

Patriotism and Government

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Quote:

”The time was fast approaching when to call a man a patriot would be the deepest insult you could offer him. Patriotism now meant advocating plunder in the interests of the privileged classes of the particular State system into which we had happened to be born.”

E. Belfort Bax.

Chapter I

I have already several times expressed the thought that the feeling of patriotism is in our day an unnatural, irrational, and harmful feeling, and is the cause of a great part of the ills from which mankind is suffering; and that, consequently, this feeling should not be cultivated, as is now being done, but should, on the contrary, be suppressed and eradicated by all means available to rational men. Yet, strange to say, though it is undeniable that the universal armaments and the destructive wars which are ruining the peoples result from that one feeling, all my arguments showing the backwardness, anachronism, and harmfulness of patriotism have been met, and are still met, either by silence, or by intentional misconception, or by a strange unvarying reply to the effect that only bad patriotism (Jingoism, or Chauvinism) is bad, but that real, good patriotism is a very elevated moral feeling, to condemn which is not only irrational but wicked.

As to what this real, good patriotism consists of nothing at all is said; or, if anything is said, instead of explanation we get declamatory, inflated phrases; or, finally, something else is substituted for patriotism, something which has nothing in common with the patriotism we all know, and from the results of which we all suffer so severely.

It is generally said that the real, good patriotism consists in desiring for one’s own people or State such real benefits as do not infringe the well-being of other nations.

Talking, recently, to an Englishman about the present war, I said to him that the real cause of the war was not avarice, as is generally said, but patriotism, as is evident from the temper of the whole English society. The Englishman did not agree with me, and said that even were the case so, it resulted from the fact that the patriotism at present inspiring Englishmen is a bad patriotism; but that good patriotism, such as he was imbued with, consists in Englishmen, his compatriots, acting well.

”Then do you wish only Englishmen to act well?” I asked.

”I wish all men to do so,” said he; indicating clearly by that reply the characteristic of true benefits,—whether moral, scientific, or even material and practical,—which is that they spread out to all men; and therefore to wish such benefits to anyone, not only is not patriotic, but is the reverse of patriotic.

Neither are the peculiarities of each people patriotism; though these things are purposely substituted for the conception of patriotism by its defenders. They say that the peculiarities of each people are an essential condition of human progress, and that therefore patriotism, which seeks to maintain those peculiarities is a good and useful feeling. But is it not quite evident that if, once upon a time, these peculiarities of each people—these customs, creeds, languages—were conditions necessary for the life of humanity, yet in our time these same peculiarities form the

chief obstacle to what is already recognised as an ideal—the brotherly union of the peoples? And therefore the maintenance and defence of any nationality—Russian, German, French, or Anglo-Saxon, provoking the corresponding maintenance and defence not only of Hungarian, Polish, and Irish nationalities, but also of Basque, Provençal, Mordvinian, Tchouvásh, and many other nationalities—serves not to harmonise and unite men, but to estrange and divide them more and more from one another.

So that not the imaginary but the real patriotism, which we all know, by which most people today are swayed, and from which humanity suffers so severely, is not the wish for spiritual benefits for one's own people (it is impossible to desire spiritual benefits for one's own people only); but it is a very definite feeling of preference for one's own people or State above all other peoples and States, and therefore it is the wish to get for that people or State the greatest advantages and power that can be got; and these are always obtainable only at the expense of the advantages and power of other peoples or States.

It would therefore seem obvious that patriotism as a feeling, is a bad and harmful feeling, and as a doctrine is a stupid doctrine. For it is clear that if each people and each State considers itself the best of peoples and States, they all dwell in a gross and harmful delusion.

Chapter II

One would expect the harmfulness and irrationality of patriotism to be evident to people. But the surprising fact is that cultured and learned men not only do not notice it for themselves, but they contest every exposure of the harm and stupidity of patriotism with the greatest obstinacy and ardour, though without any rational grounds; and they continue to belaud it as beneficent and elevating.

What does this mean?

Only one explanation of this amazing fact presents itself to me.

All human history from the earliest times and to our day may be considered as a movement of the consciousness, both of individuals and of homogeneous groups, from lower ideas to higher ones. The whole path, travelled both by individuals and by homogeneous groups, may be represented as a consecutive fight of steps from the very lowest, on the level of animal life, to the very highest to which the consciousness of man has attained at a given moment of history.

