visit Paris in July 1893 must have relished the colourful uproar around the Bal des Quat'z Arts. Setting out from the Moulin Rouge, a fancy-dress cavalcade dreamed up by students from the Ecole des Beaux-Arts and featuring debauched emperors, Cleopatras and courtesans had brought the subculture of the avant-garde to the streets as it progressed towards the Latin Quarter, where it arrived at dawn. Concerns about dancers in 'immodest attire' and charges of licentiousness prompted a heavy-handed police response, however, leading the students to barricade themselves into the old streets of the Left Bank where they stayed for several days. With a vote of confidence tabled in the Chamber of Deputies over the mishandling of the affair, it seemed artistic anarchy had come close to toppling the French government. But the time was surely coming for anarchism to express itself again in more serious ways.

'If one could know the microbe behind each illness … its favourite places, habits, its methods of advance,' Dr Trélat wrote, 'it would be possible, with a *bonne police médicale*, to catch it at just the right moment, stop its progress and prevent its homicidal attack.' While the application of the language of disease and its spread to human migration may have been scurrilous, the disciples of Pasteur were respectful in drawing an explicit comparison between their research and the inquiries conducted by the police and the judiciary. Nowhere was the analogy more apt, though, than in relation to the cryptographic work of Eugène Bazeries, known variously as the 'Lynx of the Quai d'Orsay', the 'Napoleon of Ciphers' and simply the 'Magician', whose success in breaking an alphanumerical code used by the émigré anarchists may well have helped bring the spate of international robberies to an end.

Gradually, during the latter months of 1893, members of the gang containing Emile Henry, who had himself once been nicknamed 'Microbe', began to be picked off by the police. In September, Ortiz was arrested in Paris and charged with burglaries and associated acts of violence in Mannheim and Crespin earlier in the year, while November saw an extensive and carefully coordinated operation by the French and Belgian police to corner and capture Rémi Schouppe while in the act of exchanging stolen goods in a suburb of Brussels. Anyone even faintly familiar with bacteriology would have known, though, that until the last microbe was eradicated, the risk of disease remained.

Retreating to London, Henry may have remembered the final words of Clément Duval, a member of the Panthers of Batignolles and a hero of anarchist expropriators, as he was led out of court seven years earlier to face a life sentence on Devil's Island: 'Ah, if ever I am freed, I will blow you all up!'

The autumn of 1893 brought a resumption of anarchist attacks on the Continent. First came a revenge attack in Spain

Rochefort and Rachkovsky had both demonstrated, in their different ways, that they had few scruples when it came to settling scores and making their political points.

Compared to the knotty intrigues that Rachkovsky was ravelling and unravelling in France, the problem posed by the enquiring mind of the revolutionary movement's counter-intelligence agent Vladimir Burtsev in London should have been relatively straightforward to resolve. Yet despite Rachkovsky's best efforts, Burtsev continued to be an irritant. 'The conflict of the Russian government with revolutionaries has long ago lost its primitive character and has now become a regular science,' Burtsev wrote, and responded accordingly. Having himself been the victim of betrayal on more than one occasion, he set about compiling an archive of notes and dossiers on police agents for the purposes of rooting out informers and provocateurs. For anyone to turn his own techniques against him was intolerable for Rachkovsky, but his antipathy towards Burtsev may have had a personal edge too.

For several years Rachkovsky had run a honey-pot operation against Burtsev. The woman involved was Charlotte Bullier, a rich young widow and possible cousin of Rachkovsky's agent Henri Bint. Bullier first met Burtsev in Paris in 1892, winning his trust with an offer of assistance in evading the French police. Over the next two years they conducted a tempestuous affair, in the flesh and by letter, as Bullier repeatedly sought and failed to lure her lover abroad for romantic trysts, in order to deliver him to her Okhrana paymaster. If Burtsev sometimes felt dazed by the experience, it may have been due as much to the sleeping drugs with which she dosed him, in order to read and report on his letters, as mere sexual obsession. Either way, he nearly fell prey to her wiles. Eventually answering her invitations to travel to Marseilles to be with her, he found himself locked into his cabin. Bullier's attempt to get her captive to

archists, socialists, Masons and liberals as the dupes of a diabolic Jewish plot, its roots clearly lie in the world over which Rachkovsky presided. It is not only the contemporary allusions that point to such a conclusion: the construction of the Paris Métro, for example, or the document's own claim to be the secret agenda of the first Zionist Congress, organised in Basel in the summer of 1896 by Theodor Herzl and Max Nordau, whose secret lover was the Okhrana agent Madame Novikoff. Nor is it the employment in the Okhrana's Paris offices at the time of the skilled forger Matvei Golovinsky, who like Rachkovsky and his loyal French agent Bint was an old member of the Holy Brotherhood.

The most telling facts of all concern, rather, the literary work on which the forgery was based, *The Dialogues between Machiavelli and Montesquieu in Hell*, a satire of Napoleon III's despotic manipulation of public opinion, and the context of its composition in 1867 by Albert Joly, while he was an exile in Brussels. Thirty years on, few would still have remembered Joly's work, long since out of print. But when Joly had been in Brussels, so too had Rochefort, who may well have consulted him about routes by which to smuggle *La Lanterne* into France. Albert Joly, moreover, was the brother of the lawyer Maurice Joly, who had defended Henri Rochefort before the military tribunal in 1872 at Gambetta's request, and would subsequently be hounded to suicide for it by his client. If anyone had proposed the old booklet to Rachkovsky as the basis for a trick to demonise the Jews, Rochefort appears the likeliest candidate.

When Herzl witnessed the humiliation of Captain Dreyfus in 1895, it was the visceral anti-Semitic hatred he saw and felt in the crowd that convinced him that only in a Jewish homeland could the safety of his race be guaranteed. At the time he cannot have guessed the sordid intrigues that had led to the scene, but still less can he have imagined the conspiracy that would be forged to demonise the Zionist movement he founded.

for the execution of Ravachol, when two bombs thrown by Paulino Pallas at the captain general of Catalonia left him with barely a scratch but killed a handful of bystanders. Then, on 7 November, a terrible massacre took place in the Liceo opera house in Barcelona during a performance of *William Tell*, that old favourite of the People's Will terrorists: nine women were among the twenty-nine killed by bombs dropped into the orchestra stalls in revenge for the suppression of the Jerez revolt. The consequences would be disastrous: a further ratcheting of the repression, with the Spanish anarchists left no other means to express their discontent than further acts of terrorism.

In France, an attack of a different nature took place on 12 November at the Bouillon Duval, a canteen set up by a butcher from the nearby market of Les Halles to serve good cheap food to the masses, but which had been quickly taken over by a bourgeoisie who enjoyed the frisson of slumming it. 'The French working man, though he could eat at the Bouillon Duval as cheaply and much better than in his usual greasy spoon, was too proud to thrust himself upon the society of people better dressed than himself,' the obituary of its founder would observe. With money no object, however, the young unemployed cobbler Léon Leauthier did not stint on his last meal as a free man, feasting on a menu that now stretched beyond the basic bouillon to offer fresh game, roast meats and fine wines. Then, before the bill arrived, he abruptly crossed the room and plunged his knife into the chest of another diner, apparently at random, with the single thought that 'I shall not be striking an innocent if I strike the first bourgeois that I meet.'

That his victim turned out to be Serge Georgevitch, the Serb ambassador to France who, like de Mohrenheim, had been implicated in the Panama bribery scandal, prompted some talk of conspiracy. It was generally accepted as perfectly plausible, though, that simple despair and envy of the ostentatious profiteering of bankers and the bourgeoisie had impelled Leauthier's action.

The reaction of the London colony to events abroad was predictably excitable. It was the opera attack in Barcelona that stirred them most, for the dramatic scale of the devastation. An outspoken Samuels took the lead in articulating the mood: 'I claim the man who threw the bomb as a comrade,' he told an audience at the South Place Meeting House. 'We will fight the bloodsuckers by any means … We expect no mercy from these men and we must show them none.' His rhetoric was consistent with that of the *Commonweal*, now under his editorship, whose series of meetings on the subject of 'Dynamitism' drew eager audiences; the production of the Incendiary Cigar, Lorraine Fire, Fenian Fire and Pholophore recommended by Most and the *Indicateur anarchiste* may well have been on the agenda. The newspaper *Liberty*, though, was clear in asserting that the more bloodthirsty pamphlets then circulating were 'inspired by Melville with the object … of preparing public opinion for the expulsion of foreign émigrés'.

It had been a satisfactory year for Peter Rachkovsky, quite apart from developments involving the anarchists and the benefits for his own campaign against Russia's émigré dissidents. On 12 October, the Russian fleet had anchored off the French naval port of Toulon, the Third Republic reciprocating its own ships' visit to Kronstadt in 1891, which the public at large saw as initiating the new relationship. Rachkovsky knew differently, having worked and deployed his agents for several years to help bring about a secret alliance.

That autumn, Rachkovsky could sit down to a celebratory Okhrana dinner, served *à la russe* with one course following another in the manner now fashionable in Paris. Outside the city had gone wild for the sailors' visit, the cries of '*Vive la Russie!*' reverberating as the carriages carrying dignitaries made their way up the rue de Lyon. 'There are two million French people who wait to attest with their acclaim the indissoluble friendship and union between our two nations: Russia and France,'

to widespread astonishment, as so much nonsense. Among the audience at the Geographical Society whose anger and astonishment Jogand-Pages now fled, only the winner of the prize draw for a typewriter left with anything other than shattered illusions. And even he was the unwitting victim of yet another joke: the 'Diana Vaughan' whose name Jogand-Pages had borrowed, was a saleswoman for Remington.

'They accepted my tales as gospel truth,' Taxil observed of those he had duped for so long, 'and the more I lied for the purpose of showing that I lied, the more convinced they became that I was a paragon of veracity.' To anyone of good conscience these words would have invited them to question the appeal of conspiracy stories that flattered their most atavistic tribalism; to someone like Rachkovsky they merely inspired greater deviousness.

The opportunity for Rachkovsky to implement the lesson of Taxil's audacity may have arisen not long afterwards. Sergei Witte, his powerful political ally, had responded to attacks made on him by de Cyon in the *Nouvelle Revue*, with their dangerous claims that he was conspiring to seize power, by trying and failing to force their author's return to Russia. Stripped of his Russian nationality, and with French hospitality exhausted, de Cyon had taken up residence in Switzerland as a stateless person, and it was to his villa in Territet that Rachkovsky's agents pursued him, in a raid reminiscent of that on the People's Will's presses a decade before. Their objective may have been the seizure of material incriminating de Cyon himself. It would later be claimed, however, that they had discovered a very different kind of document: one that would shock and astound readers with a vivid blueprint for the long-gestated Jewish takeover of the world.

How *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* came into existence is even more obscure than the hidden details of the Drefyus Affair. And yet, for all the many theories about the provenance of the forged document, with its cunning representation of an-

Regnum to Prepare the Public Cult of Lucifer. She was also the alleged source of the extraordinary revelations about satanic Freemasonry made by the ex-Freemason Leo Taxil.

Rachkovsky would certainly have admired Taxil's ambition, or rather that of Gabriel Jogand-Pages, the true identity of the charlatan. Building on a decade of fantastical fear-mongering, in the autumn of 1896 Taxil had been the prime mover behind the Anti-Masonic Congress, marching through the streets of Trent at the head of a torch-bearing procession 18,000 strong. A petition from Spain asserting that Freemasonry was indeed a 'dark and diabolical sect, the enemy of God' contained more than 100,000 signatures, while there was little ambiguity about the anti-Semitism later in the declaration by delegates, including dozens of Catholic bishops, that Freemasonry was the 'Synagogue of Satan'. After much pleasurable alarmism had been indulged in, though, doubts had finally been raised about the reliability of Taxil's sources. The Geographical Society event was the outcome: Jogand-Pages' punchline to his grotesquely overextended joke.

