THE STATE

ITS HISTORIC ROLE

By PETER KROPOTKIN
INTRODUCTION

The State: Its Historic Role was written originally as a lecture intended to be delivered at the Milles Colonne Hall in Paris on March 7, 1896. For some reason, the lecture was not given, and it was later printed in pamphlet form. An English translation was published by Freedom Press in 1903, and reprinted in 1920. The present edition is a somewhat drastic revision of that translation.

The State was written in the third period of Kropotkin's active life, the period of mature reflection and creative elucidation of social knowledge which followed his scholastic youth and his revolutionary manhood. In 1886 Kropotkin was released from the French prison to which he had been consigned for his activities in connection with the French anarchist movement and the reconstituted International. He attempted to settle in Paris with Elie Reclus, like himself a scientist of considerable ability whose research into the life of humanity and the evolution of human institutions had forced him irresistibly along the road to anarchism. But the French authorities would have nothing to do with a man they considered to be so dangerous a revolutionary, and Kropotkin was expelled from France.

He found a home in England, which at the time still gave refuge to a great many of the exiled revolutionaries of the continent. Cut off from the scene of active revolutionary work, he did not give up interest and fall into the lethargy and disillusionment which had submerged so many rebels under similar circumstances. Instead, he applied his scholastic gifts, his scientific training and his revolutionary enthusiasm to the task of erecting a body of anarchist theoretical writing, and during the next 30 years he lived quietly in his cottage at Harrow, among his home-made furniture, cultivating his own garden and producing a great mass of theoretical books and pamphlets which not only became classics of revolutionary writing but also had a great influence on the development of sociological thought since Kropotkin's day. The influence of Mutual Aid, indeed, went beyond both politics and sociology and was probably the major influence in the recent changes in evolutionary theory which have tended to discredit the Huxleyan and neo-Malthusian tendency of early Darwinism with its emphasis on the bloody struggle for existence, and to accept in its place an evolutionary theory much nearer to that enunciated by Kropotkin.

Indeed, it might be said of Kropotkin, as William Hazlitt said of William Godwin, that 'his works are standard in the history of the intellect,' just as they live and maintain their vital influence in the growth of revolutionary thought among mankind.

At the time when The State was produced, Kropotkin had already written some of his most important works. The Conquest of Bread appeared in 1888, In Russian and French Prisons in 1887 and by the time of the composition of The State, Mutual Aid has already been completed and had appeared in the form of a series of articles in The Nineteenth Century.

The State and Mutual Aid were, therefore, composed at the same period, and the theories that dominated Mutual Aid are evident also in the smaller work. Indeed, The State might well be described as an application of the mutual aid theory to a particular human institution. Kropotkin shows how human communities based on mutual aid were successful and prosperous, and how, when they deserted that principle and accepted instead the domination of authority, they failed and eventually died while the individuals within them lived progressively more unhappily under the domination of the State.
Much of this pamphlet repeats in condensed form the information and arguments to be found in *Mutual Aid*, and readers would do well to supplement it by reading the larger work, if they have not already done so. But *The State* differs from *Mutual Aid* in that, while in the latter book Kropotkin set out deliberately to make a completely dispassionate exposition of mutual aid as a scientific and social fact, without drawing any political conclusions or making any declaration for Anarchism, in *The State* he draws such conclusions from an examination of the evolution of human institutions and shows that anarchy, the society without a state, is the only social form in complete accordance with the beneficial and life-giving principles of social co-operation. Thus, *The State* can in a way be regarded as the final chapter of *Mutual Aid*.

*The State* contains a description of the free societies, primitive and medieval, which existed before the development of centralized power (or which, in the case of certain primitive societies in Kropotkin's own day, even contrived to exist in a world for the most part dominated by such centralized power), an analysis of the disintegration of these free societies under the impact of the rising power of the State, and a warning of the social death and the new dark age that lie at the end of the fatal evolution of the State—unless that evolution is broken beforehand by the intervention of the forces of freedom.

"Either the State will be destroyed and a new life will begin in thousands of centers, on the principle of an energetic initiative of the individual, of groups, and of free agreement, or else the State must crush the individual and local life, it must become the master of all the domains of human activity, must bring with it its wars and internal struggles for the possession of power, its surface revolutions which only change one tyrant for another, and inevitably, at the end of this evolution—death!"

Today we can find little fault in the forecast that culminated Kropotkin's essay. Indeed, for us the warning is more real than for the people to whom it was spoken, for we have experienced a large measure of its fulfillment in a world of centralized national states that during the past 50 years have traveled with gathering impetus down the primrose path to social destruction.

The degree and rapidity of this evolution can be seen by a comparison of the national states of Kropotkin's day with those of our own. We might even take his own country, Russia.

Tzarist Russia was one of the most tyrannical States of its time, a State that lived by terror and murder, by the secret police and the knouting Cossacks. Yet even within that terrible State there were many surprising intercesses in which freedom and free co-operation could live and even thrive. Among the peasants the dominant social form was still the Mir, a kind of village commune which united cooperatively the lives of the villagers. As Kropotkin reveals in this very pamphlet, under the tyrannical Tzarist system the peasants were allowed to occupy Siberia in just such a manner as they thought fit and to establish the communistic institutions which they desired. Without wishing to minimize in any way the hard, toiling, oppressed nature of the peasant's life under the Tzars, we can say safely that in spite of this he enjoyed more real freedom than he does now under the Bolsheviks who turned to their own ends the revolution which the peasants made possible. The forced collectivizations, requisitioning of crops, the persecution of independent peasants and the deportation and virtual murder of some millions of the peasant population in the Arctic death camps are crimes beside which the crimes of the Tzarist nobility and police officials seem milk-and-water.

Again, we might compare intellectual life of Tzarist Russia with that of Soviet Russia today. In the latter half of the 19th century considerable independence of thought flourished among the Russian intelligentsia, and even men like Tolstoy, who denounced the State, were
often left untouched so long as they attempted no serious political conspiracies. It is, moreover, impossible to deny the richness of the achievement in writing, in music, even in science, of the Russian intelligentsia of the time, an achievement which could not have been reached without at least some freedom of expression and a cultured and independent-minded public. When the new Russian State, however, appeared in 1917, these very intelligentsia were taken away literally in tens of thousands to the prisons which the Bolsheviks took over from the Tsars. The State instituted a system of standards to which art must conform—not only so far as its political content went, but also in the matter of form. All art must be propagandist, and all art must administer its propaganda by the same technique. The consequence was that Russia declined to a state in which the official standard of kitsch journalism kept all art down to the same level of mediocrity. The Soviet ruling class denominated fine art what even the Western bourgeoisie would have used only as advertisement dope. Artists who would not conform disappeared, like Boris Pasternak, into the dungeons of the G.P.U. Conscientious artists who attempted to conform found the conflict between inspiration and party loyalty unbearable and many, like Yessenin and Mayakovsky, committed suicide.

What can be said of the influence of the State towards peasants and artists in Russia can be said of its influence in every other respect. The regime of the new bureaucracy exceeds the Tsarist government perhaps not in the degree of its brutality, but in the fact that while the brutality of the Tsars was sporadic and inefficient in its attacks on the individual, that of the Bolsheviks is thorough and efficient, and tends steadily to reduce the means by which the individual can live any kind of life outside the State. The State has extended its scope from political government to economic government, and in this way the two forms of power which in the previous phase of the State still existed apart have coalesced into the total State governed by a united class of officials which regulates every aspect of the communal life and steadily advances its net of regulation about the life of the individuals within it.

Russia is only one and by no means an extreme example of political development. In Germany, in Italy, in Japan, in China, the growth of State power into the totalitarian dominion of the bureaucrats is obvious. But in those countries which still make some pretense to democracy this development is no less evident to those who make even a general study of political events and social tendencies. Recently James Burnham, the American political writer, published a book called "The Managerial Revolution" which caused a considerable stir in advanced circles on both sides of the Atlantic. Burnham's thesis was that Capitalism is in a state of decline, that the capitalist class is rapidly losing all real power, and that virtual control is passing into the hands of a new ruling class, "the managers," by whom he means the administrators of industry and government. There is no possibility, he contends, of old-style capitalism persisting. The managerial revolution, which has already passed through its early stages, will dominate world society.

This is a modern version of Kropotkin's theme, supported by a capable analysis of the development of this revolution in the form of the State. The State, as both Kropotkin and Burnham show, has entered into its most complete and deadly form. The primary form of the State was the monarchial or aristocratic State of the 17th or 18th century, its secondary stage was the capitalist "liberal" State of the 19th century, and its tertiary and fatal stage is the total State of the 20th century.

The way in which the power of the State has extended since Kropotkin's day can be seen by a reference to the condition of the various peoples, such as Malays, Kabyles, etc., whom he mentions as living in a manner based on the principles of mutual aid and opposite to the life of the great States of his day. These statements are ob-
solete, but this very fact is a proof of his contentions, for the Malays, the Kabyles, etc. no longer live this independent life because the spread of the various great European states has brought these peoples more and more under the domination of colonial imperialism and has in this way destroyed their independent communal ways of living. The new states spread their tentacles over the whole face of the earth, bringing within the orbits of their centralized power all races and kinds and spreading their oppression and interference with personal liberties into the remotest corners of the earth.

Where, however, Burnham and many others of his kind differ from Kropotkin and the anarchists is in their pessimistic acceptance of the inevitability of the triumph of the State in its extreme form. The deterministic that dominates their idea is, indeed, hardly tenable on any grounds of logic or social experience. Nothing is inevitable in society, either managerial revolution or social revolution. Only tendencies can be described, and the tendency towards the social revolution is just as much alive today, if less apparent, as that towards the final consummation of the State.

The State may have gained control of all the power centers of society through the operation of the managers and the bureaucrats. But the real control rests, at the last resort, in the hands of the workers who carry on industry, transport and other social functions. Without the co-operation of a section of the workers and the tacit acquiescence of the majority, no industrial society can continue in its existing form. If and when the workers become aware of this fact and decide to take their destiny into their own hands, without trusting to leaders, then the total State will vanish just as the liberal State and the old-style Capitalism are vanishing today. The consolidation of the State and the social death that will follow thereon will never be completed if the workers once become aware of their power and kill the State by the paralysis of direct economic action, to which it will be more vulnerable than any society before.

The struggle against the State is the great task of mankind today. A great controversy between the Socialists and the Anarchists in the past centered round the fact that the Socialists declared Capitalism to be the chief enemy of the workers whereas the Anarchists declared that the chief enemy was the State. Events have proved the rightness of the Anarchist contention. Today Capitalism is dying, not from the action of the workers, but from the action of the State. The expropriators are indeed being expropriated, but not quite in the way Karl Marx foresaw. But the State, gaining strength from its absorption of economic power, becomes more menacing, oppressive and destructive than ever before. And gradually, as the power of the State increases, so do we find the organs of political and reformist action lining themselves up beside it, becoming part of its very fabric. The trade unions become the State organizations for the regulation of labor, the co-operative societies dovetail into the state-controlled schemes of distribution, the Labor Party and the Communist Party become the mouths through which the State attempts to speak to the workers.

