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# The Pogrom Spirit

Alexander Atabekian

1 September 1919

Human life is short in the eternity of time. And yet, in the short years of its existence, many horrors have to be seen by the one created by God “in his own image”. The “crown of nature” — man — hears about many cruelties and experiences a lot of violence.

Four decades have passed since that time; I was still a boy; I was looking at the surrounding life with ignorant consciousness.

At that time Russia was shaken up, the people “from the far north to the southern country” rose up, fighting with a rare unanimity, not unlike the Japanese war. Mothers sent blessings to their sons on the march, sisters moistened with tears of compassion the cornea for the wounded, plucked with convulsive fingers (at that time hygroscopic cotton wool had not yet been invented); they shed tears of compassion for the fate of both the dear wounded and the victims of the pogrom spirit.

There, in the distant Balkans, our brothers, the Bulgarians, were being smashed. Towns and villages were ravaged, men were slaughtered, mothers’ wombs were torn open, and the trembling foetuses were impaled on pikes.

Who? Why?

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“Righteous” Muslims — “wicked” Christians.

For a different faith, for an alien race. There, on the majestic heights of the Balkans, in the “Pink Valley” near Shipka, on the golden fields of the plain, some people exterminated others.

Muslims, who pray to the One God of the Old Testament, who honour both Moses and Jesus Christ as prophets, who worship the Virgin Mary, slaughtered Christians.

One of the sons of Adam, armed, brutally massacred his defenceless brothers. Thus the violent spirit of a people, less developed, less human, stirred up by power and clergy to racial intolerance and religious fanaticism, found in the very defencelessness of its victim an opening for rampaging.

The spirit of the man-beast was unbridled, and the distinctions of religion and race were mere pretexts.

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Years have passed. I, a young man, was thrown by fate — no, by a disenfranchised homeland — into distant Europe, in search of light and knowledge. In 1895, I was in Lyon. The president of the republic, Carnot, had come to the opening of an international exhibition. By chance I was in the crowd when the hand of an anarchist — the *Italian* Caserio, in the midst of the state celebrations, ended the life of the president.

After that... after that the crowd raged, gangs of thugs attacked the flats of Italians, innocent workers, with shouts of anger, with faces distorted by hatred; they threw out of the windows of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> floors their utensils, their clothes, their belongings and immediately, in the street, burned them with a wild roar...

Two days later, in the dead room of the medical school, Professor Lacassagne showed the students the charred corpses, tried to establish their identity and, only by the teeth of the cheekless jaws of one, found that the victim... smoked a pipe.

Countless bells daily remind the people of the Man-God, who took the crown of martyrdom for fighting the pogrom spirit, for preaching — *love thy neighbour as thyself*. And yet the resounding ringing of the bells has not yet driven away the nightmarish spectres of possible pogroms.

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At the beginning of the world massacre, I heard the words of an eternal truth from a simple Persian woman who was listening to the horrors of war:

*All have mothers!*

Spare the tears of mothers! Preach, explain to the souls wandering in the dark all the inconsistency, all the groundlessness of man-hating accusations.

It is time for Tolstoy's nation to realise and be cured of the shameful pogrom passion, for:

THE POGROM SPIRIT IS WITHIN US.

The anonymous remains were committed to the ground. The hand of a friend did not adorn the grave, a mother's tear did not sprinkle the loose earth...

A few days later, buskers shouted through the streets that the portrait of the old president was being sold for half the price of the newly elected one. Passers-by only smirked at the wit of the sellers.

Love for the motherland, respect for the head of state, for the fatherland, had nothing to do with the events. The "civilised" French woke up only the dormant beast in man, the pogrom spirit.

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Many years have passed. A world war broke out. Ominous news began to come from the Caucasian front: Kurds were slaughtering Armenians... Streams of refugees poured into Russia. I was there, I worked among them, I saw their suffering, I heard their groans, and corpses, corpses... In Echmiadzin, at the foot of Ararat, under the sultry sun, they did not even have time to bury them... Along the roads one met abandoned dying people lying among unburied corpses, or, — from hastily filled holes, — a hand or a foot sticking out...

At one pass, I held my horse: in the middle of the road, under the animal's feet, were human remains. The vertebral column with pelvic bones, young white teeth of the jaws, long black hair and red shreds of clothes, trampled into the mud by hooves, spoke of the horrors of the last hours of a young woman abandoned on a deserted ridge, perhaps the mother of one of those orphans, for the collection of whom I rode with a group of young comrades...

Hundreds of thousands of Armenians were ruined, crushed, slaughtered. The criminal hand of power armed the man-beast, gave space to a wild rampage — a pogrom spirit.

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The Russian government is at war with the German government. The Germans, all Germans, our *neighbours*, our long-standing neighbours at home, on the stairs, our yesterday's comrades in labour, commerce and industry, are to blame for everything. A pogrom spirit, a merciless spirit, brought an old man and his young daughter to the Moskva River and drowned them both together ...

This is a disgrace that the *cruel heart of Russia* will never wash away.

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The October Revolution broke out. The same pogrom spirit turned indiscriminately against their fellow officers, the present-day "military specialists".

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But can anything compare with the persistence, the consistency, the cruelty with which they persecuted the scattered children of Israel? They crushed them, beat them to death, slaughtered them mercilessly, without distinction of sex or age, not unlike the half-wild Kurds, the Bashi-bazouks.

The pogrom spirit, slumbering in the man-beast, knows no measure, no pity, no shame, but still it needs food for its sustenance, it needs justification for the manifestation of man-hating passions.

Jews are exploiters, — Jews trade, cheat and rob the people, and meanwhile not a Jewish but a Russian proverb says: "you will not cheat, you will not sell." Jews are suspected in ritual mutilations... The ancestors of the writer of these lines were Christians since the 4<sup>th</sup> century, when the Russian people itself, not only Orthodox Russia, was not even in mind, and therefore I can safely say: it is not for those who annually symbolically commune with the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ to suspect

Jews in mutilations on the basis of the same rite. The Jews are reviled with an insulting nickname by the very ones who pray to God the son of a Jewess, and to Our Lady a Jewess.

Jews are now blamed for the overreach of government institutions. And by whom? The very same ones who found it natural that Russians under the old regime should occupy all responsible posts in the outskirts of Russia, in other nations.

They see Jewish overpopulation only because the February Revolution brought the country to the path of civilisation, equalised all the peoples of Russia, and Jews found access to all those institutions, both good and bad, from which they had previously been "excluded".

If I were a Jew, if I, by my political convictions, could and did hold any responsible position in governmental bodies, I would, in view of the condensed atmosphere, voluntarily resign — if only out of humanity, I would resign from a conspicuously prominent post.

But if I were also a Russian, if, indeed, the Jews, only the Jews, directed the whole of Russian political life, ruled over Russia, then I would not cry out that a bunch of Jews were enough to enslave the multimillion-strong Russian people like a small, unreasonable child. I would fight actively for the emancipation of my nation, and not preach, condone or justify the beatings and pogroms of people who have nothing to do with the government and whose entire fault is that they are of a different tribe and a different faith.

There is no reason, no justification for the Jewish pogroms, except for wild instincts, a beastly pogrom spirit, which more often disgraces the Russian name than other nations.

Waves of new, more and more new Jewish pogroms are rolling over Ukraine, claiming tens of thousands of human lives. The spectre of the unbridled man-beast now hovers over Great Russia.

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