To begin with Taxil regaled the audience with an account of his earlier hoaxes: the scam of the sharks troubling the fishermen of the Riviera, the year after the Commune, and of the mysterious city under the waters of Lake Geneva that so many travelled to see while anarchism was being defined nearby. And yet, he teased, 'compared with the tugboat I had dispatched hunting for sharks in the coves off Marseilles in my early years, the boat of Palladism was a true battleship … the battleship turned into a squadron. And when Miss Diana Vaughan became my auxiliary, the squadron grew into a full navy.' Taxil had fooled even the Pope, despite having previously satirised His Holiness' sexual habits: invited to the Vatican, he received a papal endorsement of his campaign against the Masons. And yet every word that Taxil wrote or spoke had been a fraud. Those terribly plausible stories of devils with telephones, of orgiastic rituals and Satan's global conspiracy were revealed,

wrote Charles Dupuy, the president of the council. Perhaps the only shadow was cast by the implication of Rachkovsky's mentor de Mohrenheim in the mess of the Panama bribes, but Dupuy had at least promised to see to it that the press would be prevented from publishing any further embarrassing revelations about the Russian ambassador.

On 9 December, a fortnight after Dupuy's bill to curb press freedoms had been defeated in a vote by France's deputies, Auguste Vaillant, radicalised by his cruel experiences in Argentina, entered the Palais Bourbon where the parliament met. Ignoring Kropotkin's personal warnings against the use of violence, he proceeded to hurl a bomb, rather clumsily, into the Chamber of Deputies. The shrapnel of nails did as much harm to his nose as to the one politician injured, though several female visitors were said to have fainted after being scratched by the projectiles. 'Gentlemen, the session will continue,' Dupuy coolly announced.

Pope Leo XII would commend Dupuy for his sangfroid, but others were dubious. 'Oh! The bravery of Dupuy!' scoffed one anarchist, within earshot of the French commissioner of police, 'It didn't cost him much! He knew better than anyone that the bomb was not dangerous!' The explosive power of the bomb had indeed been minimal: a fact due, some said, to it having been manufactured and supplied by the Municipal Laboratory. Vaillant, however, would insist that he had patiently gathered the chemicals necessary before making the glass fuse for the device, which had been intended only as a protest rather than to cause death.

Most leading anarchists interviewed were prepared to laud Vaillant's act. 'You must balance it out. On the one side, a few voluntarily sacrificed lives of our own plus a few others' lives; on the other side, the happiness of all humanity, and the end of war and want which together claim many more victims than do a few explosions,' explained Louise Michel to a reporter from *Le Matin* who visited her new suburban home in East Dul-

wich. The acerbic cultural critic Laurent Tailhade considered it a 'healthy warning', but went on to offer a chilling reformulation of aesthetic theory for a dawning era of terrorism: 'What do a few human lives matter if the gesture is beautiful?' Others, though, looked again to provocation and conspiracy, asking why the police had made so little effort to apprehend the mysterious accomplice who Vaillant told them had bankrolled the bombing. And intriguingly, Edouard Drumont's *La Libre parole* pointed the finger at Germany and England which, it claimed, were using the émigré anarchists 'to kill every ideal in French souls, to destroy that faith in Christ which has rendered the French invincible'.

The government's response was swift: so swift, in fact, that Vaillant's attack seemed almost to offer a pretext for legislation to be implemented that had been under consideration for some time. A slew of draconian measures, the 'Lois Scélérates', or 'Wicked Laws' as they became generally known, were rushed through the chamber, starting with a bill to outlaw anarchism, voted in only three days after the chamber had been bombed: the bill decreed that henceforth it would be a criminal offence to promote, publicise, encourage or exonerate the anarchist idea, punishable by up to two years in prison, while to be involved in any violent action, regardless of outcome, was liable to capital punishment. The resistrictions on the press did not yet amount to all that Ambassador de Mohrenheim had been promised by Dupuy, but the additional 80,000 francs of funding allocated to the police would surely have delighted Rachkovsky who, a few weeks later, would contact the French foreign ministry, behind his own government's back, in an attempt to promote the idea of an anti-anarchist convention.

On Boxing Day, the novelist Huysmans, immersed in a spiritual crisis of his own, expressed the prevailing mood among those sickened by the revelations of the Panama scandal. 'The infamous and fateful year 1893 is coming to an end' he wrote to a colleague and friend, 'In France, at least, it has been nothing

deffre but with key figures from the earlier struggle against terrorism. When the graphology expert Monsieur Gobert refused to bow to pressure from the military to verify the letter, Alphonse Bertillon, the criminal anthropologist, was happy to step in with elaborate justifications of Dreyfus' guilt. Most intriguing of all, however, were the rumours that circulated of a Russian angle to the skullduggery. Forged intelligence overstating France's military strength had, it was suggested, been supplied to reassure the late tsar as he wavered before signing the alliance; Dreyfus' imprisonment in solitary confinement was to prevent him from divulging what he knew. If true, it would have put both Boisdeffre and Rachkovsky in the frame.

The French government, however, issued a statement absolving all foreign embassies of involvement in the affair, but the full truth will never be known, for as the novelist Emile Zola would mention in his famous open letter to President Faure of January 1898, 'papers were disappearing, then as they continue to do to this day'. And yet, in a revealing paradox, other papers were simultaneously appearing in the most mysterious ways, with Esterhazy claiming that the document used to exonerate him, fraudulently as it proved, had been handed over by a 'veiled lady' outside, of all places, the Sacré-Coeur.

Frauds and forgeries were, of course, a practised part of Rachkovsky's repertoire of intrigue, and it is tempting to imagine him taking a connoisseur's interest in other successful practitioners. Might he, then, have been in the queue of top-hatted gentlemen waiting to check in their sticks and umbrellas at the cloakroom of the Paris Geographical Society on Easter Monday 1897, a strict requirement for admission to the auditorium on this most intriguing of nights? Against a backdrop of heightening political tensions, the foyer was abuzz with the promise of an appearance by a certain Diane Vaughan. Descended from the seventeenth-century English mystic Thomas Vaughan, it was said, she was the author of *The Restoration of Palladism, a Transition Decreed by the Sanctum*

to Dreyfus' transportation to Devil's Island, where only weeks before the rebel anarchists had been massacred. A scintillating literary talent whose anarchism had brought him full circle to that dangerous place where the extremes of right and left overlap and where an extreme form of nationalistic socialism would later be born, Barrès relished the scene, and few public figures questioned the sentence unless, like Clemenceau, to criticise its leniency. Now all that was about to change.

The first challenge to the soundness of the verdict came from another anarchist, the journalist Bernard Lazare, who had been an outspoken presence at the recent London Congress. For while Barrès, Drumont and Rochefort had spent their time feeding fresh meat to the beast of anti-Semitism, hungry again after gorging itself on the Panama scandal, Lazare had taken a considered interest as further evidence came to light. The proof of Dreyfus' guilt – an incriminating document purportedly in his handwriting – had been thrown into doubt by the discovery in a war-ministry wastebasket of a suspicious letter bearing an identical hand: that of a Major Esterhazy. Battle was joined in the press, with neither side conceding an inch. The socialists were slow to engage, and two months later Jules Guesde would still be insisting that the passion evinced by the affair was merely a 'bourgeois civil war'. Many anarchists, though, recognised behind the anti-Semitism a more far-reaching reactionary agenda that had forged a fearsome cohesion in the radical, nationalistic right. Louise Michel, torn between her gratitude to Rochefort on the one hand and, on the other, friendship for the passionate Dreyfusard, Sébastien Faure, was rare in remaining neutral: a position that left her utterly isolated.

As Rochefort wove a complex conspiracy claiming that a Jewish syndicate was conspiring against France, did he know that his amplified prejudice was merely providing a smokescreen to conceal a real conspiracy that was scarcely less alarming? If so, he had aligned himself not only with General Bois-

but a heap of filth, so much so that it has made one sympathise with the anarchists throwing bombs in parliament, which is the rotting image of a country in the process of decomposition … in an old world that is cracking apart at the seams; Europe seems drastically undermined, as she heads into the sinister unknown.'

In London, Vaillant's attack had seen the tempo of anarchist 'chatter' about terrorist plots continue to increase, with *La Cocarde* informing Paris early in the New Year that the émigrés had decided that their main targets should be stock exchanges, religious buildings and political institutions. A report to the French cabinet from the 'special commissioner' warned that nearly all émigré anarchists believed in the assassination of heads of state as the most effective means of propaganda. By then, Emile Henry had almost certainly returned to Paris having weighed the reality of Vaillant's failure: the gesture might have been beautiful and bold, but the execution and consequences were dismal. A further demonstration of the anarchism's potency was now required, Henry decided, to set the record straight, and to avenge the death sentences that awaited Vaillant and the Barcelona bombers.

Henry's original objective in early Ferbuary 1894 was to assassinate the French president, Sadi Carnot, but tight security around the Elysée Palace thwarted him. Wandering the streets in search of an alternative target, the example of the Liceo opera house in Barcelona must have passed through his mind as he glanced into the cafés and restaurants of Paris, estimating the likely number of bourgeois fatalities he could cause; repeatedly he walked on when it seemed too low a price at which to rate his own life, faced with almost certain arrest and execution. For it was now to be a whole social class who would feel the force of his attack: a class so reckless and irresponsible that, lost in their lives of leisure, they gave no thought to easing the poverty that surrounded them.

'Are those children who die slowly of anaemia in the slums, for want of bread in their home, not innocent victims too; those women ground down by exhaustion in your workshops for forty centimes a day, whose only happiness is that they have not yet been driven into prostitution; those old men turned into machines so you can work them their whole lives and then cast them out on to the street as empty husks?' As Henry settled into his seat at the Café Terminus and sipped his drink, he would have had plenty of time to ponder how he might justify the action he was about to take before a court of law.

The café, situated in the facade of the grand Hôtel Terminus at the entrance to Saint-Lazare station, was already filling up with after-work drinkers on that February evening, but Henry waited until he was satisfied that he could cause the greatest mortality. At that instant, he lifted his large bomb from its hiding place and launched it towards the diners nearest the orchestra. The noise and devastation were terrible, the blast destroying the immediate area and shattering the windows, while shrapnel ripped through flesh and furnishings and embedded itself in the ceiling and walls, leaving two dead and others dying. Henry, clutching a pistol beneath his jacket, made a bid to escape, but a crowd gave chase, persisting even when he turned and fired, emptying the chambers of his revolver. Two of his pursuers, one of them a policeman, were wounded by bullets before Henry was finally brought to bay.