Each man, like each separate homogeneous group, nation, or State, always moved and moves up this ladder of ideas. Some portions of humanity move on, others lag far behind, others, again,—the majority,—move somewhere between the most advanced and the most backward. But all, on whatever step they stand, are inevitably and irresistibly moving from lower to higher ideas. And always, at any given moment, both the individuals and the separate groups of people—advanced, middle, or backward—stand in three different relations to three stages of ideas, amid which they move.

Always, both for the individual and for the separate groups of people, there are the ideas of the past, which are worn out and have become strange to them, and to which they cannot revert: as, for instance, in our Christian world the ideas of cannibalism, universal plunder, the rape of wives, and other customs of which only a record remains.

And there are the ideas of the present, instilled into men's minds by education, by example, and by the general activity of all around them: ideas under the power of which they live at a given

time; for instance, in our own day, the ideas of property, State organisation, trade, utilisation of domestic animals, etc.

And there are the ideas of the future, of which some are already approaching realisation, and are obliging people to change their way of life and to struggle against the former ways: such ideas in our world as those of freeing the labourers, of giving equality to women, and of disusing flesh food, etc.; while others, though already recognised, have not yet begun to struggle against the old forms of life: such in our time are the ideas (which we call ideals) of the extermination of violence, the arrangement of a communal system of property, of a universal religion, and of a general brotherhood of men.

And, therefore, every man and every homogeneous group of men, on whatever level they may stand, having behind them the worn-out remembrances of the past, and before them the ideals of the future, are always in a state of struggle between the moribund ideas of the present and the ideas of the future that are coming to life. It usually happens that when an idea which has been useful and even necessary in the past becomes superfluous, that idea after a more or less prolonged struggle yields its place to a new idea which was till then an ideal, but which thus becomes a present idea.

But it does occur that an antiquated idea, already replaced in people's consciousness by a higher one, is of such a kind that its maintenance is profitable to certain people who have the greatest influence in their society. And then it happens that this antiquated idea, though it is in sharp contradiction to the whole surrounding form of life which has been altering in other respects, continues to influence people and to sway their actions. Such retention of antiquated ideas always occurred and still occurs in the region of religion. The cause is that the priests, whose profitable positions are bound up with the antiquated religious idea, using their power, purposely hold people to the antiquated idea.

The same thing occurs, and for similar reasons, in the political sphere, with reference to the patriotic idea, on which every dominion is based. People to whom it is profitable to do so, maintain that idea by artificial means, though it now lacks both sense and utility. And as these people possess the most powerful means of influencing others, they are able to achieve their object.

In this, it seems to me, lies the explanation of the strange contrast between the antiquated patriotic idea, and the whole drift of ideas making in a contrary direction which have already entered into the consciousness of the Christian world.

Chapter III

Patriotism as a feeling of exclusive love for one's own people, and as a doctrine of the virtue of sacrificing one's tranquillity, one's property, and even one's life, in defence of the weak among them from slaughter and outrage by their enemies, was the highest idea of the period when each nation considered it feasible and just, to subject to slaughter and outrage the people of other nations for its own advantage.

But already, some two thousand years ago, humanity, in the person of the highest representatives of its wisdom, began to recognise the higher idea of a brotherhood of man; and that idea penetrating man's consciousness more and more, has in our time attained most varied forms of realisation. Thanks to improved means of communication, and to the unity of industry, of trade, of the arts, and of science,—men to-day are so bound one to another that the danger of

conquest, massacre, or outrage by a neighbouring people has quite disappeared, and all peoples (the peoples, but not the governments) live together in peaceful, mutually advantageous, friendly, commercial, industrial, artistic, and scientific relations, which they have no need and no desire to disturb. And, therefore, one would think that the antiquated feeling of patriotism—being superfluous and incompatible with the consciousness we have reached of the existence of brotherhood among men of different nationalities—should dwindle more and more until it completely disappears. Yet the very opposite of this occurs: this harmful and antiquated feeling not only continues to exist, but burns more and more fiercely.

