The Open Court

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Devoted to the Science of Religion, the Religion of Science, and the Extension of the Religious Parliament Idea

Founded by EDWARD C. HEGELER

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PRINCE PETER KROPOTKIN.

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THE SOCIOLOGICAL IDEAS OF PRINCE PETER KROPOTKIN.

BY M. JOURDAIN.

THE sociology of Prince Peter Kropotkin is essentially Russian since it has to a great extent been called into being by the peculiarity of the social-political life of that nation. Brückner calls the Russian Slav a born anarchist;[1] he is certainly a born communist. The Russian peasant has a firm hold upon the institution called the land commune or community ownership, which, although in 1906 allowed to be broken up, survived to a considerable extent, and the idealization of the commune appear in Kropotkin as in Cernyševskii and other Russian populists. What gives color to his sociological theory can be analyzed readily enough, Bakuninism (and other less powerful Russian influences), the influence of English thinkers such as Adam Smith, and in the last resort, the psychology of the Russian revolutionary and a kindly and temperamental personal optimism. Russia has been called the land of extremes, and Kropotkin is an illustration of this divergence—a man emotionally humane, who can mete out no punishment to the work-shy,[2] justifies and recommends the destruction of a tyrant as though he were a "viper." Yet Kropotkin is of the stuff that Shaftesbury and Shelley were made of.

[1] *Geschichte der russischen Literatur,* p. 1.

[2] "Kropotkin is himself a fresh illustration of the psychology of the Russian revolutionary. Humane as a man can be, a gentleman in the best and finest sense of the word, when he speaks of 'vipers' Kropotkin is concentrating in that expression the revolutionary mood of a lifetime. Thus does it come to pass that a man who by temperament and philosophic training is one of the kindliest of his day can justify the slaughter of a tyrant." Masaryk, *The Spirit of Russia,* London, 1919, Vol. II, p. 386. This valuable study, recently translated into English (1919), is an authoritative and well-documented history of Russian thought by Professor Masaryk, first President of the Czecho-Slovak Republic.

Kropotkin, who was for so many years resident in England and whose books and contributions to the English press are widely read, is sometimes regarded by English readers as the originator of certain ideals which he shares with other Russian thinkers such as Lavrov, Černyševskii and Bakunin. He reflects and develops rather than originates. He is in sympathy with Černyševskii's socialism, which is based on the *mir* or commune, and he accepts the solution presented in *What Is Done* of the problem of marriage and divorce.[3] But the leading influence is, without doubt, that of Bakunin, and Kropotkin may be described as a genial Bakunin. A more temperate visionary than that turbulent dreamer who delighted in the idea of shattering the world to bits,[4] Kropotkin's leading idea is rather the remoulding of the world into a new and desirable order.

Kropotkin's views are distinguished from Marx's in the recognition of morality. He believes that the moral sense is, like the sense of taste, innate. "Morals, therefore, need neither sanction nor obligation—*une morale sans obligation ni sanction,* as Guyau puts it. . . . The natural inclinations of human beings serve to explain human action: every one treats others as he wishes to be treated by them."[5] It is on this foundation of "natural sympathy" that Kropotkin builds his communistic ideal. The sense of membership produces a spontaneous social order, and this order he terms *mutualism.* He contends that there has always been a harmony of interests between the individual and the community, but he admits the existence of men unable to grasp this mutuality, whose actions are anti-social. At the same time he contends that there have always been men able to recognize the principle, and therefore able to lead a perfectly social life. To Kropotkin society is "a great total, organized to produce the greatest possible result of well-being with the smallest expenditure of human strength."[6] It is "an aggregation of organisms trying to find out the best ways of combining the wants of the individual with those of cooperation for the wel-

[3] Masaryk, *op. cit.,* Vol. II, p. 386.

[4] Bakunin inveighs against those who demand a precise plan of reconstruction and of the future. "It suffices if we can achieve no more than a hazy idea of the opposite to all that is loathsome in contemporary civilization. Our aim is to raze things down to the ground; our goal, pandestruction. It seems to us criminal that those who are already busied about the practical work of revolution should trouble their minds with the thoughts of this nebulous future, for such thoughts will merely prove a hindrance to the supreme cause of destruction." Quoted by Masaryk, *op. cit.,* Vol. I, p. 453.

[5] *Ibid.,* Vol. II, p. 383.