The trial would be a tense affair. Bulot, the prosecuting lawyer, had been the intended victim of one of Ravachol's bomb attacks, and was determined not only to secure justice but to humiliate Henry in the process, while all Henry's wasted education welled up into angry wit and bilious eloquence that would prove endlessly quotable. 'Your hands are stained with blood,' the judge told him. 'Like the robes you wear, Your Honour,' Henry quipped back. His display delighted the likes of the aesthetic Félix Fénéon, who claimed that Henry's acts had 'Done far more for propaganda than twenty years

One crisp October morning in 1896, dignitaries gathered on the Left Bank of the Seine near the Esplanades des Invalides for the ceremony to lay the cornerstone of the bridge that would be France's tribute to Alexander III. Standing slightly apart, Rachkovsky looked on hawkishly. The safety of Tsar Nicholas II, there to honour his late father, was always the Okhrana chief's top priority and should have commanded his full attention. Yet despite his duties, Rachkovsky may have allowed himself to exchange a knowing glance with one or two familiar figures. Boisdeffre was present, the general with whom he had dealt over the French alliance, as was Henri Rochefort who had travelled a long way politically since 1881, when the nihilists had entrusted him alone with the inside story of a previous tsar's assassination. That the reactionary soldier and the radical marquis had recently found common ground was strange enough, with Rochefort considering his new friend for the Boulanger role in the dictatorship of which he still dreamed. Stranger still, though, was the possibility that both shared a secret with the Russian spymaster that was far more explosive: one that within weeks would seep out into the public domain.

The Dreyfus Affair, when it broke that November, would redraw the political fault lines that divided French society, with dramatic effect. Nearly two years had passed since Maurice Barrès had described the ritual humiliation of the Jewish army captain from the ministry of war convicted of spying for Germany, in terms reminiscent of those more usually applied to the criminal degenerate. 'As he came towards us with his cap thrust down over his forehead, his pince-nez on his ethnic nose, his eyes dry and furious, his foreign physiognomy, his impassive stillness,' Barrès wrote, 'the very atmosphere he exuded revolted even the most self-controlled of spectators.' In a brutal spectacle, the braid and buttons were ripped from Dreyfus' uniform by a towering blond Breton, who then proceeded to break the disgraced officer's sword over his knee; a prelude

was riven by factionalism. It was a situation whose risks were illustrated in tragic fashion on the very day of Nicholas II's coronation in the gilded splendour of the Kremlin's Uspensky Cathedral, when his entourage had insulated the new tsar from news of the stampede by peasants on the nearby Khodynka Field that had left almost 1,400 dead. The decision that he would proceed as planned to a ball at the French Embassy left a lasting impression of callous aloofness on the peasant population, which compounded their irritation at Nicholas's recent dismissal of proposals for constitutional change as 'senseless dreams'.

For Rachkovsky, there was no option but to choose sides and his preference was clear: the progressive Witte, determined to drag peasant Russia into the modern world. Witte was still an enthusiast for railway expansion, as he had been when he claimed to have seeded the idea of the Holy Brotherhood, and an advocate of an active credit system, migration to cities and the division of labour. Implicit in Rachkovsky's choice of patron, however, was the acquisition of powerful enemies: the politically conservative Plehve, who as director of police had never quite trusted Rachkovsky, and Pobedonostsev, procurator of the Orthodox synod, a deeply thoughtful man who nevertheless hated all originality and innovation, and was committed to the resettlement of migrant peasants in villages subject to the traditional social binding of church and family. Rachkovsky's audience with Pope Leo XIII in the Vatican, where he allegedly attempted to broker a rapprochement between the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches, might almost have been designed to pique Pobedonostsev. Witte must have hoped that ease and wealth had not blunted Rachkovsky's capacity for subtler intrigues and that he could rely on him to serve his interests. The coming years would be fertile in opportunity.

of brochures by Reclus and Kropotkin'. It was the rousing conclusion to Henry's final speech, though, that would truly resonate with the friends he was leaving behind:

> You have hanged us in Chicago, beheaded us in Germany, garrotted us in Jerez, shot us in Barcelona, guillotined us in Montbrison and Paris, but anarchy itself you cannot destroy. Its roots are deep: it grows from the heart of a corrupt society that is falling apart, it is a violent reaction to the established order, it represents the aspiration to freedom and equality that struggles against all current authority. It is everywhere, which means it cannot be beaten, and ultimately it will defeat you and kill you.

20. *The Mysteries of Bourdin and the Baron*

London and Liège, 1894

At around one o'clock on 15 February 1894, three days after Emile Henry's bombing of the Café Terminus, Special Branch was on a high state of alert. Henry Samuels was meeting his younger brother-in-law Martial Bourdin for lunch in the International Restaurant near Fitzroy Square. The same day, a French informant penned the only report that the prefecture ever received that focused exclusively on the two men. Neither the source nor the nature of the intelligence that prompted such attentiveness by the police on either side of the Channel is known. However, the sighting of a 'Bourdin brother' in Paris a week earlier, in conversation with Henry, may well have raised the alarm.

Leaving the restaurant Samuels and Bourdin travelled together to Westminster where they parted, Bourdin crossing Westminster Bridge to the south side of the Thames. It was at that moment too, by curious coincidence, that the Special Branch undercover agent also lost the scent. 'I never spent hours of greater anxiety than … when [the] information reached me,' Sir Robert Anderson, Melville's superior, would remember. 'To track him was impracticable. All that could be done was to send out officers in every direction to watch persons and places that he might be likely to attack.' Where and when Bourdin had collected the small, homemade grenade that Special Branch clearly knew to be in his pocket by this

in swaying the press, must also have been in tacit acknowledgement of his feats of provocation: fortunately for him, it was paid before the embarrassment of Liège. Yet, despite Liège, few of his superiors could have doubted that Rachkovsky's deft exploitation of the anarchist bombings was largely to thank when, late in the year, the Russian department of police's magazine *Obzor* reported 'a marked cooling of the English towards the supposedly innocent but persecuted Russian dissidents'.

The way ahead, though, was less clear. A flurry of warnings from British and French police about mooted attacks on Russian targets after the death of Alexander III, and the involvement of a group of Berlin anarchists in a planned assassination of the new tsar in Moscow, maintained a sense of imminent danger. So too did the discussions between Lazarev and Burtsev, among others, about a renewal of revolutionary violence in Russia to offset the drift towards reformism in the movement led by the charismatic Georgi Plekhanov and his Social Democrats, the official standard-bearers for the ideas of Marx. Times were changing, though, and Rachkovsky had to reposition himself accordingly: both with regard to the declining threat of terrorism in the West, and more crucially the change of ruler in Russia.

Rachkovsky appears never to have been a favourite of the late tsar, who had once scrawled the single word 'villain' next to Rachkovsky's name in an official report. And yet for fourteen years, Alexander III's towering physical presence and authority had maintained stability and held Russia on a tight course of religious and political conservatism. In stark contrast, his son Nicholas, on hearing of his succession, is said to have wept not for his lost father but at his own unreadiness to inherit the throne: a sound self-assessment that would leave him dependent on the influence of his advisers. According to one popular joke, so fickle was the young tsar that whoever had last spoken to him could be considered the most powerful man in Russia, with the serious consequence that the court

22. *Conspiracy Theories*

Europe and America, 1896–1901

Taking stock in early 1896, Rachkovsky could have reflected on two turbulent but largely efffective years for himself and the foreign Okhrana. In the weeks before the bombs of Henry and Bourdin had exploded, he had appeared more vulnerable than at any time since his arrival in Paris. Neither the fact that he had recently exercised 'more influence on the course of our rapprochement with France than did our ambassadors', in the words of the Russian finance minister, Sergei Witte, nor his success in 'exerting pressure on the local press … in the battle against the émigrés' in London, had been enough to make his position secure. Ambassador de Mohrenheim, his supporter for many years, looked ripe for ignominious retirement, tarnished by his involvement in the Panama scandal and deemed increasingly unreliable after a debilitating bout of influenza, while Rachkovsky had been criticised for his indiscreet dealings with the French government.

The visit that January of Ivan Manasevich-Manuilov from the ministry of the interior, whom Rachkovsky suspected of collecting 'information about my personal life, my financial position abroad, about the staff of the *agentura*, and about my relations with the prefecture and the embassy in Paris', must have appeared the prelude to his removal from post. Yet Rachkovsky had quickly turned the situation around, swatting away 'the nimble Jew' who was 'ready to do anything for a goodly sum', and earning fitting recognition for his efforts. The bonus of 10,000 rubles that he received in April, nominally for his work

stage, together with £13 worth of gold, would remain a mystery.

Boarding a tram in the direction of East Greenwich, Bourdin took a seat at the rear, but gradually moved forward towards the driver, eager perhaps to peer through the windscreen at what lay ahead, or else from a fearful man's simple instinct for company. It was half-past four when he reached his stop near the edge of Greenwich Park and the afternoon light was already dying away in the west. He began to climb the zigzagging path up the hill. Behind him lay the Thames, on either side of which London stretched away beneath a hanging blanket of smoke from its fires and factories; ahead, the powerful symbol of the Greenwich Observatory, named a decade earlier as the site of the Prime Meridian, in the face of competition from Jerusalem and Paris, a decision to which the latter still refused to acquiesce. Was revenge for Henry's arrest on his mind, and was the Observatory truly his target: the guardian of the point in space from which the worldwide tyranny of time, oppressor of the working man, was calibrated? Or was it merely that the park was the agreed venue for him to hand over the bomb to whoever had commissioned its production?

At eight minutes to five, a flash suddenly lit up the fog-laden air: jolted by the sound of a 'sharp and clear detonation', two assistants in the Observatory's Computing Room noted the time. Whether pausing to prime the bomb, or tripping on the path, Bourdin had accidentally triggered the device. Two children were the first to reach the dying man, on their way home from school. The scene that greeted them was appalling: flesh and fragments of bone had been flung through the air to hang in trees, while the force of the impact had wrapped a section of sinew around the iron railings of a nearby fence. 'Take me home' was all Bourdin could gasp, his left hand and forearm blown off, his entrails spilling out, but instead he was carried to the nearby Seamen's Hospital, where shortly afterwards he expired.

Late the following evening, police raided the Autonomie Club, to which Melville gained entry by means of the secret password of knocks. While the chief inspector disdainfully puffed on a cigar, all those present were detained and interrogated, and the premises was subsequently closed until further notice. There were no angry crowds to block his exit this time, though, as there had been when he had visited Richard's shop with Houllier eighteen months before; as the dramatic news sank in, popular feeling turned against the anarchists as never before, and the next time the police were called out in force to the Charlotte Street area it would be to protect its radical citizens against an angry English mob.

Many émigrés reacted with consternation to the news from Greenwich: 'Anarchists were not so blind to their own interests and well-being as to forgo by their conduct the right to asylum that England so generously offered to political refugees,' one told the *Morning Leader*. But whilst an attack that killed or injured innocent victims, like those perpetrated by Ravachol or Henry, would surely have caused the British press to close ranks in outrage, the mysterious circumstances of Bourdin's death in Greenwich simply invited further investigation.

Among the anarchists themselves, rumours of provocation were rife in the days following the debacle, with the greatest suspicion focused on Henry Samuels, whose influence on the younger man David Nicoll would express in his recollection of a scene from the Autonomie Club a few weeks earlier, of 'little Bourdin sitting at the feet of Samuels, and looking up into his eyes with loving trust'. Nicoll's own misgivings about Samuels had long been a matter of record but already that January the first edition of the newspaper *Liberty* – founded by James Tocchati, a veteran of Morris' Socialist League, in order to provide a moderate counterbalance to *Commonweal* – had explicitly accused him of working for Melville.

