

## **An Anarchist on Anarchy.**

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# AN ANARCHIST ON ANARCHY.

BY  
ELISÉE RECLUS.

FOLLOWED BY A SKETCH OF  
THE CRIMINAL RECORD OF THE AUTHOR.

BY  
E. VAUGHAN.

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"It is a pity that such men as Eliséé Reclus cannot be promptly shot."—*Providence Press*.

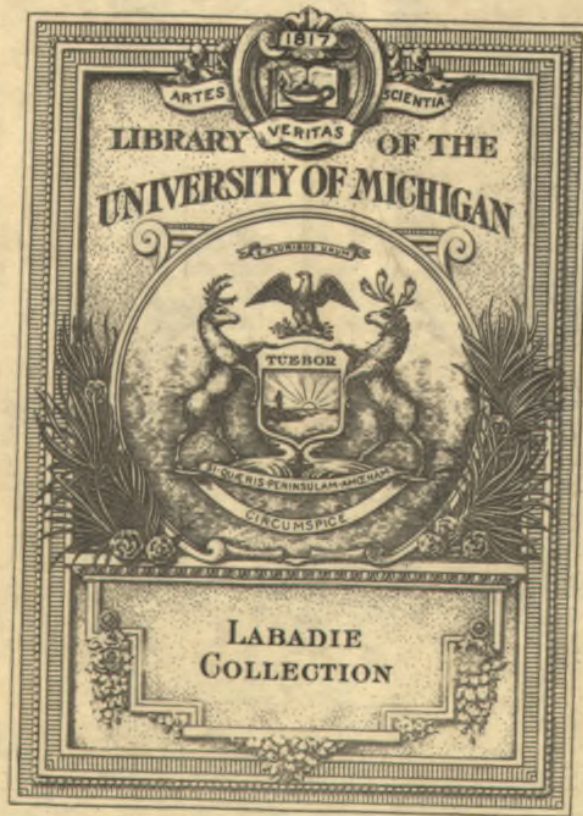
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BOSTON :  
BENJ. R. TUCKER, PUBLISHER,  
1886.





THE GIFT OF  
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*October 17. 1936*



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# AN ANARCHIST ON ANARCHY.

By ELISÉE RECLUS.

[From the Contemporary Review.]

To most Englishmen the word Anarchy is so evil-sounding that ordinary readers of the "Contemporary Review" will probably turn from these pages with aversion, wondering how anybody could have the audacity to write them. With the crowd of commonplace chatterers we are already past praying for; no reproach is too bitter for us, no epithet too insulting. Public speakers on social and political subjects find that abuse of Anarchists is an unfailing passport to popular favor. Every conceivable crime is laid to our charge, and opinion, too indolent to learn the truth, is easily persuaded that Anarchy is but another name for wickedness and chaos. Overwhelmed with opprobrium and held up to hatred, we are treated on the principle that the surest way of hanging a dog is to give it a bad name.

There is nothing surprising in all this. The chorus of imprecations with which we are assailed is quite in the nature of things, for we speak in a tongue unhalloved by usage, and belong to none of the parties that dispute the possession of power. Like all innovators, whether they be violent or pacific, we bring not peace but a sword, and are in nowise astonished to be received as enemies.

Yet it is not with light hearts that we incur so much ill-will, nor are we satisfied with merely knowing that it is undeserved. To risk the loss of so precious an advantage as popular sympathy without first patiently searching out the truth and carefully considering our duty were an act of reckless folly. To a degree never dreamt of by men who are borne unresistingly on the great current of public opinion, are we bound to render to our conscience a reason for the faith that is in us, to strengthen our convictions by study of nature and mankind, and, above all, to compare them with that ideal justice which has been slowly elaborated by the untold generations of our race. This ideal is known to all, and is almost too trite to need repeating. It exists in the moral teaching of every people, civilized or savage; every religion has tried to adapt it to its dogmas and precepts, for it



is the ideal of equality of rights and reciprocity of services. "We are all brethren," is a saying repeated from one end of the world to the other, and the principle of universal brotherhood expressed in this saying implies a complete solidarity of interests and efforts.

Accepted in its integrity by simple souls, does not this principle seem to imply as a necessary consequence the social state formulated by modern socialists: "To each according to his needs, from each according to his powers?"\* Well, we are simple souls, and we hold firmly to this ideal of human morality. Of a surety there is much dross mixed with the pure metal, and the personal and collective egoisms of families, cities, castes, peoples, and parties have wrought on this groundwork some startling variations. But we have not to do here with the ethics of selfish interests, it is enough to identify the central point of convergence towards which all partial ideas more or less tend. This focus of gravitation is justice. If humanity be not a vain dream, if all our impressions, all our thoughts, are not pure hallucinations, one capital fact dominates the history of man — that every kindred and people yearns after justice. The very life of humanity is but one long cry for that fraternal equity which still remains unattained. Listen to the words, uttered nearly three thousand years ago, of old Hesiod, answering beforehand all those who contend that the struggle for existence dooms us to eternal strife. "Let fishes, the wild beasts and birds, devour one another — but our law is justice."

Yet how vast is the distance that still separates us from the justice invoked by the poet in the very dawn of history! How great is the progress we have still to make before we may rightfully cease comparing ourselves with wild creatures fighting for a morsel of carrion! It is in vain that we pretend to be civilized, if civilization be that which Mr. Alfred R. Wallace has described as "the harmony of individual liberty with the collective will." It is really too easy to criticise contemporary society, its morals, its conventions, and its laws, and to show how much its practices fall short of the ideal justice formulated by thinkers and desired by peoples. To repeat stale censures is to risk being called mere declaimers, scatterers of voices in the market-place. And yet so long as the truth is not heard, is it not our duty to go on speaking it in season and out of season? A sincere man owes it to himself to expose the frightful barbarity which still prevails in the hidden depths of a society so outwardly well-ordered. Take, for instance, our great cities, the leaders of civilization, especially the most populous, and, in many respects, the first of all — that immense London, which gathers to herself the riches of the world, whose every warehouse is worth a king's ransom;

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\*None but the communistic Anarchists accept this motto. The mutualistic Anarchists, who are the original Anarchists, hold to the simpler and more just rule: "To each according to his work." — *Publisher's Note.*



where are to be found enough, and more than enough, of food and clothing for the needs of the teeming millions that throng her streets in greater numbers than the ants which swarm in the never-ending labyrinth of their subterranean galleries. And yet the wretched who cast longing and hungry eyes on those hoards of wealth may be counted by the hundred thousand; by the side of untold splendors, want is consuming the vitals of entire populations, and it is only at times that the fortunate for whom these treasures are amassed hear, as a muffled wailing, the bitter cry which rises eternally from those unseen depths. Below the London of fashion is a London accursed, a London whose only food are dirt-stained fragments, whose only garments are filthy rags, and whose only dwellings are fetid dens. Have they disinherited the consolation of hope? No: they are deprived of all. There are some among them who live and die in dampness and gloom without once raising their eyes to the sun.