The peoples, without any reasonable ground, and contrary alike to their conception of right and to their own advantage, not only sympathise with governments in their attacks on other nations, in their seizures of foreign possessions, and in defending by force what they have already stolen, but even themselves demand such attacks, seizures, and defences; are glad of them; and take pride in them. The small oppressed nationalities which have fallen under the power of the great States,—the Poles, Irish, Bohemians, Fins, or Armenians,—reacting against the patriotism of their conquerors, which is the cause of their oppression, catch from their oppressors the infection of this feeling of patriotism,—which has ceased to be necessary, and is now obsolete, unmeaning, and harmful,—and catch it to such a degree that all their activity is concentrated upon it, and they, themselves suffering from the patriotism of the stronger nations, are ready to perpetrate on other peoples, for the sake of this same patriotism, the very same deeds that their oppressors have perpetrated and are perpetrating on them.

This occurs because the ruling classes (including not only the actual rulers with their officials, but all the classes who enjoy an exceptionally advantageous position—the capitalists, journalists, and most of the artists and scientists) can retain their position,—exceptionally advantageous in comparison with that of the labouring masses,—thanks only to the government organisation, which rests on patriotism. They have in their hands all the most powerful means of influencing the people, and always sedulously support patriotic feelings in themselves and in others, more especially as those feelings which uphold the government's power, are those that are always best rewarded by that power.

Every official prospers in his career the better the more patriotic he is; so also the army man gets promotion in time of war; and war is produced by patriotism.

Patriotism and its result—wars, give an enormous revenue to the newspaper trade, and profits to many other trades. Every writer, teacher, and professor is more secure in his place the more he preaches patriotism. Every emperor and king obtains the more fame the more he is addicted to patriotism.

The ruling classes have in their hands the army, money, the schools, the churches, and the press. In the schools they kindle patriotism in the children by means of histories describing their own people as the best of all peoples, and always in the right. Among adults they kindle it by spectacles, jubilees, monuments, and by a lying patriotic press. Above all, they inflame patriotism in this way: perpetrating every kind of injustice and harshness against other nations, they provoke in them enmity towards their own people, and then in turn exploit that enmity to embitter their own people against the foreigner.

The intensification of that terrible feeling of patriotism has gone on among the European peoples in a rapidly increasing progression, and in our time has reached the utmost limits, beyond which there is nowhere for it to extend.

Chapter IV

Within the memory of people not yet old, an occurrence took place showing most obviously the amazing intoxication caused by patriotism among the people of Christendom.

The ruling classes of Germany excited the patriotism of the masses of their people to such a degree that, in the second half of the nineteenth century, a law was proposed in accordance with which all the men had to become soldiers; all the sons, husbands, fathers, learned men, and godly men, had to learn to murder; to become submissive slaves of the first man of superior military rank they met, and be absolutely ready to kill whomsoever they were ordered to kill; to kill men of oppressed nationalities, and their own working men standing up for their rights, and even their own fathers and brothers,—as was publicly proclaimed by that most barefaced of potentates, William ii.

That horrible measure, outraging all many best feelings in the grossest manner, was, under the influence of patriotism, acquiesced in without murmur by the people of Germany. It resulted in their victory over the French. That victory yet further excited the patriotism of Germany, and afterwards of France, Russia, and the other Powers; and all the men of the continental countries unresistingly submitted to the introduction of general military service, i.e. to a state of slavery, involving a degree of humiliation and submission incomparably worse than any slavery of the ancient world. After this servile submission of the masses to the calls of patriotism, the audacity, cruelty, and insanity of the governments knew no bounds. A competition in the usurpation of other people's lands in Asia, Africa, and America began,—evoked partly by whim, partly by vanity, and partly by covetousness,—and was accompanied by ever greater and greater distrust and enmity between the governments.

The destruction of the people on the lands seized, was accepted as a quite natural proceeding. The only question was who should be first in seizing other people's land and destroying the inhabitants. All the governments not only most evidently infringed, and are infringing, the elementary demands of justice in relation to the conquered peoples, and in relation to one another, but they were guilty and continue to be guilty, of every kind of cheating, swindling, bribing, fraud, spying, robbery, and murder; and the peoples not only sympathised, and still sympathise, with them in all this, but they rejoice when it is their own government and not another government that commits such crimes.

The mutual enmity between the different peoples and States has reached, latterly, such amazing dimensions, that, notwithstanding the fact that there is no reason why one State should attack another, everyone knows that all the governments stand with their claws out and showing their teeth, and only waiting for someone to fall into trouble, or become weak, in order to tear him to pieces with as little risk as possible.