The struggle against the State is one which the workers must fight for themselves. Leaders will only lead them back into the old governmental ambushes. Only by their own attack on authority, by using the power controls of society, the means of production and distribution which in reality lie in their hands, can the workers defeat and destroy the State. And when they have destroyed it, their course of action must lie not in the directions laid down by political parties, of a centralized "workers" State governed by a party bureaucracy, which will bring back all the evils of government and exploitation in an aggravated form, but in the direction pointed out by Kropotkin and the other Anarchists, towards a free society based on "the principle of an energetic initiative of the individual, of groups and of free agreement."


GEORGE WOODCOCK
THE STATE

Its Historic Role

I.

In taking as subject the State and the part it played in history I thought it would respond to a need which is greatly felt at this moment: that of thoroughly examining the very idea of the State, of studying its essence, its role in the past, and the part it may be called upon to play in the future.

It is especially on the “State” question that Socialists are divided. Amidst the number of factions existing among us and corresponding to different temperaments, to different ways of thinking, and especially to the degree of confidence in the coming Revolution, two main currents can be traced.

On the one hand, there are those who hope to accomplish the Social Revolution by means of the State: by upholding most of its functions, even by extending them and making use of them for the Revolution. And there are those who, like us, see in the State, not only in its actual form and in all forms that it might assume, but in its very essence, an obstacle to the Social Revolution, the most serious hindrance to the growth of a society based on equality and liberty, the historic form elaborated to impede this growth—and who consequently work to abolish the State, and not to reform it.

The division, as you see, is deep. It corresponds to two divergent currents which clash in all the philosophy, literature, and action of our time. And if the prevalent notions about the State remain as obscure as they are today, it will, without doubt, be over this question that the most obstinate struggles will be entered upon, when—as I hope soon—Communist ideas seek their practical realization in the life of societies.

It is therefore important, after having so often criticized the present State, to seek the cause of its appearance, to investigate the part played by it in the past, to compare it with the institutions which it superseded.

Let us first agree as to what we mean by the word State.

There is the German school that likes to confuse the State with

* In order to avoid a certain confusion that may arise from Kropotkin’s use of the terms Communism and Socialism, it is necessary to point out that the application of these words has changed considerably in the past 50 years. Communism, in Kropotkin’s day, meant the theory of the common ownership of the means of production and distribution, and the sharing of the work and goods of society on the basis of “from each according to his ability, to each according to his need.” This theory of Communism was adhered to by the Anarchists. The authoritarian Socialists of Kropotkin’s day were not Communist but Collectivist, and stood for the ownership of the means of production by the State, and the remuneration of the workers by a system of wages based on the supposed social value of various types of work. The term Socialism, however, was used to embrace all the various types of social theory which envisaged the replacement of individual Capitalism by some form of collective ownership and included both Anarchism and the various schools of Marxist Social Democracy. Today, of course, it is applied almost exclusively to the various parties advocating State ownership.

The present confusion regarding the term Communism arises from Lenin’s appropriation of the term from the Anarchist-Communists, to cover the essentially Collectivist Bolshevik Party.—Ed.
Society. This confusion is to be met even among the best German thinkers and many French ones, who cannot conceive society without State concentration; and thence arises the habitual reproach cast on Anarchists of wanting to "destroy society" and of "preaching the return of perpetual war of each against all."

Yet to reason thus is entirely to ignore the progress made in the domain of history during the past 30 years; it is to ignore that men have lived in societies for thousands of years before having known the State; it is to forget that for European nations the State is of recent origin—that it hardly dates from the 16th century; it is to fail to recognize that the most glorious epochs in humanity were those in which the liberties and local life were not yet destroyed by the State, and when masses of men lived in communes and free federations.

The State is but one of the forms taken by society in the course of history. How can one be confused with the other?

On the other hand, the State has also been confused with government. As there can be no State without government, it has been sometimes said that it is the absence of government, and not the abolition of the State, that should be the aim.

It seems to me, however, that State and government represents two ideas of a different kind. The State not only includes the existence of a power placed above society, but also a territorial concentration of many or even all functions of the life of society in the hands of a few. It implies new relations among the members of society.

This characteristic distinction, which perhaps escapes notice at first sight, appears clearly when the origin of the State is studied.

To really understand the State, there is, in fact, but one way: it is to study it in its historical development, and that is what I shall endeavor to do.

The Roman Empire was a State in the true sense of the word. Up till now it is the ideal of the students of law.

Its organs covered a vast domain with a close network. Everything flowed towards Rome: economic life, military life, judicial relations, riches, education, even religion. From Rome came laws, magistrates, legions to defend their territory, governors to rule the province, gods. The whole life of the Empire could be traced back to the Senate; later on the Caesar, the omnipotent, omniscient, the god of the Empire. Every province, every district had its miniature Capitol, its little share of Roman sovereignty to direct its whole life. One law, the law imposed by Rome, governed the Empire; and that Empire did not represent a confederation of citizens: it was only a flock of subjects.

Even now, the students of law and the authoritarians admire the unity of that Empire, the spirit of unity of those laws, the beauty—they say—the harmony of that organization.

But the internal decomposition furthered by barbarian invasion—the death of local life, henceforth unable to resist attacks from without, and the gangrene spreading from the center—pulled that empire to pieces, and on its ruins was established and developed a new civilization, which is ours today.

If, putting aside antique empires, we study the origin and development of that young barbarian civilization till the time when it gave birth to our modern States, we shall be able to grasp the essence of the State. We shall do it better than we should have done, if we had launched ourselves in the study of the Roman Empire, or the empire of Alexander, or the despotie Eastern monarchies.

In taking these powerful barbarian destroyers of the Roman Empire as a starting point, we can retrace the evolution of all civilization from its origin till it reaches the stage of the State.
Most of the philosophers of the last century had conceived very elementary notions about the origin of societies. At the beginning, they said, men lived in small, isolated families, and perpetual war among these families represented the normal condition of existence. But one fine day, perceiving the drawbacks of these endless struggles, they decided to form a society. A social contract was agreed upon among scattered families, who willingly submitted to an authority, which authority became the starting point and the initiative of all progress. Must I add, as you have been told in school, that our present governments have impersonated the noble part of salt of the earth, the pacifiers and civilizers of humanity?

This conception, which was born at a time when little was known about the origin of man, prevailed in the last century; and we must say that in the hands of the encyclopedists and of Rousseau, the idea of a "social contract" became a powerful weapon with which to fight royalty and divine right. Nevertheless, in spite of services it may have rendered in the past, that theory must now be recognized as false.

The fact is that all animals, save some beasts and birds of prey, and a few species in course of extinction, live in societies. In the struggle for existence it is the sociable species that get the better of the unsociable. In every class of animals they occupy the top of the ladder, and there can be no doubt that the first beings of human aspect already lived in societies. Man did not create society; society is anterior to man.

We also know today—anthropology has clearly demonstrated it—that the starting point of humanity was not the family, but the clan, the tribe. The paternal family as we have it, or as depicted in Hebrew tradition, appeared very much later. Men lived tens of thousands of years in the stage of clan or tribe, and during that first stage—let us call it the primitive tribe—man already developed a whole series of institutions, habits, and customs, far anterior to the paternal family institutions.

In those tribes, the separate family existed no more than it exists among so many other sociable mammals. Divisions in the tribe itself were formed by generations; and since the earliest periods of tribal life limitations were established to hinder marriage relations between divers generations, while they were freely practiced between members of the same generation. Traces of that period are still extant in certain contemporary tribes, and we find them again in the language, customs and superstitions of nations who were far more advanced in civilization.

The whole tribe hunted and harvested in common, and when they were satisfied they gave themselves up to their dramatic dances. Nowadays we still find tribes, very near this primitive phase, driven back to the least accessible regions of our world.

The accumulation of private property could not take place, because each thing that had been personal property of a member of the tribe was destroyed or burned where his corpse was buried. This is still done by gypsies in England, and the funeral rites of the "civilized" bear its traces: the Chinese burn paper models of what the dead possessed; and we lead the military chief's horse, and carry his sword and decorations as far as the grave. The meaning of the institution is lost: only the form survives.

Far from professing contempt for human life, these primitive men had a horror of blood and murder. Shedding blood was considered a deed of such gravity that each drop shed—not only the blood of men,
but also that of certain animals—required that the aggressor should lose an equal quantity of blood.

In fact, murder within the tribe itself was absolutely unknown; you may see this even now, among the Inoits or Esquimaux—those survivors of the stone age who inhabit the Arctic regions. But when tribes of different origin, color, or tongue met during their migrations, war was often the result. It is true that men already tried to mitigate the effect of these shocks. Already, as has been demonstrated by Maine, Post, and Nys, the tribes agreed upon and respected certain rules and limitations of war which contained the germs of what was later to become international law. For example, a village must not be attacked without warning to the inhabitants. No one would have dared to kill on a path trodden by women going to the well. And, to come to terms, the balance of the men killed on both sides had to be paid.

However, from that time forward, a general law overruled all others. "Your people have killed or wounded one of ours, therefore we have the right to kill one of yours, or to inflict an absolutely similar wound on one of yours"—never mind which, as it is always the tribe that is responsible for every act of its members. The well-known biblical verses, "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth," (but no more!) thence derive their origin. It was their conception of justice, and, we have no reason to boast, for the principle of "a life for a life" which prevails in our codes is but one of its numerous survivals.

As you see, a whole series of institutions and a whole code of tribal morals was already elaborated during this primitive stage. To maintain this kernel of social customs, habit and tradition sufficed. There was no authority to impose it.

Primitive individuals had, no doubt, temporary leaders. The sorcerer, the rain-maker—the scientist of that epoch—sought to profit by what they knew (or thought they knew) about nature, in order to rule over their fellow men. Likewise, he who could best remember proverbs and songs, in which tradition was embodied, became powerful. Later, these "educated" men endeavored to secure their rulership by transmitting their knowledge only to the elect. All religions, and even all arts and crafts began in "mysteries."

Also the brave, bold, and cunning man became the temporary leader during conflicts with other tribes, or during migrations. But an alliance between the "law" bearer, the military chief and the witchdoctor did not exist, and there can be no more question of a State with these tribes than there is in a society of bees or ants, or among our contemporaries the Patagonians or Esquimaux.

This stage, however, lasted thousands of years, and the barbarians who invaded the Roman empire had hardly emerged from it.

In the first centuries of our era, immense migrations took place among the tribes and confederations of tribes that inhabited Central and Northern Asia. A stream of peoples, driven by more or less civilized tribes, came down from the table-lands of Asia (probably driven away by the rapid drying-up of those plateaux) and inundated Europe, impelling one another onward, mingling with one another in their overflow towards the West.