[6] *Revolutionary Studies,* p. 24.

fare of the species."[7] All social aggregates—both animal or human —are united by a consciousness of the oneness of each individual with each and with all, and this sense, not love, which is always personal, is the guiding principle of his acts.[8]

This sense of solidarity, which may appear in the form of instinct in animals, and the principle of federated cooperation have been, in Kropotkin's view, the chief influences in the formation of society, and he concludes that those who practised mutual aid, among animal and human societies, were better equipped for survival and for progress, while struggles within the species are unfavorable to survival and development. The periods when institutions have been based on mutual aid have made the greatest progress in the arts, industry and science.[9] To this factor of mutual aid Kropotkin's attention was drawn by a lecture of Professor Kessler in 1880, while he based his emphasis upon sympathetic solidarity upon Adam Smith's *Theory of the Moral Sentiments.* "Adam Smith's only failure was," he writes, "that he did not understand that this same feeling of sympathy, in its habitual stage, exists among animals as well as among men."[10] When Kropotkin was studying the relations between Darwinism and sociology he saw no reason to admit the struggle for the means of existence of every animal against all its congeners, and of every man against all other men, as a law of nature. To admit a pitiless inner war for life within each species, and to see in that war a condition of progress was to admit something which not only had not been proved but also lacked confirmation from direct observation.[11] In a lecture delivered a year before his death, Professor Kessler contended that besides the law of mutual struggle there exists the law of mutual aid which is far more important for the progressive evolution of the species, and Kropotkin, when he became acquainted with the lecture in 1883, began to collect materials for the further development of the idea which Professor Kessler did not live to develop.

Mutual aid, in human society, tends toward communism, and its organization must be the work of the mass, and a natural growth. It is, according to Kropotkin, with its freedom from centralized control, favorable for individual development, and an opportunity for "a full expansion of man's faculties, the superior development

[7] *Anarchist Communism, Its Basis and Principles,* p. 4.
[8] *Mutual Aid,* p. 300.
[9] *Ibid.,* p. 296.
[10] *Anarchist Morality,* p. 11.
[11] *Mutual Aid,* p. ix.

of whatever is original in him, the greatest fruitfulness of intelligence, feeling and will."[12]

The existence of primitive communistic communities suggests to him that if the State were destroyed, communistic societies would spontaneously spring up from the ruins. The State is, therefore, a stumbling-block in the way of perfect liberty of the individual, "the blood-sucker,"[13] in fact, the arch-enemy. He sees in it nothing but "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 to prevent their restoration."[14] His anarchism is directed against the State, being essentially astatism and apolitism, and also against authority in every form, and he defines it as the "no-government theory of socialism." He has no use even for the democratic State, for Parliament cannot help the weak; nor are, he believes, electoral methods the way to find those who can represent the people. The root of the evil lies in the very principle of the State, and therefore the State is not to be reformed and modified but annihilated. Like many other Russian thinkers, Kropotkin believed in the Revolution as the appropriate engine for the destruction of his enemy, the State, and considered Revolution as the accelerated period in a process of natural evolution, as natural and necessary as the slower processes. It was, therefore, not an accident but an ideal and an inspiration, and the aim of the revolutionary must be to guide it in its channel so that it may yield the best results. Of the Revolution as an ideal he writes in the closing words of *Law and Authority* with all the fervor of the French revolutionaries of the late eighteenth century.

"In the next revolution we hope that this cry will go forth: Burn the guillotines; demolish the prisons; drive away the judges, policemen and informers—the impurest race upon the face of the earth; treat as a brother the man who has been led by passion to do ill to his fellow; above all, take from the ignoble products of middle-class idleness the possibility of displaying their vices in attractive colors, and be sure that but few crimes will mar our society, as the main supports of crime are idleness, law and authority; laws about property, laws about government, laws about penalties and misdemeanors; and authority, which takes upon itself to manufacture these laws and apply them. No more laws! No more judges! Liberty, equality and practical human sympathy are the only effec-

[12] *Anarchism, Its Philosophy and Ideal*, p. 20.

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 19.

[14] *The State, Its Historic Role*, p. 39.

tual barriers we can oppose to the anti-social instincts of certain among us."

His Utopian revolution is very different from the reality in Russia. His revolution amounted almost to the peaceful dissolution of the State by agreement, as in the dreams of Shelley. Kropotkin's revolutionaries were to have a distinct aim, to choose the right moment for the crisis. Civil war was to be restricted and the number of victims was to be as small as possible.

