

## KROPOTKIN.

Memoirs of the Revolutionary  
Russian.\*

How are we to judge what are the effects, produced on the unbiased reader by the "Memoirs of a Revolutionist," as written by Prince Kropotkin? The social question now agitates the world, and it has for basis the general formula that all men are born free and equal. The first premise must be granted, but the second, never, for, alas! God in His infinite wisdom does not give to all men the same brains, or the identical animal structure. Then, in studying the precise character of the volume, written so honestly, it should be borne in mind that it emanates from a source absolutely alien to our race and civilization. A Russian, to put it in a comic way, is not a German, an American, or an Englishman. Racial instincts differ. Such drastic methods as are suggested by Prince Kropotkin might be advantageous in the domain of the Czar and be the cause of ruin in other countries.

Prince Kropotkin is singularly impersonal, and that has its merit, but his ends and aims are as seemingly vague as they are impossible. There are many contradictions. The author of the volume would not kill a fly, and yet he advocates the extermination of those opposed to his theories. As Mr. Courtney expresses it, Tolstoi, the dreamer, believes that, through religion and the teaching of the Gospel the whole world will be saved. He eliminates the question of time. Kropotkin is not afraid of violence. He is "on amicable terms with the extreme section of Nihilism." Contrasting Tolstoi and Kropotkin, the first may believe that by the means of pure literature he will change the status of the world, the latter thinks the betterment of mankind will come about by the study of science. Both these men early in their lives were in revolt with their surroundings. Kropotkin and Tolstoi were of the nobility, and were born when Nicholas of unhappy memory was Emperor. Mr. Brandes, in his preface, writes of Kropotkin:

He has lived the life of the aristocrat and the worker; he has been one of the Emperor's pages and a poverty-stricken writer; he has lived the life of the student, the officer, the man of science, the explorer of unknown lands, the administrator, and the hunted revolutionist. In exile he has had at times to live upon bread, and tea as a Russian peasant; and he has been exposed to espionage and assassination plots like a Russian Emperor.

Born in Moscow, Kropotkin draws this picture of his home:

In these quiet streets, far away from the noise and bustle of the commercial Moscow, all the houses had much the same appearance. They were mostly built of wood, with bright green sheet-iron roofs, the exteriors stuccoed and decorated with columns and porticoes; all were painted in gay colors. Nearly every house had but one story, with seven or nine big, gay-looking windows facing the street. A second story was admitted only in the back part of the house, which looked upon a spacious yard, surrounded by numbers of small buildings, used as kitchens, stables, cellars, coach-houses, and as dwellings for the retainers and servants. A wide gate opened upon this yard, and a brass plate on it usually bore the inscription, "House of So-and-So, Lieutenant or Colonel, and Commander," very seldom "Major General" or any similarly elevated rank. But if a more luxurious house, embellished by a gilded iron railing and an iron gate, stood in one of these streets, the brass plate on the gate was sure to bear the name of "Commerce Council," or "Honorable Citizen So-and-So."

As a child, Kropotkin's father, the Prince, was the type of the old Russian Boyard. The boy's mother was dead. Kropotkin in his younger days learned to love the serfs, who took care of him. He describes the horrors of serfdom:

If I were to relate what I heard of in those years it would be a much more gruesome narrative; stories of men and women torn from their families and their villages, and sold, or lost in gambling, or exchanged for a couple of hunting dogs, then transported to some remote part of Russia for the sake of creating a new estate; of children taken from their parents and sold to cruel or dissolute masters; of flogging "in the stables," which occurred every day with unheard-of cruelty; of a girl who found her only salvation in drowning herself; of an old man who had grown gray-haired in his master's service, and at last hanged himself under his master's window, and of revolts of serfs, which were suppressed by Nicholas I.'s Generals by flogging to death each tenth or fifth out of the ranks, and by laying waste the village whose inhabitants, after a military execution, went begging for bread in the neighboring provinces, as if they had been the victims of a conflagration. As to the poverty which I saw during our journeys in certain villages, especially in those which belonged to the imperial family, no words would be adequate to describe the misery to readers who have not seen it.