During these migrations, when so many tribes of diverse origin were intermixed, the primitive tribe, which still existed among them and the primitive inhabitants of Europe, necessarily became disaggregated. The tribe was based on its common origin, on the worship of common ancestors; but what common origin could be invoked by the agglomerations that emerged from the hurly-burly of migrations, collisions, wars between tribes, during which we see the paternal family spring up here and there—the kernel formed by men appropriating women they had conquered or kidnapped from neighboring tribes?

Ancient ties were rent asunder, and under the threat of a general breakup (that took place, in fact, for many tribes which disappeared
from history) it was essential that new ties should spring up. They were found in the communal possession of land, on which such an agglomeration settled down.

The possession in common of a certain territory, of certain valleys, plains or mountains, became the basis of a new agreement. Ancient gods had lost all meaning; and the local gods of valley, river and forest gave the religious consecration to the new agglomeration, substituting themselves for the gods of the primitive tribe. Later on, Christianity, always ready to accommodate itself to pagan survivals, made local saints of them.

Henceforth, the village community, composed partly or entirely of separate families—all united, nevertheless, by the possession in common of the land—became the necessary bond of union for centuries to come.

On the immense stretches of land in Eastern Europe, Asia and Africa, it still exists today. The barbarians who destroyed the Roman Empire—Scandinavians, Germans, Celts, Slavs, etc.—lived under this kind of organization. And, in studying the ancient barbarian codes, as well as the laws and customs of the confederations of village communes among the Kabyles, Mongols, Hindus, Africans, etc., which still exist, it became possible to reconstruct that form of society, which was the starting point of our present civilization.

Let us, therefore, examine that institution.

III.

The village community was composed, as it still is, of separate families; but the families of a village possessed the land in common. They looked upon it as their common patrimony and allotted it according to the size of the families. Hundreds of millions of men still live under this system in Eastern Europe, India, Java, etc. It is the same system as Russian peasants have established nowadays, when the State left them free to occupy the immense Siberian territory, as they thought best.*

At first the cultivation also was done in common, and this custom still obtains partially in many places. As to deforestation and clearings made in the woods, construction of bridges, building of fortlets and turrets which served as refuge in case of invasion, they were done in common—as hundreds of millions of peasants still do wherever the village commune has resisted State encroachments. But consumption, to use a modern expression, already took place by family—each having its own cattle, kitchen garden and provisions; the means of hoarding and transmitting wealth accumulated by inheritance already existed.

In all its business, the village commune was sovereign. Local custom was law and the plenary council of all chiefs of families—men and women—was the only judge, in civil and criminal affairs. When one of the inhabitants, complaining of another, planted his knife in the ground where the commune was wont to assemble, the commune had to "find the sentence" according to local custom, after the fact had been proved by the jurors of both litigant parties.

All institutions of which States later took possession for the benefit of minorities, all notions of right which we find in our codes (mutilated to the advantage of minorities), and all forms of judicial procedure, in so far as they offer guarantees to the individual, had their origin in the village community. Thus, when we imagine we have made great progress—in introducing the jury, for example—we have only returned to the institution of the barbarians, after having modified it to the advantage of the ruling classes. Roman law was only superimposed on customary law.

* Kropotkin is referring to the Tsarist State and not to the more highly organized Bolshevik State, under which such action would be more unlikely.—Ed.
The sentiment of national unity was developing at the same time, by great free federations of village communes.

Based on the possession, and very often on the cultivation of the soil in common, sovereign as judge and legislator of customary law—the village community satisfied most needs of the social being.

But not all his needs: there were still others to be satisfied. However, the spirit of the age was not to call upon a government as soon as a new need was felt. It was, on the contrary, to take the initiative oneself, to unite, to league, to federate, to create an understanding great or small, numerous or restricted, which would correspond to the new need. Society at that time was covered by a network of sworn fraternities, guilds for mutual support, “con-jurations,” within and without the village, and in the federation. We can observe this stage and spirit at work, even today, among many a barbarian federation which has remained outside modern States modelled on the Roman, or rather the Byzantine type. Thus, to take one example among many, the Kabyles have retained their village community with the powers I have just mentioned.

But man feels the necessity of action outside the narrow limits of his hamlet. Some like to wander in quest of adventures, in the capacity of merchants. Some take to a craft, “an art” of some kind. And these merchants and artisans unite in “fraternities,” even when they belong to different villages, tribes and confederations. There must be union for mutual help in distant adventures or to transmit mutually the mysteries of the craft—and they unite. They swear brotherhood, and practice it in a manner that strikes Europeans: in deed and not in words only.

Besides, misfortune can overtake anyone. A man, gentle and peaceful as a rule may, in a brawl, exceed the established limits of good behavior and sociability. Heavy compensation will then have to be paid to the insulted or wounded; the aggressor will have to defend himself before the village council and prove facts on the oath of six, 10 or 12 “con-jurors.” This is another reason for belonging to a fraternity.

Moreover, man feels the necessity of talking politics and perhaps even intriguing, the necessity of propagating moral opinions or customs. There is, moreover, external peace to be safeguarded; alliances to be concluded with other tribes; federations to be constituted far off; the idea of intertribal law to be propagated. To satisfy all these needs of an emotional and intellectual kind of Kabyles, the Mongols, the Malays do not turn to a government: they have none. * Men of customary law and individual initiative, they have not been perverted by the corrupted idea of a government and a church supposed to do everything. They unite directly. They constitute sworn fraternities, political and religious societies, unions of crafts—guilds as they were called in the Middle Ages, sofs as Kabyles call them today. These sofs go beyond the boundaries of hamlets; they flourish far out in the desert and in foreign cities; and fraternity is practiced in them. To refuse to help a member of your sof, even at the risk of losing belongings and life, is an act of treason to the fraternity and exposes the traitor to be treated as the murderer of a “brother.”

What we find today among Kabyles, Mongols, Malays, etc., was the essence of the life of so-called barbarians in Europe from the 5th to the 12th and even the 15th century. Under the name of guilds, friendships, universities, etc., unions abounded for mutual defense and for solidarily avenging offenses against each member of the union: for substituting compensation, followed by the reception of the aggressor into the fraternity, instead of the vengeance of an “eye for an eye”; for the exercise of crafts, for helping in case of illness, for the defense

* In Kropotkin’s day European Imperialism had not yet reached its zenith, and many primitive peoples which have since come more or less under white administration were still allowing to live according to their customary law.—Ed.
of territory, for resisting the encroachments of nascent authority, for commerce, for the practice of "good neighborship," for propaganda, for everything, in a word, that the European, educated by the Rome of the Caesars and the Popes, asks of the State today. It is even doubtful if there existed at that time any man, free or serf, save those outlawed by their own fraternities, who did not belong to some fraternity or guild, besides his commune.

Scandinavian Sagas sing their exploits. The devotion of sworn brothers is the theme of the most beautiful of these epic songs; whereas the Church and the rising kings, representatives of reappearing Byzantine or Roman law, hurl against them anathemas and decrees which happily remain ineffectual.

The whole history of that period loses its significance, and becomes incomprehensible, if we do not take into account these unions of brothers and sisters that spring up everywhere to satisfy the multiple needs of the economic and emotional life of man.

Nevertheless, clouds gather on the horizon. Other unions—those of ruling minorities—are formed; and they endeavor, little by little, to transform these free men into serfs and subjects. Rome is dead, but its tradition revives; and the Christian Church, haunted by Oriental theocratic visions, gives its powerful support to the new powers that seek to constitute themselves.

Far from being the sanguinary beast that he is represented in order to prove the necessity of ruling over him, man has always loved tranquility and peace. He rights rather from necessity than ferocity, and prefers his cattle and his land to the profession of arms. Therefore, hardly had the great migration of barbarians begun to abate, hardly had hordes and tribes more or less cantoned themselves or their respective lands, than we see the care of the defense of territory against new waves of immigrants confident to a man who engages a small band of adventures, men hardened in wars, or brigands, to be his followers; while the great mass raises cattle or cultivates the soil. This defender soon begins to amass wealth. He gives a horse and armour (very dear at that time) to the poor man, and reduces him to servitude; he begins to conquer the germ of military power. On the other hand, little by little, tradition, which constituted law in those times, is forgotten by the masses. There hardly remains an old man who keeps in his memory the verses and songs which tell of the "precedents," of which customary law consists, and recites them before the commune on great festival days. Little by little, some families made a speciality, transmitted from father to son, of retaining these songs and verses in their memory and of preserving "the law" in its purity. To them villagers apply to judge differences in intricate cases, especially when two villages or confederations refuse to accept the decisions of arbitrators taken from their midst.

The germ of princely or royal authority is already sown in these families; and the more I study the institutions of that time, the more I see that the knowledge of customary law did far more to constitute that authority than the power of the sword. Man allowed himself to be enslaved far more by his desire to "punish according to law" than by direct military conquest.

Gradually the first "concentration of powers," the first mutual insurance for domination—that of the judge and the military chief—grew to the detriment of the village commune. A single man assumed these two functions. He surrounded himself with armed men to put his judicial decisions into execution; he fortified himself in his turret; he accumulated the wealth of the people of the epoch, bread, cattle and iron, for his family; and little by little he forced his rule upon the neighboring peasants. The scientific man of the age, the witch-doctor, or priest, lost no time in bringing him support and in sharing his domination; or else, adding the sword to his power of redoubtable magician, he seized the domination for his own benefit.

12
Much space would be needed to deal thoroughly with this subject and to tell how free men became gradually serfs, forced to work for the lay or clerical lord of the manor; how authority was constituted, in a tentative manner, over village and boroughs; how peasants leagued, revolted, struggled to fight the advancing domination, and how they succumbed in those struggles against the strong castle walls, and the men in armour who defended them.

Suffice it for me to say, that towards the 10th and 11th centuries, Europe seemed to be drifting towards the constitution of such barbarous kingdoms as we now discover in the heart of Africa, or those Eastern theocracies which we know through history. This could not take place in a day; but the germs of those little kingdoms and those little theocracies were already there and were developing.

Happily, the “barbarian” spirit, Scandinavian, Saxon, Celt, German, Slav, which had led men for about seven or eight centuries to seek for the satisfaction of their needs in individual initiative and in free agreement of fraternities and guilds, still lived in the villages and boroughs. The barbarians allowed themselves to be enslaved, they worked for a master, but their spirit of free action and free agreement was not yet corrupted. Their fraternities flourished more than ever, and the crusades only roused and developed them in the West.

Then the revolution of the commune, long prepared by that federative spirit and born of the union of sworn fraternity with the village community, burst forth in the 12th century with a striking spontaneity all over Europe.

This revolution, which the mass of university historians prefer to ignore, saved Europe from the calamity with which it was menaced. It arrested the evolution of theocratic and despotic monarchies in which our civilization would probably have gone down after a few centuries of pompous expansion, as the civilizations of Mesopotamia, Assyria and Babylon had done. This revolution opened up a new phase of life—that of the free communes.

IV.

It is easy to understand why modern historians, nurtured as they are in the spirit of the Roman law, and accustomed to look to Roman law for the origin of every political institution, are incapable of understanding the spirit of the communalist movement of the 12th century. This virile affirmation of the rights of the Individual, who managed to constitute Society through the federation of individuals, villages and towns, was an absolute negation of the centralizing spirit of ancient Rome, which spirit penetrates all historical conceptions of the present day university teaching.

