

ART. II.—WHAT IS NIHILISM ?

THERE are few spectacles more painful in the study of history than the fierce licence which so frequently animates a nation when seeking to set itself free from the fetters of a severe and harassing despotism. In the struggle upwards towards the light of liberty, so long as men are restrained by the control of loyal and disinterested leaders, the terrors of revolt are avoided, whilst the evils complained of are often redressed. It is that dark hour which inevitably wraps resistance in its gloomy folds, when men, maddened by the servitude of the past, escape from the government of those whose wisdom and foresight have successfully fought their battles, and, letting the reins lie loose upon their passions, give themselves up to every evil influence that possesses them. Accustomed to be controlled, they are ignorant in the wild moment of victory where to stop, what limits to set up, and what course to pursue. Hence, as the shade is but the proof of the light, almost every revolution which has sought the removal of legitimate sufferings has been attended by an after-revolution, which has made revolt synonymous with destruction, wholesale spoliation, and moral anarchy. It was so in England when the oppression and injustice complained of by Pym and Eliot and Hampden led to the terrors of civil war, regicide, and a military tyranny more hard and cruel than the most kingly despotism. It was so in France, when the righteous reforms advocated by just and tolerant men like Clermont Tonnerre, Lally Tollendal, and Montesquieu led to the revolutionary tribunal, the Reign of Terror, and the inauguration of the Goddess of Reason. The laudable desire of Germany to obtain for herself the advantages of constitutional government gave a stimulus to the predatory schemes and murderous designs of the Teutonic Socialists. The ambition which was the life-long work of Cavour, to create a united Italy, had to recognise as one of its results the daggers and firebrands of the Carbonari. France herself, with all her activity of intellect and fertility of resource, had to crush beneath her tread the flames of the Communists ere she succeeded in freeing herself from the thralldom of the Third Empire. And now we see Russia, the last of the family of nations who has declined to abjure absolutism, torn between two rival sections—the one, which seeks with philosophical prudence to dissolve an autocracy into a constitutional monarchy; the other, to raze the edifice to the ground, and on its site to erect an entirely new building, based on a foundation as immoral as it is impracticable. What the Mountain was to the Girondists in France, so the Nihilists in Russia are to the Constitutionals of Moscow, Kiev, and St. Petersburg.

It was not to be expected that a country so vast, and with such inherent signs of weakness so useful to the agitator, as Russia, should escape the popular cry for liberal institutions which since 1848 has so earnestly made its voice heard. Her statesmen, her politicians, her lawyers, her novelists, have been loud in their moans that at the present day, with its levelling tendencies and spread of culture, such a despotism as that of the Czar should be permitted to exist. Can Russia, it was asked, with Liberalism outside her frontiers, long expect to obey the sway of one man, to have no appeal to parliamentary institutions, to read in the daily Press only what is sanctioned, to be subject to partial judicial decisions, degrading restrictions, and a humiliating *espionage*, and to meet with on every side, when opposition is raised, the chains of the dungeon or a living tomb within the mines of Siberia? These questions have, to a certain extent, been answered by the present Czar in the various reforms he has seen the necessity of instituting, and which will make his reign ever memorable in the history of his country. Within the last twenty years he has emancipated the serfs, he has sought to purify the current of justice, he has removed certain of the restrictions which hampered promotion to the people in the ranks of the army and the civil service, and he has abolished punishment by torture. Thus, he has gone a certain length, but he refuses to go further. He has granted a sip from the cup of liberty instead of a generous draught; he has tantalised thirst by awakening it; he sternly declines to quench it. The Constitutionalists demand—and with their demands, temperately urged, we most cordially sympathise—that the monarchy be established on a parliamentary basis; that the Czar be a Constitutional sovereign, not controlled but guided by the advice of his Parliament, which is to be the representative of the nation; that the Press be almost free; that the regulations as to conscription be modified; that the question as to the right of the soil be settled on a more liberal basis; that exile be no longer the rule, but the exception; and that religious toleration be the law of the State. These requests—as just and equitable as any to be found in the provisions of our Magna Charta or Bill of Rights—once granted, the political and commercial prosperity of Russia is assured. But it is not from the Constitutionalists—the moderate party which heads a revolution—that there is any cause for fear; it is from savage and relentless agitators, many of them rendered fiendishly discontented by their past miseries and oppressions, who are careless of consequences provided all in high places be overthrown and a radical change be effected. To this class belong the Nihilists, whose name and doings have now so evil a sound in the ears of Europe.

