

III - THE APPETITE OF TYRANNY

The German Emperor has reproached this country with allying itself with "barbaric and semi-oriental power." We have already considered in what sense we use the word barbaric: it is in the sense of one who is hostile to civilisation, not one who is insufficient in it. But when we pass from the idea of the barbaric to the idea of the oriental, the case is even more curious. There is nothing particularly Tartar in Russian affairs, except the fact that Russia expelled the Tartars. The eastern invader occupied and crushed the country for many years; but that is equally true of Greece, of Spain, and even of Austria. If Russia has suffered from the East she has suffered in order to resist it: and it is rather hard that the very miracle of her escape should make a mystery about her origin. Jonah may or may not have been three days inside a fish, but that does not make him a merman. And in all the other cases of European nations who escaped the monstrous captivity, we do admit the purity and continuity of the European type. We consider the old Eastern rule as a wound, but not as a stain. Copper-coloured men out of Africa overruled for centuries the religion and patriotism of Spaniards. Yet I have never heard that Don Quixote was an African fable on the lines of Uncle Remus. I have never heard that the heavy black in the pictures of Velasquez was due to a negro ancestry. In the case of Spain, which is close to us, we can recognise the resurrection of a Christian and cultured nation after its age of bondage. But Russia is rather remote; and those to whom nations are but names in newspapers can really fancy, like Mr. Baring's friend, that all Russian churches are "mosques." Yet the land of Turgeniev is not a wilderness of fakirs; and even the fanatical Russian is as proud of being different from the Mongol, as the fanatical Spaniard was proud of being different from the Moor.

The town of Reading, as it exists, offers few opportunities for piracy on the high seas: yet it was the camp of the pirates in Alfred's day. I should think it hard to call the people of Berkshire half-Danish, merely because they drove out the Danes. In short, some temporary submergence under the savage flood was the fate of many of the most civilised states of Christendom; and it is quite ridiculous to argue that Russia, which wrestled hardest, must have recovered least. Everywhere, doubtless, the East spread a sort of enamel over the conquered countries, but everywhere the enamel cracked. Actual history, in fact, is exactly opposite to the cheap proverb invented against the Muscovite. It is not true to say "Scratch a Russian and you find a Tartar." In the darkest hour of the barbaric dominion it was truer to say, "Scratch a Tartar and you find a Russian." It was the civilisation that survived under all the barbarism. This vital romance of Russia, this revolution against Asia, can be proved in pure fact; not only from the almost superhuman activity of Russia during the struggle, but also (which is

much rarer as human history goes) by her quite consistent conduct since. She is the only great nation which has really expelled the Mongol from her country, and continued to protest against the presence of the Mongol in her continent. Knowing what he had been in Russia, she knew what he would be in Europe. In this she pursued a logical line of thought, which was, if anything, too unsympathetic with the energies and religions of the East. Every other country, one may say, has been an ally of the Turk; that is, of the Mongol and the Moslem. The French played them as pieces against Austria; the English warmly supported them under the Palmerston regime; even the young Italians sent troops to the Crimea; and of Prussia and her Austrian vassal it is nowadays needless to speak. For good or evil, it is the fact of history that Russia is the only Power in Europe that has never supported the Crescent against the Cross.

That, doubtless, will appear an unimportant matter; but it may become important under certain peculiar conditions. Suppose, for the sake of argument, that there were a powerful prince in Europe who had gone ostentatiously out of his way to pay reverence to the remains of the Tartar, Mongol and Moslem, which are left as outposts in Europe. Suppose there were a Christian Emperor who could not even go to the tomb of the Crucified, without pausing to congratulate the last and living crucifier. If there were an Emperor who gave guns and guides and maps and drill instructors to defend the remains of the Mongol in Christendom, what should we say to him? I think at least we might ask him what he meant by his impudence, when he talked about supporting a semi-oriental power. That we support a semi-oriental power we deny. That he has supported an entirely oriental power cannot be denied--no, not even by the man who did it.

But here is to be noted the essential difference between Russia and Prussia; especially by those who use the ordinary Liberal arguments against the latter. Russia has a policy which she pursues, if you will, through evil and good; but at least so as to produce good as well as evil. Let it be granted that the policy has made her oppressive to the Finns and the Poles--though the Russian Poles feel far less oppressed than do the Prussian Poles. But it is a mere historic fact, that if Russia has been a despot to some small nations, she has been a deliverer to others. She did, so far as in her lay, emancipate the Servians and the Montenegrins. But whom did Prussia ever emancipate--even by accident? It is indeed somewhat extraordinary that in the perpetual permutations of international politics, the Hohenzollerns have never gone astray into the path of enlightenment. They have been in alliance with almost everybody off and on: with France, with England, with Austria, with Russia. Can anyone candidly say that they have left on any one of these people the faintest impress of progress or liberation? Prussia was the enemy of the French Monarchy; but a worse enemy of the French Revolution. Prussia had been an enemy of the Czar; but she was a worse enemy of the Duma. Prussia totally disregarded Austrian rights: but she is

to-day quite ready to inflict Austrian wrongs. This is the strong particular difference between the one empire and the other. Russia is pursuing certain intelligible and sincere ends, which to her at least are ideals, and for which, therefore, she will make sacrifices and will protect the weak. But the North German soldier is a sort of abstract tyrant, everywhere and always on the side of materialistic tyranny. This Teuton in uniform has been found in strange places; shooting farmers before Saratoga and flogging soldiers in Surrey, hanging niggers in Africa and raping girls in Wicklow; but never, by some mysterious fatality, lending a hand to the freeing of a single city or the independence of one solitary flag. Wherever scorn and prosperous oppression are, there is the Prussian; unconsciously consistent, instinctively restrictive, innocently evil; "following darkness like a dream."