When the little Prince was present at some Court ceremony at Moscow, the engaging ways of the child so interested the Emperor that he appointed him to be a page. In time Kropotkin entered the military school at St. Petersburg. With the death of Nicholas and the reign of Alexander II. came the first great changes in Russia.

On the day of the emancipation of the serfs Alexander II. was worshipped at St. Petersburg; but it is most remarkable that, apart from that moment of general enthusiasm, he had not the love of the city. Alexander II. had retained too much of the despotic character of his father, which pierced now and then through his usually good-natured manners. He easily lost his temper, and often treated his courtiers in the most contemptuous way. He was not what one would describe as a reliable man, either in his policy or in his personal sympathies; and he was vindictive. I doubt whether he was sincerely attached to any one. Some of the men in his nearest surroundings were of the worst description—Count Adlerberg, for instance, who made him pay over and over again his enormous debts—and others renowned for their colossal thefts. From the beginning of 1862 he commenced to show himself capable of reviving the worst practices of his father's reign. It was known that he still wanted to carry through a series of important reforms in the judicial organization and in the army, that the terrible corporal punishments were about to be

abolished, and that a sort of local self-government, and perhaps a Constitution of some sort would be granted. But the slightest disturbance was repressed under his orders with a stern severity; he took each movement as a personal offense, so that at any moment one might expect from him the most reactionary measures.

Such social change as came about then Russia was unable to comprehend. Old ingrained ideas still prevailed. The reaction took place. Alexander's character Kropotkin describes. In studying the history of these Russian Emperors one reverts to the immutable law, that all men, even Kings or Emperors, are not born equal, and that there are brains unsound and unhealthy bodies among those who wear the purple. There has been much insanity in the present reigning Russian family. Having passed his examination, not satisfied with his surroundings, Kropotkin sought service in Siberia. Having always devoted himself to science, it was in Siberia where he determined the direction of the great Asiatic ranges of mountains. He gave to them an entirely different trend, and in opposition to former authorities. He took part in an expedition to the Amoor and Manchuria, and traveled over 50,000 miles. Then arose dissatisfaction in Kropotkin's mind. He saw what was human suffering, brought about at home and abroad, in uttermost Russia, by the shortcomings, the stupidity, the cruelty of the Government. Now came radical ideas. He wanted freedom. He deplored the general want of education. He found on his return to Russia the birth of many new and radical ideas. He joined a secret circle. He tells how he first met Stepniak.

And in a house within a stone's throw of that where my father had died, and within a few months after his death, I received Stepniak, clothed as a peasant, he having escaped from a country village where he had been arrested for Socialist propaganda among the peasants. Such was the change which had been accomplished in the old equestrian quarter within the last fifteen years. The last stronghold of the old nobility was now invaded by the new spirit.

Kropotkin went to Zurich. Returning to St. Petersburg he became affiliated with the Teaycoffsky Circle. The police were eager now to catch Kropotkin, and his arrest soon took place. There were police spies in the circle. His first prison was the horrible one in the Peter-Paul fortress. Subsequently he was removed to another prison, whence he made the most miraculous of escapes. Passing over to Finland, he made his way to Norway, and landed finally in Hull. His struggles in England to earn a living are cleverly told. Calling himself "Mr. Levaschoff," he wrote scientific notes for Nature. Once he was given by the editor to review a work of his own, "The Glacial Period" and "The Orography of Asia." Then he did not know what to do. He said to the editor, "I could not praise them because they are mine; and I cannot be too sharp on the author, as I hold the views expressed by him." Then Prince Kropotkin had to tell the editor that he was for the time being "Mr. Levaschoff."

Going to France, Kropotkin was imprisoned on a trumped-up charge, but was finally set free. These memoirs are of the most intense human interest. As Mr. Brandes writes of Kropotkin, he is the ideal fighter for freedom, and "none have been more disinterested." Kropotkin never poses as an avenger of mankind, though you understand that there is plenty of fight in him. Giving him all praise for his efforts to better conditions in Russia, futile though such attempts have been, perhaps the ways employed would have been worthless if tried in any other country.

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