The uprising of the 12th century cannot even be attributed to any personality of mark, or to any central institution. It is a natural phase of human development; and, as such, it belongs to human evolution like the tribe and the village-community periods, but to no nation in particular, to no special region of Europe, and is the work of no special hero.

This is why University science, which is based upon Roman law, centralization and hero-worship, is incapable of understanding the substance of this movement which grew from below.

In France, Augustin Thierry and Sismondi, who both wrote in the first half of the 19th century and who had really understood the communalist period, have had no followers up to the present time; and only now M. Lachâtre timidly attempts to follow the lines of research indicated by the great historian of the Merovingian and the communalist period, Augustin Thierry. This is why in Germany, the awakening of studies of this period and a vague comprehension of its spirit are only now appearing, and why, in England, one finds a true comprehension of the 12th century in the poet William Morris rather than among the his-
torians—Green alone having been capable (in the latter part of his life) of understanding it at all.

The Commune of the middle ages takes its origin, on the one hand, from the village community, on the other from those thousands of fraternities and guilds constituted outside territorial unions. It was a federation of these two kinds of unions, developed under the protection of the fortified enclosure and the turrets of the city.

In many regions it was a natural growth. Elsewhere—and this is the rule in Western Europe—it was the result of a revolution. When the inhabitants of a borough felt themselves sufficiently protected by their walls, they made a "conjuration." They mutually took the oath to put aside all pending questions concerning feuds arisen from insults, assaults or wounds, and they swore that henceforth in the quarrels that might arise they would never again have recourse to personal revenge or to a judge other than the syndics nominated by themselves in the guild and the city.

This had long been the regular practice in every art or good-neighborship guild, in every sworn fraternity. In every village commune, such was the custom before bishop or kinglet succeeded in introducing—and later in enforcing—his judge. Now the hamlets and the parishes which constituted the borough, as well as all the guilds and fraternities that had developed there, considered themselves a single amitas. They named their judges and swore permanent union between all these groups.

A charter was drawn up and accepted. In case of need they sent for the copy of a charter to some neighboring commune, (we know hundreds of these charters today), and the commune was constituted. The bishop or prince, who had up till then been judge of the commune and had often become more or less its master, had only to recognize the accomplished fact—or else to fight the young "con-juration" by force of arms. Often the king—that is to say the prince who tried to gain superiority over other princes and whose coffers were always empty—"granted" the charter for ready money. He thus renounced imposing his judge on the commune, while giving himself importance before other feudal lords. But it was by no means the rule: hundreds of communes lived without any other sanction than their good pleasure, their ramparts and their lances.

In a hundred years this movement spread by imitation to the whole of Europe, including Scotland, France, the Netherlands, Scandinavia, Germany, Italy, Spain, Poland and Russia. And today, when we compare the charters and internal organization of French, English, Scottish, Irish, Scandinavian, German, Bohemian, Russian, Swiss, Italian and Spanish communes, we are struck by the almost complete similarity of these charters and of the organization which grew up under the shelter of these "social contracts." What a striking lesson for Romanists and Hegelists who knew no other means to obtain similarity of institutions than servitude before the law!

From the Atlantic to the middle course of the Volga, and from Norway to Italy, Europe was covered with similar communes—some becoming populous cities like Florence, Venice, Nuremburg or Novgorod, others remaining boroughs of 100 or even 20 families, and nevertheless treated as equals by their more or less prosperous sisters.

Organisms full of vigor, the communes grew dissimilar in their evolution. Geographical position, the character of external commerce, the obstacles to be vanquished outside, gave every commune its own history. But for all that, the principle was the same. Pskov in Russia and Bruges in Flanders, a Scottish borough of 300 inhabitants and rich Venice with its islands, a borough in the North of France or in Poland, and Florence the Beautiful represent the same amitas. The same fellowship of village communes and of associated guilds; the same constitution in its general outline.

Generally the town, whose enclosure grows with the population and surrounds itself with higher and higher towers, each erected by
a parish or guild and having its own individual character, is divided into four, five or six districts or sections which radiate from the citadel to the ramparts. In preference each district is inhabited by one “art” or craft, whereas new trades—the “young arts”—occupy the suburbs, which will soon be enclosed in a new fortified circle.

The street, or parish, represents a territorial unit, corresponding to the ancient village community. Each street, or parish, has its popular assembly, its forum, its popular tribunal, its elected priest, militia, banner, and often seal as a symbol of sovereignty. It is federated with other streets, but nevertheless keeps its independence.

The professional unit, which often corresponds, or nearly so, with the district, is the guild—the trade union. This union also retains its saints, its assembly, its forum, its judges. It has its treasury, its landed property, its militia and banner. It also has its seal and remains sovereign. In case of war, should it think right, its militia will march with those of other guilds, and it will plant its banner beside the great banner or carosse (cart) of the city.

And lastly the city is the union of districts, streets, parishes and guilds, and it has its plenary assembly of all inhabitants in the large forum, its great belfry, its elected judges, its banner for rallying the militia of the guilds and districts. It negotiates as a sovereign with other cities, federates with whom it likes, concludes national and foreign alliances. Thus the English “Cinque Ports” round Dover are federated with French and Netherland ports on the other side of the Channel; the Russian Novgorod is the ally of Scandinavian, Germanic Hansa, and so on. In its external relations, every city possesses all the prerogatives of the modern State, and from that time is constituted, by free contract, that body of agreements which later became known as International law and was placed under the sanction of public opinion of all cities, while later on it was more often violated than respected by the States.

Often a city, not being able to decide a dispute in a complicated case, sends for “finding the sentence” to a neighboring city, and equally often the ruling spirit of the time—arbitration, rather than the judge’s authority—is manifested in the fact of two communes taking a third as arbitrator.

Trade unions behave in the same way. They carry their commercial and trade affairs beyond the cities and make treaties, without taking their nationalities into account. And when, in our ignorance, we talk boastingly of our international workers’ congresses, we forget that international trade congresses and even apprentice congresses were already held in the 15th century.

Lastly, the city either defends itself against aggressors and wages its own stubborn wars against neighboring feudal lords, nominating each year one of two military commanders of its militias, or its accepts a “military defender”—a prince or duke, who is chosen by the city for a year and whom it can demiss when it pleases. It usually delivers up to him the produce of judicial fines for the maintenance of his soldiers; but it forbids him to interfere in the business of the city. Or, lastly, too feeble to emancipate itself entirely from its neighbors, the feudal vultures, the city will retain a bishop or a prince as a more or less permanent military protector, but it will watch with jealousy that this authority shall not extend beyond the soldiers encamped in the castle. It will even forbid them to enter the town without permission. Even at the present day the King of England cannot enter the city of London without the Lord Mayor’s permission.

I should like to discuss at length the economic life of cities in the Middle Ages; but I am obliged to pass it over in silence. It was so varied that it would need long development. Suffice it to remark that internal commerce was always carried on by the guilds—not by isolated artisans—prices being fixed by mutual agreement; that at the beginning of that period, external commerce was carried on exclusively by the city; that it only became the monopoly of the merchants’ guild later on, and still
later of isolated individuals; that no work was done on Sunday or on Sunday afternoon (bathing day); lastly that the city purchased the chief necessities (corn, coal, etc.) and delivered them to the inhabitants at cost price. The custom of the city making the purchases of grain was retained in Switzerland until the middle of the 19th century. In fact, it is proved by a mass of documents of all kinds that humanity has never known, either before or after, a period of relative well-being as perfectly assured to all as existed in the cities of the Middle Ages. The present poverty, insecurity and over-work were then absolutely unknown.

V.

With these elements—liberty, organization from simple to complex, production and exchange by trade-unions (guilds), commerce with foreign parts and the buying of main provisions carried on by the city itself, the towns of the Middle Ages, during the first two centuries of their free life, became centers of well-being for all the inhabitants, centers of opulence and civilization such as we have not seen since then.

If we consult documents that allow of establishing the rates of wages for work, compared with the price of provisions (Rogers has done it for England and a great number of writers have done it for Germany) we see that the work of the artisan, and even of the simple day-laborer, was remunerated at the time by a wage not reached even by skilled workmen nowadays. The account-books of the University of Oxford and certain English estates and those of a great number of German and Swiss towns are there to testify to it.

On the other hand, consider the artistic finish and the quantity of decorative work which a workman of those days used to put into his beautiful work of art, as well as into the simplest thing of domestic life—a railing, a candlestick, an article of pottery—and you will see at once that he did not know the pressure, the hurry, the overwork of our times; he could forge, sculpture, weave, embroider at his leisure—as few artist-workers can do nowadays. If we glance over the donations to the churches and to houses which belonged to the parish, to the guild or to the city, be it in works of art—in decorative panels, sculptures, cast or wrought iron and even silver works—or in simple mason’s or carpenter’s work, we understand what degree of well-being those cities had realized in their midst. We can conceive the spirit of research and invention that prevailed, the breath of liberty that inspired their works, the sentiment of fraternal solidarity that grew in those guilds in which men of a craft were united, not only by the mercantile and technical sides of a trade but also by bonds of sociability and fraternity. For it was the guild-law that two brothers should watch at the bedside of every sick brother, and that the guild should take care of burying the dead brother or sister (a custom which called for devotion, in those times of contagious diseases and plagues) follow him to the grave, and take care of his widow and children.

Black misery, depression, the uncertainty of tomorrow for the greater number, which characterize our modern cities, were unknown in those “oases sprung up in the 12th century in the middle of the feudal desert.” In those cities, under the shelter of their liberties acquired under the impulse of free agreement and free initiative, a whole new civilization grew up and attained such expansion, that the like has not since been seen.

All modern industry comes to us from those cities. In three centuries, industries and arts developed to such perfection that the 19th century has been able to surpass them only in rapidity of production, but rarely in quality, and very rarely in beauty of the product. In the higher arts which we try in vain to revive today, have we surpassed the beauty of Raphael, the vigor and audacity of Michel Angelo, the science
and art of Leonardo da Vinci, the poetry and language of Dante, or the architecture to which we owe the cathedrals of Laon, Rheims, Cologne (“the people were its masons” as Victor Hugo said so truly), the treasures of beauty of Florence and Venice, the town halls of Bremen and Prague, the towers of Nuremberg and Pisa? All these great conquests of art were the product of that period.

Do you wish to measure the progress of that civilization at a glance? Compare the Dome of St. Marc in Venice with the rustic arch of the Normans, Raphael’s pictures with the naïve embroideries and carpets of Bayeux, the mathematical and physical instruments and clocks of Nuremberg with the sand clocks of the preceding centuries, Dante’s sonorous language with the barbarous Latin of the 10th century. A new world has opened between the two!

Never, with the exception of that other glorious period of ancient Greece (free cities again) had humanity made such a stride forward. Never in two or three centuries had man undergone so profound a change or so extended his power over the forces of nature.