Determined to exculpate himself, Samuels briefed the press about Bourdin's 'erratic behaviour' at their lunch on the fateful

sky's early experiences in the Bosnian gaols, an episode never before mentioned, where he had supposedly acquired the ability to will himself deaf in order to stay sane amid the cacophony. 'How else could I endure English dinner parties?' they remembered him joking. Olive Garnett cropped her hair in grief. Rachkovsky's reaction to the news was doubtless rather different.

words of a man who had once taught the art of coquettishness to Vera Zasulich and knew that both Garnett sisters doted on him and despised his wife. However, after fifteen years of onerous exile, with little progress to see for his efforts, Kravchinsky's anguish was probably all too real. As the year drew to an end, and the rest of London prepared for Christmas, Kravchinsky remained hard at work thrashing out the details of a new journal that he was to edit, which would create a united front of Russian socialists and liberals against autocracy. On the subject of elopement, he appeared to have reconciled himself to quietly cuckolding Constance's husband Edward, and had 'promised to get a bear's ham from Russia' for his visit to the Garnett family's new country cottage when it was completed in the New Year. First, though, on 23 December, he was scheduled to attend a crucial meeting to discuss editorial policy.

From Kravchinsky's home in Bedford Park in West London, whose calm streets Camille Pissarro had recently painted, it was only a short walk to where Volkhovsky and Lazarev awaited him. Both were old friends, veterans of the Trial of the 193 twenty years before, but in Lazarev he would face a man reconverted to terrorism, quite possibly under Evalenko's influence, and determined to sway Kravchinsky, a founder member of the Independent Labour Party, from his commitment to the principle that social justice should be achieved through peaceful change. Distracted or distraught, Kravchinsky's state of mind can only be guessed at when, swinging his legs across the stile at the end of his road, he wandered on to the tracks of the North London Railway. Rounding the distant bend, the attentive driver pulled on the power vacuum brakes of his engine, but when the train came to a stop Kravchinsky's body lay mangled beneath the second carriage.

Foul play was ruled out, suicide not mentioned. Friends considerately explained the accident by reference to Kravchinsky's

day, but professed himself certain that when they had parted – insisting that this was outside the restaurant at 2.50 p.m. – his brother-in-law had no intention of bombing the Observatory: his plan, he thought, must have been 'either to buy the explosive or to experiment'. Samuels' purpose was clearly to put time and space between himself and the incriminating material but his version of events rapidly began to unravel when a witness came forward to testify that he had seen them together in Westminster. Forced to concede that he had lied, Samuels now volunteered that on their journey across the city they had been 'pursued by' detectives. His new contortions, though, raised as many questions as they answered. If Samuels had known that he and Bourdin were under surveillance, why had he tried to pretend that they had parted earlier, unless he could rely on the police to keep his secret? Was it not more likely that Samuels himself was both the source of the bomb and the money that Bourdin collected along the way, and in league with the police?

While Samuels' amateurish attempts at deception were easily exposed, his old friend and colleague Auguste Coulon, still on the Special Branch payroll, played the journalist from the *Morning Leader* with an altogether more deft professionalism. Speaking anonymously, and unidentifiable to his old colleagues, Coulon was interviewed in the jeweller's shop in South London in which he now maintained an office lined with books on the theme of anarchism, the better to understand the subjects of his infiltration. As an array of clocks and watches ticked away the time, as if in portentous countdown, and his Swiss assistant tinkered at a workbench, Coulon divulged that he had been aware of plots brewing and had recently been on Bourdin's trail, but had relaxed his attention on the fateful day in the mistaken belief that the plot would not come to a head until the following Saturday. Having established his authority on the subject, he then persuasively asserted that the authorities would have to take 'steps to cleanse from their midst the criminals that now infest London. Too long has

London been an asylum for European murderers, forgers, and thieves.'

The argument that Coulon advanced for the benefit of the newspaper's readers would have been welcomed by Melville, as by his associates abroad, but all were likely to have been disconcerted by his accompanying boast that 'I am in the service of the International Secret Police, which is subsidised by the Russian, German and French governments.' That Coulon may have been taking money from all three in a freelance capacity was perfectly possible, but the idea that cooperation between the national police forces amounted to anything like the official organisation he evoked was as fanciful as the much-touted notion of a vast concerted anarchist conspiracy. Yet Coulon's self-regarding admission perhaps hinted at something almost as extraordinary, whose existence none of those involved would wish revealed: a clandestine arrangement that had grown out of Melville's back-channel offer to Rachkovsky of his personal assistance, two years earlier. It may moreover have been upon such a foundation that the Okhrana chief hoped to build when he had approached the French foreign ministry, only weeks before Bourdin's death, to call for an anti-anarchist convention, in the move that had so angered his superiors in St Petersburg.

David Nicoll, at least, was in no doubt that Bourdin had died as the result of an elaborate intrigue involving police agents, and was unafraid to point the finger in print. Even before the explosion at Greenwich, he had charged Coulon with having received £70 to help reignite Melville's 'delectable game [of] dynamite outrages'; now Henry Samuels, whom he had previously considered 'too much of a fool to be a spy, but … the sort of man whom a spy could make good use of', was elevated to the status of a full-blown agent provocateur. And then there was Dr Fauset MacDonald, a well-heeled medical practitioner who had thrown in his lot with the *Commonweal* group the previous year: he too was now labelled a police agent, from whose surgery the chemicals could be supplied to produce ex-

by the Friends failed to reach its destination, but the true, unidentified cause actually lay closer to home.

Some of the packages whose shipment the Okhrana agent Evalenko, posing as the Friends' American librarian 'Vladimir Sergeyev', had volunteered to oversee were destroyed by him as soon as they arrived from the presses; others he forwarded to Russia having supplied details that allowed their interception by the border police. Meanwhile, in London, the Okhrana agent Lev Beitner had so thoroughly infiltrated himself into the organisation and the society surrounding it that when he applied for a reader's ticket for the British Museum Library, it was Garnett's own brother, Richard, an employee, who provided a reference. Drawing on the intelligence he had gathered, Rachkovsky reported to St Petersburg that Kravchinsky and his associates were involved with other previously antagonistic émigré groups around Europe in the creation of 'a central organisation that would unite them all and help to join efforts and resources, forge and sustain contacts with revolutionaries back home'.

A unified distribution network might bring together the disparate émigré groups in a common front; without it, they would surely only atomise further. Rachkovsky was determined to see it sabotaged, and his agent Evalenko had already begun the dirty work, helping to seed the discord between Lazarev and Kravchinsky that, ironically in light of Kravchinsky's past actions and reputation, had its origin in his resistance to Lazarev's demands for the Russian revolutionary movement to adopt more militant tactics. Then, having effectively destroyed the American wing of the Society of Friends of Russian Freedom from within, in late 1895 Evalenko was recalled to London to continue his mischief-making there.

Early that summer, Constance Garnett's sister Olive had written of how Kravchinsky had confided in her that he 'wanted a new life, to elope with someone, not to be set down to work'. There was perhaps an element of flirtation in the

seemed scarcely credible, in the case of a man who had always lived by his wits.

Recent years had undoubtedly imposed great strains on Kravchinsky, as he risked the safety of even those closest to him in the cause of Russian freedom, only to find himself repeatedly thwarted in his task by the ruthless efficiency of his enemies, and the unscrupulous tactics that they were prepared to employ. When, on the eve of 1894, he had sent Constance Garnett into the depths of icy Russia on a risky mission to distribute money and collect information, she had returned deeply unnerved by the police surveillance to which she had been subjected, and which had caused her to burn all her entire precious cargo of letters and documents back to London before she reached the border. Almost as bad, it had been while she was away, leaving her six-month-old baby in the care of her husband, that Rachkovsky had placed the article in the British press that exposed her beloved Kravchinsky as Mezentsev's murderer and made pointed reference to his 'shallow theories of free love'. The personal awkwardness was as nothing to Kravchinsky, however, compared to the damage being done by the Okhrana to the Society of Friends of Russian Freedom.

With a new efficiency, the Russian police department had distilled the product of its intensive surveillance of suspected subversives, in Russia and abroad, into a diagrammatic representation of the whole vast web of revolutionary activity. Taken in isolation, the colour-coded lines that fanned out from the central individual on each chart allowed seemingly tenuous relationships to be traced deep into the revolutionary underworld, revealing complicity where least expected; cross-referenced, with up to 300 suspects mentioned on each sheet, they mapped the far-reaching curiosity of a formidable police state. This system alone might have explained why a large portion of the printed material smuggled into Russia

plosives. As for a motive, Nicoll believed that 'A few dynamite explosions in England would suit the Russian police splendidly, and might even result in terrifying the English bourgeoisie into handing over the refugees to the vengeance of the Russian tsar.'

Nicoll's apprehension of the conspiracy that had been woven around Bourdin was corroborated by an improbable source more than a decade later, when Joseph Conrad wrote *The Secret Agent*. Despite Conrad's assurance to his publisher that the plot was 'based on inside knowledge of a certain event', which was clearly the Greenwich bombing, in certain respects the novel presented a rather schematic cross-section of the anarchist world of the period. Comrade Ossipon may be taken as a slightly facetious version of Kropotkin; Yundt of the firebrand Johann Most. But when Verloc, the equivalent of Henry Samuels in Conrad's account, who habitually works as a nark for Chief Inspector Heat, recruits the Bourdin character, Stevie, into bombing the Observatory, he is in fact acting on the behest of Mr Vladimir, assigned the position of first secretary at the Russian Embassy but an obvious avatar of Rachkovsky.

Conrad would later protest, perhaps too much, that the work was drawn primarily from imagination. In reflecting on a realm where fact and fiction were constantly and intentionally being blurred, however, his well-informed storytelling may come closer to illuminating the truth than documentary sources that are so often partial and distorting. As to the true quality of the 'inside knowledge' about which Conrad boasted, the proof lies in the figure of the novel's purveyor of explosives, 'The Professor', whose elusive factual counterpart, bearing the very same sobriquet, is today known only from French police files that remained locked away in the Paris prefecture until long after the novelist's death. In one intriguing report, the real 'Professor' is said to have supplied Emile Henry's mentor, Constant Martin, with dynamite; in another, more significantly, the French informant states that 'Russian anarchists have confirmed that

the school for the manufacture of bombs is in London and that the Professor is a Russian refugee'.

Unfortunately for the anarchist movement as a whole, in the London underworld of early 1894, it was all too easy for those accused by Nicoll to dismiss his suspicions as far-fetched: a further symptom of his paranoia, whose disruptive effects were beginning to weary even those who had some sympathy for the poor man's plight. For whilst rumours that Bourdin's intended destination had been Epping Forest, where he intended to test the bomb, may have carried echoes of the Landesen plot of 1890, they hardly constituted proof of Russian involvement. Furthermore, claims by anarchists to have received unsolicited deliveries of explosive materials, of which they had then wisely disposed, shortly before Special Branch ransacked their homes in search of incriminating evidence, could be easily explained away as anti-police propaganda. And when a pair of anarchists, Ricken and Brall, who had previously been suspected by neighbours of manufacturing bombs, suddenly disappeared, two days after Bourdin's death, the move suggested the remaining members of a terrorist cell hastily going to ground, more than it did innocents fleeing persecution.

It was perhaps fortunate for the sake of Nicoll's sanity that he did not know what the agents of the Paris prefecture had reported about the comings and goings of the London anarchists in Paris in the weeks before the Henry and Bourdin bombings. Had he done so, his paranoia would surely have reached a dangerous pitch. He would have been disturbed enough to learn that Dumont, an ex-colleague of Ravachol who was now part of the clique around Coulon that Nicoll had named as provocateurs, had been troublemaking in the city: indeed, early in January, Charles Malato had been so infuriated by Dumont's incendiary rhetoric in Paris that he had threated to go there 'to sort him out'.

What, though, would Nicoll have made of the reported meeting between Emile Henry and a 'Bourdin Brother' only days

caused the congress to mark the end of an era. The recent death of Kravchinsky and failing health of Morris would have left Kropotkin, had he attended, without two of those contemporaries closest to him.