Suppose we heard of a person (gifted with some longevity) who had helped Alva to persecute Dutch Protestants, then helped Cromwell to persecute Irish Catholics, and then helped Claverhouse to persecute Scotch Puritans, we should find it rather easier to call him a persecutor than to call him a Protestant or a Catholic. Curiously enough this is actually the position in which the Prussian stands in Europe. No argument can alter the fact that in three converging and conclusive cases, he has been on the side of three distinct rulers of different religions, who had nothing whatever in common except that they were ruling oppressively. In these three Governments, taken separately, one can see something excusable or at least human. When the Kaiser encouraged the Russian rulers to crush the Revolution, the Russian rulers undoubtedly believed they were wrestling with an inferno of atheism and anarchy. A Socialist of the ordinary English kind cried out upon me when I spoke of Stolypin, and said he was chiefly known by the halter called "Stolypin's Necktie." As a fact, there were many other things interesting about Stolypin besides his necktie: his policy of peasant proprietorship, his extraordinary personal courage, and certainly none more interesting than that movement in his death agony, when he made the sign of the cross towards the Czar, as the crown and captain of his Christianity. But the Kaiser does not regard the Czar as the captain of Christianity. Far from it. What he supported in Stolypin was the necktie and nothing but the necktie: the gallows and not the cross. The Russian ruler did believe that the Orthodox Church was orthodox. The Austrian Archduke did really desire to make the Catholic Church catholic. He did really believe that he was being Pro-Catholic in being Pro-Austrian. But the Kaiser cannot be Pro-Catholic, and therefore cannot have been really Pro-Austrian, he was simply and solely Anti-Servian. Nay, even in the cruel and sterile strength of Turkey, anyone with imagination can see something of the tragedy and therefore of the tenderness of true belief. The worst that can be said of the Moslems is, as the poet put it, they offered to man the choice of the Koran or the sword. The best that can be said for the German is that he does not care about the Koran, but is satisfied if he can have the sword. And for me, I confess,

even the sins of these three other striving empires take on, in comparison, something that is sorrowful and dignified: and I feel they do not deserve that this little Lutheran lounge should patronise all that is evil in them, while ignoring all that is good. He is not Catholic, he is not Orthodox, he is not Mahomedan. He is merely an old gentleman who wishes to share the crime though he cannot share the creed. He desires to be a persecutor by the pang without the palm. So strongly do all the instincts of the Prussian drive against liberty, that he would rather oppress other people's subjects than think of anybody going without the benefits of oppression. He is a sort of disinterested despot. He is as disinterested as the devil who is ready to do anyone's dirty work.

This would seem obviously fantastic were it not supported by solid facts which cannot be explained otherwise. Indeed it would be inconceivable if we were thinking of a whole people, consisting of free and varied individuals. But in Prussia the governing class is really a governing class: and a very few people are needed to think along these lines to make all the other people act along them. And the paradox of Prussia is this: that while its princes and nobles have no other aim on this earth but to destroy democracy wherever it shows itself, they have contrived to get themselves trusted, not as wardens of the past but as forerunners of the future. Even they cannot believe that their theory is popular, but they do believe that it is progressive. Here again we find the spiritual chasm between the two monarchies in question. The Russian institutions are, in many cases, really left in the rear of the Russian people, and many of the Russian people know it. But the Prussian institutions are supposed to be in advance of the Prussian people, and most of the Prussian people believe it. It is thus much easier for the war-lords to go everywhere and impose a hopeless slavery upon everyone, for they have already imposed a sort of hopeful slavery on their own simple race.

And when men shall speak to us of the hoary iniquities of Russia and of how antiquated is the Russian system, we shall answer "Yes; that is the superiority of Russia." Their institutions are part of their history, whether as relics or fossils. Their abuses have really been uses: that is to say, they have been used up. If they have old engines of terror or torment, they may fall to pieces from mere rust, like an old coat of armour. But in the case of the Prussian tyranny, if it be tyranny at all, it is the whole point of its claim that it is not antiquated, but just going to begin, like the showman. Prussia has a whole thriving factory of thumbscrews, a whole humming workshop of wheels and racks, of the newest and neatest pattern, with which to win back Europe to the Reaction ... *infandum renovare dolorem* And if we wish to test the truth of this, it can be done by the same method which showed us that Russia, if her race or religion could sometimes make her an invader and an oppressor, could also be made an emancipator and a knight errant. In the same way, if the Russian institutions are old-fashioned, they

honestly exhibit the good as well as the bad that can be found in old-fashioned things.

In their police system they have an inequality which is against our ideas of law. But in their commune system they have an equality that is older than law itself. Even when they flogged each other like barbarians, they called upon each other by their Christian names like children. At their worst they retained all the best of a rude society. At their best, they are simply good, like good children or good nuns. But in Prussia, all that is best in the civilised machinery is put at the service of all that is worst in the barbaric mind. Here again the Prussian has no accidental merits, none of those lucky survivals, none of those late repentances, which make the patchwork glory of Russia. Here all is sharpened to a point and pointed to a purpose, and that purpose, if words and acts have any meaning at all, is the destruction of liberty throughout the world.