All the peoples of the so-called Christian world have been reduced by patriotism to such a state of brutality, that not only those who are obliged to kill or be killed desire slaughter and rejoice in murder, but all the people of Europe and America, living peaceably in their homes exposed to no danger, are, at each war—thanks to easy means of communication, and to the press—in the position of the spectators in a Roman circus, and, like them, delight in the slaughter, and raise the bloodthirsty cry, "*Pollice verso*." [1]

Not adults only, but also children, pure, wise children, rejoice, according to their nationality, when they hear that the number killed and lacerated by lyddite or other shells is not seven hundred but one thousand Englishmen or Boers.

And parents (I know of such cases) encourage their children in such brutality.

But that is not all. Every increase in the army of one nation (and every nation being in danger seeks to increase its army for patriotic reasons) obliges its neighbours to increase their army, also from patriotism, and this evokes a fresh increase by the first nation.

And the same thing occurs with fortifications and navies; one State has built ten ironclads, a neighbour builds eleven; then the first builds twelve, and so on to infinity.

"I'll pinch you." "And I'll punch your head." "And I'll stab you with a dagger." "And I'll bludgeon you." "And I'll shoot you," . . . only bad children, drunken men, or animals quarrel or fight so, but yet it is just what is going on among the highest representatives of the most enlightened governments, the very men who undertake to direct the education and the morality of their subjects.

Chapter V

The position is becoming worse and worse, and there is no stopping this descent towards evident perdition.

The one way of escape believed in by credulous people has now been closed by recent events. I refer to the Hague Conference and to the war between England and the Transvaal which immediately followed it.

If people who think little, or but superficially, were able to comfort themselves with the idea that international courts of arbitration would supersede wars and ever-increasing armaments, the Hague Conference and the war that followed it demonstrated in the most obvious manner the impossibility of finding a solution of the difficulty in that way. After the Hague Conference it became obvious that as long as governments with armies exist, the termination of armaments and of wars is impossible. That an agreement should become possible, it is necessary that the parties to it should trust each other. And in order that the Powers should trust each other, they must lay down their arms, as the parlementaires do when they meet for a conference.

So long as governments, distrusting one another, not only do not disband or decrease their armies, but always increase them in correspondence with augmentations, made by their neighbours, and by means of spies watch every movement of troops, knowing that each of the Powers will attack its neighbour as soon as it sees its way to do so,—no agreement is possible, and every conference is either a stupidity, or a pastime, or a fraud, or an impertinence, or all these together.

It was particularly becoming for the Russian rather than any other government to be the enfant terrible of the Hague Conference. No one at home being allowed to reply to all its evidently mendacious manifestations and rescripts, the Russian Government is so spoilt, that having without the least scruple ruined its own people with armaments, strangled Poland, plundered Turkestan and China, and while specially engaged in suffocating Finland, it proposed disarmament to the governments, in full assurance that it would be trusted.

But strange, unexpected, and indecent as such a proposal was, especially at the very time when orders were being given to increase its army, the words publicly uttered in the hearing of the people were such, that for the sake of appearances the governments of the other Powers could not decline the comical and evidently insincere consultation, and the delegates met, knowing in advance that nothing would come of it, and for several weeks, during which they drew good

salaries, though they were laughing in their sleeves, they all conscientiously pretended to be much occupied in arranging peace among the nations.

The Hague Conference ending as it did in the terrible bloodshed of the Transvaal War, which no one attempted, or is now attempting, to stop, was, nevertheless, of some use, though not at all in the way expected of it; it was useful because it showed in the most obvious manner that the evils from which the peoples are suffering cannot be cured by governments. That governments, even if they wished to, can terminate neither armaments nor wars.

Governments to have a reason for existing must defend their people from other people's attack; but not one people wishes to attack, or does attack, another. And, therefore, governments, far from wishing for peace, carefully excite the anger of other nations against themselves. And having excited other people's anger against themselves, and stirred up the patriotism of their own people, each government then assures its people that it is in danger, and must be defended.

And having the power in their hands, the governments can both irritate other nations and excite patriotism at home, and they carefully do both the one and the other; nor can they act otherwise, for their existence depends on thus acting.

If, in former times, governments were necessary to defend their people from other people's attacks, now, on the contrary, the governments artificially disturb the peace that exists among the peoples, and provoke enmity among them.

When it was necessary to plough in order to sow, ploughing was wise; but evidently it is absurd and harmful to go on ploughing after the seed has been sown. But this is just what the governments are obliging their people to do: to infringe the unity which exists, and which nothing would infringe if there were no governments.