What boots it to the wretched outcast, burning with fever or craving for bread, that the Book of the Christians opens the doors of heaven more widely to him than to the rich! Beside his present misery all these promises of happiness, even if he heard them, would seem the bitterest irony. Does it not appear, moreover, — judging by the society in which the majority of preachers of the Gospel most delight, — that the words of Jesus are reversed, that the “Kingdom of God” is the guerdon of the fortunate of this world, — a world where spiritual and temporal government are on the best of terms, and religion leads as surely to earthly power as to heavenly bliss? “Religion is a cause for preferment, irreligion a bar to it,” as a famous commentator of the Bible, speaking to his sovereign, said it ought to be.\*

When ambition thus finds its account in piety, and hypocrites practise religion in order to give what they are pleased to call their conscience a higher mercantile value, is it surprising that the great army of the hopeless should forget the way to church? Do they deceive themselves in thinking that, despite official invitations, they would not always be well received in the “houses of God?” Without speaking here of churches whose sittings are sold at a price, where you may enter only purse in hand, is it nothing to the poor to feel themselves arrested on the threshold by the cold looks of well-clad men and the tightened lips of elegant women? True, no wall bars the passage, but an obstacle still more formidable stops the way, — the dark atmosphere of hatred and disgust which rises between the disinherited and the world’s elect.

Yet the first word uttered by the minister when he stands up in the pulpit is “Brethren,” a word which, by a characteristic differentiation, has come to mean no more than a sort of potential and theoretic fraternity without practical reality. Nevertheless, its primitive sense has not altogether perished, and if the outcast

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\* Alexander Cruden, Preface to the “Concordance.”



that hears it be not stupefied by hunger, if he be not one of those boneless beings who repeat idiotically all they hear, what bitter thoughts will be suggested by this word "brethren," coming from the lips of men who feel so little its force! The impressions of my childhood surge back into my mind. When I heard for the first time an earnest and eager voice beseech the "Father who is in heaven" to give us "our daily bread," it seemed to me that by a mysterious act a meal would descend from on high on all the tables of the world. I imagined that these words, repeated millions and milliards of times, were a cry of human brotherhood, and that each, in uttering them, thought of all. I deceived myself. With some the prayer is sincere; with the greater part it is but an empty sound, a gust of wind like that which passes through the reeds.

Governments at least talk not to the poor about fraternity; they do not torment them with so sorry a jest. It is true that in some countries the jargon of courts compares the Sovereign to a father whose subjects are his children, and upon whom he pours the inexhaustible dews of his love; but this formula, which the hungry might abuse by asking for bread, is no longer taken seriously. So long as Governments were looked upon as direct representatives of a heavenly Sovereign, holding their powers by the grace of God, the comparison was legitimate; but there are very few now that make any claim to this *quasi*-divinity. Shorn of the sanctions of religion, they no longer hold themselves answerable for the general weal, contenting themselves instead with promising good administration, impartial justice, and strict economy in the administration of public affairs. Let history tell how these promises have been kept. Nobody can study contemporary politics without being struck by the truth of the words attributed alike to Oxenstjerna and Lord Chesterfield: "Go, my son, and see with how little wisdom the world is governed!" It is now a matter of common knowledge that power, whether its nature be monarchic, aristocratic, or democratic, whether it be based on the right of the sword, of inheritance, or of election, is wielded by men neither better nor worse than their fellows, but whose position exposes them to greater temptations to do evil. Raised above the crowd, whom they soon learn to despise, they end by considering themselves essentially superior beings; solicited by ambition in a thousand forms, by vanity, greed, and caprice, they are all the more easily corrupted that a rabble of interested flatterers is ever on the watch to profit by their vices. And possessing as they do a preponderant influence in all things, holding the powerful lever whereby is moved the immense mechanism of the State — functionaries, soldiers, and police — every one of their oversights, their faults, or their crimes repeats itself to infinity and magnifies as it grows. It is only too true: a fit of impatience in a Sovereign, a crooked look, an equivocal word, may plunge nations into mourning and be fraught with disaster for mankind. English readers, brought up to a knowledge of Biblical lore, will remember the striking parable of the trees who



wanted a king.\* The peaceful trees and the strong, those who love work and whom man blesses; the olive that makes oil, the fig-tree that grows good fruit, the vine that produces wine, "which cheereth God and man," refuse to reign; the bramble accepts, and of that noxious briar is born the flame which devours the cedars of Lebanon.

But these depositaries of power who are charged, whether by right divine or universal suffrage, with the august mission of dispensing justice, can they be considered as in any way more infallible, or even as impartial? Can it be said that the laws and their interpreters show towards all men the ideal equity as it exists in the popular conception? Are the judges blind when there come before them the wealthy and the poor — Shylock, with his murderous knife, and the unfortunate who has sold beforehand pounds of his flesh or ounces of his blood? Hold they always even scales between the king's son and the beggar's brat? That these magistrates should firmly believe in their own impartiality and think themselves incarnate right in human shape, is quite natural; every one puts on — sometimes without knowing it — the peculiar morality of his calling; yet judges, no more than priests, can withstand the influence of their surroundings. Their sense of what constitutes justice, derived from the average opinion of the age, is insensibly modified by the prejudices of their class. How honest soever they may be, they cannot forget that they belong to the rich and powerful, or to those, less fortunate, who are still on the look-out for preferment and honor. They are moreover blindly attached to precedent, and fancy that practices inherited from their forerunners must needs be right. Yet when we examine official justice without prejudice, how many iniquities do we find in legal procedures! Thus the English are scandalized — and rightly so — by the French fashion of examining prisoners, those sacred beings who in strict probity ought to be held innocent until they are proved guilty; while the French are disgusted, and not without reason, to see English justice, through the English Government, publicly encourage treachery by offers of impunity and money to the betrayer, thereby deepening the degradation of the debased and provoking acts of shameful meanness which children in their schools, more moral than their elders, regard with unfeigned horror.

