

CHAPTER XI.

THE CHRISTIAN CONCEPTION OF LIFE HAS ALREADY ARISEN IN OUR SOCIETY, AND WILL INFALLIBLY PUT AN END TO THE PRESENT ORGANIZATION OF OUR LIFE BASED ON FORCE--WHEN THAT WILL BE.

The Condition and Organization of our Society are Terrible, but they Rest only on Public Opinion, and can be Destroyed by it--Already Violence is Regarded from a Different Point of View; the Number of those who are Ready to Serve the Government is Diminishing; and even the Servants of Government are Ashamed of their Position, and so often Do Not Perform their Duties--These Facts are all Signs of the Rise of a Public Opinion, which Continually Growing will Lead to No One being Willing to Enter Government Service--Moreover, it Becomes More and More Evident that those Offices are of No Practical Use--Men already Begin to Understand the Futility of all Institutions Based on Violence, and if a Few already Understand it, All will One Day Understand it--The Day of Deliverance is Unknown, but it Depends on Men Themselves, on how far Each Man Lives According to the Light that is in Him.

The position of Christian humanity with its prisons, galleys, gibbets, its factories and accumulation of capital, its taxes, churches, gin-palaces, licensed brothels, its ever-increasing armament and its millions of brutalized men, ready, like chained dogs, to attack anyone against whom their master incites them, would be terrible indeed if it were the product of violence, but

it is pre-eminently the product of public opinion. And what has been established by public opinion can be destroyed by public opinion--and, indeed, is being destroyed by public opinion.

Money lavished by hundreds of millions, tens of millions of disciplined troops, weapons of astounding destructive power, all organizations carried to the highest point of perfection, a whole army of men charged with the task of deluding and hypnotizing the people, and all this, by means of electricity which annihilates distance, under the direct control of men who regard such an organization of society not only as necessary for profit, but even for self-preservation, and therefore exert every effort of their ingenuity to preserve it--what an invincible power it would seem! And yet we need only imagine for a moment what will really inevitably come to pass, that is, the Christian social standard replacing the heathen social standard and established with the same power and universality, and the majority of men as much ashamed of taking any part in violence or in profiting by it, as they are to-day of thieving, swindling, begging, and cowardice; and at once we see the whole of this complex, and seemingly powerful organization of society falls into ruins of itself without a struggle.

And to bring this to pass, nothing new need be brought before men's minds. Only let the mist, which veils from men's eyes the true meaning of certain acts of violence, pass away, and the

Christian public opinion which is springing up would overpower the extinct public opinion which permitted and justified acts of violence. People need only come to be as much ashamed to do deeds of violence, to assist in them or to profit by them, as they now are of being, or being reputed a swindler, a thief, a coward, or a beggar. And already this change is beginning to take place. We do not notice it just as we do not notice the movement of the earth, because we are moved together with everything around us.

It is true that the organization of society remains in its principal features just as much an organization based on violence as it was one thousand years ago, and even in some respects, especially in the preparation for war and in war itself, it appears still more brutal. But the rising Christian ideal, which must at a certain stage of development replace the heathen ideal of life, already makes its influence felt. A dead tree stands apparently as firmly as ever--it may even seem firmer because it is harder--but it is rotten at the core, and soon must fall. It is just so with the present order of society, based on force. The external aspect is unchanged. There is the same division of oppressors and oppressed, but their view of the significance and dignity of their respective positions is no longer what it once was.

The oppressors, that is, those who take part in government, and those who profit by oppression, that is, the rich, no longer

imagine, as they once did, that they are the elect of the world, and that they constitute the ideal of human happiness and greatness, to attain which was once the highest aim of the oppressed.

Very often now it is not the oppressed who strive to attain the position of the oppressors, and try to imitate them, but on the contrary the oppressors who voluntarily abandon the advantages of their position, prefer the condition of the oppressed, and try to resemble them in the simplicity of their life.