Chapter VI

in reality what are these governments, without which people think they could not exist?

There may have been a time when such governments were necessary, and when the evil of supporting a government was less than that of being defenceless against organised neighbours; but now such governments have become unnecessary, and are a far greater evil than all the dangers with which they frighten their subjects.

Not only military governments, but governments in general, could be, I will not say useful, but at least harmless, only if they consisted of immaculate, holy people; as is theoretically the case among the Chinese. But then governments, by the nature of their activity, which consists in committing acts of violence,[2] are always composed of elements the most contrary to holiness;—of the most audacious, unscrupulous, and perverted people.

A government, therefore, and specially a government entrusted with military power, is the most dangerous organisation possible.

The government in the widest sense, including capitalists and press, is nothing else than an organisation which places the greatest part of the people in the power of a smaller part who dominate them; that smaller part is subject to a yet smaller part, and that again to a yet smaller, and so on, reaching at last a few people, or one single man, who by means of military force has power over all the rest. So that all this organisation resembles a cone, of which all the parts are completely in the power of those people, or of that one person, who are, or is, at the apex.

The apex of the cone is seized by those people, or by that person, who are, or who is, more cunning, audacious, and unscrupulous than the rest, or by someone who happens to be the heir of those who were audacious and unscrupulous.

To-day it may be Borís Godunóf,[3] and to-morrow Gregory Otrépief.[4] To-day the licentious Catherine, who, with her paramours, has murdered her husband; tomorrow Pougatchéf;[5] then Paul the madman, Nicholas i., and Alexander iii.

To-day it may be Napoleon, to-morrow a Bourbon or an Orleans, a Boulanger, or a Panama Company; to-day it may be Gladstone, to-morrow Salisbury, Chamberlain, or Rhodes.

And to such governments is allowed full power, not only over property and lives, but even over the spiritual and moral development, the education, and the religious guidance of everybody.

People construct such a terrible machine of power, they allow anyone who can, to seize it (and the chances always are that it will be seized by the most morally worthless)—they slavishly submit to him, and are then surprised that evil comes of it. They are afraid of Anarchists' bombs, and are not afraid of this terrible organisation which is always threatening them with the greatest calamities.

People found it useful to tie themselves together in order to resist their enemies, as the Circassians[6] did when resisting attacks. But the danger is quite past, and yet people go on tying themselves together.

They carefully tie themselves so that one man can have them at his mercy; then they throw away the end of the rope that ties them and leave it trailing, for some rascal or fool to seize and to do them whatever harm he likes.

Really, what are people doing but just that, when they set up, submit to, and maintain an organised and military government?

Chapter VII

One To deliver men from the terrible evils of armaments and wars, which are always increasing and increasing, what is wanted are neither congresses nor conferences, nor treaties, nor courts of arbitration, but the destruction of those instruments of violence which are called governments, and from which humanity's greatest evils result.

To destroy governmental violence only one thing is needed: it is that people should understand that the feeling of patriotism, which alone supports that instrument of violence, is a rude, harmful, disgraceful, and bad feeling, and above all—is immoral. It is a rude feeling, because it is one natural only to people standing on the lowest level of morality, and expecting from other nations those outrages which they themselves are ready to inflict on others; it is a harmful feeling, because it disturbs advantageous and joyous peaceful relations with other peoples, and above all it produces that governmental organisation under which power may fall, and does fall, into the hands of the worst men; it is a disgraceful feeling, because it turns man not merely into a slave, but into a fighting cock, a bull, or a gladiator, who wastes his strength and his life for objects which are not his own but his governments'; and it is an immoral feeling, because, instead of confessing oneself a son of God, as Christianity teaches us, or even a free man guided by his own reason, each man under the influence of patriotism confesses himself the son of his fatherland and the slave of his government, and commits actions contrary to his reason and his conscience.

It is only necessary that people should understand this, and the terrible bond, called government, by which we are chained together, will fall to pieces of itself, without struggle; and with it will cease the terrible and useless evils it produces.

And people are already beginning to understand this. This, for instance, is what a citizen of the United States writes:—

Quote:

”We are farmers, mechanics, merchants, manufacturers, teachers, and all we ask is the privilege of attending to our own business. We own our homes, love our friends, are devoted to our families, and do not interfere with our neighbours—we have work to do, and wish to work.

”Leave us alone!