It is characteristic of Kropotkin's temper that he desired no unnecessary blood-letting, but he recognized the right of individual acts of violence if undertaken in the last resort and as an act of self-defense. Tyrannicide is permissible according to him, because the terrorist asks us in advance to slay him should he become a tyrant. "Treat others as you would wish them to treat you in similar circumstances."[15] This argument, of course, would only be valid in the case of the destruction of a Lenin, not of a Romanoff.

As the *raison d'être* of the Revolution is to produce small self-governing agricultural communities, each cultivating its communal land, and fairly sharing the produce among its members, the objections to his communal Utopia, which are obvious, may be indicated. He assumes a race of men who will be moral from habit, and who need no compulsion to do the right thing. "Men are to be moralized only by placing them in a position which shall contribute to develop in them those habits which are social and to weaken those which are not so. A morality which is instinctive is the true morality." It is easy to draw up a scheme of a new society in which no member is anti-social. Kropotkin's method of dealing with the case of a work-shy member of a community is, as Professor Masaryk puts it, extremely amiable but somewhat childish.[16] Let us suppose, he says, that a group of men have combined to carry out an undertaking. One man proves disorderly and work-shy: what is to be done? Is the group to be dissolved, or is it to be given an overseer who will dictate punishments or keep a time-book of work done? Kropotkin solves the difficulty in the following way. The comrades will say to the comrade whose conduct is injuring the undertaking: "Good friend, we should like to go on working with you, but since you often fail to turn up and often neglect your work, we shall have to part company. Go and seek other comrades who will get on better with you."

Kropotkin's contributions to sôcial science are, as we have seen,

[15] Masaryk, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 386.

[16] *Ibid.*

Bakuninist and concerned with theory. Of greater practical value is his discussion of the advantages which civilized societies could gain from a combination of industry with intensive agriculture, of brain with manual work. His ideal State is a society of *integrated labor*, where each individual is producer of both manual and intellectual work; where each able-bodied worker works both in the field and in the workshop.[17] The value of such a combination had already been emphasized and discussed under the names of "harmonized labor," "integral education" and so on. Specialization had been the direct outcome of the industrial revolution, and economists had proclaimed the necessity of dividing the world into national workshops, having each of them its speciality. So it had been for some time past; so it ought to remain. "It being proclaimed that the wealth of nations is increased by the amount of profits made by the few, and that the largest profits are made by means of specialization of labor, the question was not conceived to exist as to whether human beings would always submit to such a specialization; whether nations could be specialized like isolated workmen."[18]

At a definite stage of the industrial revolution, union between agricultural and industrial work could only be a remote desideratum. But the simplification of the technical processes in industry, partly due to the increasing division of labor, has brought such a synthesis nearer. Agriculture has also changed, and it is on the possibilities of the *petite culture* and the new methods of transmission of motive power in industry, that Kropotkin insists.[19] "It is precisely in the most densely populated parts of the world that agriculture has lately made such strides as hardly could have been guessed twenty years ago. As to the future, the possibilities of agriculture are such that in truth we cannot yet foretell what would be the limit of the population which could live from the produce of a given area."

[17] *Fields, Factories and Workshops*, p. 6. Where Černyševskii advocated social reforms in connection with the concrete conditions of the day, as for example when he deals with the decay of silk-weaving in Lyons, his suggestions were extremely modest; the weavers, he tells us, must have their workshops outside the town, must cultivate a plot of land in addition to working at their looms, etc.

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 3.

[19] "It would be a great mistake to imagine that industry ought to return to the handwork stage in order to be combined with agriculture. Whenever a saving of human labor can be obtained by means of a machine, the machine is welcome and will be resorted to.

"Why should not the cottons, the woolen cloth, the silks, now woven by hand in the villages, be woven by machinery in the same villages, without ceasing to remain connected with work in the fields? There is no reason why the small motor should not be much more general in use than it is now, wherever there is no need to have a factory." *Op. cit.*, p. 220.

He sees as the present tendency of industry the aggregation of the greatest possible variety of industries in each country, side by side with agriculture, instead of over-specialization in industry. The industries must scatter themselves all over the world, and "the scattering of industries amidst all civilized nations will be followed by a further scattering of factories over the territories of each nation."[20] Under this new distribution, industrial nations would revert to a combination of agriculture with industry, and there would ensue, in Kropotkin's Utopia, an integration of labor on the part of the worker, who would divide his time working for some hours, for instance, at his loom and for others in his garden.