Not to speak of the duties and occupations now openly despised, such as that of spy, agent of secret police, moneylender, and publican, there are a great number of professions formerly regarded as honorable, such as those of police officials, courtiers, judges, and administrative functionaries, clergymen, military officers, speculators, and bankers, which are no longer considered desirable positions by everyone, and are even despised by a special circle of the most respected people. There are already men who voluntarily abandon these professions which were once reckoned irreproachable, and prefer less lucrative callings which are in no way connected with the use of force.

And there are even rich men who, not through religious sentiment, but simply through special sensitiveness to the social standard that is springing up, relinquish their inherited property, believing that a man can only justly consume what he has gained by

his own labor.

The position of a government official or of a rich man is no longer, as it once was, and still is among non-Christian peoples, regarded as necessarily honorable and deserving of respect, and under the special blessing of God. The most delicate and moral people (they are generally also the most cultivated) avoid such positions and prefer more humble callings that are not dependent on the use of force.

The best of our young people, at the age when they are still uncorrupted by life and are choosing a career, prefer the calling of doctor, engineer, teacher, artist, writer, or even that of simple farmer living on his own labor, to legal, administrative, clerical, and military positions in the pay of government, or to an idle existence living on their incomes.

Monuments and memorials in these days are mostly not erected in honor of government dignitaries, or generals, or still less of rich men, but rather of artists, men of science, and inventors, persons who have nothing in common with the government, and often have even been in conflict with it. They are the men whose praises are celebrated in poetry, who are honored by sculpture and received with triumphant jublations.

The best men of our day are all striving for such places of honor.

Consequently the class from which the wealthy and the government officials are drawn grows less in number and lower in intelligence and education, and still more in moral qualities. So that nowadays the wealthy class and men at the head of government do not constitute, as they did in former days, the ÉLITE of society; on the contrary, they are inferior to the middle class.

In Russia and Turkey as in America and France, however often the government change its officials, the majority of them are self-seeking and corrupt, of so low a moral standard that they do not even come up to the elementary requirements of common honesty expected by the government. One may often nowadays hear from persons in authority the naïve complaint that the best people are always, by some strange--as it seems to them--fatality, to be found in the camp of the opposition. As though men were to complain that those who accepted the office of hangman were--by some strange fatality--all persons of very little refinement or beauty of character.

The most cultivated and refined people of our society are not nowadays to be found among the very rich, as used formerly to be the rule. The rich are mostly coarse money grubbers, absorbed only, in increasing their hoard, generally by dishonest means, or else the degenerate heirs of such money grubbers, who, far from playing any prominent part in society, are mostly treated with general contempt.

And besides the fact that the class from which the servants of government and the wealthy are drawn grows less in number and lower in caliber, they no longer themselves attach the same importance to their positions as they once did; often they are ashamed of the ignominy of their calling and do not perform the duties they are bound to perform in their position. Kings and emperors scarcely govern at all; they scarcely ever decide upon an internal reform or a new departure in foreign politics. They mostly leave the decision of such questions to government institutions or to public opinion. All their duties are reduced to representing the unity and majesty of government. And even this duty they perform less and less successfully. The majority of them do not keep up their old unapproachable majesty, but become more and more democratized and even vulgarized, casting aside the external prestige that remained to them, and thereby destroying the very thing it was their function to maintain.

It is just the same with the army. Military officers of the highest rank, instead of encouraging in their soldiers the brutality and ferocity necessary for their work, diffuse education among the soldiers, inculcate humanity, and often even themselves share the socialistic ideas of the masses and denounce war. In the last plots against the Russian Government many of the conspirators were in the army. And the number of the disaffected in the army is always increasing. And it often happens (there was a case, indeed, within the last few days) that when called upon to

quell disturbances they refuse to fire upon the people. Military exploits are openly reprobated by the military themselves, and are often the subject of jests among them.

It is the same with judges and public prosecutors. The judges, whose duty it is to judge and condemn criminals, conduct the proceedings so as to whitewash them as far as possible. So that the Russian Government, to procure the condemnation of those whom they want to punish, never intrust them to the ordinary tribunals, but have them tried before a court martial, which is only a parody of justice. The prosecutors themselves often refuse to proceed, and even when they do proceed, often in spite of the law, really defend those they ought to be accusing. The learned jurists whose business it is to justify the violence of authority, are more and more disposed to deny the right of punishment and to replace it by theories of irresponsibility and even of moral insanity, proposing to deal with those they call criminals by medical treatment only.