”But they will not—these politicians. They insist on governing us and living off our labour. They tax us, eat our substance, conscript us, draft our boys into their wars. All the myriads of men who live off the government, depend upon the government to tax us, and in order to tax us successfully, standing armies are maintained. The plea that the army is needed for the protection of the country is pure fraud and pretence. The French Government affrights the people by telling them that the Germans are ready and anxious to fall upon them; the Russians fear the British; the British fear everybody; and now in America, we are told we must increase our navy and add to our army because Europe may at any moment combine against us.

”This is fraud and untruth. The plain people in France, Germany, England, and America are opposed to war. We only wish to be let alone. Men with wives, children, sweethearts, homes, aged parents, do not want to go off and fight some one. We are peaceable and we fear war; we hate it.

”We would like to obey the Golden Rule.

”War is the sure result of the existence of armed men. That country which maintains a large standing army will sooner or later have a war on hand. The man who prides himself on fisticuffs is going some day to meet a man who considers himself the better man, and they will fight. Germany and France have no issue save a desire to see which is the better man. They have fought many times—and they will fight again. Not that the people want to fight, but the Superior Class fan fright into fury, and make men think they must fight to protect their homes.

”So the people who wish to follow the teachings of Christ are not allowed to do so, but are taxed, outraged, deceived by governments.

”Christ taught humility, meekness, the forgiveness of one’s enemies, and that to kill was wrong. The Bible teaches men not to swear, but the Superior Class swear us on the Bible in which they do not believe.

”The question is, How are we to relieve ourselves of these cormorants who toil not, but who are clothed in broadcloth and blue, with brass buttons and many costly accoutrements; who feed upon our substance, and for whom we delve and die?

”Shall we fight them?

”No, we do not believe in bloodshed; and besides that, they have the guns and the money, and they can hold out longer than we.

”But who composes this army that they would order to fire upon us?

”Why, our neighbours and brothers—deceived into the idea that they are doing God’s service by protecting their country from its enemies. When the fact is, our country has no enemies save the Superior Class, that pretends to look out for our interests if we will only obey and consent to be taxed.

”Thus do they siphon our resources and turn our true brothers upon us to subdue and humiliate us. You cannot send a telegram to your wife, nor an express package to your friend, nor draw a cheque for your grocer until you first pay the tax to maintain armed men, who can quickly be used to kill you; and who surely will imprison you if you do not pay.

”The only relief lies in education. Educate men that it is wrong to kill. Teach them the Golden Rule, and yet again teach them the Golden Rule. Silently defy this Superior Class by refusing to bow down to their fetich of bullets. Cease supporting the preachers who cry for war, and spout patriotism for a consideration. Let them go to work as we do. We believe in Christ—they do not. Christ spoke what He thought; they speak what they think will please the men in power—the Superior Class.

”We will not enlist. We will not shoot on their order. We will not ‘charge bayonet’ upon a mild and gentle people. We will not fire upon shepherds and farmers, fighting for their firesides, upon suggestion of Cecil Rhodes. Your false cry of ‘Wolf, wolf,’ shall not alarm us. We pay your taxes only because we have to, and we will pay no longer than we have to. We will pay no pew-rents, no tithes to your sham charities, and we will speak our minds upon occasion.

”We will educate men.

”And all the time our silent influence will be going out, and even the men who are conscripted will be half-hearted and refuse to fight. We will educate men into the thought that the Christ Life of Peace and Good-will is better than the Life of Strife, Bloodshed, and War.

”Peace on earth!’—it can only come when men do away with armies, and are willing to do unto other men as they would be done by.”

So writes a citizen of the United States; and from various sides, in various forms, such voices are sounding.

This is what a German soldier writes:—

Quote:

”I went through two campaigns with the Prussian Guards (in 1866 and 1870), and I hate war from the bottom of my soul, for it has made me inexpressibly unfortunate. We wounded soldiers generally receive such a miserable recompense that we have indeed to be ashamed of having once been patriots. I, for instance, get ninepence a day for my right arm, which was shot through at the attack on St. Privat, 18th August 1870. Some hunting dogs have more allowed for their keep. And I had suffered for

years from my twice wounded arm. Already, in 1866, I took part in the war against Austria, and fought at Trautenau and Königgrätz, and saw horrors enough. In 1870, being in the reserve, I was called out again; and, as I have already said, I was wounded in the attack at St. Privat: my right arm was twice shot through lengthwise. I had to leave a good place in a brewery, and was unable afterwards to regain it. Since then I have never been able to get on my feet again. My intoxication soon passed, and there was nothing left for the wounded invalid but to keep himself alive on a beggarly pittance eked out by charity. . . .

