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# EXPROPRIATION

AN ANARCHISTIC ESSAY,

BY

## PIERRE KRAPOTKINE

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# EXPROPRIATION.

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No Social problem is more important for Revolutionists than that which deals with the expropriation of the rich in favour of the people, and the appropriation of all wealth by the latter. We invite all our comrades to study this problem under all its aspects, and to discuss it unceasingly, in view of its realization, which must sooner or later force itself upon us, as the definite success or temporary failure of the Revolution depends upon the manner in which this expropriation is applied.

✓ As a matter of fact, no Socialist can doubt that any  
✓ revolutionary effort is condemned in advance if it does not correspond with the interests of the great majority, and find means for satisfying its requirements. It is not enough to have a noble ideal : man cannot live on great thoughts and lofty discourses alone ; he requires bread ; the stomach has more rights than even the brain, for it is the stomach which sustains the whole organism. If, on the morrow of the Revolution, men do not see by the force of evidence as clear as daylight that the situation has been totally changed to their

✓ advantage—if the upset ends merely in a change of persons and formulas, nothing will have been done, and once more we shall have to set ourselves to the thankless task of Sisyphus ceaselessly rolling his massive rock uphill. In order that the Revolution may be something more than a name, and that a reaction may not bring us back on the morrow to the situation of the day before, it is necessary that the conquest of the day should be worth defending, it is necessary that he who was wretched yesterday should no longer be miserable to-day. After the Revolution of 1848, simple-minded Republicans placed “three months of misery” at the disposal of the Provisional Government. The offer was accepted with enthusiasm, and, when the appointed time came, those who had accepted it did not fail to render payment for the three months, but they did so with volleys of grape-shot and wholesale transportation. The unfortunate people had hoped that those painful months of waiting would have sufficed for the enactment of the salutary laws which they expected would make them free men, and secure to them work and their daily bread. In place of *asking*, would it not have been better to *take*? Instead of making a parade of their misery, would it not have been preferable to put an end to it? Not but what devotion is a grand and beautiful thing, but it is not devotion, it is treason to abandon to their unhappy lot all those who march along with us. Let combatants die—Good! but let their death be of some use! Let devoted men sacrifice themselves—Quite right! but let

the masses profit by the self-sacrifice of those valiant ones!

A general expropriation alone can satisfy the multitude of sufferers and oppressed. The matter must be made to pass from the domain of theory into that of practice: but, in order that expropriation may correspond with its principle, which is the suppression of private property and the restoration of all to all, it ought to be accomplished in vast proportions. On a small scale it would seem only vulgar pillage, on a large scale it would be the commencement of the Social Revolution. Of course we should be altogether ignorant of the laws of history, if we were to imagine that all at once a whole vast country could become our field of experience. Europe and the world will not become anarchist by a sudden transformation, but we know that on the one hand the madness of the ruling classes, together with their ambitions, their wars and their bankruptcies, and, on the other hand, the unceasing spread of our ideas, will have as their consequences great upheavals, that is to say, revolutions. It is at such times that we can act. How many times already have Revolutionists been taken by surprise, and allowed events to pass without taking advantage of them, and so have left propitious destiny still unattained!

Well, when these opportunities arise—and it is for you, comrades, to hasten their coming—when a whole district, or when large towns with their environs shall have shaken off their rulers, our work will be clearly

traced out for us; the whole stock of instruments of labour must return into the possession of the community, and the wealth detained by private individuals must be restored to its true master—everybody—in order that each may be able to have his ample share in consumption, that production may be continued in respect to all matters necessary and useful, and that our social life, far from being interrupted, may be renewed with greater energy. Without the gardens and fields which afford us the articles indispensable to life; without the graneries, stores and warehouses which contain the accumulated products of labour; without the manufactories and workshops which supply the stuffs, the wrought metals, the thousand objects of industry and of art, together with the means of defence, without the railways and other means of communication which will enable us to exchange our products with the free communities in our neighbourhood, and to combine our efforts for resistance and attack: without all these we are condemned beforehand to perish, and to be stifled like the fish out of water, which cannot breathe, though bathed in the immense ocean of the air. Let us remember the great strike of railway servants which took place in America some years ago. The great bulk of the public recognized that their cause was just, everybody was weary of the insolence of the railway companies, and rejoiced to see them at the mercy of their servants; but when the latter, having made themselves masters of the locomotives and railways, had neglected to make