Jailers and overseers of galleys generally become the champions of those whom they ought to torture. Police officers and detectives are continually assisting the escape of those they ought to arrest. The clergy preach tolerance, and even sometimes condemn the use of force, and the more educated among them try in their sermons to avoid the very deception which is the basis of their position and which it is their duty to support. Executioners

refuse to perform their functions, so that in Russia the death penalty cannot be carried out for want of executioners. And in spite of all the advantages bestowed on these men, who are selected from convicts, there is a constantly diminishing number of volunteers for the post. Governors, police officials, tax collectors often have compassion on the people and try to find pretexts for not collecting the tax from them. The rich are not at ease in spending their wealth only on themselves, and lavish it on works of public utility. Landowners build schools and hospitals on their property, and some even give up the ownership of their land and transfer it to the cultivators, or establish communities upon it. Millowners and manufacturers build hospitals, schools, savings banks, asylums, and dwellings for their workpeople. Some of them form co-operative associations in which they have shares on the same terms as the others. Capitalists expend a part of their capital on educational, artistic, philanthropic, and other public institutions. And many, who are not equal to parting with their wealth in their lifetime, leave it in their wills to public institutions.

All these phenomena might seem to be mere exceptions, except that they can all be referred to one common cause. Just as one might fancy the first leaves on the budding trees in April were exceptional if we did not know that they all have a common cause, the spring, and that if we see the branches on some trees shooting and turning green, it is certain that it will soon be so with all.

So it is with the manifestation of the Christian standard of opinion on force and all that is based on force. If this standard already influences some, the most impressionable, and impels each in his own sphere to abandon advantages based on the use of force, then its influence will extend further and further till it transforms the whole order of men's actions and puts it into accord with the Christian ideal which is already a living force in the vanguard of humanity.

And if there are now rulers, who do not decide on any step on their own authority, who try to be as unlike monarchs, and as like plain mortals as possible, who state their readiness to give up their prerogatives and become simply the first citizens of a republic; if there are already soldiers who realize all the sin and harm of war, and are not willing to fire on men either of their own or a foreign country; judges and prosecutors who do not like to try and to condemn criminals; priests, who abjure deception; tax-gatherers who try to perform as little as they can of their duties, and rich men renouncing their wealth--then the same thing will inevitably happen to other rulers, other soldiers, other judges, priests, tax-gatherers, and rich men. And when there are no longer men willing to fill these offices, these offices themselves will disappear too.

But this is not the only way in which public opinion is leading

men to the abolition of the prevailing order and the substitution of a new order. As the positions based on the rule of force become less attractive and fewer men are found willing to fill them, the more will their uselessness be apparent.

Everywhere throughout the Christian world the same rulers, and the same governments, the same armies, the same law courts, the same tax-gatherers, the same priests, the same rich men, landowners, manufacturers, and capitalists, as ever, but the attitude of the world to them, and their attitude to themselves is altogether changed.

The same sovereigns have still the same audiences and interviews, hunts and banquets, and balls and uniforms; there are the same diplomats and the same deliberations on alliances and wars; there are still the same parliaments, with the same debates on the Eastern question and Africa, on treaties and violations of treaties, and Home Rule and the eight-hour day; and one set of ministers replacing another in the same way, and the same speeches and the same incidents. But for men who observe how one newspaper article has more effect on the position of affairs than dozens of royal audiences or parliamentary sessions, it becomes more and more evident that these audiences and interviews and debates in parliaments do not direct the course of affairs, but something independent of all that, which cannot be concentrated in one place.

The same generals and officers and soldiers, and cannons and fortresses, and reviews and maneuvers, but no war breaks out. One year, ten, twenty years pass by. And it becomes less and less possible to rely on the army for the pacification of riots, and more and more evident, consequently, that generals, and officers, and soldiers are only figures in solemn processions--objects of amusement for governments--a sort of immense--and far too expensive--CORPS DE BALLET.