Nevertheless law, like religion, plays only a secondary part in contemporary society. It is invoked but rarely to regulate the relations between the poor and the rich, the powerful and the weak. These relations are the outcome of economic laws and the evolution of a social system based on inequality of conditions.

*Laissez faire!* Let things alone! have said the judges of the camp. Careers are open; and although the field is covered with corpses, although the conqueror stamps on the bodies of the vanquished, although by supply and demand, and the

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\* Judges ix. 8.



combinations and monopolies in which they result, the greater part of society becomes enslaved to the few, let things alone — for thus has decreed fair play. It is by virtue of this beautiful system that a *parvenu*, without speaking of the great lord who receives counties as his heritage, is able to conquer with ready money thousands of acres, expel those who cultivate his domain, and replace men and their dwellings with wild animals and rare trees. It is thus that a tradesman, more cunning or intelligent, or, perhaps, more favored by luck than his fellows, is enabled to become master of an army of workers, and as often as not to starve them at his pleasure. In a word, commercial competition, under the paternal ægis of the law, lets the great majority of merchants — the fact is attested by numberless medical inquests — adulterate provisions and drink, sell pernicious substances as wholesome food, and kill by slow poisoning, without for one day neglecting their religious duties, their brothers in Jesus Christ. Let people say what they will, slavery, which abolitionists strove so gallantly to extirpate in America, prevails in another form in every civilized country; for entire populations, placed between the alternatives of death by starvation and toils which they detest, are constrained to choose the latter. And if we would deal frankly with the barbarous society to which we belong, we must acknowledge that murder, albeit disguised under a thousand insidious and scientific forms, still, as in the times of primitive savagery, terminates the majority of lives. The economist sees around him but one vast field of carnage, and with the coldness of the statistician he counts the slain as on the evening after a great battle. Judge by these figures. The mean mortality among the well-to-do is, at the utmost, one in sixty. Now the population of Europe being a third of a thousand millions, the average deaths, according to the rate of mortality among the fortunate, should not exceed five millions. They are three times five millions! What have we done with these ten million human beings killed before their time? If it be true that we have duties, one towards the other, are we not responsible for the servitude, the cold, the hunger, the miseries of every sort, which doom the unfortunate to untimely deaths? Race of Cains, what have we done with our brothers?

And what are the remedies proposed for the social ills which are consuming the very marrow of our bones? Can charity, as assert many good souls — who are answered in chorus by a crowd of egoists — can charity by any possibility deal with so vast an evil? True, we know some devoted ones who seem to live only that they may do good. In England, above all, is this the case. Among childless women who are constrained to lavish their love on their kind are to be found many of those admirable beings whose lives are passed in consoling the afflicted, visiting the sick, and ministering to the young. We cannot help being touched by the exquisite benevolence, the indefatigable solicitude shown by these ladies towards their unhappy fellow-creatures; but, taken even in their entirety, what economic value can be attached to these well-meant efforts? What sum



represents the charities of a year in comparison with the gains which hucksters of money and hawkers of loans oftentimes make by the speculations of a single day? While Ladies Bountiful are giving a cup of tea to a pauper, or preparing a potion for the sick, a father or a brother, by a hardy stroke on the Stock Exchange or a successful transaction in produce, may reduce to ruin thousands of British workmen or Hindoo coolies. And how worthy of respect soever may be deeds of unostentatious charity, is it not the fact that the bestowal of alms is generally a matter of personal caprice, and that their distribution is too often influenced rather by the political and religious sympathies of the giver than by the moral worth of the recipient? Even were help always given to those who most need it, charity would be none the less tainted with the capital vice, that it infallibly constitutes relations of inequality between the benefited and the benefactor. The latter rejoices in the consciousness of doing a good thing, as if he were not simply discharging a debt; and the former asks bread as a favor, when he should demand work as a right, or, if helpless, human solidarity. Thus are created and developed hideous mendicancy with its lies, its tricks, and its base, heart-breaking hypocrisy. How much nobler are the customs of some so-called "barbarous countries" where the hungry man simply stops by the side of those who eat, is welcomed by all, and then, when satisfied, with a friendly greeting withdraws — remaining in every respect the equal of his host, and fretting under no painful sense of obligation for favors received! But charity breeds patronage and platitudes — miserable fruits of a wretched system, yet the best which a society of capitalists has to offer us!

## II.

Hence we may say that, in letting those whom they govern — and the responsibility for whose fate they thereby accept — waste by want, sink under exposure, and deteriorate by vice, the leaders of modern society have committed moral bankruptcy. But where the masters have come short, free men may, perchance, succeed. The failure of governments is no reason why we should be discouraged; on the contrary, it shows us the danger of entrusting to others the guardianship of our rights, and makes us all the more firmly resolved to take our own cause into our own care. We are not among those whom the practice of social hypocrisies, the long weariness of a crooked life, and the uncertainty of the future have reduced to the necessity of asking ourselves — without daring to answer it — the sad question: "Is life worth living?" Yes, to us life does seem worth living, but on condition that it has an end — not personal happiness, not a paradise, either in this world or the next — but the realization of a cherished wish, an ideal that belongs to us and springs from our innermost conscience. We are striving to draw nearer to that ideal equality which, century after century, has hovered before subject peoples like a heavenly dream. The little that each of us can do



offers an ample recompense for the perils of the combat. On these terms life is good, even a life of suffering and sacrifice — even though it may be cut short by premature death.