use of them; when the interchange of commodities continued interrupted, and food and articles of all descriptions had doubled in price, then public opinion changed sides, and people began to cry out, "Let us rather have the companies that rob us and break our limbs than these fellows on strike who starve us." Let us never forget that it is necessary that *all* the interests of the people be protected, and that its needs as well as its instinctive love of justice be fully satisfied.

Nevertheless it is not sufficient to recognise the principle, we must also apply it. Our opponents say to us, "Venture to touch the peasant's plot of ground or the mechanic's cottage, and see how they will receive you." Very well! But we shall not interfere with the plot of ground nor with the cottage. We shall take good care not to attack our best friends, who without knowing it to-day, will certainly be our allies to-morrow. The expropriation will be to their advantage. We know that there is an average of means below which men suffer want, and above which they have a superfluity. In each town, in each country this average differs, but the popular instinct will not err, and without there being any necessity for drawing up lengthy statistics on paper, or for filling a whole series of volumes with figures, the people will know how to recover what is its own. In our beautiful existing society, a feeble minority lays claim to the bulk of the national wealth, has town and country houses built for itself, and accumulates in banks the coin, notes and

documents of all sorts which represent the wealth produced by labour. All this we must seize, and by one and the same blow we shall set free the unhappy peasant whose plot of ground is burdened by a mortgage, the small shopkeeper who lives in constant dread of bankruptcy, and all that wretched crowd of persons who have not enough bread for the morrow. All this multitude may have been indifferent on the eve of the Revolution, but when the day of expropriation comes, how can it fail to see that it depends upon itself whether it is to remain free or to fall again into misery and eternal anxiety? Or, indeed, instead of freeing itself by itself, will it again have the simplicity to appoint a provisional government consisting of individuals with supple fingers and glibly wagging tongues, nor be contented until it has set up new masters in place of the old? Let it do its own work if it is to be done; let it confide it to representatives if it wishes to be betrayed!

It is not enough that the interested parties should come to recognise their interest, which is to live without continual anxiety respecting the future, and without the humiliation of having to serve masters, it is also necessary that ideas should change with regard to property, and that corresponding ideas of morality should be modified in consequence. We must understand and admit without hesitation or reserve that all the instruments and products of human labour are due to the united labour of all, and have but one proprietor

—**Humanity.** We must clearly see that private property is a conscious or an unconscious theft of that which belongs to all, and we must be prepared to seize all with alacrity for the common use and benefit so soon as ever the hour of redress shall sound. Take, waste not, for all is yours, and you have need of it. But destroy without delay all that has to be destroyed; the forts which are built to overawe the towns, the prisons, and those unhealthy quarters in which you have so long breathed an atmosphere loaded with poison. Take up your abode in the palaces and mansions, and make a bonfire of the piles of bricks and rotting wood which were your unwholesome dwellings. The instinct of destruction which is so natural and so just, because it is at the same time the instinct of renovation, will find ample room for satisfaction. How many antiquated obstructions there are to be done away with! Everything has to be re-modelled—houses, cities, agricultural and industrial appliances, and, in short, the entire social apparatus.

To each great historical event there corresponds a certain evolution in human morality. It is certain that the morality of equals will not be the same as that of the charitable rich and the grateful poor. For a new world a new law is necessary, and it is indeed a new world which is giving notice of its near approach. Our adversaries themselves repeat unceasingly: "The gods are vanishing, the kings are going, the prestige of authority is disappearing." And what is there to take the place of the gods, the kings,



and the priests, if not the free individual relying on his manhood? Blind faith takes flight! Make way for Science! Gracious pleasure and Charity disappear! Make room for Justice!

**P. KRAPOTKINE.**



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