The same lawyers and judges, and the same assizes, but it becomes more and more evident that the civil courts decide cases on the most diverse grounds, but regardless of justice, and that criminal trials are quite senseless, because the punishments do not attain the objects aimed at by the judges themselves. These institutions therefore serve no other purpose than to provide a means of livelihood for men who are not capable of doing anything more useful.

The same priests and archbishops and churches and synods, but it becomes more and more evident that they have long ago ceased to believe in what they preach, and therefore they can convince no one of the necessity of believing what they don't believe themselves.

The same tax collectors, but they are less and less capable of

taking men's property from them by force, and it becomes more and more evident that people can collect all that is necessary by voluntary subscription without their aid.

The same rich men, but it becomes more and more evident that they can only be of use by ceasing to administer their property in person and giving up to society the whole or at least a part of their wealth.

And when all this has become absolutely evident to everyone, it will be natural for men to ask themselves: "But why should we keep and maintain all these kings, emperors, presidents, and members of all sorts of senates and ministries, since nothing comes of all their debates and audiences? Wouldn't it be better, as some humorist suggested, to make a queen of india-rubber?"

And what good to us are these armies with their generals and bands and horses and drums? And what need is there of them when there is no war, and no one wants to make war? and if there were a war, other nations would not let us gain any advantage from it; while the soldiers refuse to fire on their fellow-countrymen.

And what is the use of these lawyers and judges who don't decide civil cases with justice and recognize themselves the uselessness of punishments in criminal cases?

And what is the use of tax collectors who collect the taxes unwillingly, when it is easy to raise all that is wanted without them?

What is the use of the clergy, who don't believe in what they preach?

And what is the use of capital in the hands of private persons, when it can only be of use as the property of all?

And when once people have asked themselves these questions they cannot help coming to some decision and ceasing to support all these institutions which are no longer of use.

But even before those who support these institutions decide to abolish them, the men who occupy these positions will be reduced to the necessity of throwing them up.

Public opinion more and more condemns the use of force, and therefore men are less and less willing to fill positions which rest on the use of force, and if they do occupy them, are less and less able to make use of force in them. And hence they must become more and more superfluous.

I once took part in Moscow in a religious meeting which used to take place generally in the week after Easter near the church in

the Ohotny Row. A little knot of some twenty men were collected together on the pavement, engaged in serious religious discussion. At the same time there was a kind of concert going on in the buildings of the Court Club in the same street, and a police officer noticing the little group collected near the church sent a mounted policeman to disperse it. It was absolutely unnecessary for the officer to disperse it. A group of twenty men was no obstruction to anyone, but he had been standing there the whole morning, and he wanted to do something. The policeman, a young fellow, with a resolute flourish of his right arm and a clink of his saber, came up to us and commanded us severely: "Move on! what's this meeting about?" Everyone looked at the policeman, and one of the speakers, a quiet man in a peasant's dress, answered with a calm and gracious air, "We are speaking of serious matters, and there is no need for us to move on; you would do better, young man, to get off your horse and listen. It might do you good"; and turning round he continued his discourse. The policeman turned his horse and went off without a word.

That is just what should be done in all cases of violence.

The officer was bored, he had nothing to do. He had been put, poor fellow, in a position in which he had no choice but to give orders. He was shut off from all human existence; he could do nothing but superintend and give orders, and give orders and superintend, though his superintendence and his orders served no

useful purpose whatever. And this is the position in which all these unlucky rulers, ministers, members of parliament, governors, generals, officers, archbishops, priests, and even rich men find themselves to some extent already, and will find themselves altogether as time goes on. They can do nothing but give orders, and they give orders and send their messengers, as the officer sent the policeman, to interfere with people. And because the people they hinder turn to them and request them not to interfere, they fancy they are very useful indeed.

But the time will come and is coming when it will be perfectly evident to everyone that they are not of any use at all, and only a hindrance, and those whom they interfere with will say gently and quietly to them, like my friend in the street meeting, "Pray don't interfere with us." And all the messengers and those who send them too will be obliged to follow this good advice, that is to say, will leave off galloping about, with their arms akimbo, interfering with people, and getting off their horses and removing their spurs, will listen to what is being said, and mixing with others, will take their place with them in some real human work.