The first condition of equality, without which any other progress is merest mockery — the object of all socialists without exception — is that every man shall have bread. To talk of duty, of renunciation, of ethereal virtues to the famishing, is nothing less than cowardice. Dives has no right to preach morality to the beggar at his gates. If it were true that civilized lands did not produce food enough for all, it might be said that, by virtue of vital competition, bread should be reserved for the strong, and that the weak must content themselves with the crumbs that fall from the feasters' tables. In a family where love prevails things are not ordered in this way; on the contrary, the small and the ailing receive the fullest measure; yet it is evident that dearth may strengthen the hands of the violent and make the powerful monopolizers of bread. But are our modern societies really reduced to these straits? On the contrary, whatever may be the value of Malthus's forecast as to the distant future, it is an actual, incontestable fact that in the civilized countries of Europe and America the sum total of provisions produced, or received in exchange for manufactures, is more than enough for the sustenance of the people. Even in times of partial dearth the granaries and warehouses have but to open their doors that every one may have a sufficient share. Notwithstanding waste and prodigality, despite the enormous losses arising from moving about and "handling" in warehouses and shops, there is always enough to feed generously all the world. And yet there are some who die of hunger! And yet there are fathers who kill their children because when the little ones cry for bread they have none to give them.

Others may turn their eyes from these horrors; we socialists look them full in the face, and seek out their cause. That cause is the monopoly of the soil, the appropriation by a few of the land which belongs to all. We Anarchists are not the only ones to say it: the cry for nationalization of the land is rising so high that all may hear it who do not wilfully close their ears. The idea spreads fast, for private property, in its present form, has had its day, and historians are everywhere testifying that the old Roman law is not synonymous with eternal justice. Without doubt it were vain to hope that holders of the soil, saturated, so to speak, with ideas of caste, of privilege, and of inheritance, will voluntarily give back to all the bread-yielding furrows; the glory will not be theirs of joining as equals their fellow-citizens; but when public opinion is ripe — and day by day it grows — individuals will oppose in vain the general concourse of wills, and the axe will be applied to the upas tree's roots. Arable land will be held once more in common;\* but instead of being ploughed and sown almost at hazard by ignorant

\* Not preventing, however, each who may so desire from holding his share individually. — *Publisher's Note.*



hands, as it has hitherto been, science will aid us in the choice of climate, of soils, of methods of culture, of fertilizers, and of machinery. Husbandry will be guided by the same prescience as mechanical combinations and chemical operations; but the fruits of his toil will not be lost to the laborer. Many so-called savage societies hold their land in common, and humble though in our eyes they may seem, they are our betters in this: want among them is unknown. Are we, then, too ambitious in desiring to attain a social state which shall add to the conquests of civilization the privileges of these primitive tribes? Through the education of our children we may to some extent fashion the future.

After we have bread for all, we shall require something more — equality of rights; but this point will soon be realized, for a man who needs not incline himself before his fellows to crave a pittance is already their equal. Equality of conditions, which is in no way incompatible with the infinite diversity of human character, we ardently desire and look upon as indispensable, for it offers us the only means whereby a true public morality can be developed. A man can be truly moral only when he is his own master. From the moment when he awakens to a comprehension of that which is equitable and good it is for him to direct his own movements, to seek in his conscience reasons for his actions, and to perform them simply, without either fearing punishment or looking for reward. Nevertheless his will cannot fail to be strengthened when he sees other men, guided like himself by their own volition, following the same line of conduct. Mutual example will soon constitute a collective code of ethics to which all may conform without effort; but the moment that orders, enforced by legal penalties, replace the personal impulses of the conscience, there is an end to morality. Hence the saying of the Apostle of the Gentiles, "the law makes sin." Even more, it is sin itself, because, instead of appealing to man's better part, to his bold initiative, it appeals to his worst — it rules by fear. It thus behooves every one to resist laws that he has not made, and to defend his personal rights, which are also the rights of others. People often speak of the antagonism between rights and duties. It is an empty phrase; there is no such antagonism. Whoso vindicates his own rights fulfils at the same time his duty towards his fellow-men. Privilege, not right, is the converse of duty.

Besides the possession of a man's own person, sound morality involves yet another condition — mutual goodwill, which is likewise the outcome of equality. The time-honored words of Mahabarata are as true as ever: "The ignorant are not the friends of the wise; the man who has no cart is not the friend of him who has a cart. Friendship is the daughter of equality; it is never born of inequality." Without doubt it is given to some men, great by their thoughts, by sympathy, or by strength of will, to win the multitude; but if the attachment of their followers and admirers comes otherwise than of an enthusiastic affinity of idea to idea, or of heart to heart, it is speedily transformed either into fanaticism or servility. He



who is hailed lord by the acclamations of the crowd must almost of necessity attribute to himself exceptional virtues, or a "grace of God," that marks him in his own estimation as a predestined being, and he usurps without hesitation or remorse privileges which he transmits as a heritage to his children. But, while in rank exalted, he is morally degraded, and his partisans and sycophants are more degraded still: they wait for the words of command which fall from the master's lips; when they hear in the depths of their conscience some faint note of dissent, it is stifled; they become practised liars, they stoop to flattery, and lose the power of looking honest men in the face. Between him who commands and him who obeys, and whose degradation deepens from generation to generation, there is no possibility of friendship. The virtues are transformed; brotherly frankness is destroyed; independence becomes a crime; above is either pitying condescension or haughty contempt, below either envious admiration or hidden hate. Let each of us recall the past and ask ourselves in all sincerity this question: "Who are the men in whose society we have experienced the most pleasure?" Are they personages who have "honored" us with their conversation, or the humble with whom we have "deigned" to associate? Are they not rather our equals, those whose looks neither implore nor command, and whom we may love with open hearts without afterthought or reserve?

It is to live in conditions of equality and escape from the falsehoods and hypocrisies of a society of superiors and inferiors, that so many men and women have formed themselves into close corporations and little worlds apart. America abounds in communities of this sort. But these societies, few of which prosper while many perish, are all ruled more or less by force; they carry within themselves the seeds of their own dissolution, and are reabsorbed by Nature's law of gravitation into the world which they have left. Yet even were they perfection, if man enjoyed in them the highest happiness of which his nature is capable, they would be none the less obnoxious to the charge of selfish isolation, of raising a wall between themselves and the rest of their race; their pleasures are egotistical, and devotion to the cause of humanity would draw back the best of them into the great struggle.