”In a world in which people run round like trained animals, and are not capable of any other idea than that of overreaching one another for the sake of mammon,—in such a world let people think me a crank; but, for all that, I feel in myself the divine idea of peace, which is so beautifully expressed in the Sermon on the Mount. My deepest conviction is that war is only trade on a larger scale—trade carried on by the ambitious and the powerful with the happiness of the peoples.

”And what horrors do we not suffer from it! Never shall I forget those pitiful groans that pierced one to the marrow!

”People who never did each other any harm begin to slaughter one another like wild animals, and petty slavish souls implicate the good God, making Him their confederate in such deeds.

”My neighbour in the ranks had his jaw broken by a bullet. The poor wretch went wild with pain. He ran like a madman, and in the scorching summer heat could not even get water to cool his horrible wound. Our commander, the Crown Prince (who was afterwards the noble Emperor Frederick), wrote in his diary: ‘War—is an irony on the Gospels.’ . . .”

People are beginning to understand the fraud of patriotism, in which all the governments take such pains to keep them.

Chapter VIII

”But,” it is usually asked, ”what will there be instead of governments?”

There will be nothing. Something that has long been useless and therefore superfluous and bad will be abolished. An organ that, being unnecessary had become harmful, will be abolished.

”But,” people generally say, ”if there is no government, people will violate and kill each other.”

Why? Why should the abolition of the organisation which arose in consequence of violence, and which traditionally has been handed down from generation to generation to do violence,—why should the abolition of such an organisation, now devoid of use, cause people to outrage and kill one another? On the contrary, the presumption is that the abolition of the organ of violence would result in people ceasing to violate and kill one another.

Now, some men are specially educated and trained to kill and to do violence to other people,—there are men who are supposed to have a right to use violence, and who make use of an organisation which exists for that purpose. Such deeds of violence and such killing are considered good and worthy deeds.

But then, people will not be so educated, and no one will have a right to use violence to others, and there will be no organisation to do violence, and, as is natural to people of our time, violence and murder will always be considered bad actions, no matter who commits them.

But should acts of violence continue to be committed even after the abolition of the governments, still such acts will certainly be fewer than are committed now while an organisation exists specially devised to commit acts of violence, and a state of things exists in which acts of violence and murders are considered good and useful deeds.

The abolition of governments will merely rid us of an unnecessary organisation which we have inherited from the past for the commission of violence and for its justification.

”But there will then be no laws, no property, no courts of justice, no police, no popular education,” say people who intentionally confuse the use of violence by governments with various social activities.

The abolition of the organisation of government formed to do violence, does not at all involve the abolition of what is reasonable and good, and therefore not based on violence, in laws or law courts, or in property, or in police regulations, or in financial arrangements, or in popular education. On the contrary, the absence of the brutal power of government, which is needed only for its own support, will facilitate a more just and reasonable social organisation, needing no violence. Courts of justice, and public affairs, and popular education, will all exist to the extent to which they are really needed by the people, but in a shape which will not involve the evils contained in the present form of government. What will be destroyed is merely what was evil and hindered the free expression of the people’s will.

But even if we assume that with the absence of governments there would be disturbances and civil strife, even then the position of the people would be better than it is at present. The position now is such that it is difficult to imagine anything worse. The people are ruined, and their ruin is becoming more and more complete. The men are all converted into war-slaves, and have from day to day to expect orders to go to kill and to be killed. What more? Are the ruined peoples to die of hunger? That is already beginning in Russia, in Italy, and in India. Or are the women as well as the men to go to be soldiers? In the Transvaal even that has begun.

So that even if the absence of government really meant Anarchy, in the negative, disorderly sense of that word,—which it is far from meaning,—even in that case, no anarchical disorder could be worse than the position to which governments have already led their peoples, and to which they are leading them.

And therefore emancipation from patriotism, and the destruction of the despotism of government that rests upon it, cannot but be beneficial to mankind.

Chapter IX

Men, recollect yourselves! And for the sake of your well-being, physical and spiritual, for the sake of your brothers and sisters, pause, consider, and think of what you are doing!