All this is very much in the spirit of Fourier, who maintains that "all labor may be pleasant; it is only overwork that is unpleasant, and that should be unnecessary," and that "change of occupation is good; no man ought to devote long consecutive hours to one piece of work." The hours of labor are to be reduced by the abolition of the idle class. "We must recognize that Franklin was right in saying that to work five hours a day would generally do for supplying each member of a civilized nation with the comfort now accessible for the few only, provided everybody took his due share in production....more than one half of the working day would then remain to every one for the pursuit of art, science or any hobby he might prefer....Moreover, a community organized on the principle of all being workers would be rich enough to conclude that every man and woman, after having reached a certain age—say forty or more—ought to be relieved of the moral obligation of taking a direct part in the performance of the necessary manual work."[21]

In Kropotkin's conception of society all common and necessary commodities would be available to every one without stint, laid on, as it were, like water is at present. As he points out, without a certain leaven of communism in the present, societies could not exist. "In spite of the narrowly egoistic turn given to men's minds by the commercial system, the tendency toward communism is constantly appearing....The bridges, for the use of which a toll was levied in old days, are now become public property and free to all; museums, free libraries, free schools, free meals for children; parks and gardens, open to all, streets paved and lighted, free to all, water supplied to every house without measure or stint—all

[20] *Ibid.*, p. 225.

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 264.

such arrangements are founded on the principle 'Take what you need.'"[22]

Leaving the material side of Kropotkin's scheme, there is a divergence of opinion as to the human factor, the motive leading men to work. Supporters of the existing wage-system maintain that if the wage-system were abolished men would cease to do enough work to support the community in tolerable comfort. Kropotkin holds that practically every one will prefer work to idleness, because it is "overwork that is repulsive to nature, not work.... work, labor, is a physiological necessity, a necessity for spending accumulated bodily energy, a necessity which is life and health itself." Mr. Bertrand Russell, basing his view too exclusively upon the willingness to work of the *intelligenzia*,[23] also believes that "nine tenths of the necessary work of the world could ultimately be made sufficiently agreeable to be preferred before idleness even by men whose bare livelihood would be assured, whether they worked or not. There would, of course, be a certain proportion of the population who would prefer idleness. *Provided the proportion were small,* this need not matter."[24]

The contents of Kropotkin's books and pamphlets can be thus divided into the advocacy of (1) communistic anarchism, and (2) of intensive production; and while the former is the negation of the existing order, his views on production might well be carried out under a socialist or a capitalist régime. His views on production, remarkably concrete and convincing, have had, perhaps, more effect in England than his communistic anarchism, and it is obvious that Mr. Bertrand Russell is under his influence. In his *Roads to Freedom*, Mr. Russell, from the point of view of liberty, has "no doubt that the best system would be one not far removed from that advocated by Kropotkin, but rendered more practicable of the adoption of the main principles of guild socialism." The plan of the Utopia sketched by Mr. Russell in the last pages of his book is Kropotkin's,[25] with certain criticisms and reservations.

Of Kropotkin's attempt to influence Russia directly on his return there in June, 1917, little has been heard. An eyewitness saw

[22] *The Conquest of Bread*, p. 35.

[23] "I think it reasonable to assume that few would choose idleness in view of the fact that even now at least nine out of ten of those who have, say, £100 a year from investments prefer to increase their income by paid work." *Roads to Freedom*, London, 1918, p. 193.

[24] *Ibid.*, p. 114.

[25] Cf. pp. 104-114, 193, 197.

his "venerable figure" on the railway platform at Tornea on the Swedish-Finnish frontier, talking to a group of soldiers, and "the word ran round the station, 'Kropotkin has come home.' More and more pressed round him to hear the reiterated declaration in his quavering voice: 'We must have peace, but, friends, unless it is peace with victory, our brothers will have died in vain.'" All along the line crowds collected at each station to see him, and cheered Russia and war and Kropotkin and liberty, while the bands beat out the Marseillaise. "At Viborg, three thousand soldiers paraded in the station, and the train was delayed until he had reviewed them to the thunders of the Marseillaise and the plaudits that drowned the drums. One of his family murmured to the writer: 'He insisted on returning—he thinks it his duty to his people, but I know that he is going to his death. He will never leave Petrograd alive.'"[26] He reached Petrograd at a time when Russia was attempting to put into practice the most advanced doctrines of European socialism, and descended into a whirlpool of pandestruction very different from the benevolent anarchism that he had advocated. A report of his death was spread, but a later account spoke of him at Kharkov, under surveillance, but not, fortunately, renewing his acquaintance with Russian prisons.

[26] *Country Life,* Jan. 11, 1919.