As for us Anarchists, never will we separate ourselves from the world to build a little church, hidden in some vast wilderness. Here is the fighting ground, and we remain in the ranks, ready to give our help wherever it may be most needed. We do not cherish premature hopes, but we know that our efforts will not be lost. Many of the ignorant, who either out of love of routine or simplicity of soul now anathematize us, will end by associating themselves with our cause. For every man whom circumstances permit to join us freely, hundreds are hindered by the hard necessities of life from openly avowing their opinions, but they listen from afar and cherish our words in the treasury of their hearts. We know that we are defending the cause of the poor, the disinherited, the suffering; we are seeking to



restore to them the earth, personal rights, confidence in the future; and is it not natural that they should encourage us by look and gesture, even when they dare not come to us? In times of trouble, when the iron hand of might loosens its hold, and paralyzed rulers reel under the weight of their own power; when the "groups," freed for an instant from the pressure above, reform themselves according to their natural affinities, on which side will be the many? Though making no pretension to prophetic insight, may we not venture without temerity to say that the great multitude would join our ranks? Albeit they never weary of repeating that Anarchism is merely the dream of a few visionaries, do not even our enemies, by the insults they heap upon us and the projects and machinations they impute to us, make an incessant propaganda in our favor? It is said that, when the magicians of the Middle Ages wanted to raise the devil, they began their incantations by painting his image on a wall. For a long time past modern exorcists have adopted a similar method for conjuring Anarchists.

Pending the great work of the coming time, and to the end that this work may be accomplished, it behooves us to utilize every opportunity for rede and deed. Meanwhile, although our object is to live without government and without law, we are obliged in many things to submit. On the other hand, how often are we enabled to disregard their behests and act on our own free will? Ours be it to let slip none of these occasions, and to accept tranquilly whatever personal consequences may result from doing that which we believe to be our duty. In no case will we strengthen authority by appeals or petitions, neither shall we sanction the law by demanding justice from the courts nor, by giving our votes and influence to any candidate whatsoever, become the authors of our own ill-fortune? It is also easy for us to accept nothing from power, to call no man "master," neither to be called "master" ourselves, to remain in the ranks as simple citizens and to maintain resolutely, and in every circumstance, our quality of equal among equals. Let our friends judge us by our deeds, and reject from among them those of us who falter.

There are unquestionably many kind-hearted men that, as yet, hold themselves aloof from us, and even view our efforts with a certain apprehension, who would nevertheless gladly lend us their help were they not repelled by fear of the violence which almost invariably accompanies revolution. And yet a close study of the present state of things would show them that the supposed period of tranquillity in which we live is really an age of cruelty and violence. Not to speak of war and its crimes, from the guilt of which no civilized State is free, can it be denied that chief among the consequences of the existing social system are murder, maladies, and death. Accustomed order is maintained by rude deeds and brute force, yet things that happen every day and every hour pass unperceived; we see in them a series of ordinary events no more phenomenal than times and seasons. It seems less than impious to rebel against the cycle of violence and



repression which comes to us hallowed by the sanction of ages. Far from desiring to replace an era of happiness and peace by an age of disorder and warfare, our sole aim is to put an end to the endless series of calamities which has hitherto been called by common consent "The Progress of Civilization." On the other hand, vengeance is the inevitable incident of a period of violent changes. It is in the nature of things that they should be. Albeit deeds of violence, prompted by a spirit of hatred, bespeak a feeble moral development, these deeds become fatal and necessary whenever the relations between man and man are not the relations of perfect equity. The original form of justice as understood by primitive peoples was that of retaliation, and by thousands of rude tribes this system is still observed. Nothing seemed more just than to offset one wrong by a like wrong. Eye for eye! Tooth for tooth! If the blood of one man has been shed, another must die! This was the barbarous form of justice. In our civilized societies it is forbidden to individuals to take the law into their own hands. Governments, in their quality of social delegates, are charged on behalf of the community with the enforcement of justice, a sort of retaliation somewhat more enlightened than that of the savage. It is on this condition that the individual renounces the right of personal vengeance; but if he be deceived by the mandatories to whom he entrusts the vindication of his rights, if he perceives that his agents betray his cause and league themselves with his oppressors, that official justice aggravates his wrongs; in a word, if whole classes and populations are unfairly used, and have no hope of finding in the society to which they belong a redresser of abuses, is it not certain that they will resume their inherent right of vengeance and execute it without pity? Is not this indeed an ordinance of Nature, a consequence of the physical law of shock and counter-shock? It were unphilosophic to be surprised by its existence. Oppression has always been answered by violence.

Nevertheless, if great human evolutions are always followed by sad outbreaks of personal hatreds, it is not to these bad passions that well-wishers of their kind appeal when they wish to rouse the motive virtues of enthusiasm, devotion, and generosity. If changes had no other result than to punish oppressors, to make them suffer in their turn, to repay evil with evil, the transformation would be only in seeming. What boots it to him who truly loves humanity and desires the happiness of all that the slave becomes master, that the master is reduced to servitude, that the whip changes hands, and that money passes from one pocket to another? It is not the rich and the powerful whom we devote to destruction, but the institutions which have favored the birth and growth of these malevolent beings. It is the medium which it behooves us to alter, and for this great work we must reserve all our strength; to waste it in personal vindications were merest puerility. "Vengeance is the pleasure of the gods," said the ancients; but it is not the pleasure of self-respecting mortals; for they know that to be-



come their own avengers would be to lower themselves to the level of their former oppressors. If we would rise superior to our adversary, we must, after vanquishing him, make him bless his defeat. The revolutionary device, "For our liberty and for yours," must not be an empty word.

The people in all times have felt this; and after every temporary triumph the generosity of the victor has obliterated the menaces of the past. It is a constant fact that in all serious popular movements, made for an idea, hope of a better time, and above all, the sense of a new dignity, fills the soul with high and magnanimous sentiments. So soon as the police, both political and civil, cease their functions and the masses become masters of the streets, the moral atmosphere changes, each feels himself responsible for the prosperity and contentment of all; molestation of individuals is almost unheard of; even professional criminals pause in their sad career, for they too, feel that something great is passing through the air. Ah! if revolutionaries, instead of obeying a vague idea as they have almost always done, had formed a definite aim, a well-considered scheme of social conduct, if they had firmly willed the establishment of a new order of things in which every citizen might be assured bread, work, instruction, and the free development of his being, there would have been no danger in opening all prison-gates to their full width, and saying to the unfortunates whom they shut in, "Go, brothers, and sin no more."