The valedictory tone of *News from Nowhere* in 1890 had marked William Morris' turn away from socialism and back to his artistic activities, in particular the exquisite printing of the Kelmscott Press, but since 1893 he had once again begun to appear at public meetings of the Social Democratic Federation. Its brand of bureaucratic socialism was scarcely more to his taste, though, than the anarchism that had driven him from his own Socialist League, and he had wearily bemoaned to a leading Fabian that 'The world is going your way, Webb, but it is not the right way in the end.' The last lecture he delivered before his death that autumn was to the newly formed Society for Checking the Abuses of Public Advertising, denouncing the plague of billboard advertising that had begun to disfigure the landscapes he so loved and from which he had drawn such inspiration. As a sideways attack on the capitalist culture of consumption, it chimed perfectly with the oblique approach to revolution increasingly being adopted by his lasting friends in the anarchist movement.

It had been almost a year earlier, however, standing on the steps of Waterloo station on 28 December 1895, that Morris had delivered his final outdoor address to the mourners at Kravchinsky's funeral, 200 of whom then boarded the train run by the London Necropolis Company to accompany his coffin on the twenty-mile journey to Brookwood Cemetery. 'It was a significant and striking spectacle, this assemblage of socialists, nihilists, anarchists, and outlaws of every European country, gathered together in the heart of London to pay respect to the memory of their dead leader,' *The Times* told its readers. The sadness of those present was all the greater that his death was so premature and unnecessary, while its cause

had succeeded in packing the congress with delegates shipped in from Germany and Belgium as well as many local supporters. Malatesta's oratory failed to break down their disciplined obstructionism, despite the attempts of the British trade unionist Tom Mann and others to win him a hearing. 'Were I not an anarchist already, that congress would have made me one,' wrote Michel, after witnessing the expulsion of her colleagues; an excommunication, in effect, by a new 'state religion' of Marx with its own 'infallible hierarchy'.

Even this decisive schism in the socialist movement was not without its benefits, however, with many of the heretics from the congress impelled towards a consensus on the vexed question of how the future society to which anarchism aspired should be organised. For too long, the rival claims of communism and collectivism – ownership in common, or on a cooperative basis, with some degree of private property – had clouded anarchism's clarity of purpose. Now, the young Fernand Pelloutier joined with Emile Pouget to clarify the issue. Inspired by the dynamic example set by the British unions, and his own recent work in France in bringing together the representation of different industries with the city-specific work of the *bourses du travail*, Pelloutier advocated 'a hybrid of anarchist and trade unionism known as anarcho-syndicalism or revolutionary socialism'. The project breathed new life into the vision of autonomous but associated units of economic activity that Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin had all held up as a viable basis for social transformation, but also provided a robust base from which eventually to launch a general strike, as the mechanism for effecting peaceful revolutionary change.

The London Congress of 1896 was notable too, however, for those who were absent: Kropotkin, Kravchinsky and Morris. Kropotkin, weary of the predictable and unproductive debate that characterised past meetings, and perhaps reading the runes, had decided in advance not to attend. It was not only the final marginalisation of the anarchists, though, that

before the attack on the Café Terminus? If it were Martial Bourdin who had crossed the Channel to meet his fellow bomber, that would surely point simply to some coordination of their attacks. But what if it was Henry Samuels who had made the trip to meet Henry, using his wife's name as he sometimes did, not least when applying for the British Museum Library card that was used to gain entry to specialist works on the manufacture of explosives? Both recent bombs could then have been linked to one suspected agent provocateur, with others in the background. And what questions might then have been asked about the true provenance of the earlier attacks in which Henry had been involved, or that committed by Vaillant, or even those carried out by the anarchist Christ, Ravachol, Dumont's late friend?

No such doubts about who truly benefited from the self-sustaining cycle of anarchist terrorism seem to have troubled Emile Henry's associate Louis Matha, whom Agent Z6 had reported leaving London on the day of the Greenwich bombing to rejoin Henry's brother Fortune in Paris, where they meant to stage another dynamite outrage. Exactly a month later, however, while Henry read *Don Quixote* to pass the time as he awaited trial, it was another of his old accomplices by the name of Pauwels who set out for La Madeleine, in what was to have been the latest of a series of attacks on ecclesiastical targets in Paris. Yet in a near repeat of the accident that had befallen Bourdin, the device he was carrying exploded prematurely as he entered the church.

If the two events suggested a consistent flaw in design or manufacture of bombs supplied to the anarchists, however, whether accidental or preconceived, it did not deter the part-time art impresario Félix Fénéon – who had earlier stored bomb components in his desk at the war ministry on Henry's behalf – from venturing what seemed like a small-scale attack on his own initiative. The bomb he concealed in a flowerpot on the windowsill of the Café Foyot, just across the road

from the Senate chamber in the Palais de Luxembourg and a favourite watering hole of its members, exploded as intended, but injured only his old friend Tailhade who happened to be drinking nearby. That it took out his eye seemed oddly like poetic justice for the man who had so coldly acclaimed Henry's destructive artistry, and yet the bomb's effect was to sustain the widespread sense of terror.

Paris once again lived in fear, as it had after the attacks by Ravachol and his gang: the bourgeoisie stayed at home and policemen handed in transfer requests, while the sound of scenery collapsing backstage at the Gaîté theatre was enough to send the audience rushing for the exits. The Third Republic and its new left-leaning government, patently incapable of defending the institutions of politics or religion against the anarchist bombers, and with the general public now in the firing line, had been further destabilised. For Henri Rochefort, dining with anarchist friends in London on the very day that Pauwels had blown himself up, the situation must have seemed quite satisfactory.

The previous year had seen Rochefort substantially repair his relationship with the anarchists themselves, telling *Le Gaulois* that they were more sinned against than sinning: 'the true anarchist is not dangerous for he tolerates without complaint the promiscuous presence of agents provocateurs'. Furthermore, Louise Michel had recently extracted a large donation from him on their behalf, while police agents reported that anarchists and nihilists regularly visited his home to solicit his largesse. Did this generosity, that might be considered material assistance to those involved in the violence, buy him the kind of malign influence enjoyed by Conrad's fictional Comrade X? If so, it might have made for a rather uncomfortable evening on 15 March, when his fellow diners included Constant Martin, a linchpin of the campaign of robberies that had involved Emile Henry, and Emile Pouget who had been sent to prison with Louise Michel for the bread

than they used to be, and the bombs are past history.' But while the bombs may have fallen silent, her statement was otherwise wishful thinking, as would be shown in the onslaught of criticism to which the anarchist elements at the congress of the Second International would be subjected when it convened in London in July 1896. A determination that anarchism should remain recognised as a legitimate socialist creed, socialism in its ultimate and purest form indeed, had led Malatesta to help organise the event, but any hopes he may have had of shaping the agenda from the inside were soon revealed as futile.

'The only resemblance between the individual anarchists and us is that of a name,' Reclus had recently protested, but not even the campaign of denigration waged by Parmeggiani's L'Anonymat group against Kropotkin, Malato and Pouget could persuade the Marxists and social democrats to acknowledge the reality, when there was so much for them to gain by not doing so. 'What we advocate is free association and union, the absence of authority, minds free from fetters, independence and well-being of all. Before all others it is we who preach *tolerance* for all – whether we think their opinions right or wrong – we do not wish to crush them by force or otherwise,' Gustav Landauer reminded the delegates, but failed to shame Liebknecht, Lafargue and the other Marxists into matching those ideals. Minds were made up, even before his assertion that 'What we fight is *state socialism*, levelling from above, bureaucracy', setting the stage for a coup even more decisive than that staged by Marx and Engels against Bakunin a quarter-century earlier.

Having delayed her planned move to America to be present at the congress, Louise Michel attended for its second day and the showdown. The dice were heavily loaded against the anarchists, who were poorly represented: offers by Special Branch to subsidise the cost of a one-way Channel crossing at the time of the amnesty the previous year had left the once thriving London colonies sadly depleted. The followers of Marx, by contrast,

francophone peasantry. The project that was dearest to him, though, was the revival of his plans for a Great Globe, for he believed that 'in the solemn contemplation of reliefs you participate so to speak with eternity … Globes must be temples which will make people grave and respectful.' Conceived now on a scale of 1:100,000, at over a quarter of a mile in diameter, a third as high again as the Eiffel Tower and nearly twice the height of the Sacré-Coeur, Reclus hoped that it would be commissioned for the 1900 Paris Expo, where it would reassert the values of the Enlightenment which commerce and religion threatened to obscure.

It is amusing to imagine what Special Branch and French police agents in London must have made of the diagrams that Reclus sent to his nephew Paul, one of those charged *in absentia* in the Trial of the Thirty and who had remained in partial exile for some time after the amnesty of 1895. Complete with its proposed superstructure housing the external observation platforms, in profile the pointed egg-shape of the globe bore a strong resemblance to that of the most advanced terrorist grenades, whose eye-opening function it was meant to supersede. The allusion was surely unintentional, though, and the path to acceptance would not be easy for either Reclus' proposals or the anarchism they projected.

In 1891, Oscar Wilde had proposed a geographical metaphor of his own for the development of socialism. 'A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not even worth glancing at,' he wrote in his essay, 'The Soul of Man Under Socialism', 'for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing.' Since then, anarchists had ventured into treacherous territory in search of their ideal. Even now, though, as veterans of the recent rough seas charted a course to new and diverse destinations, the shores that awaited them held unforeseen hazards of their own.

'There is a growing sense of harmony and reconciliation,' Louise Michel had written, 'the reactionaries are less harsh

riots a decade earlier. For on their way to the dinner from the Charlotte Street enclave, some would have passed the window of the undertaker's shop in Tottenham Court Road, where the image of Martial Bourdin's face, photographed as he lay in his coffin and showing all the puncture marks of the shrapnel from his bomb, offered a grim reminder of what waging war against the state could cost.

By April, it was once again Meunier's dossier that topped the pile on Chief Inspector Melville's desk. With the bomber of the Café Véry said to have returned from Canada, the hunt was resumed. The associates of known militants found themselves under pressure to provide information, presumably in return for indemnity from prosecution. Bourdin's close friend Charpentier was arrested for burglary, while Rousseau, the watchmaker who had given Henry work, was also detained. In due course, he and Coulon were considered the most likely candidates to have betrayed details of Meunier's movements.

Melville's coup in Walsall had briefly won him celebrity status and now the chance finally arrived for him to cement his reputation for decisive action. Having forewarned journalists, on 12 April the chief inspector and his troops staked out the boat train preparing to depart from Charing Cross station. Then, just as Meunier was about to board, Melville himself appeared from his hiding place and wrestled the outlaw to the ground. Lively representations of the scene were rushed out in the illustrated magazines: real-life detective heroism for a public whose appetite for such things had soared since the *Strand* began publishing the Sherlock Holmes stories by Conan Doyle in episodic form two years earlier. But where the phenomenal popularity of the fictional sleuth was based on regular monthly instalments of his adventures, Melville would have been confident, as he escorted Meunier out of Charing Cross station, that he could provide his public with a dramatic sequel far sooner than that.

In fact, it was only two days after Meunier's arrest that Inspector Sweeney took a seat at the front of a bus bound for Clerkenwell, next to a twitchy Italian teenager. For the previous fortnight Special Branch agents had been watching the eighteen-year-old Francis Polti, knowing that some weeks earlier a middle-aged anarchist drifter calling himself Emile Carnot had approached Polti to take part in a bomb plot. Since then, the police had shadowed him up to the hospital in Highgate, where his wife lay dangerously ill after the recent birth of their twins, and around pharmacists' shops closer to his home in Saffron Hill, observing as he assembled the necessary components.