Of the various forms which Socialism or Communism is made

to assume it would be impossible to find one more cynically destructive, more hopelessly immoral, or more mischievously pernicious than Nihilism. It is not so much the enemy of a despotism as it is the enemy of the whole system of social organisation. It is the very creed of negation, as its name implies. "Seize hold of the earth and heaven," cried a Nihilist when asked to explain his faith. "Seize hold of the State and the Church, seize hold of all kings and of God, and spit upon them—that is our doctrine." If such be the faith—so awful in its blasphemy and sweeping in its destructiveness—can we be surprised at any act, however Satanic, of its disciples? In its grossness and intolerance Nihilism tramples under foot all that humanity honours and respects; it is Radicalism bereft of its senses surging to and fro amidst the multitude of men seeking whom and what it may devour. It does not create, it does not improve, it has but one aim, to destroy. All the old and holy associations in connection with religion, government, the family relations, good and evil, it effaces with the hand of a brutish intolerance. It rejects the ideas of the existence of a God, and of the immortality of the soul; it desires the abolition of all forms of worship and the substitution of science for Faith. "There can be no real liberty," it says, "where there is a belief in the supernatural." The sacred tie of marriage has no place in its creed; both sexes are to be on a perfect footing of equality; to each is to be allowed the same advantages and the same freedom of action; the relationship of marriage is only to exist so long as it is desired by both parties; whilst to add to the population is to fly in the face of one of the chief articles of Nihilism, which seeks to blot out from off the earth all the race of mankind. Man was made out of nothing, let him, it says, return to his original nothingness. The only study in the eyes of a Nihilist worth pursuing is natural science; he has all the hate of the animal boor for art, poetry, and the refinements of culture; "a good chemist," he sneers, "is worth all the poets and artists in the world." Like the Communist, the disciple of Nihilism is an advocate of perfect equality; he will have no privileged classes, for they are to be absorbed in the people; if they object to absorption they are to be put out of the way; all goods are to be in common—what an excellent doctrine for men like the Nihilists, drawn mainly from the lower classes, who have nothing!—and hereditary rights are to be abolished; there is to be no antagonism in the future between labour and capital, as the interests of the two will be identical; or, in plain English, their positions will be reversed, the wealthy capitalist will find himself a labourer, and a penniless labourer, thanks to spoliation under a new name, will find himself a capitalist. Russia is to be the property of the Russian people, not the country for an

Imperial clique or for a favoured coterie. The revenues of the State are to be handed over to the nation; the appointments now in the gift of the Crown are to be in the gift of the people; the days of patronage are dead, or, in other words, the patronage which was formerly exercised by the aristocracy is to be dispensed by the democracy. These are the leading principles of the Nihilists, women and men; and they are resolved upon asserting and carrying them out, no matter at what cost to themselves or at what hazard to the community at large. That the Nihilists have a courage which refuses to be intimidated, an organisation complete in its system and in its secrecy, and a vigour of purpose which makes them most dangerous, cannot be denied. Their faith is a pessimism of the most heinous kind. Seeing themselves surrounded by all that they deem evil, they aim at upsetting everything, government, religion, society, the family relationships, and in their stead to erect a new order of things. Their principles are those of the Socialist of the most advanced type, their agents may be with every class, and their weapons are those of the hidden assassin, incendiary, and miner.

To the members of a society of this kind the peculiar organisation of Russia is favourable. The system of castes into which the empire of the Czar is divided renders many of the tenets of the Nihilists most favourable to the ambitious middle classes. It has been ascertained that at the universities "young Russia" is specially favourable to the teaching of Nihilism. As the government of the vast dominions of the Czar is different to any other form of government, so is its aristocracy different from that of any other aristocracy. A prince may be a powerful general or an important statesman, or he may take your fare as he drives his drojky along the Nevski Prospect. In Russia there is no purely privileged class holding its lands and exercising its authority by virtue alone of its hereditary rights. The Russian authority is one composed more of office than of birth—it is more of a bureaucracy than an aristocracy. To be enrolled within the ranks of the *tchinovniki*, or civil functionaries of the State, is the ambition of every Russian gentleman. This order is divided into fourteen classes, and unless an aristocrat is a *tchin* he is comparatively a nobody. The superior classes of the *tchinovniki* are almost entirely composed of the *elite* of Russian society, and the middle classes consider themselves fortunate if they can be included even in its lowest ranks. To be a *tchin* of the first class is to be raised to so elevated a position as to be something more than merely human in the eyes of the Russian people. The exclusiveness of the *tchinovniki* is one of the grievances complained of by both the Constitution-ists and the Nihilists. In addition to this order there are various other castes, all established and systematised by the late