The time will come and is inevitably coming when all institutions based on force will disappear through their uselessness, stupidity, and even inconvenience becoming obvious to all.

The time must come when the men of our modern world who fill

offices based upon violence will find themselves in the position of the emperor in Andersen's tale of "The Emperor's New Clothes," when the child seeing the emperor undressed, cried in all simplicity, "Look, he is naked!" And then all the rest, who had seen him and said nothing, could not help recognizing it too.

The story is that there was once an emperor, very fond of new clothes. And to him came two tailors, who promised to make him some extraordinary clothes. The emperor engages them and they begin to sew at them, but they explain that the clothes have the extraordinary property of remaining invisible to anyone who is unfit for his position. The courtiers come to look at the tailors' work and see nothing, for the men are plying their needles in empty space. But remembering the extraordinary property of the clothes, they all declare they see them and are loud in their admiration. The emperor does the same himself. The day of the procession comes in which the emperor is to go out in his new clothes. The emperor undresses and puts on his new clothes, that is to say, remains naked, and naked he walks through the town. But remembering the magic property of the clothes, no one ventures to say that he has nothing on till a little child cries out: "Look, he is naked!"

This will be exactly the situation of all who continue through inertia to fill offices which have long become useless directly someone who has no interest in concealing their uselessness

exclaims in all simplicity: "But these people have been of no use to anyone for a long time past!"

The condition of Christian humanity with its fortresses, cannons, dynamite, guns, torpedoes, prisons, gallows, churches, factories, customs offices, and palaces is really terrible. But still cannons and guns will not fire themselves, prisons will not shut men up of themselves, gallows will not hang them, churches will not delude them, nor customs offices hinder them, and palaces and factories are not built nor kept up of themselves. All those things are the work of men. If men come to understand that they ought not to do these things, then they will cease to be. And already they are beginning to understand it. Though all do not understand it yet, the advanced guard understand and the rest will follow them. And the advanced guard cannot cease to understand what they have once understood; and what they understand the rest not only can but must inevitably understand hereafter.

So that the prophecy that the time will come when men will be taught of God, will learn war no more, will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into reaping-hooks, which means, translating it into our language, the fortresses, prisons, barracks, palaces, and churches will remain empty, and all the gibbets and guns and cannons will be left unused, is no longer a dream, but the definite new form of life to which mankind is approaching with ever-increasing rapidity.

But when will it be?

Eighteen hundred years ago to this question Christ answered that the end of the world (that is, of the pagan organization of life) shall come when the tribulation of men is greater than it has ever been, and when the Gospel of the kingdom of God, that is, the possibility of a new organization of life, shall be preached in the world unto all nations. (Matt. xxiv. 3-28.) But of that day and hour knoweth no man but the Father only (Matt. xxiv. 3-6), said Christ. For it may come any time, in such an hour as ye think not.

To the question when this hour cometh Christ answers that we cannot know, but just because we cannot know when that hour is coming we ought to be always ready to meet it, just as the master ought to watch who guards his house from thieves, as the virgins ought to watch with lamps alight for the bridegroom; and further, we ought to work with all the powers given us to bring that hour to pass, as the servants ought to work with the talents intrusted to them. (Matt. xxiv. 43, and xxvi. 13, 14-30.) And there could be no answer but this one. Men cannot know when the day and the hour of the kingdom of God will come, because its coming depends on themselves alone.

The answer is like that of the wise man who, when asked whether it

was far to the town, answered, "Walk!"

How can we tell whether it is far to the goal which humanity is approaching, when we do not know how men are going toward it, while it depends on them whether they go or do not go, stand still, slacken their pace or hasten it? All we can know is what we who make up mankind ought to do, and not to do, to bring about the coming of the kingdom of God. And that we all know. And we need only each begin to do what we ought to do, we need only each live with all the light that is in us, to bring about at once the promised kingdom of God to which every man's heart is yearning.