You perhaps may think of the boasted progress of civilization in the 19th century. But in each of its manifestations it is but the child of the civilization which grew up in the free communes! All the great discoveries which have made modern science—the compass, the clock, the watch, printing, the maritime discoveries, gunpowder, the law of gravitation, the law of atmospheric pressure (of which the steam-engine is but a development), the rudiments of chemistry, the scientific method already pointed out by Roger Bacon and practiced in Italian universities, come from the free cities which developed under the shelter of communal liberties.*

But you may say perhaps, that I forget the conflicts, the internal struggles of which the history of those communes is full; the street tumults, the ferocious battles sustained against the landlords; the insurrections of “young arts” against the “ancient arts”; the blood that was shed and the reprisals which took place in these struggles.

I forget nothing. But, like Leo and Botta, the two historians of medieval Italy, like Sismondi, like Ferrari, Gino Capponi, and so many others, I see that these struggles were the guarantee of free life in a free city. I perceive a renewal of and a new flight towards progress after each one of these struggles. After having described these struggles and conflicts in detail, and after having measured the immensity of progress realized while these struggles stained the streets with blood—well-being assured to all the inhabitants and the renovation of civilization, Leo and Botta concluded by this thought which often comes to my mind:

“A commune only represents the picture of a moral whole, only appears universal in its behavior, like the human mind itself, when it has admitted conflict and opposition in its midst.” (Conflict, freely thrashed out, without an external power, the State, throwing its immense weight into the balance, in favor of one of the struggling forces).

Like those two authors, I also think that “far more misery has often been caused by imposing peace, because in such cases contradictory things were forcibly allied in order to create a general politic order, and by sacrificing individualities, and little organisms, in order to absorb them in a vast body without color and life.”

This is why the communes, so long as they themselves did not strive to become States and to impose submission around them so as to create “a vast body without color or life,” always grew up, always came out younger and stronger after every struggle; this is why they

* Of course some of the discoveries such as the compass, printing, the principle of the steam engine, etc., originated in China or Greece centuries before the free cities of the Middle Ages, but it was through the initiative of these free cities that they were actually developed and transmitted to modern society. It should also be remembered that the circumstances under which they first originated in the Greek and Chinese cities were similar in many respects to those which obtained in the medieval city societies.—Ed.
flourished at the sound of arms in the street, while two centuries later that same civilization was crumbling at the noise of wars brought about by States.

In the commune, the struggle was for the conquest and maintenance of the liberty of the individual, for the principle of federation, for the right to unite and act; whereas the wars of the States aimed to destroy these liberties, to subjugate the individual, to annihilate free agreement, to unite men in one and the same servitude before the king, the judge, the priest, and the State.

There lies all the difference. There are struggles and conflicts that kill. And there are those that launch humanity forward.

VI.

In the course of the 16th century, modern barbarians come and destroy the whole civilization of the cities of the Middle Ages. These barbarians do not completely annihilate it; they cannot do so, but at least they check its progress for two or three centuries, and drive it in a new direction.

They fetter the individual, take all his liberties away, order him to forget the unions which were based formerly on free initiative and free agreement, and their aim is to level the whole of society in the same submission to the master. They destroy all bonds between men, by declaring that State and Church alone must henceforth constitute the union between the subjects of a state; that only Church and State have the mission of watching over industrial, commercial, judiciary, artistic and passionate interests, for which men of the 12th century had been wont to unite directly.

And who are those barbarians? They are the State, the Triple Alliance, constituted at last, of the military chief, the Roman judge, and the priest, forming a mutual insurance for domination, united in one power that will command in the name of the interests of society.

We naturally ask ourselves, how these new barbarians could get mastery over the communes, formerly so powerful? Where did they get their strength for conquest?

That strength they first found in the village. As the communes of ancient Greece did not manage to abolish slavery, so the communes of the Middle Ages were not able to emancipate the peasant from serfdom at the same time as they emancipated the citizen.

It is true that nearly everywhere, at the time of his emancipation, the citizen—himself an artisan-cultivator—had tried to induce country folk to help in his enfranchisement. For two centuries, the citizens of Italy, Spain and Germany carried on a stubborn war against feudal lords. Prodigies of heroism and perseverance were displayed by citizens in that war against the feudal castles. They drained themselves to become masters of the castles of feudalism and to cut down the feudal forest that enveloped them.

But they only half succeeded. Then, tired of war, they made peace over the head of the peasant. To buy peace they delivered the peasant to the lord, outside the territory which was conquered by the commune. In Italy and Germany they even ended by recognizing the lord as fellow citizen on condition that he resided within the commune. In other parts they ended by sharing his domination over the peasant. And the lord avenged himself on these common people, whom he hated, by drenching their streets in blood during the struggles and acts of revenge of noble families, that were not carried before communal judges and syndics, whom the nobles despised, but were settled by the sword in the street.

The nobles demoralized the towns by their munificence, their intrigues, their great style of living, their education received at the bishop’s or the king’s court. They made the citizens espouse their
family struggles. And the citizen ended by imitating the lord, and became a lord in his turn, enriching himself by the labor of serfs encamped in the villages outside the city walls.

Thereafter, the peasant lent assistance to rising Kings, Emperors, Tsars and Popes, when they began to build their kingdoms and to bring the towns under subjection. When not marching by their orders, the peasant left them free to act.

In the country, in fortified castles, situated in the midst of rural populations, royalty was slowly constituted. In the 12th century it existed but in name, and today we know what to think of the rogues, chiefs of little bands of brigands, who adorned themselves with this title, which after all, as Augustin Thierry has so well demonstrated, had little meaning at that time; in fact the Norse fishermen had their "Nets' Kings," even the beggars had their "Kings"—the word having then simply the meaning of "temporary leader."

Slowly, tentatively, a baron more powerful or more cunning, succeeded here and there by force, money, sword, and poison in rising above his fellows. The Church no doubt bestirred itself to support him. But it was never in one of the free cities, which had their noisy forum, their Tarpelan rock, or their river for the tyrants, the royal authority succeeded in constituting itself: it was always in the country, in the village.

After vain attempts to constitute this authority in Rheims or in Lyons, it was established in Paris, an agglomeration of villages and boroughs surrounded by a rich country, which had not yet known the life of free cities; it was established in Westminster, at the gates of populous London; it was established in the Kremlin which was built in the midst of rich villages on the banks of the Moskva, after having failed at Souzdal and Vladimir. But never in Novgorod or Pskov, in Nuremberg or Florence could royal authority be consolidated.

The neighboring peasants supplied them with grain, horses and men; and commerce—royal, not communal—increased the wealth of the growing tyrants. The Church looked after their interests. It protected them, came to their succor with its treasure chests; it invented saints and miracles for their royal towns. It encircled with its veneration Notre-Dame of Paris or the Virgin of Iberia at Moscow. And while the citizens of free cities, emancipated from the bishops, took its youthful bound, the Church worked steadily to reconstitute its authority by the intermediary of nascent royalty, it surrounded with its tender care, its incense and its ducats, the family cradle of the one whom it had finally chosen, in order to rebuild with him, and through him, the ecclesiastical authority.

Hardworking, strong in its State education, leaning on the man of will or cunning whom it sought out in any class of society, learned in intrigue as well as in Roman and Byzantine law—the Church marched without repulse towards its ideal, the Hebrew King, absolute but obeying the high priest, the mere secular arm of ecclesiastical power.

In the 16th century, the long work of the two conspirators is already in full force. A king rules over the barons, his rivals, and that force will alight on the free cities to crush them in their turn.

Besides, the towns of the 16th century were not what they had been in the 12th, 13th or 14th centuries.

They were born out of a libertarian revolution. But they had not the courage to extend their ideas of equality, either to the neighboring rural districts or even to those citizens who had later on established themselves in their enclosures, refuges of liberty, to create industrial arts. A distinction between the old families who had made the revolution of the 12th century and the others who established themselves later in the city, is to be met with in all towns. The old "Merchant Guild" had no desire to receive new-comers. It refused to incorporate the "young arts" for commerce. And from simple clerk of the city, it became the go-between, the intermediary, who enriched himself by distant commerce and imported oriental ostentation. Later, the "Merchant Guild"
allied itself to the lord and the priest, or it sought the support of the nascent King to maintain its monopoly, its right to enrichment. Having thus become personal, instead of communal, commerce killed the free city.

The guilds of ancient trades, of which the city and its government were composed at the outset, would not recognize the same rights to the young guilds, formed later by the younger trades. These had to conquer their rights by revolution. That is what they did everywhere. But while that revolution became, in most large cities, the starting of a renewal of life and arts (this is so well seen in Florence), in other cities it ended in the victory of the richer orders over the poorer ones—of the "fat people" (popolo grasso) over the "low people" (popolo basso)—in a despotic crushing of the masses, in numberless transports and executions, especially when lords and priests took part in it. And it was "the defense of the poorer orders" that the king, who had received Machiavelli's lessons, later took as a pretext when he came to knock at the gates of the free cities!

The cities had to die, because the ideas of men had themselves changed, perverted by the teaching of canonical and Roman law.

The 12th century European was essentially a federalist, a man of free initiative, of free agreement, of unions freely consented to. He saw in the individual the starting point of all society. He did not seek salvation in obedience or ask for a savior of society. The idea of Christian or Roman discipline was unknown to him.

But under the influence of the Christian Church—always fond of authority, always zealous to impose its rule on the souls and especially on the arms of the faithful, and, on the other hand, under the influence of Roman law, which already, since the 12th century, invaded the courts of the powerful lords, the kings and the popes, and soon became a favorite study in the universities, minds grew depraved in proportion as priests and legist triumphed.

Men became enamored of authority. If a revolution of the lower trades was accomplished in a commune, the commune called in a savior. It gave itself a dictator, a municipal Caesar, and endowed him with full powers to exterminate the opposite party. And the dictator profited by it, with all the refinement of cruelties inspired by the Church or the examples brought from the despotic kingdoms of the East.

The Church, of course, supported that Caesar. Had it not always dreamed of the biblical king, who kneels before the high priest, and is his docile tool? Had it not, with all its might, hated the ideas of Rationalism which inspired the free towns during the first Renaissance, that of the 12th century, and those "pagan" ideas which brought man back to Nature under the influence of the rediscovery of Greek civilization, and, later on, those ideas which in the name of primitive Christianity incited men against the Pope, the priest and faith in general? Whoever was the tool, pope, king or dictator, it was of little importance to the Church, so long as the wheel and the gibbet worked against the heretics.

Under the twofold teaching of the Roman legist and the priest, the old federalist spirit, the spirit of free initiative and free agreement, was dying out to make room for the spirit of discipline, organization and pyramidal authority. The rich and the poor alike asked for a savior.

When the savior presented himself, when the king, who had become enriched far from the Forum, in some town of his creation, leaning on the wealthy Church, and followed by vanquished nobles and peasants, knocked at the city gates, promising the "lower orders" his protection against the rich, and the obedient rich his protection against the rebellious poor, the towns, which themselves were already undermined by the canker of authority, had no longer the strength to resist. They opened their gates to the King.