Emperor Nicholas, and transmitted by him to his son Alexander. The nobles are divided into *la grande noblesse*, who are of ancient race, and have been peers for centuries, and *la petite noblesse*, who are of a recent creation. The citizens consist of the inhabitants of the towns and the inhabitants of the country. The merchants are separated into three distinct classes. The clergy are of two sections, the black clergy or the monastic, and the white clergy or secular. The army is divided into the Guard and the Line. The rights of each caste are clearly defined, but the very head and front of this social edifice is *la grande noblesse*. It fills the superior classes of the *tchin*, whilst its sons are attached to embassies, officer the Guards, and accept lucrative sinecures salaried by a heavy and partial taxation. The people at large have to be satisfied with any of the crumbs that fall from the table of the *grande noblesse*, and to consider themselves fortunate if their hunger is in any measure appeased. Thus, we can easily see in the organisation of Russian life how numerous are the elements to promote discontent and irritation amongst an ambitious but impoverished nation. When once reform has set in it cannot be arbitrarily discontinued; liberty is general, not partial in its operations. The serfs have been emancipated, but it is impossible that emancipation can be made to halt there; other classes have to be released from their disabilities as important to the State as its peasantry. "Why"—cry the middle classes, anxious to obtain office in the *tchinovniki* and to hold commands in crack regiments—"Why show such kindness for the slaves of the soil, who are the most ignorant and the least deserving of the nation? Grant to the other classes similar benefits." Under a Constitutional Government reform must be progressive; it may march slowly, but it must still be moving on. We have seen this fact exemplified in our own country. When we removed the political disabilities under which Dissenters laboured, the next step was to emancipate the Roman Catholics, and the logical consequence of those two acts led to the passing of the Jewish Disabilities Bill. When we opened the ranks of the Engineers and Artillery to the test of competitive examinations, it was but the prelude to the general abolition of patronage which now prevails. It is impossible for a Constitutional Power to resist the legitimate demands of its subjects: a Despotie Power can resist, but, as we now see in Russia, at the hazard of its safety and stability.

Another source of Muscovite discontent should not be overlooked. Between the Russians and the Germans there is but little cordiality, yet the Teutonic element is largely distributed over the *tchin* and the army. Men, either Germans or the sons of Germans, hold the seals as Ministers, or wear the uniform of generals of division. The Germans, by their superior intel-

lectual capacity, their immense patience, and their intense industry, easily outrival the Russians in their race for office. If the Muscovite list be examined, it will be seen that the men who form the *entourage* of the Czar—who are his Ministers and Commanders-in-Chief—have names which end far oftener in *mann* and *heim* than in *koff* and *iski*. Hence the Germans are now as much hated in Russia as were the Scotch in England in the days of the Marquis of Bute. Nor can we forget that the controlling force of religion is painfully wanting in the Russian character. The Russian is superstitious, but he is not religious, and for this deficiency he is indebted to the creed of his country. It may suit the pretensions of a certain small section of the English Church, anxious to consolidate its newly-created position—like some *parvenu* who seeks a brilliant alliance—by a union with an old established branch of the Catholic Church to speak in terms of eulogy of the Greek Communion. As a matter of fact, however, the Greek Church exhibits the most debased form of Christianity that is, perhaps, in existence. Holding many of the errors of Rome, she has nothing of the discipline and intellectual culture which, it must be admitted, is conspicuous in the fold of the Vatican. Her creed is practically a degrading superstition; whilst her priests by their lives often plainly prove how feeble is the influence exercised by their religion over themselves. Among the higher classes the Greek Church is treated with silent contempt; her faith does not tend to elevate the mind to nobler things, nor does it deter men from following the course inclination prescribes. Where the national religion is lightly considered, a people are always more prone to run into excesses than where their passions are curbed by the restraining influences of a faith which inspires them with respect, and in many instances with attachment. Thus, the young men of Russia, busy with their studies in the universities, or with their hampered industries in the workshops, are ready at the outset to join in the cry of the Nihilists of "Down with all religion!" Hot youth, which is ambitious and yet observant, can see no grounds for the preservation of a creed based on silly and puerile miracles, and whose popes are openly given to scandalous habits. Having enlisted *la jeunesse orangeuse* in the cause of dethroning religion, the Nihilists proceed to cast a deeper glamour over their victims. One of the most powerful fascinations of Nihilism is, that in many instances its ends seem so plausible that it is not until the whole of its doctrines is comprehended that its diabolical harmony becomes visible. Hence the reason why men far above the station of the middle classes have been accused as Nihilists, and have suffered for their temerity by exile or death. The articles of Nihilism are most comprehensive; they include the vicious as well as the