It is always to the nobler part of man that we should address ourselves when we want to do great deeds. A general fighting for a bad cause stimulates his soldiers with promises of booty; a benevolent man who cherishes a noble object encourages his companions by the example of his own devotion and self-sacrifice. For him faith in his idea is enough. As says the proverb of the Danish peasants: "His will is his paradise." What matters it that he is treated as a visionary! Even though his undertaking were only a chimera, he knows nothing more beautiful and sweet than the desire to act rightly and do good; in comparison with this vulgar realities are for him but shadows, the apparitions of an instant.

But our ideal is not a chimera. This, public opinion well knows; for no question more preoccupies it than that of social transformation. Events are casting their shadows before. Among men who think is there one who in some fashion or another is not a socialist — that is to say, who has not his own little scheme for changes in economic relations? Even the orator who noisily denies that there is a social question affirms the contrary by a thousand propositions. And those who would lead us back to the Middle Ages, are they not also socialists? They think they have found in a past, restored after modern ideas, conditions of social justice which will establish for ever the brotherhood of man. All are awaiting the birth of a new order of things; all ask themselves, some with misgiving, others with hope, what the morrow will bring forth. It will not come with empty hands. The century which has witnessed so many grand discoveries in the world



of science cannot pass away without giving us still greater conquests. Industrial appliances, that by a single electric impulse make the same thought vibrate through five continents, have distanced by far our social morals, which are yet in many regards the outcome of reciprocally hostile interests. The axis is displaced; the world must crack that its equilibrium may be restored. In spirit revolution is ready; it is already thought — it is already willed; it only remains to realize it, and this is not the most difficult part of the work. The Governments of Europe will soon have reached the limits to the expansion of their power and find themselves face to face with their increasing populations. The superabundant activity which wastes itself in distant wars must then find employment at home — unless in their folly the shepherds of the people should try to exhaust their energies by setting Europeans against Europeans, as they have so often done before. It is true that in this way they may retard the solution of the social problem, but it will rise again after each postponement, more formidable than before.

Let economists and rulers invent political constitutions or salaried organizations, whereby the workman may be made the friend of his master, the subject the brother of the potentate, we, "frightful Anarchists" as we are, know only one way of establishing peace and goodwill among men — the suppression of privilege and the recognition of right. Our ideal, as we have said, is that of the fraternal equity for which all yearn, but almost always as a dream; with us it takes form and becomes a concrete reality. It pleases us not to live if the enjoyments of life are to be for us alone; we protest against our good fortune if we may not share it with others; it is sweeter for us to wander with the wretched and the outcast than to sit, crowned with roses, at the banquets of the rich. We are weary of these inequalities which make us the enemies of each other; we would put an end to the furies which are ever bringing men into hostile collision, and all of which arise from the bondage of the weak to the strong under the form of slavery, serfage, and service. After so much hatred we long to love each other, and for this reason are we enemies of private property and despisers of the law.



## THE CRIMINAL RECORD OF RECLUS.\*

By E. VAUGHAN.

### I.

The examining magistrate in the trials now in progress at Lyons appears to have abandoned the ingenious idea which he at first entertained, — of adding Elisée Reclus to his little collection of malefactors.

Elisée Reclus, nevertheless, placed himself at his disposition with perfect good grace. But it had been discovered, that, in the matter of conspicuous names, that of our friend Kropotkine sufficed for the moment. It is imprudent to put all one's eggs in the same basket, and it has been determined to save Elisée Reclus for the conspiracy that Devès † will not fail to discover next year.

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\* The series of three articles printed under this head originally appeared in Henri Rochefort's journal, "L'Intransigeant," on January 11, January 30, and February 8, 1883, and were written apropos of the rumors then current regarding the French government's intention of arresting Elisée Reclus on a charge of conspiracy with Pierre Kropotkine, who was then on trial and shortly afterwards was sentenced to imprisonment for a long term. The following letter from M. Reclus himself had also just appeared: —

*Monsieur Rigot, Examining Magistrate at Lyons:*

SIR, — I read in the Lyons "Republican" of December 23 that, "according to the warrant," the two chiefs and organizers of the "revolutionary Anarchists" are Elisée Reclus and Prince Kropotkine, and that I do not share my friend's imprisonment for the sole reason that French justice cannot go beyond the frontier to arrest me.

You know, however, that it would have been very easy to arrest me, since I have just passed more than two months in France. Nor are you ignorant that I returned to Thonon to attend the burial of Ananieff the day after Kropotkine's arrest, and that I pronounced a few words over his grave. The officers who were stationed immediately behind me and who repeated my name had only to invite me to follow them.

But whether I reside in France or in Switzerland matters little. If you desire to institute proceedings against me, I will hasten to respond to your personal invitation.

Name the place, the day, and the hour.

At the appointed time I will knock at the door of the prison designated.

Accept, sir, my civilities.

ELISEE RECLUS.

*Publisher's Note.*

† Then French minister of justice. — *Publisher's Note.*



Well! in my opinion, the Lyons magistrate, in this affair, has failed in all his duties. His mission is to protect society, and until he shall have laid hands on all the disturbers who are a menace to it, he will have done nothing. I point out this timorous judge to the implacable Devès.

But the audacious criminal — I do not mean the examining magistrate or Devès — shall not escape, through I know not what shameful compromises, being branded as he deserves.

At the risk of exposing my breast to the daggers of the Internationalists, of whom I should still be one if it were not forbidden, I will pitilessly draw up the criminal record of the hardened rascal whom the galleys claim, if not the scaffold.

Before all else the public safety!

Elisée Reclus was a precocious criminal. Brought up in detestable ideas of truth and justice, he was compelled to quit France, whose ruin he already plotted, at the time when Napoleon III. was trying to save her. At the *coup d'Etat* of 1851 Elisée Reclus was barely twenty-one years old. He went to live — and industriously, I will answer for it — in England first, then in the two Americas, finally in New Granada.

The various pursuits in which he was obliged to engage did not prevent him from studying these various countries. The precious notes which he brought back to France in 1857 alone sufficed to place him in one day in the front rank of our geographers.

During the war of secession he published in the "*Revue des Deux-Mondes*" some remarkable studies which threw complete light upon the question, and started the current of public opinion in favor of the generous cause upheld by Lincoln.