It was 'a weary and thankless task' for the surveillance agents, Sweeney would complain, 'telegraphing for relief to come to one place when you've already had to leave to go halfway across London in pursuit'. Finally, however, they had tailed him to Mr Cohen's iron foundry in Clerkenwell, from where he and Carnot – whose real name was Giuseppe Farnara – had commissioned the bomb's casing. Realising that once Polti was back in the slums of the Italian quarter he might 'easily give his pursuers the slip in the maze of alleys and courts', and fearing that the device might prematurely explode as Bourdin's had done, Sweeney moved to make the arrest as soon as he saw Polti's hand enter the bag.

The motive for his planned attack, Polti declared, was to avenge himself on the British tourists who deluged the cities of his native Italy in droves each year: those Cookites who were 'destroying the natural beauties of the place and making scorching, sunbaked boulevards where were formerly olive-shaded lanes'. The outraged eloquence, though, was that of a journalist writing in a *Pall Mall Gazette* article two years earlier; Polti's explanation appeared quite bathetic in light of the bombs that had recently shaken the ministries in Rome in revenge for the government's brutal suppression of the anarchist uprising. An unsent letter from Polti to his parents left no doubt

same brush. Up on the slopes of Montmartre, Henri Zisly's anarchist group Les Naturiens pursued a libertarian existence that echoed Signac's bucolic idyll, perplexing the police with their defiant choice of a life of near savagery in such close proximity to the metropolis. But while they won converts with their neo-Gaulish festivals and vegetarian banquets in honour of Rousseau, it was an attempted dynamite attack on the Sacré-Coeur in July 1895, rising ever higher on the skyline, and fantastical sketches of the destruction such a blast might cause published by the anarchist lithographer Théophile Steinlen, that caught the public imagination. These seemed to the general public to be a more credible representation of what life would be like *In the Time of Anarchy* than Signac's flower-strewn paradise.

In recognition of the adverse circumstances, Signac altered the title of his painting to *In the Time of Harmony* but not even this compromise could secure its place in Victor Horta's revolutionary art nouveau House of the People in Brussels, for which it had originally been destined. In fact, the previous year the Belgian authorities had revealed their nervousness towards anarchism, even in its most peaceable form, with the Free University's last-minute decision to cancel Elisée Reclus' fellowship. The decision had proved counterproductive. Rather than leave Brussels, Reclus had found an alternative venue for his lectures in the Freemasonic Loge des Amis Philanthropes, where his willingness to debate ideas with his audience had so energised the pedagogic process that, such was the demand to attend, arrangements were made for a breakaway New University to open its doors the following September.

Reclus had demonstrated how anarchists could turn marginalisation to their advantage, using their exclusion from the mainstream to shape new opportunities and a new identity that might in time deliver the objective of social revolution. While resident in Belgium, the geographer even took up the composition of songs to carry anarchist propaganda to the

repeated linkage of Malatesta's conspiratorial presence and the use of dynamite led many, in the police forces of Europe and even among his colleagues, to suppose a causal relationship where it did not necessarily exist. Even his denunciations of individualistic violence, including his tart exchange of views with Emile Henry in 1893, were consequently seen as a ruse to misdirect attention away from his supposed role in such plots.

The wave of 'anarchist' terror that had swept the Continent was a millstone for Malatesta. He had been a suspect in the case of the rue des Bons-Enfants bomb in 1892, which Henry had in fact planned himself, and was thought by many to be the guiding hand behind others in Spain and Italy. During the weeks before the Café Terminus bombing it was his presence rather than that of either Henry or 'Bourdin' which attracted the heaviest surveillance, while his movements and contacts in London were consistently reported with an assiduousness that applied to few other émigrés. Accused in one report of having been 'involved with' President Carnot's assassin, Caserio, and in another of being 'satisfied' with the result of the attack, in the face of all evidence to the contrary, the image of him presented by French police agents was like that in the Englishman W. C. Harte's memoir *Confessions of an Anarchist*: 'the most dangerous plotter of modern times – who however … when the death of kings and presidents is in the air – appears in the background'. When Malatesta reviled dynamite, the authorities swiftly claimed it was because he 'prefers daggers that are sure to strike their predetermined target', and would long continue to insist that 'he wraps himself in mystery'.

Malatesta's predicament exemplified that of the movement as a whole. The demonisation of the movements in the 1890s had provided the press with a compelling shorthand for the anarchist as a malign figure in the shadows, a bomb beneath his coat and hell-bent on destruction, and it was a cliché that enemies on all sides found highly advantageous to exploit. Even Signac's innocent painting found itself tarred with the

that he had indeed planned a suicide attack for the following day, but his words lacked the brazen clarity of Farnara's 'I am guilty; I wanted to kill capitalists.' Perhaps, to the impoverished teenager, the glory of martyrdom in the anarchist cause simply offered an escape from the burden of fatherhood. What seems certain is that he was a dupe, his reference to the 'Royal Exchange' rather than the 'Stock Exchange' as the intended target, an obvious example of poor rote learning. The crucial question was on whose behalf, if any, Farnara had put him up to it.

The newspaper *Justice* was as forthright as it dared be: 'Somehow it does seem to us that the great Melville has possibly engineered the whole thing. We don't say that he has, of course. Nevertheless, we cannot but remember that a serious anarchist plot in England would be very convenient just now, especially an Italian or French anarchist plot.' A plot by Russian nihilists would have been even better, of course, but they had learned to be more cautious than their impetuous and gullible anarchist peers. If the Polti and Farnara conspiracy was useful in some respects for the chief inspector, however, in others it represented a considerable personal risk, and its early interdiction was a necessary act of caution. For shortly after the Greenwich bomb explosion, the Home Secretary, Sir William Harcourt, had been overheard in the lobby of the House of Commons reprimanding the assistant commissioner, Sir Robert Anderson, whose responsibility it was to supervise Special Branch. 'All that's very well,' he had said, 'but your idea of secrecy over there seems to consist of keeping the Home Secretary in the dark.'

Ten years before, during his previous tenure at the Home Office, Harcourt had adamantly opposed the use of agents provocateurs, arguing that 'the police ought not to set traps for people'. It must have been clear to Chief Inspector Melville that were some terrible error in Special Branch's management of a bomb plot to expose his illicit plans to undermine the principles of liberal Britain, he could expect no quarter from its po-

litical masters. And yet with each successive coup against the anarchists, Melville's reputation rose, and with each outrage abroad, so too did the perceived need for robust policing of the émigrés. It must have been with some delight, then, that just a week after Polti's arrest, when the air was still thick with awkward rumours of provocation, Melville received news of a series of explosions that had rocked the city of Liège in Belgium. His delight, however, would have been premature. Any hopes he had of presenting the Belgium bombings as final proof of an international terrorist network would soon evaporate.

Liège, nestling in the deep folds of hills close to Belgium's industrial heartland, was no stranger to terrorism. Nor was it unfamiliar with the effects of agents provocateurs, with the Catholic and government conspiracy that had framed the socialist leader Pourbaix, seven years earlier, still fresh in many memories. More recently, in 1892, the city had been the first to be struck by the international wave of terrorism that had since reached from Barcelona to Rome, and Paris to London. Though largely unremarked upon outside Belgium, the attacks had been in response to the mayor's decision to ban May Day demonstrations, and had targeted the more affluent areas of the city, causing considerable damage and alarm but no injuries. Moineaux, a leading Belgian anarchist, had been convicted of the bombings, together with fifteen other *compagnons*, but to the surprise of many in the city, a local cabaret owner called Schlebach, widely blamed for initiating the violence, had been acquitted on the judge's instruction.

As May Day approached in 1894, mounting tensions and resentments appeared to augur a new round of trouble. A month earlier, a huge clerical march had roused the indignation of the local socialists, since when it had been reported that an anti-socialist organisation over 500 strong was planning to demand tougher restrictions on the labour movement's activities. Against a backdrop of recent pit collapses at nearby coal mines which had cost many lives, and press reports of an army of tens

ambassador in the Bouillon Duval restaurant, were among eleven to be thrown to the sharks.

At any other time in the previous three years, such brutality would have aroused hot talk of vengeance among the London émigrés, but what meagre conspiracies the French police agents now reported had instead an air of desperate futility. Only the new young Tsar Nicholas in Moscow, who had recently inherited the crown on the death of Alexander III, was deemed a fitting target. With Rochefort turning off the tap of funding to the émigré communities, however, and in the absence of further nefarious investment from Rachkovsky and the Okhrana, any such murderous expeditions seemed certain to remain a pipe dream. Such, at least, must have been the hope of the more senior anarchists in London, who had for some time been edging towards a more outspoken denunciation of dynamite.

The previous March, soon after the bombs at the Café Terminus and in Greenwich, Louise Michel had gone on record as saying that terrorism was irrelevant to the general struggle. It was a view that Malatesta would echo in his critical essay on the subject, 'Heroes and Martyrs', observing that 'with any number of bombs and any number of blows of the knife, bourgeois society cannot be overthrown, being built as it is on an enormous mass of private interests and prejudices and sustained, more than it is by force of arms, by the inertia of the masses and their habits of submission'. However, a reputation, once acquired, is hard to live down.

For many years, Malatesta's commitment to the cause of social revolution had led him to plot and plan its advent wherever the prospect seemed most promising; it was no accident that his travels around Europe, since his return from South America, had frequently coincided with strikes and demonstrations. The confrontations that ensued often led to violence, initiated by one side or the other. An almost inevitable outcome was the recourse to terrorism by anarchists for purposes of revenge. The

only have needed to read the articles in French magazines about the constant preparedness of the Home Office's resident bomb expert, Colonel Majendie, to understand how vigilant the British police remained. A spate of bomb attacks on London post offices in August may have proved to be the work of an indigenous anarchist from Deptford, but the French and Italian émigrés continued to feel the hot breath of Melville's agents on their necks.

With no other outlet for their violent urges, the expropriators turned on one another. Parmeggiani, frustrated as his gang went their separate ways, waved a revolver when Marocco accused him of stealing his share of the ill-gotten gains. For others, a long visit by Emma Goldman provided a welcome distraction, although her friendship with the informant Mowbray, who had recently accompanied her on a lecture tour of America, said little for her judgement. Her presence at least inspired thoughts of greener pastures, despite the harsh restrictions that the United States had imposed on anarchists entering the country. One French anarchist, Mollet, who had come into a sizeable inheritance, even set up a travel agency in Liverpool to facilitate passage for all those wishing to cross the Atlantic. Louise Michel herself appeared intent on doing so, though she wavered over which side of the equator should be graced with her presence.

The end of the year brought further bad news, this time from the penal colony of Devil's Island off the coast of Guyana, where many of those responsible for the most notorious crimes of recent years were serving sentences of hard labour. A number of anarchists had risen in revolt, stabbing four of their warders in vengeance for a convict beaten to death by a guard. Forewarned by informers, however, the authorities quickly reasserted control, hunting the miscreants down in bestial fashion. Hiding in a tree, Ravachol's accomplice Charles Simon ('Biscuit') was used for target practice. His body and that of Leauthier, who had stabbed the Serbian

of thousands of America's unemployed converging on Washington, DC to demonstrate, the socialists of Liège, a powerful force, were not inclined to submit without a fight. Where normally the result might have been strikes and demonstrations, however, the start of Emile Henry's trial at the Court of Assizes appeared to inspire the anarchist faction to emulate his bloodier example.