Reflect, and you will understand that your foes are not the Boers, or the English, or the French, or the Germans, or the Fins, or the Russians, but that your foes—your only foes—are you yourselves, who maintain by your patriotism the governments that oppress you and make you unhappy.

They have undertaken to protect you from danger, and they have brought that pseudo-protection to such a point that you have all become soldiers, slaves, and are all ruined, or are being ruined more and more, and at any moment may and should expect that the tight-stretched cord will snap, and a horrible slaughter of you and your children will commence.

And however great that slaughter may be, and however that conflict may end, the same state of things will go on. In the same way, and with yet greater intensity, the governments will arm, and ruin, and pervert you and your children, and no one will help you to stop it or to prevent it, if you do not help yourselves.

And there is only one kind of help possible—it lies in the abolition of that terrible linking up into that cone of violence, which enables the person or persons who succeed in seizing the apex, to have power over all the rest, and to hold that power the more firmly the more cruel and inhuman they are, as we see by the cases of the Napoleons, Nicholas I., Bismarck, Chamberlain, Rhodes, and our Russian Dictators who rule the people in the Tsar's name.

And there is only one way to destroy this binding together—it is by shaking off the hypnotism of patriotism.

Understand that all the evils from which you suffer, you yourselves cause by yielding to the suggestions by which emperors, kings, members of parliament, governors, officers, capitalists, priests, authors, artists, and all who need this fraud of patriotism in order to live upon your labour, deceive you!

Whoever you may be,—Frenchman, Russian, Pole, Englishman, Irishman, or Bohemian,—understand that all your real human interests, whatever they may be,—agricultural, industrial, commercial, artistic, or scientific,—as well as your pleasures and joys, in no way run counter to the interests of other peoples or states; and that you are united—by mutual co-operation, by interchange of services, by the joy of wide brotherly intercourse, and by the interchange not merely of goods but also of thoughts and feelings—with the folk of other lands.

Understand that the question, who manages to seize Wei-hai-wei, Port Arthur, or Cuba,—your government or another,— does not affect you, or rather every such seizure made by your government injures you because it inevitably brings in its train all sorts of pressure on you by your government, to force you to take part in the robbery and violence by which alone such seizures are made, or can be retained when made. Understand that your life can in no way be bettered by Alsace becoming German or French, and Ireland or Poland being free or enslaved; whoever holds them, you are free to live where you will, if even you be an Alsatian, an Irishman, or a Pole, yet understand that by stirring up patriotism you will only make the case worse; for the subjection in which your people are kept has resulted simply from the struggle between patriotisms, and every manifestation of patriotism in one nation provokes a counteracting reaction in another. Understand that salvation from your woes is only possible when you free yourself from the obsolete idea of patriotism and from the obedience to governments that is based upon it, and when you boldly enter into the region of that higher idea, the brotherly union of the peoples, which has long since come to life, and from all sides is calling you to itself.

If people would but understand that they are not the sons of some fatherland or other, nor of governments, but are sons of God, and can therefore neither be slaves nor enemies one to another, those insane, unnecessary, worn-out, pernicious organisations called governments, and all the sufferings, violations, humiliations, and crimes which they occasion, would cease.

Pirogova, 23rd May 1900.

[A portion of the translation of this article appeared contemporaneously in Reynold's Newspaper. It is now first issued complete, translated directly from the MS.—Ed.]

Jump up

↑ Pollice verso ("thumb down") was the sign given in the Roman amphitheatres by the spectators who wished a defeated gladiator to be slain.—Trans.

Jump up

↑ The word government in English is frequently used in an indefinite sense as almost equivalent to management or direction; but in the sense in which the word is used in the present article, the characteristic feature of government is that it claims a moral right to inflict physical penalties, and by its decree to make murder a good action. —Trans.

Jump up

↑ Borís Godunóf, brother-in-law of the weak Tsar Feódor, succeeded in becoming Tsar, and reigned in Moscow from 1598 to 1605.—Trans.

Jump up

↑ Gregory Otrépief was a pretender who, passing himself off as Dimitry, son of Iván the Terrible, reigned in Moscow in 1605 and 1606.—Trans.

Jump up

↑ Pougatchéf, the leader of a most formidable insurrection, was executed in Moscow in 1775.—Trans.

Jump up

↑ The Circassians, when surrounded, used to tie themselves together leg to leg, that none might escape, but all die fighting. Instances of this kind occurred when their country was being annexed by Russia.—Trans.

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