The United States minister, grateful for this service spontaneously rendered, offered Elisée Reclus a considerable sum, which the young *savant*, wrapping himself in his proud poverty, had the indelicacy to refuse. Did he intend to give the men of the Empire a lesson which the men of the present Republic take for them? I do not know. What I do know is that this affectation of disinterestedness was a deplorable example.

Elisée Reclus did not stop there. Applying to his country and his fellow-citizens the marvellous processes of investigation in which he had been so successful elsewhere, he dared to find the economic and political system of imperial France not the best imaginable. An original *savant*, he did not separate, in his profound and luminous researches, effects from causes, men from the earth. It was not enough for him to determine the natural fertility of a soil; he bothered himself also about the conditions of the distribution of this common patrimony.

It was largely for that reason that in 1869 he joined the International. It was permissible then and even not unfashionable: no other proof is needed than the affiliation of that old crocodile, Jules Simon.



The wretch — I still mean Elisée Reclus — whose talent and notoriety enabled him to gain the highest positions, made common cause with the wretched against the bloated, with the exploited against the exploiters.

After the war of 1870, during which he was hypocritical enough to do his duty valiantly, he naturally found himself mingled with the Communalist movement. Throwing off all shame, on March 25, 1871, he offered the Thiers, MacMahons, and Galliffets the supreme insult of appealing, in the "Cri du Peuple," to their sentiments of humanity, fraternity, and reconciliation.

On the fifth of April following he fell into the hands of the soldiers of order at Châtillon. For seven months he was detained at Brest. There, instead of devoting his time to asking pardon and making his *meâ culpâ* by beating the breasts of his accomplices, he formed the mad notion of teaching mathematics to his fellow-prisoners.

But the hour of punishment drew nigh. On November 15 Elisée Reclus was condemned to transportation by the seventh council of war sitting at Saint-Germain.

Thereby an unlooked-for scandal was created. The most illustrious *savants* of the entire world intervened. Such men as Darwin, Williamson, &c., addressed to the little Thiers a collective letter.

"We dare to think," they said, "that the life of a man like Elisée Reclus, whose services in the cause of literature and science seem to us but a promise of other and greater services yet, — we dare to think that this life belongs not only to the country which gave it birth, but to the entire world, and that, in thus silencing such a man or sending him to languish far from the centres of civilization, France would only mutilate herself and lessen her legitimate influence upon the world."

Thiers (Adolphe), whom one infamy more or less was not calculated to frighten (on the contrary!), did not dare nevertheless to refuse such a petition, and commuted the sentence of Elisée Reclus to banishment.

I will show you in a second article how little gratitude was shown by this recipient of mercy. By which the Lyons court will find its work all done.

## II.

I thought I had said enough in my first article to call the attention of the magistracy to the crimes of Kropotkine's accomplice, and I expected to see him condemned, were it only in default, to imprisonment or hard labor for a respectable number of years.

This satisfaction has been refused me. That is no reason why I should lose courage. In pointing out, without insisting too strongly, the peril in which so hardened a disturber as Elisée Reclus places society, I fulfilled an imperative but painful duty. Though one were actuated by the best intentions in the world, the



profession of informer is not exactly the most enviable of professions. Nevertheless, I am going to resume my thankless task, even though, a new Cassandra, I see my warnings perpetually ignored.

They have condemned the accomplices of Elisée Reclus for connection with an International Association, with the demonstration of whose existence they have supposed that they could dispense. It exists, no doubt, since the irremovable magistrates say so; nevertheless, to us profane beings, to whom the Holy Ghost refuses its light, a slight material proof would have been preferable to this affirmation.

But, once more, why not have included Elisée Reclus in the prosecutions? The evidence would have been overwhelming against him, for Elisée Reclus is internationalism incarnate in a great man.

As early as 1868 he published, thanks to the complicity of the firm of Hachette & Co., a superb work entitled "The Earth."

It was and is yet the most beautiful picture ever drawn of the phenomena of the globe's life. A critic who is an authority has given his appreciation of it in these words: "This work puts a mine of interesting information within the reach of all. It awakens our curiosity, kindles within us the desire of personal investigation. In calling our attention to the phenomena and changes which one may follow and observe without difficulty, at least in part, he invites us to undertake for ourselves the direct study of nature, to penetrate further into the sanctuary of this science whose revelations are an invigorating light."

All this is very true; but that which is no less so is that already there appears, in the author of these two fine and valuable volumes, the determination to consider at once all points of the globe instead of confining himself, wisely and particularly, to the study, for instance, of that portion of it which gave him birth.

Elisée Reclus, aggravating his offenses, wrote at the beginning of his work: "I can say it with the feeling of duty done: to preserve my clearness of vision and honesty of thought I have traversed the world as a free man, I have contemplated nature with a look at once candid and proud, remembering that the ancient Freya was at the same time the goddess of the earth and of liberty."

"The Earth," magnificently published and illustrated, was, it must be confessed, immediately translated into several languages, and established the reputation of its author. This success, the more dangerous because deserved, resulted in carrying to its paroxysm the international monomania of Elisée Reclus.

Scarcely restored, by the kindness of the little Thiers, to the comforts of an exile's life, he undertook a work before which any other man would have recoiled. I mean that "Universal Geography: A History of the Earth and its Inhabitants," the eighth volume of which has just appeared, and which will remain one of the most important books of our century.

Here again the complicity of Messrs Hachette & Co. is flagrant; they neglect



nothing to propagate the substance of the offense. Looked at in the right light, are they not, after all, the guilty principals? For, indeed, if they had not taken it upon themselves . . . . . but let that pass.

It would be impossible for me, be it understood, to devote to the "Universal Geography" of Reclus the profound study of which it is worthy. Ten articles like this would not be enough. I will confine myself, then, to a summary indication of its principal features.

Elisée Reclus, who, as an Anarchist, does nothing as other people do, not even in geography, does not confine himself, like his predecessors, to describing the physical aspect of the various portions of the globe: from a historical, biological, and, above all, sociological standpoint, he describes the men who inhabit it and the institutions which they have created. He makes us witnesses of the formation of societies whose political transformations he explains to us. He makes us trace out race-relationships, initiates us into the origin and growth of languages, and all in a marvellous and entrancing style, at once colored and sober, showing that Elisée Reclus is no less a *littérateur* than a scientist.