The first bomb exploded on the evening of 1 May itself, the Saturday of the week in which Henry's advocate had opened the case for his defence. Wedged into an angle of the right transept of the medieval pilgrimage church of Saint-Jacques, the sixty cartridges of dynamite, weighing more than six kilograms, produced a devastating blast. Windows were shattered, a large hole was blown in the floor and many of the great stones supporting the vaulted roof cracked; had the charge been positioned only slightly differently, the ancient nave would have been brought down. Within minutes, the sound of the explosion had drawn a crowd of several hundred. Troops from the Belgian army had to be drafted in to keep order, but the young man seen sprinting away from the blast escaped unrecognised.

Awaiting news of the attack at his lodgings in Schlebach's cabaret club was the well-dressed Baron Ernest Ungern-Sternberg. A pale and rather corpulent figure with blond hair and a moustache tinted with red, his somewhat anomalous presence appears to have aroused no prior suspicion. Having arrived in Liège some months earlier, he had established himself as a charismatic presence in the anarchist community, equipped in advance with a descriptive list of its most significant members, to guide him in winning their trust. It was he who had commissioned one local activist called Muller to steal a sizeable quantity of dynamite from a store in nearby Chevron earlier in the year. And as witnesses would attest, 'The joy of the Russian was fierce' upon hearing of the damage caused by the Saint-Jacques bomb.

Ungern-Sternberg held his nerve as the police began their investigation with the round-up of predictable suspects, remaining in Liège for the moment to ensure that the series of attacks he had initiated and helped plan was seen through. Having already accompanied the anarchist Muller in collecting the casings and fuses from an elegant town house in the rue des Dominicains, it appears probable that on 3 May he joined him in placing the next device outside what was taken to be the home of Monsieur Renson, the president of the Court of Assizes. The explosion this time, in a residential area, was of a similar force to that in St Jacques and caused even more alarm and distress: the facades of buildings all around were ravaged and one old woman reported having been thrown from her bed on to the floor. As for the intended victim, the Monsieur Renson who was badly burned and blinded turned out to be not the scourge of anarchists, but his namesake, a popular local doctor. 'It is to be doubted that it will bring anarchism many new adepts,' the social democratic newspaper *Le Peuple* remarked of the attack, with considerable understatement. Before dawn broke the baron had fled, leaving the anarchists of Liège to face the music, the additional bombs still in their possession, should they choose to use them.

Claims that events in Liège provided final proof that the anarchists were involved in a truly international conspiracy appeared to be corroborated when one of the documents left behind by the baron conveniently listed eight Germans, two Dutch and five locals among his accomplices; reports in the German press claimed quite mistakenly that Kropotkin had been arrested in Russia. Meanwhile, under interrogation the Liège anarchists began to divulge more information about the baron himself. He had, the police were told, urged one of the anarchists he knew best to 'come with me, you can be part of a big spectacular' before setting off alone for Paris, two days before the Café Foyot bombing. Others testified to how he had planned a similar attack on the Café Canterbury in Liège that

October 1894, in all but three instances of serious but non-political violence, either the charges were dropped or acquittal ensued. 'Not since Pontius Pilate has anyone washed their hands with such solemnity,' Fénéon had quipped after Bulot opened a package from a 'well-wisher' that proved to be full of human excrement. However, although his facetious wit had afforded the 'individualist' anarchists outside the courtroom a crumb of comfort, the events of the previous year had left the movement high and dry, its press almost silenced and its lost momentum almost impossible to regain.

In retrospect, the Trial of the Thirty can be seen as marking a watershed in the history of French anarchism, between a period of terroristic violence and one of more considered attrition against the existing structures of society. The moderation of the jury's verdict reflected the unease that was widely felt in French society when people compared the harsh treatment meted out to those conspiring in the cause of a more just society, feared and despised as they widely were, with the leniency shown towards many of those involved in the Panama scandal, which had defrauded the French people of untold millions of francs. But while the trial may have helped release the dangerous pressure that had built up on both sides, the attitude of the authorities towards the anarchists in its immediate aftermath was scarcely conciliatory.

The mood among the London émigrés was variously depressed, chastened and pathetically vituperative. 'Most of them have lost their exaltation; others regret having ever become part of the anarchist movement and want to return to France,' concluded the prefecture's regular summary of its intelligence in October. The 'Wicked Laws' still threatened harsh penalties, though, and even the most remorseful were to remain trapped for the foreseeable future in an exile that became ever less congenial. Colleagues in Paris were warned by both Rochefort and Grave that coming to London had become a risky business and was inadvisable, but they would

The charge against him was of conspiring with anarchists and keeping explosive materials concealed in his desk at the war ministry, in relation to the bombing of the Café Foyot. The incidental accusation of having spied for Germany was clearly absurd, but in other respects the case against him had a firmer foundation than certain outraged sections of the press claimed. By making the case as much about crimes of thought as of action, however, the authorities provided Fénéon with a field of battle tailored to his talents.

'You were seen conversing with an anarchist behind a gas lamp,' challenged Bulot, who was once again prosecuting for the state, his occasional fumbling of the cross-examination perhaps explained by the emotion of having himself narrowly escaped one of Ravachol's bombs. 'Could you explain to me,' Fénéon asked, turning insouciantly to the president of the court, 'which side of a gas lamp is its behind?' And when the president reminded the court how the mercury that Fénéon had admitted keeping for Henry might easily be made into an explosive fulminate, Fénéon had a smart riposte: just as it could be made into thermometers and barometers. Emile Henry had shown a quick tongue too, of course, until silenced by the guillotine, but the glowing tributes paid to Fénéon by such respectable character witnesses as the poet Mallarmé lent the acerbic logic of his responses something like a moral weight when set beside the sophistry of the prosecution.

The French authorities had intended the Trial of the Thirty, as it became known, to be a slick spectacle that would demonstrate the necessity and efficacy of the 'Wicked Laws' in defending the state and its citizens. Having started its hearings less than a month after President Carnot's assassination, only one outcome to the trial seemed likely. The police, though, had overreached themselves in attempting to construct a case that conflated the theorists of anarchism with those who merely used the ideology as political cover for their habitual violent criminality. The result was that by the end of the trial in late

had only failed due to last-minute nerves on the part of the assigned bombers; how he had spoken too of his involvement with plots in London, his boasts seemingly borne out by information contained in his private papers. Following a further explosion outside the home of the city's mayor, bombs were discovered in the Théâtre-Royal foyer and close to a prominent banker's house, while warnings that the baron had been scouting a local gasworks raised further alarm. Despite the inevitable concern with the safety of Liège's citizens, however, there remained many awkward questions to be answered.

At the prefecture in Paris, the police tried to join the dots. Information supplied by their London-based agent, Léon, that Henry's dangerous friend Marocco and others had recently visited Brussels gave substance to the notion of cross-border coordination among the anarchists. Léon even provided the class and number of the carriage in which they had travelled, in support of his theory that so short were the distances to be travelled in Belgium that London-based anarchists might themselves have carried out the attack in Liège and still caught the return train. Marocco himself was said to be quite openly advising visitors that the Liège bombings and that in the Café Foyot in Paris were linked. Meanwhile, there were reports from Geneva that the Russian colony there had known of the Liège attacks in advance. In this case, though, the agent noted that the nihilist suspected of funding them 'always has a well-filled wallet': a shorthand signal, in this context, that he was an Okhrana agent.

In the past Rachkovsky had always been able to keep any hard evidence of provocation at arm's length, relying on friendly figures in the local police, where such operations were undertaken, to intervene and prevent the exposure of his agents. The Paris prefecture had done so with admirable efficiency in 1890, turning a blind eye to the false passport sent to Landesen from the Russian Embassy and ensuring that he was given enough time to make good his escape

before their officers swooped; for his part Chief Inspector Mace of the Sûreté had been generously decorated by the tsar. Melville too had done a good job of silencing David Nicoll's inconvenient revelations about Walsall, at least for a while: it was only unfortunate that awkward scruples high up the chain of command in England meant that his rewards would have to wait. Rachkovsky must have thought his operations in Belgium were at least as secure, guaranteed by the position of respect that his foremost agent held there.

Rachkovsky had made every effort to provide the new life and identity for which Hekkelman had pleaded while holed up in the Grand Hotel in Brighton, after the sting operation of 1890. The stigma of his Jewish birth had been erased in grand fashion, with Count Muraviev and the wife of Imperial Senator Mansurov drafted in as godparents for his baptism in the chapel of the Russian Embassy in Berlin. But his christening as 'Arkady Harting' was only the beginning of the makeover. Rapid elevation to the position of state councillor was followed by an attachment, in 1892, to the Russian legation in Brussels, where the Belgian Sûreté, in full knowledge of his true identity, expressed their admiration for his undercover work. It was the next event in Harting's life, however, that would have most reassured Rachkovsky that Liège was safe for the Okhrana's operations: his protégé's marriage to the local high-society beauty, Marie-Hortense-Elizabeth-Madeleine Pirlot, nine years Harting's junior and the niece of a key figure in the city's judiciary. The dowry was 100,000 francs, with twice that sum gifted by her parents to help the newlyweds establish a home on the rue des Dominicains, while the presence of the Belgian attaché to the French ministry of the interior as one of four witnesses conferred on the union the appearance of an official sanction.

Yet all those efforts had been in vain, it now seemed, thwarted by the foolish incorruptibility of the Russian consul in Amsterdam, and the excessive zeal of the Liège police. For

Symbolist movements conjuring an unknown aesthetic cosmos into existence. 'Everything new to be accepted requires that old fools must die. We are longing for this to happen as soon as possible' Fénéon had since written, in this case out of impatience for Camille Pissarro's work to receive due recognition. Increasingly, though, his belief in violent rupture as the necessary mechanism of progress had spilled over from his artistic concerns into political activism. In common with the large numbers of Signac's cultural peers who had spent months or years in a self-imposed London exile among the most extreme of the 'individualist' anarchists, the aura that surrounded Fénéon by 1894 was that of the dynamite blast.

That spring, when police raids were netting more than 400 anarchists suspected of conspiracy, Elisée Reclus was in Belgium, where he had finally gone with the intention of taking up a fellowship at the Free University in Brussels, which he had delayed until the nineteenth and final volume of the *Universal Geography* was complete. Wisely, the French authorities declined to pursue him, recognising that quite apart from the international furore his arrest might cause, the prosecution of a man of such high intellectual standing would muddy the convenient image of anarchism as the preserve of thugs and degenerates. Signac too was left unmolested, despite his name appearing, together with those of many other cultural figures, on a document seized by the police that listed the circulation of *La Révolte*. Yet when thirty anarchists accused of promulgating terror were arraigned in France that August, Fénéon found himself in the dock, together with the artist Maximilien Luce. Alongside them were Grave and Sébastien Faure, both of whom were reluctant speakers, together with a selection of other journalists and a handful of inarticulate career criminals from among Parmeggiani's gang of expropriators, many of them recent members of the London colony. With Emile Pouget and Constant Martin both in hiding, Fénéon was free to command the stage.

amuse some child, and saying, "This is the ideal place to teach geography." '

The influence of the two venerable anarchists on Signac went far deeper, though, than his choice of subject matter. The pointillist method of constructing images through the application of minute paint dabs, that characterised the neo-Impressionist style of Signac and his late friend Seurat, had first been inspired by Reclus' descriptions of running water, and only later developed by reference to recent innovations in optical theory. Reclus, a true poet of nature as Kropotkin said of him, saw how closely mankind and its environment were informed by one another: that aesthetic harmony encouraged social well-being, promoting the intellectual, moral and spiritual growth of its members and, conversely, that 'the planet's characteristics will not have their complete harmony if men are not first united in a concert of justice and peace'. Signac had visualised that reciprocity at its most benign, and for him the very perceptual process by which adjacent spots of colour blended into a shimmering whole in the eye of the beholder, as musical notes did in a complex composition, was itself a potent metaphor of the political harmony that the coming social revolution would herald. To many of his artistic peers, however, Signac's gesture of solidarity with the older generation of anarchists must have seemed curiously anachronistic, at the very least.

