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Anti-Copyright



From a letter to Christopher Tolkien

J. R. R. Tolkien

29 November 1943

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[In the summer of 1943, Christopher, then aged eighteen, was called up into the Royal Air Force. When this letter was written, he was at a training camp in Manchester.]

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My political opinions lean more and more to Anarchy (philosophically understood, meaning abolition of control not whiskered men with bombs) – or to 'unconstitutional' Monarchy. I would arrest anybody who uses the word State (in any sense other than the inanimate realm of England and its inhabitants, a thing that has neither power, rights nor mind); and after a chance of recantation, execute them if they remained obstinate! If we could get back to personal names, it would do a lot of good. Government is an abstract noun meaning the an and process of governing and it should be an offence to write it with a capital G or so as to refer to people. If people were in the habit of referring to 'King George's council, Winston and his gang', it would go a long way to clearing thought, and reducing the frightful landslide into Theyocracy. Anyway the proper study of Man is anything but Man; and the most improper job of any man, even saints (who at any rate were at least unwilling to take it on), is bossing other men. Not one in a million is fit for it, and least of all those who seek the opportunity. And at least it is done only to a small group of men who know who their master

is. The mediævals were only too right in taking *nolo efiscopari* as the best reason a man could give to others for making him a bishop. Give me a king whose chief interest in life is stamps, railways, or race-horses; and who has the power to sack his Vizier (or whatever you care to call him) if he does not like the cut of his trousers. And so on down the line. But, of course, the fatal weakness of all that – after all only the fatal weakness of all good natural things in a bad corrupt unnatural world – is that it works and has worked only when all the world is messing along in the same good old inefficient human way. The quarrelsome, conceited Greeks managed to pull it off against Xerxes; but the abominable chemists and engineers have put such a power into Xerxes' hands, and all anti-communities, that decent folk don't seem to have a chance. We are all trying to do the Alexander-touch – and, as history teaches, that orientalized Alexander and all his generals. The poor boob fancied (or liked people to fancy) he was the son of Dionysus, and died of drink. The Greece that was worth saving from Persia perished anyway; and became a kind of Vichy-Hellas, or Fighting-Hellas (which did not fight), talking about Hellenic honour and culture and thriving on the sale of the early equivalent of dirty postcards. But the special horror of the present world is that the whole damned thing is in one bag. There is nowhere to fly to. Even the unlucky little Samoyedes, I suspect, have tinned food and the village loudspeaker telling Stalin's bed-time stories about Democracy and the wicked Fascists who eat babies and steal sledge-dogs. There is only one bright spot and that is the growing habit of disgruntled men of dynamiting factories and power-stations; I hope that, encouraged now as 'patriotism', may remain a habit! But it won't do any good, if it is not universal.

Well, cheers and all that to you dearest son. We were born in a dark age out of due time (for us). But there is this comfort: otherwise we should not know, or so much love, what we do love. I imagine the fish out of water is the only fish to have an inkling of water. Also we have still small words to use. 'I will not bow be-

fore the Iron Crown, nor cast my own small golden sceptre down.' Have at the Ores, with winged words, war-adders, biting darts – but make sure of the mark, before shooting.