The Mongols had conquered the devastated Eastern Europe in the 13th century and an Empire was springing up in Moscow, under
the protection of the Tartar Khans and the Russian Christian Church. The Turks had settled in Europe, and pushed as far as Vienna in 1453, devastating everything on their path; and powerful States were being constituted in Poland, Bohemia, Hungary and in the center of Europe. At the other extremity, the war of extermination against the Moors in Spain allowed another powerful Empire to constitute itself in Castille and Aragon, supported by the Roman Church and the Inquisition, the sword and the stake.

As the communes themselves were becoming little States, so these little States were inevitably doomed to be swallowed up by the big ones.

VII.

The victory of the State over the communes and the federalist institutions of the Middle Ages did not take place straightway. At one time the State was so threatened that its victory seemed doubtful.

A great popular movement—religious in form and expression, but eminently communistic in its aspirations and striving at equality—originated in the towns and rural parts of central Europe.

Already in the 14th century (in 1358 in France and in 1381 in England), two great similar movements had taken place. Two powerful revolts, that of the Jacquerie and that of Wat Tyler, had shaken society to its foundations. Both, however, had been principally directed against feudal lords. Both were defeated; but the peasant revolt in England completely destroyed serfdom, and the Jacquerie in France so checked its development that it never attained the development it subsequently reached in Germany and in Eastern Europe.

In the 16th century, a similar movement took place in central Europe. Under the name of “Hussite” in Bohemia, “Anabaptist” in Germany, Switzerland and the Netherlands, and of “Troubled Times” in Russia (at the beginning of the next century), it was above all a struggle against feudal lords—a complete revolt against Church and State, against Canon and Roman law, in the name of primitive Christianity.

This movement, which is only just beginning to be understood, was for many years travestied by State and ecclesiastical historians.

The absolute liberty of the individual, who must only obey the commandments of his conscience, and Communism were the watchwords of this revolt. It was only later, when Church and State succeeded in exterminating its most ardent defenders, and juggled with it to their own profit, that this movement, diminished and deprived of its revolutionary character, became Luther’s Reformation.

It began by Communist Anarchism preached, and in some places, practiced. If we set aside the religious formulas, which are a tribute to that epoch, we find the very essence of the current of ideas which we represent today: the negation of all law, both State and divine, the conscience of each individual being thus his only law; the commune, absolute master of its destiny, retaking its lands from feudal lords, and refusing all personal or monetary service to the State. In fact, Communism and equality put into practice. Moreover when Denck, one of the philosophers of the Anabaptist movements, was asked if he did not at least recognize the authority of the Bible, he answered that the only obligatory rule of conduct is the one that each individual finds for himself in the Bible. And yet these vague formulas borrowed from ecclesiastical slang, this authority “of the book” from which it is so easy to borrow arguments for and against Communism, for and against authority, and so uncertain to define what liberty is, these very religious tendencies of the revolt contained already the germ of an unavoidable defeat.

Originating in towns, the movement spread to the country. The peasants refused to obey anybody, and planting an old shoe on a pike by way of a flag, took back the lands which the lords had seized from
the village communities; they broke their bonds of servitude, drove away priest and judge, and constituted themselves into free communes. It was only by the stake, the wheel, the gibbet, by massacring more than 100,000 peasants in a few years, that royal or imperial power, allied to the papal or reformed church (Luther inciting to massacre peasants more violently even that the Pope), put an end to these risings that had for a moment threatened the constitution of nascent States.

Born of popular Anabaptism, the Lutheran Reformation, leaning on the State, massacred the people and crushed the movement from which it originally had derived its strength. The survivors of this immense wave of thought took refuge in the communities of the "Morian Brothers," who, in their turn, were destroyed by Church and State. Those among them who were not exterminated, sought shelter, some in the South-East of Russia, others in Greenland, where to this day they have been able to live in communities and to refuse all service to the State.

Henceforth, the State's existence was secure. The lawyer, the priest, and the soldier-lord, having constituted a solid alliance around the thrones, could carry on their work of annihilation.

How many lies have been accumulated by State-paid historians, concerning that period!

Have we not all learned at school and believed in manhood that the State rendered great service in constituting national unions on the ruins of feudal society; unions made impracticable in earlier times by the rivalry of cities?

Nevertheless, today we learn that in spite of all rivalries, medieval cities had already worked during four centuries to constitute these unions by freely consented federation, and that they had fully succeeded in the work of consolidation.

The Lombard union, for example, included the cities of Upper Italy and had its federal treasury in safe keeping in Genoa and Venice. Other federations, such as the Tuscan Union, the Rhenan Union (comprising 60 towns), the federations of Westphalia, of Bohemia, of Servia, of Poland, and of Russian towns covered Europe. At the same time, the commercial unions of the Hansa included Scandinavia, German, Polish, and Russian towns throughout the basin of the Baltic.

All the elements were there already, as well as the fact itself of large, freely constituted, human agglomerations.

Do you wish for a living proof of these groups? You have it in Switzerland. There the union asserted itself first between village communities (the old Cantons), in the same way as it was constituted in France in the Loannals. And, as in Switzerland the separation between town and village was never so great as it was for towns carrying on an extensive and distant commerce, the Swiss towns lent a hand to the peasant insurrections of the 16th century, and the union encompassed both towns and villages, and constituted a federation that exists today.

But the State, by its very essence, cannot tolerate free federation because the latter represents that nightmare of the legist: "The State within the State." The State does not recognize a freely adopted union working within itself. It only deals with subjects. The State and its prop, the Church, arrogate to themselves alone the right of being the connecting link between men.

Consequently the State must perforce annihilate cities based on direct union between citizens. It must abolish all union within the city, abolish the city itself, abolish all direct union between cities. For the federative principle it must substitute the principle of submission and discipline. Submission is its substance. Without this principle it leaves off being the State; it becomes a federation.

The 16th century—century of carnage and wars—is entirely summed up in this war waged by the growing States against the cities and their federations. The towns are besieged, taken by assault, pillaged;
their inhabitants are decimated or transported. The State is victorious all along the line. The consequences are these.

In the 15th century, Europe was covered by rich cities, whose artisans, masons, weavers and carvers, produced marvels of art, whose universities laid the foundations of science, whose caravans traveled over continents, and whose vessels ploughed rivers and seas.

What was left of them two centuries later? Towns that had numbered 50,000 and 100,000 inhabitants and had possessed (as in Florence) more schools, and, in the communal hospitals, more beds per inhabitant, than are possessed today by the towns best endowed in this respect, had become rotten boroughs. Their inhabitants having been massacred or transported, the State and Church seized their riches. Industry was fading under the minute tutelage of State officials. Commerce was dead. The very roads that formerly united the cities had become impracticable in the 17th century.

The State spelled warfare, and wars were devastating Europe and completing the ruin of those towns which the State had not yet ruined direct. But had not the villages, at least, gained by State centralization? Certainly not! Read what historians tell us about the style of living in the rural districts of Scotland, Tuscany, and Germany in the 14th century, and compare their descriptions of that time with the misery in England at the beginning of 1648, in France under the "sun-king" Louis XIV, in Germany, in Italy, everywhere, after a hundred years of State domination.

Misery everywhere. Wherever serfdom had been abolished, it was reconstituted in a hundred different forms; wherever it had not yet been destroyed, it was shaped, under State protection, into a ferocious institution, bearing all the characteristics of antique slavery, or even worse.

Yet could anything else evolve out of this State-produced misery, when the State's chief anxiety was to annihilate the village community after the town, to destroy all bonds between peasants, to give their lands to be pillaged by the rich, and to subject them individually to the functionary, the priest and the lord?

VIII.

To annihilate the independence of cities, to plunder merchants' and artisans' rich guilds, to centralize the foreign trade of cities into its own hands and ruin it, to seize the internal administration of guilds, and subject home trade, as well as all manufactures, even in the slightest detail, to a swarm of functionaries, and by these means kill both industry and arts, to seize local militias and all municipal administration, to crush the weak by taxation for the benefit of the strong and to ruin countries by war, such was the nascent State's behavior towards urban agglomerations in the 16th and 17th centuries.

The same tactics were employed towards villages and peasants. As soon as the State felt itself strong enough, it destroyed the village commune, ruined the peasants committed to its mercy and plundered the common lands.

Historians and economists paid by the State have no doubt taught us that the village commune, having become an obsolete form of landownership obstructing agricultural progress, was bound to disappear by the action of natural economic forces. Politics and bourgeois economists do not tire of repeating this even nowadays, and there are revolutionists and Socialists (those who pretend to be scientific) who recite this fable learned in school.

Yet a more odious and deliberate falsehood has never been affirmed by science, for history swarms with documents amply proving, to those who wish to know (for France it would almost suffice to read Dalloz) that the village commune was first of all deprived by the State of its privileges, its independence, its judicial and legislative
powers, and that later its lands were either simply stolen by the rich under State protection, or else confiscated by the State itself.

Plundering began as early as the 16th century in France, and grew in space in the following century. As early as 1659 the State took the communes fictitious debts have bee nedevised," said the "Sun King" Louis XIV's edict of 1667 to learn what plundering of communal lands took place at that period. "Men have taken possession of lands when it suited them ... lands have been divided ... in order to plunder the communes fictitious debts have been devised," said the "Sun King" in this edict. Two years later he confiscated for his own benefit all the revenues of the communes.

In the following century it is estimated that at least half the communal lands were appropriated by the aristocracy and the clergy under State patronage. Yet communes continued to exist until 1787. The village council met under the elm, granted lands, appointed taxes (the documents relating to this are to be found in Babeau—Le village sous l'ancien régime). Turgot, however, in the province of which he was governor, found the village councils "too noisy" and abolished them during his governorship, substituting assemblies elected among the well-to-do. In 1787, on the eve of the Revolution, the State made this measure general in its application. The mir was abolished and thus communal affairs fell into the hands of a few syndics, elected by the richest bourgeois and peasants. The Constituent Assembly sanctioned this law in December, 1789, and the bourgeois, substituting themselves for the nobles, plundered what remained of communal lands. Many a peasant revolt was necessary to force the Convention in 1792 to sanction what the rebellious peasant had accomplished in the Eastern part of France. That is to say, the Convention ordered the restitution of communal lands to the peasants. This took place only when the land had already been retaken by revolutionary means. It is the fate of all revolutionary laws to be put into action when they are already accomplished facts.

Nevertheless the Convention tainted this law with bourgeois gall. It decreed that lands retaken from nobles should be divided into equal parts among "active citizens" only—that is to say among the village bourgeois. By one stroke of the pen it thus dispossessed "passive citizens," that is to say the mass of impoverished peasants, who had most need of these communal lands. Upon which, fortunately, the peasants again revolted and in 1793 the Convention passed a new law decreeing the division of communal lands among all inhabitants. This was never put into practice and only served as an excuse for new thefts of communal lands.