virtuous. On the one hand they breathe out threatenings and slaughter, slaying monarchs, insulting decency, and casting down religion; but, on the other hand, they preach civil equality, reform of taxation, liberty of the Press, the suppression of the *tsin*, and the more moderate proposals of the Constitutionalists. There have been many who have thrown in their lot with the Nihilists, tempted by the plausible portion of their programme, but who have had no intention of carrying out their schemes by the aid of the sanguinary clauses. But Nihilism, like the terrible *Vehm-gericht*, forces its followers to accept the whole of its teaching, and to him who resists it deals out secret but certain death.

Two courses, and only two, are open to Russia. She must accede to the demands of the Constitutional party, and thus introduce peace and prosperity into her kingdoms; or she must maintain a rigid despotism, and convert the Russia of Alexander into the Russia of Nicholas. She may reform her constitution altogether or she may leave it alone; she cannot patch it. Constitutionalism or Absolutism lies before her, which will she choose? Holding an important position in the councils of Europe, Russia must act as a Western, not as an Eastern Power. At the present moment she is an anachronism. Environed by nations who have had to yield to the pressure put upon them by their subjects and to grant a constitution, the mighty Muscovite Power has turned a deaf ear to the requests of her people, and rules with the tyranny of the sixteenth century in the middle of the enlightened nineteenth century. Not one demand has been placed before her which Prussia, Austria, Italy, France, Spain have not acceded to. Let her then grant these requests, and she will sound the knell of Nihilism and of social revolution. We are not amongst those who place much faith in the capacity of the Nihilists to overthrow an Empire. A few thousands of young men, without experience, without practical ideas, whose resources are pamphlets and tracts circulated amongst an illiterate people, and whose arms are the weapons of the murderer and the incendiary, cannot prove themselves victorious when pitted against a population of some eighty millions of souls. The danger lies in the possibility of the moderate party, irritated at the short-sighted and persistent refusals to its prayers, forming in despair a union with the Nihilists, and thus giving its sanction to excesses of which it disapproves. History teaches us how often and by what almost imperceptible gradations the Left has found itself acting in conjunction with the Extreme Left; and history, both ancient and modern, is surely full of solemn warnings against the rashness of those placed in supreme power running counter to the wishes of a nation. We do not say that the Czar cannot succeed in restoring the most

from despotism that Government ever saw established, but we do say that his evil end can only be attained at the expense of alienating the hearts of his people, crushing the prosperity of his kingdom, and increasing tenfold the influence and mischief of those secret societies now plotting against his State. Nihilism is one of those parasites which battens only upon the miseries and sufferings of mankind. It cannot be stamped out by death or punishment; martial law and the rigours of a severe discipline fail to suppress it; it pays no heed to police supervision, the sentence of judicial tribunals, or the power of the sword. But its pestilential breath loses all its poison when once it has to contend against the fresh air of political liberty. We pray that He who is the King of Kings and Ruler of Rulers may so guide the counsels of him who wields the sceptre as the Czar of All the Russias that the painful agitation now rife in his dominions may be calmed by the introduction of a wise, a tolerant, and an enlightened policy.

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ART. III.—ARE OUR SUNDAY SCHOOLS A FAILURE?

FEW more important questions can be asked in the present day than this—Are our Sunday Schools a success or a failure? The gradual rise of the intellectual standard in all our other schools, while it is of great value in expanding the minds of the young, and rendering them more intelligently receptive of instruction, has also led to the shortening of the time for religious teaching, and imparted a more secular tone to our elementary day schools. The absence of encouragement under the present Governmental regulations to Scriptural instruction has also undoubtedly weakened the interest taken in it except by pious and conscientious teachers. Other subjects pay; but the Bible does not. The test has therefore often proved too severe.

Then there is the impossibility in large and populous parishes of carrying out our Church's order of catechising on Sundays and holy days by the clergyman. George Herbert's beautiful ideal cannot be universally realised, however desirable it may be in the country. Nor does this, even when most effectively done, supersede the Sunday Schools. In the hands of a specially gifted catechist it may impart clear and correct knowledge of Divine truth. The great facts and doctrines of the Gospel may be questioned into and out of our children, and so impressed on the memory, and, with God's blessing, on the heart. Still, one essential element is wanting. The clergyman in the reading-