Here is the language of the author in the introduction to his first volume: "The publication of a universal geography may seem a bold enterprise, but it is justified by the great progress recently made and still going on in the scientific conquest of the planet.

"The countries which have long been the domain of civilized man have allowed the penetration of a great portion of their mysteries; vast regions, which the European had never visited before, have been added to the known world, and the very laws which all terrestrial phenomena obey have been scrutinized with more rigorous precision. The acquisitions of science are too great and numerous to allow the introduction of a summary thereof into any old work, even one of the highest value, such as that of the illustrious Malte-Brun.

"A new period must have new books."

And farther on, giving an idea of what he intends to do, Elisée Reclus adds: "Conventional geography, which consists in giving longitudes and latitudes, in enumerating cities, villages, political and administrative divisions, will have but a secondary place in my work; the atlases, dictionaries, and official documents furnish all desirable information in this branch of geographical science."

Finally he ends with these eloquent and generous words:

"At least I can promise my readers careful work, honest judgments, and respect for the truth. That it is which permits me to confidently invite them to study with me this *beneficent earth* which bears us all and upon which it would be so pleasant to live as brothers."

An abominable programme, is it not? And I will show you that it was only too rigorously followed.



## III.

It was not arbitrarily that Elisée Reclus chose Southern Europe as the starting-point of his patient and profound studies. It is in the countries bordering on the Mediterranean that he places, and rightly, the cradle of European civilization. Concerning that part of the globe we have twenty centuries of uninterrupted history and documents. No other offers with equal certainty, for so long a series of years, a view of the relation between the earth and its inhabitants.

Searching for the origins of European peoples, Elisée Reclus remarks that very few political frontiers are at the same time lines of separation between races and tongues. "Founded as it is upon the right of war and the rivalry of ambitions," he writes, "European equilibrium is necessarily unstable. While on the one hand it separates by violence peoples made to live the same political life, elsewhere it associates by force those who feel no ties of natural affinity; it tries to blend in one nation oppressors and oppressed, whom the memories of bloody struggles and massacres separate."

Farther on he adds: "True equilibrium will not be established until all the peoples of the continent shall be able to decide their own destinies for themselves, disengage themselves from every pretended right of conquest, and freely associate themselves with their neighbors for the management of common interests."

Given these premises and the vast plan which he had mapped out, could Elisée Reclus avoid establishing the existence of the human afflictions to which, with more or less equity and good will, it would be so easy to put an end?

Studying Turkey, for instance, could he help getting indignant in describing the way in which taxes are collected there? In that country certain collectors of tithes oblige the cultivators to heap up along their fields the whole products of their harvest until the agents of the Treasury have abstracted every tenth sheaf. Often half the crop is lost without profit to any one, before the government collects its tithe.

The Slavonic, Albanian, or Bulgarian peasant keeps the soil in a good productive state only in spite of his masters, who seem to take pains to disgust him with all effort and all labor.

In Italy Elisée Reclus saw that the scourge by which millions of cultivators are crushed is poverty.

"Deprived of the lands which belong to them, uncertain of the wages to come to them, the peasants of the Abruzzi and of Molise have remained serfs, although legally free. They belong to the master just as in the good old times . . . . . The peasants live in frightful dens, which the air reaches only in a polluted state. All the diseases caused by lack of food are common, and the mortality of children is large . . . . . Ignorance, the usual companion of poverty, is still very dense in all the provinces of the Peninsula."



Do you wonder, then, O innocent *bourgeois!* that there are Socialists, Anarchists, rebels in short, in Italy?

In Spain, although progress is beginning to make itself felt there and labor is more respected than formerly, the Treasury, in spite of financial fictions, is in a state of permanent bankruptcy. In the country of the Cid public instruction is very much behindhand, while, on the other hand, the art of bull-fighting is still held in high honor.

The second volume is entirely devoted to France. The author shows that, although the nation since February 21, 1875, has been a regularly constituted republic the institutions of the country are largely monarchical in origin and spirit.

Next taking up Switzerland (Central Europe, third volume), which has become, in proportion to its size, one of the most flourishing countries in Europe, he finds in the mountain pasture-lands either *almenden* — that is, common lands held by a town or village — or domains belonging to associations.

Material proofs that this individual property upon which we have based our institutions is not one of those holy principles without which a people cannot live.

In his fourth volume Elisée Reclus deals with Northwestern Europe, notably with England, which in many respects is still a feudal country.

He shows us in Ireland entire populations killed before their time by insufficiency of food and the impossibility of good hygiene.

The fifth volume is devoted to Scandinavian and Russian Europe. It is by no means the least saddening. We see there peasants, those of Saratow in 1873 for instance, obliged even in periods of famine to sell their wheat in order to pay their taxes. In the spring they are too poor to repurchase of others, and then they literally die of hunger.

The sixth volume gives us a masterly description of Russian Asia. It is at the end of this volume that complicity with Kropotkine is declared with extraordinary impudence.

Elisée Reclus, in fact, confesses that our friend has revived in his behalf the memories of his geological explorations in Oriental Siberia and Manchuria; he has given him his notes, and indicated the relative value of the articles printed in the Russian scientific journals.

Yet Kropotkine has been sentenced only to five years' imprisonment and ten years' police supervision! Truly, M. Devès's judges show an indulgence which borders on weakness.

The seventh volume is devoted to Oriental Asia; the eighth, and so far the last, deals with India and Indo-China. I have reviewed it elsewhere.

I shall have said all when I add that each of the volumes of the "Universal Geography" contains no less than a thousand quarto pages, and is illustrated with hundreds of maps in black and colors and with a large number of views and plans designed by our best and most conscientious artists.



Can the man of science and heart who shows that in all the countries of the world the situation of the most numerous classes of society is so intolerable counsel those who suffer thereby to tolerate it? Can he help wishing with all his heart and hastening with all his strength the advent of a better social organization?

Condemn, then, Ellsée Reclus and his accomplices, myself included, Messrs. judges. Without suspecting it, you are aiding in the overthrow of the odious institutions which you pretend to sustain, and the revolutionary socialists have no more powerful auxiliaries than yourselves!

THE END.



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