Would not such measures suffice to bring about what these gentlemen call "the natural death" of communes? Yet communes still existed. On August 24th, 1794, the reaction now in power, struck the final blow. The State confiscated all communal lands and made of them a guarantee fund for the public debt, putting them up to auction and selling them to its creatures the "Thermidorsians."

This law was happily repealed on Prairial 2nd, in the year V, after being in force for three years. But at the same time, communes were abolished, and replaced by cantonal councils in order that the State might the more easily fill them with its creatures. This lasted till 1801 when village communes were revived; but then the government took it upon itself to appoint mayors and syndics in each of the 36,000 communes! This absurdity lasted till the revolution of July 1830, after which the law of 1789 was again put into force. In the interval communal lands were again wholly confiscated by the State in 1813 and plundered anew for three years. What remained of them was only returned to the communes in 1816.

This was by no means the end. Every new regime saw in communal lands a source of reward for its supporters. Therefore at three different intervals since 1830—the first time in 1837 and the last under Napoleon III—laws were promulgated to force peasants to divide what they
possessed of forests and common pasture-lands, and three times the government was compelled to abrogate this law on account of the peasants' resistance. All the same Napoleon III was able to profit by it and snatch several large estates for his favorites.

This is what, in scientific language, these gentlemen call the "natural death" of the communal landed property under the influence of economic laws. One might as well call the massacre of 100,000, soldiers in a battlefield "natural death"!

What happened in France happened also in Belgium, England, Germany, Austria; in fact everywhere in Europe, Slav countries excepted.

The periods of plundering communes correspond in all Western Europe. The methods alone vary. Thus in England they did not dare enact sweeping measures; they preferred passing several thousands of separate enclosure acts by which, in each special case, parliament sanctioned the confiscation of land (it does so still) and gave to the squire the right to keep common lands he had fenced in. Notwithstanding that nature has up till now respected the narrow furrows by which communal fields were temporarily divided among families in the villages of England, and that we have clear descriptions of this form of landed property at the beginning of the century in the books of a certain Marshall, scientific men (such as Seebohm, worthy emulator of Fustel de Coulanges) are not wanting to maintain and teach that communes have never existed in England save in the form of serfdom.

We find the same thing going on in Belgium, Germany, Italy and Spain. In one way or another personal appropriation of lands formerly communal was almost brought to completion towards the 50's in this century. Peasants have only kept scraps of their common lands. This is the way in which the mutual assurance of lord, priest, soldier and judge—the State—has behaved towards peasants in order to despoil them of their last guarantee against misery and economic servitude.

But, while organizing and sanctioning this plunder, could the State respect the institution of the commune as an organ of local life?

Obviously not. To allow citizens to constitute a federation among themselves in order to appropriate some functions of the State would have been a contradiction of principle. The State demands personal and direct submission of its subjects without intermediate agents; it requires equality in servitude; it cannot allow the State within the State.

Therefore as soon as the State began to constitute itself in the 16th century it set to work to destroy all bonds of union that existed among citizens, both in towns and villages. If under the name of municipal institutions it tolerated any vestiges of autonomy (never of independence), it was only with a fiscal aim, to lighten the central budget, or to allow the provincial well-to-do to enrich themselves at the people's expense as is still done to this day in English institutions and customs.

This is easily understood. Customary law naturally pertains to local life and Roman law to centralization of power. The two cannot live side by side and the one must kill the other.

That is why under French rule in Algeria, when a Kabyle djammah—a village commune—wants to plead for its lands, every inhabitant of the commune must bring his isolated action before the judge, who will hear 50 or 200 isolated actions sooner than hear the collective suit of the djammah. The Jacobin code of the Convention (known under the name of Code Napoleon) does not recognize customary law; it recognizes only Roman law, or rather Byzantine law.

That is why in France when the wind blows down a tree on the National highway, or a peasant prefers giving a stonebreaker two or three francs to the unpleasant task of repairing the communal road himself, it is necessary for 12 or 15 employees of the Home Office and Treasury to be put in motion, and for more than 50 documents to be exchanged between these austere functionaries, before the tree can be
sold, or the peasant receives permission to deposit two or three francs into the communal treasury.

Should you have any doubts about it you will find these 50 documents recapitulated and duly numbered by M. Tricoche in the *Journal des Economistes.*

This is under the third Republic, for I do not speak of the barbarous methods of the ancient regime that limited itself to five or six documents. No doubt scientists will tell you that at that barbarous period State control was only fictitious.

If it were only this, it would be but 20,000 functionaries too many, and a thousand million francs more added to the budget, a detail for the lovers of "order" and levelling!

But there is worse beneath all this, for the principle kills everything. The peasants of a village have a thousand interests in common: interests of economy, neighborhood and constant intercourse. They must unite for a thousand divers things. But the State cannot allow them to unite! It gives them school and priest, police and judge; these must suffice, and should other interests arise, they must apply in the regular way to Church and State.

Thus till 1883 it was severely forbidden to the villagers of France to unite, even to buy chemical manure or to irrigate their fields. It was only in 1883-1886 that the Republic granted this right when it voted the law of unions, hampered by many a precaution and obstacle.

And we, with our faculties blunted by State education, rejoice at the sudden progress accomplished by agricultural syndicates, without blushing at the idea that this right of union of which peasants were deprived for centuries belonged to them without contention in the Middle Ages. Belonged to every man—free or serf. Slaves that we are, we believe it to be a "conquest of democracy"!

This is the pitch of stupidity we have reached by our warped and vitiated State education, and our State prejudices.

"If you have any common interests in the city or the village, ask the Church and the State to look after them. But you are forbidden to combine in a direct way to settle matters for yourselves!" Such is the formula throughout Europe since the 16th century. Already in an edict of Edward III, issued at the end of the 14th century, we read that "all unions, combinations, meetings, organized societies, statutes and oaths already established or to be established by carpenters and masons, will henceforth be null and void." But when the defeat of the towns and of the popular insurrection of which we have spoken was completed, the State boldly laid hands on all the institutions (guilds, fraternities, etc.) which used to bind artisans and peasants together, and annihilated them.

This is plainly seen in England where a mass of documents exists showing every step of that annihilation. Little by little the State laid hands on all guilds and fraternities. It abolished their leagues, their festivals, their aldermen, and replaced them by its own functionaries and tribunals, and at the beginning of the 15th century, under Henry VIII, the State confiscated everything possessed by the guilds without further ado. The heir to the great Protestant king finished his father's work.

It was open robbery. "without excuse" as Thorold Rogers has put it. And it is this robbery which the so-called 'scientific' economists represent as the "natural" death of the guilds under the influence of economic laws!

In fact, it was impossible for the State to tolerate a guild or corporation of a trade, with its tribunal, its militia, its treasury, its sworn organization. It was, for the statesmen, "a State within the State." The State had to destroy the guild, and it destroyed it everywhere, in England, in France, in Germany, in Bohemia, preserving only its semblance as an instrument of the exchequer, as a part of the vast administrative machine. Should we be astonished that guilds, trade-unions and wardships, deprived of everything that was formerly
their life and placed under royal functionaries, became in the 18th century mere encumbrances and obstacles to the development of industry, after having been the very life of progress four centuries before.

The State had killed them. In fact it did not content itself with destroying the autonomous organization which was necessary for the very life of the guilds and impeded the encroachments of the State; it did not content itself with confiscating all their riches and property: it appropriated to itself all their economic functions as well.

In a city of the Middle Ages, when interests conflicted in a trade, or when two guilds disagreed, there was no other appeal but to the city. They were forced to settle matters, to find some compromise as all guilds were mutually allied in the city. And a compromise was always arrived at—by calling in another city to arbitrate, if necessary.

Henceforth the only arbitrator was the State. All local disputes, sometimes of the most insignificant kind, in the smallest town of a few hundred inhabitants, had to be piled up in the shape of useless documents in the offices of king and parliament. We see the English parliament literally inundated with these thousands of petty local squabbles. It then became necessary to have thousands of functionaries in the capital (venal for the greater part) to classify, read and judge all these documents, to regulate the way to forge a horse’s hoof, bleach linen, salt herrings, make a barrel, and so on *ad infinitum*.

But this was not all. Soon the State laid hands on exportation, in which it saw a means of enrichment. Formally, when a dispute arose between two towns about the value of exported cloth, the purity of wool, or the capacity of barrels of herrings, the two towns made remonstrances to each other. If the dispute lasted long, they addressed themselves to a third town to step in as arbitrator (this happened constantly); or a congress of guilds of weavers and cooper was convened to regulate internationally the quality and value of cloth or the capacity of barrels.

Now, however, the State had stepped in and taken upon itself to regulate all these contentions from the center, in Paris or in London. Through its functionaries it regulated the capacity of barrels, specified the quality of cloth, ordered the number of threads and their thickness in the warp and woof and interfered in the smallest detail of each industry.

You know the result. Industry under this control was dying out in the 18th century. What had become of Benvenuto Cellini’s art under State tutelage? Vanished. And the architecture of those guilds of masons and carpenters whose works we still admire? Only look at the hideous monuments of the State period, and at one glance you will know that architecture was dead, so dead that up till now it has not recovered from the blow dealt it by the State.

What became of the fabrics of Bruges, of the cloth from Holland? What became of those blacksmiths, skilled in manipulating iron, who, in each European borough, knew how to turn this ungrateful metal into the most exquisite decorations? What became of those turners, those clock-makers, those fitters who had made Nuremberg one of the glories of the Middle Ages by their instruments of precision? James Watt looked in vain during 30 years for a man who could make a fairly round cylinder for his steam engine, and his machine remained 30 years a rough model for want of workmen to construct it!

Such was the result of State interference in the domain of industry. All that the State managed to do was to tighten the screw on the worker, depopulate the land, sow misery in the towns and reduce thousands of beings to the state of starvelings and impose industrial slavery.

It is these miserable wrecks of ancient guilds, these organisms mangled and oppressed by the State that “scientific” economists have the ignorance to confound with the guilds of the Middle Ages! What the great Revolution swept away as harmful to industry was not the guild, nor even the trade-union; it was a piece of machinery both useless and harmful.
But what the Revolution took good care not to sweep away was the power of the State over industry and over the factory serf.

To the grievances of strikes the Convention answered (I quote from memory): "The State alone has a right to watch over the interests of all citizens. In striking, you are organizing a coalition, you are creating a State within the State. Therefore—death!"

In this answer we see the bourgeois character of the French Revolution. But has that answer not a still deeper meaning? Does it not summarize the attitude of the State that found its most complete and logical expression towards the whole of society in the Jacobinism of 1793?

"If you have a grievance, complain to the State! It alone has the right to redress its subjects' grievances. As to combining to protect yourselves—never!" It was in this sense that the Republic called itself one and indivisible.

Does not the modern Jacobin-Socialist think the same? Did not the Convention express his uttermost thought with the severe logic peculiar to it?

In this answer of the Convention is summed up the attitude of all States towards all combinations and all private societies, whatever be their aim.