The propaganda value of all the articles written by Reclus and Kropotkin were as nothing, Félix Fénéon had pronounced, beside the bomb attacks by Vaillant and Henry, with the latter's attack on the Café Terminus especially noteworthy, 'being directed toward the voting public, more guilty in the long run, perhaps, than the representatives they elected'. In 1890, Signac had painted a full-length portrait of Fénéon in profile, in which the swirling psychedelic background, 'Rhythmic with Beats and Angles, Tones and Tints', suggested the lily-carrying impresario of the post-Impressionist and

while the attention of the press and the police had initially focused on Schlebach and the 'Academy of Anarchy' that was said to operate out of his club, papers and letters found in the baron's rented room there had shifted the emphasis of the official inquiry. And when news had arrived from the police in Amsterdam that the man known best to his old associates as 'Le Russe' had been turned over to them by the Russian consul, on whose mercy he had thrown himself, the Liège authorities had broadened their investigation.

Rachkovsky can have had little warning of the approaching storm when, sitting at his desk on 5 May, only four days after the Saint-Jacques bomb and within hours of the baron being handed over to the Dutch police, he was passed a message that a visitor had asked to see 'Monsieur Léonard'. Just as great, though, was the surprise of the Belgian official sent to track down the man whom letters found in the baron's room revealed as the financier of the Liège bomb conspiracy. He would have double-checked the address in his dossier before entering the grand courtyard of the Russian Embassy on rue de Grenelle, and surely paused again before mounting the steps beneath the canopied entrance. However, the momentary but unmistakable flicker of recognition in the face of the doorman at the mention of 'Léonard' suggested he was on the right track, while the long interval between his request being passed through and his polite but firm ejection from the building surely confirmed it.

In the Okhrana's offices in the east wing, Rachkovsky himself may have felt tempted simply to close his eyes tight and hold his breath, in the hope that the awkward reality of the situation would melt away. For 'Léonard' was his wife's maiden name which he, in common with Henry Samuels, regularly borrowed for his double-dealing. Seeing the imminent ruin of his reputation and the collapse not only of the great conspiracy he had woven but the wide network of agents he had constructed, he instead moved swiftly into firefighting mode. With the Ungern-Sternberg family, well-known Baltic

aristocracy, telegraphing Amsterdam that their relation, whose passport had recently been stolen in Gibraltar, bore no resemblance to the man described, Rachkovsky's options were limited. Determined to save his agent Cyprien Jagolkovsky from exposure, he applied pressure on the Dutch police who were holding the 'baron' to free him, which they did: tellingly, Jagolkovsky's route back to Russia involved a period spent in hiding in London with Dumont, about whom Nicoll and Malato had harboured such strong suspicions. At least with the 'baron' removed as a source of potential embarrassment, the Okhrana chief could turn his attention to perception management, though with so many secrets out in the open the process would be long and laborious.

By the time of the trial of the Liège conspirators, nine months later, Rachkovsky had comprehensively secured his position, due in part perhaps to strings pulled by Harting in Liège. In the course of the cross-examination, 'Le Russe' was endlessly referred to, and yet 'Ungern-Sternberg' was not to be blamed: Monsieur Seny, the *juge d'instruction*, informed the court that he had travelled to St Petersburg in person to question the accused, and declared him wholly innocent. The name of Jagolkovsky was never mentioned. *Le Peuple* reported how the Russian consul in Amsterdam, when 'interviewed afresh, refused to reply, hiding behind professional secrecy', while evidence that the bombs had been collected from Harting's house on the rue des Dominicains was also suppressed. Even Muller changed his story, insisting that he had been mistaken in thinking that the baron had helped him carry out the attack on Renson. And as for Monsieur Léonard, who had channelled the funds for the bombings to Schlebach via an anonymous female sympathiser, the judge ruled that a case could not be brought against a man who did not exist.

The truth about the scope of the Okhrana provocation conspiracy in 1894 that encompassed Liège, London and Paris, and the covert involvement of foreign police services, remains elu-

21. *A Time of Harmony*

Paris, London and New York, 1894–1896

The Utopia for which veterans like Reclus and Kropoktin had strived for so long was finally plain to see. Paul Signac had begun work on his vast canvas *In the Time of Anarchy* in 1894, while the campaign of bombings and assassinations was at its most intense, but the scene he envisioned was a world apart from the chaos and ruination to which most now thought anarchism aspired. In Signac's modern-day Eden, fruit hung from trees within easy reach, babies explored freely, women danced in elegant but loose dresses and men read or played *petanques*, stripped to the waist, while couples gazed out over the sea. A distant steam tractor implied the benefits of technology but did not intrude on the balmy peace of the Mediterranean landscape.

Signac had ignored Kropotkin's famous call of a decade earlier for artists to 'depict for us in your vivid style or in your fervent paintings the titanic struggle of the people against the oppressors' or 'show the people the ugliness of contemporary life and make us touch with a finger the cause of this ugliness'. Instead, his restorative paradise evoked the kind of world in which Reclus had advised workers to spend their leisure, the better to counteract the bestiality of their labour, and for which Kropotkin had more recently supplied the logistical foundation in *Fields, Factories and Workshops*. Reclus himself would have been in his element there. 'I see him yet,' a friend of the geographer would later recollect, 'close to the waterside, making islands, capes and archipelagos in the sand with his stick, to

murder on the Continent,' opined the leader article in the *Globe*. Alarmist accounts of the terrorist threat, previously the preserve of the sensationalist novels, now became the subject of supposedly factual reportage in the popular magazines. The *Strand* published an article entitled 'Dynamite and Dynamiters' which disingenuously denied any intention to 'give rise to alarm or be an incentive to disturbed or restless nights', while offering the most blood-chilling accounts and illustrations of the destructive power of anarchist bombs. *Tit Bits* upped the ante, scooping an interview with a 'gentleman holding a high position in the detective force' who confided his concern that the anarchists were now turning their attention from conventional to biological terrorism, using the spores of typhus and yellow fever to spread viral contamination. Following the model of Rachkovsky's anti-Semitic propaganda, the immigrant masses were to be transformed in the popular imagination from inadvertent vectors of disease into intentional agents of infection.

sive today. The file on Cyprien Jagolkovsky held by the Belgian Sûreté was immediately transferred to the cabinet office, where it soon disappeared into the ether, as did the court transcripts; those of Emile Henry's private papers that were not spirited away by friends in the hours after his arrest were impounded by the French interior ministry. Later they would be joined in oblivion by the documents relating to the Okhrana's activities in London at the time, as well as Special Branch ledgers that were said for decades to have been destroyed; since their inconvenient reappearance shortly prior to 2002, their retention has been defended, and heavy redaction undertaken. And yet beneath the whitewash, the fragmentary outline of the relationships that Rachkovsky and his co-conspirators were so eager to conceal can still be discerned.

What is known of events in Liège that spring reveals the modus operandi of Rachkovsky's agents: a model that conforms closely to that of the 1890 sting operation in Paris, was echoed at Walsall, and surely replicated elsewhere. A charismatic figure like the baron or Landesen or Coulon, burning with idealism and determination, presents themselves as an inspiration to impressionable youths who talk a good fight but lack the means. The material is provided, or else commissioned with detailed instructions for its acquisition or manufacture. Funds are supplied from a distant and affluent benefactor, ideally through an intermediary, of a generosity that dazzles any doubters. Secondary agents provocateurs, recruited locally, affirm the credulous recruits in their sense of purpose. And if the execution of attacks is part of the plan, the bombers' own preferences may be solicited but are then refined, to ensure maximum impact on public opinion.

So to what had the counterfeit 'baron' been referring when he told a group of cowardly Liègeois anarchists that 'You should see how we do things in Paris', or when he alluded to his part in plots in London? His involvement in Fénéon's attack on the Café Véry seems highly likely; the coincidence

of the unfortunate Pauwels' bombing of churches and the baron's choice of Saint-Jacques as the first target in Liège, intriguing. And then there was Dumont, Jagolkovsky's associate in London, who had raised such suspicion in Paris the month before Henry's bombing of the Café Terminus, and who had been part of Ravachol's group when their raid on the dynamite store, reminiscent of that at Chevron near Liège, had supplied the large haul of explosives used in any number of the attacks that followed. As for Samuels and Coulon, they were bit-part players at least in the whole mad cycle of violent retribution that Rachkovsky's wiles had kept spinning. Rochefort, if he had a role, unquestionably had his own agenda too.

A year after the Greenwich bombing, a disgruntled ex-sergeant in Special Branch called MacIntyre would be the first to go public on the use of agents provocateurs against the anarchists. 'Their intrigues produce conspiracies,' he wrote in *Reynolds News*, his confirmation of long-standing suspicions about the Walsall Affair eliciting a letter from Coulon confessing to his role. For all Melville's attempts to discredit him, MacIntyre was surely right to say that when such a provocateur 'finds the prevailing danger is diminishing in quality … He manufactures more "danger".' In 1898, Sir Robert Anderson, the assistant commissioner, would admit as much, acknowledging 'emphatically that in recent years the police have succeeded only by straining the law, or, in plain English, by doing utterly unlawful things, at intervals, to check this conspiracy'. It would be another two decades before a veteran of the French police would admit the force's involvement in luring Vaillant into bombing the Chamber of Deputies.

David Nicoll evoked the human cost of such tactics with great pathos. 'Romance and novelty there are,' he wrote of the anarchist's life, 'though sometimes the delightful vision comes to an abrupt termination, changing suddenly like a lovely face into an opium vision of something horrible and devilish. This

was the fate of some friends of ours, who dreamed of regenerating the world, and found themselves, thanks to the machinations of a police spy, doomed to a long term of penal servitude.' The fate of others was more abrupt.

The twenty-first of May 1894 was a day of executions. In Paris, Emile Henry was guillotined, while in Barcelona, the six men convicted of the Liceo opera house bombing faced a firing squad. As widely expected, their deaths heralded the next wave of revenge attacks. Three weeks later, an anarchist assassin tried and failed to shoot dead the Italian prime minister, Crispi, whom he held accountable for the imprisonment of over 1,000 socialists after the risings in the south of the country. Eight days after that, in Lyons, another Italian, Sante Geronimo Caserio, would meet with greater success: dashing from the crowd as the French president Sadi Carnot's carriage passed, he hauled himself up on to the running board and plunged a dagger into his victim's chest. Few were convinced by the assassin's insistence that he had acted on his own initiative, having simply caught a train from his home near the Mediterranean and then walked the rest of the distance to carry out the act, nor by the anarchists' disavowal of all knowledge of him.

Around the world, increasingly draconian measures were taken to counter the terrorist threat. In America, mere adherence to the anarchist cause had already become a crime, and any who espoused it were barred from entering the country. In July, France added a Press Law to the anti-anarchist armoury that the 'Wicked Laws' already constituted. The same month, Italy caught up by enacting three exceptional laws to ensure public security, known collectively as the 'Crispi Dictatorship', that imposed harsh restrictions on freedom of speech and association. Sentiment in Britain too was swinging against the anarchists.

'Society is asking how long the British metropolis will be content to afford a safe asylum for gangs of assassins, who there plot and perfect atrocious schemes for universal