A strike is even now in Russia considered a crime of high treason against the State. In a great measure this is so in Germany, where young William * said the other day: "Appeal to me; but if you ever allow yourselves to take action on your own behalf, you will make the acquaintance of my soldiers' bayonets!" It is still almost always the case in France. Even in England, it is only after struggling 100 years by means of secret societies, dagger thrusts for traitors and masters, explosive powder under machinery (not further back than 1860), emery thrown into axle-boxes, and so forth, that English workmen have begun to conquer the right to strike. They will soon have it entirely, if they do not fall into the traps that the State is already laying for them in trying to impose its obligatory arbitration in exchange for an eight-hour law.

More than a century of terrible struggles and sufferings! Many men have died in prisons, many more have been transported to Australia, shot and hanged, to reconquer the right of combination, which every man, free or serf, practiced freely, before the State laid its heavy hand on societies.

But was it the workman only who was treated in this fashion? Think of the struggles the bourgeoisie had to carry on against the State in order to conquer the right of constituting themselves into commercial societies, a right which the State only conceded when it discovered in it an easy method of creating monopolies to the advantage of its creatures and to re-fill its treasury; and the struggle for the right to write or speak differently from what the State orders through its academies, universities or churches; and the struggles for the right to teach, be it only reading; and the struggles even to obtain the right of amusing oneself in common; not to mention those wars which would still have to be fought for the right to choose one's judge or one's law (which before the growth of the State was of daily occurrence), or the struggles that separate us from the day when they will burn the book of infamous punishments, invented by the spirit of the inquisition and the despotic empires of the East and known under the name of penal code!

Then look at taxation, an institution of purely State origin, a formidable weapon which the State uses in Europe as well as in young societies in the United States to keep the masses under its heel, to favor friends, to ruin the greater number to the advantage of those who govern, and to uphold the old divisions and castes.

Then take war, without which States can neither constitute them-

---

* Kaiser Wilhelm II.—Ed.
selves nor stand—war that becomes fatal, inevitable, as soon as we admit that a certain region (because it is a State) can have interests opposed to those of its neighbors. Think of past wars and of those we are threatened with before the conquered races will be allowed to breathe freely, of wars for commercial markets, of wars to create colonial empires. In France we know only too well what servitude each war, whether victorious or not, brings in its train.

What is worse than all that I have enumerated, is that the education we all receive from the State, at school and later on in our life, has so vitiating our brains that the idea of liberty itself goes astray and is travestied into servitude.

It is sad to see those who believe themselves to be revolutionists, vowing their deepest hatred to Anarchists—because the Anarchist conception of liberty surpasses their own narrow and mean conception culled from State teaching.

The spirit of voluntary servitude has always been artfully nourished in your brains, and is so still, in order to perpetuate the slavery of the subject to the State.

Libertarian philosophy is suffocated by pseudo-Roman and Catholic State philosophy. History is vitiating from the first page, where it lies about the Merovingian and Carolingian dynasties, to its last page, on which it glorifies Jacobinism and ignores the people and their work in the creation of institutions. Natural sciences are perverted to the benefit of the dual idol Church and State. The psychology of the individual, and still more that of society, is falsified to justify the triple alliance of soldier, priest and executioner. Even morality, which for centuries has preached obedience to the Church or to some so-called divine book, emancipates itself today only to preach servility to the State. "You have no direct moral obligations towards your neighbor, not even a sentiment of solidarity; all your obligations are to the State," we are taught by this new religion of the old Roman and Caesarian divinity. Neighbors, comrades, companions—forget them! You must know them only through the intermediary of an organ of your State. And all of you must practice the virtue of being equally its slaves.

This glorification of State and discipline, for which Church and University, press and political parties work, is so well preached that even revolutionists dare not confront this fetish.

The modern radical is a centralizer, a State partisan, a Jacobin to the core, and the Socialist walks in his footsteps. Like the Florentines at the end of the 15th century, who could only invoke the dictatorship of the State, to save them from the patricians, the Socialists know only how to invoke the same gods, the same dictatorship and the same State, to save us from the abominations of an economic system created by that very State!

IX.

If you look still deeper into all the facts which I have touched upon, if you see the State as it was in history and as it is in essence today, and if you consider moreover that a social institution cannot serve all aims indiscriminately, because, like every other organ, it is developed for a certain purpose, and not for all purposes, you will understand why we desire the abolition of the State.

We see in it an institution developed in the history of human societies to hinder union among men, to obstruct the development of local initiative, to crush existing liberties and prevent their restoration.

And we know that an institution, which has a past dating back some thousands of years, cannot lend itself to a function opposed to that for which it was developed in the course of history.

To this argument, unassailable to anyone who has reflected on history, what replies do we receive?

We are answered by an almost childish argument: "The State
is there, it exists, it represents a ready-made powerful organization. Why destroy it instead of making use of it? Admittedly it works for ill, but that is due to its being in the hands of exploiters. In the hands of the people, why should it not be utilized for a better end and for the good of men?"

Always the same dream, the dream of Schiller’s Marquis of Posa trying to make autocracy an instrument of enfranchisement, the dream of the gentle priest Peter in Zola’s *Rome*, wishing to make the Church a lever of Socialism!

Those who reason in this way either have not the least notion of the real historical role of the State, or else conceive the Social Revolution under such a tame and insignificant form, that it has nothing more in common with Socialist aspirations.

Take a concrete example, France.

All of us have perceived that the Third Republic, in spite of its republican form of government, has remained monarchical in its essence. Everyone has reproached it with not having republicanized France. I do not speak of its not having done anything for the Social Revolution, but of its not having even introduced the simple republican habits and customs and spirit. For the little that has been done during the last 25 years to democratize customs, or to spread a little enlightenment, has been done everywhere—even in the European monarchies—under the pressure of the times through which we are passing. Whence comes then the strange anomaly that we have in France—a Republican Monarchy?

It comes from France having remained as much a State as it was 30 years ago. The holders of power have changed their name; but all the immense scaffolding of centralized organization, the imitation of the Rome of the Caesars which had been elaborated in France, has remained. The wheels of this huge machinery continue to exchange their 50 documents when the wind has blown down a tree on the national route. The stamp on the documents has changed; but the State, its spirit, its organs, its territorial centralization, and its centralization of functions, have remained unaltered. Worse than that; they extend from day to day over the country.

Sincere Republicans nourished the illusion that the State organization could be utilized to operate a change in a republican sense; and here is the result. When they ought to have destroyed the old organization, destroyed the *State*, and constructed a new organization, by beginning at the very basis of society—the free village commune, the free workers’ union, and so on—they thought to utilize “the organization that already existed.” And for not having understood that you cannot make an historical institution go in any direction you would have it, that it must go its own way, they were swallowed up by the institution.

Yet in this case there was no question of modifying the whole of the economic relations of society, as is the case with us. It was merely a question of reforming certain points in the political relations among men!

But, after this complete failure and in face of such a conclusive experience, they obstinately continue to say that the conquest of power in the State by the people will suffice to accomplish the Social Revolution; that the old machine, slowly elaborated in the course of history to mangle liberty, to crush the individual, to seat oppression on a legal basis, to lead the brain astray in accustoming it to servitude, will lend itself marvellously to new functions; that it will become the means of making a new life germinate, that it will seat liberty and equality on an economic basis, awaken society, and march to the conquest of a better future! What an absurd miscomprehension of history!

To give free scope to Socialism, it is necessary to reconstruct society, based today on the narrow individualism of the shopkeeper, from top to bottom. It is not only, as they said sometimes in a vague metaphysical way, a question of returning to the worker “the integral product of his work,” but a question of re-modeling in their entirely
all relations among men, from those existing today between every individual and his churchwarden or his station master, to those existing between trades, hamlets, cities and regions. In every street, in every hamlet, in every group of men assembled about a factory or along a railroad, we must awaken the creative, constructive, organizing spirit, in order to reconstruct the whole of life in the factory, on the railroad, in the village, in the stores, in taking supplies, in production, in distribution. All relations between individuals and between human agglomerations must begin to be remodeled as soon as we begin to reform any part of the present commercial or administrative organization.

And they expect this immense work, demanding the full and free exercise of popular genius, to be carried out within the framework of the State, within the pyramidal scale of organization that constitutes the essence of each State! They want the State, whose very reason for existence lies in the crushing of the individual, in the destruction of all free grouping and free creation, in the hatred of initiative and in the triumph of one idea (which must necessarily be that of the mediocrity), to become the lever of this immense transformation! They want to govern a newborn society by decrees and electoral majorities! What childishness!

Throughout the history of our civilization, two traditions, two opposed tendencies, have been in conflict: the Roman tradition and the popular tradition, the imperial tradition and the federalist tradition, the authoritarian tradition and the libertarian tradition.

Again, on the eve of the great Social Revolution these two traditions stand face to face.

Between these two currents, always alive, always struggling in humanity—the current of the people and the current of the minorities which thirst for political and religious domination—our choice is made.

We again take up the current which led men in the 12th century to organize themselves on the basis of free understanding, of free initiative of the individual, of free federation. We leave others to cling to the Roman, Canonic, and Imperial tradition.

History has not been an uninterrupted evolution. At different intervals evolution has been broken in a certain region, to begin again elsewhere. Egypt, Asia, the banks of the Mediterranean, Central Europe have in turn been the scene of historical development. But in every case, the first phase of the evolution has been the primitive tribe, passing on into a village commune, then into that of the free city, and finally dying out when it reached the phase of the State.

In Egypt, civilization began with the primitive tribe. It reached the village community phase, and later the period of free cities; still later that of the State, which, after a flourishing period, resulted in the death of the civilization.

The evolution began again in Assyria, in Persia, in Palestine. Again it traversed the same phase: the tribe, the village community, the free city, the all-powerful State, and finally the result was—death!

A new civilization then sprang up in Greece. Always beginning by the tribe, it slowly reached the village commune, then the period of republican cities. In these cities, civilization reached its highest summits. But the East brought to them its poisoned traditions of despotism. Wars and conquests created Alexander's empire of Macedonia. The State enthroned itself, the parasite grew, killed all civilization, and then came—death!

Rome in its turn restored civilization. Again we find the primitive tribe at its origin; then, the village commune; then, the free city. At that stage, it reached the apex of its civilization. But then came the State, the Empire, and then—death!

On the ruins of the Roman Empire, Celtic, Germanic, Slavonian and Scandinavian tribes began civilization anew. Slowly the primitive tribe elaborated its institutions and reached the village commune. It remained at that stage till the 12th century. Then rose the Republican
cities which produced the glorious expansion of the human mind, attested by th monuments of architecture, the grand development of arts, the discoveries that laid the basis of natural sciences. But then came the State.

Will it again produce death? It will, unless we reconstitute society on a libertarian and anti-State basis. Either the State will be destroyed and a new life will begin in thousands of centers, on the principle of an energetic initiative of the individual, of groups, and of free agreement; or else the State must crush the individual and local life, it must become the master of all the domains of human activity, must bring with it wars and internal struggles for the possession of power, surface-revolutions which only change one tyrant for another, and inevitably, at the end of this evolution—death!

Choose yourselves which of the two issues you prefer.