Article

No. 38

Subject
"Nihilism"

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by way of interviews with intelligent fellow creatures, supposed to be "au courant" rather than through an overhauling of books pamphlets and other masses of printed matter bearing on the subject.

We have found that provided the victims belonged to the brainy class of humanity, we have always had cause to congratulate ourselves on the success obtained with our newly patented apparatus called the "Interviewer" warranted endurable if not entirely painless. It made us get our knowledge fast enough, cheap enough and with much comfort. Hence the most immediate result always was a feeling of

general benevolence, and a consequent anxiety to see ~~to it~~ that the rest of all mankind be benefitted at once.

We never resisted the impulse, but always yielded the mighty weapon and started in as we propose to do ~~again~~ now.

For some time past our mind has been running on "Nihilism". What "Anarchy" meant we thought had been clearly enough shown by the Chicago Events. Was Nihilism to be considered as its twin brother, or only as closely related to ~~the Communist~~ it or as altogether distinct in ~~its~~ principles and aims?

What kind of connection if any, were found to exist between these two and the other two "isms" viz: Communism and Socialism?

Laying awake one night and thinking of what we had read in the daily papers about Nihilism in Russia, the idea flashed through our somewhat excited brain that these four great "isms" of our time ~~were~~ night be like a party of four in a game of Whist. Cutting for partners how does that come out? Cutting for first deal - who is destined to lead? Will honors, if any, be counted and the doors opened to chance or will the game be one of skill and ~~courage~~ pluck, perhaps of desperate pluck alone, strength? Which side of those chance partners will make the trick this time, which the next? And whose will be the victory when the game is ended

some day as end it must.

With such thoughts still bearing us company and while walking the streets of the City, whom should we happen to meet but a Russian gentleman, ~~whom~~ whom we had been introduced two years ago. Nihilism and Russia on the brain and a Russian before our eyes, of course we jumped at the chance, and at the button-hole of our Muscovite friend ~~to talk to him of Cuba~~. An invitation to lunch nailed him down for a comfortable application of our patent apparatus. and we spared him not. He took occasion to remind us of the existence of other Russians besides himself in the City and when we ~~gave~~ mentioned the names of

two compatriots of his whom we had all along numbered among our most esteemed acquaintances, he insisted on our consulting either of them or both rather than him alone, as they were really learned men and philosophical thinkers. We followed our friend's advice, called on those men and were rewarded by their characteristically kind willingness to impart as much knowledge, regarding the origin, principles aims and present condition of nihilism in Russia to us as they possessed themselves:

Our first mentioned friend, let him be designated as a — had really surprised us

by some of his statements and convictions. He traced the origin of the word "Nihilist" to the principal character in one of Turgenieff's celebrated novels ~~namely that of~~ entitled "Fathers and children". Although a novel in form, the book is ~~contains the~~ an actual history of mental progress in Russia ~~and the~~ showing the difference in thoughts and feelings ~~of~~ the youthful generation of the present day as compared with the last preceding one.
A young student, with a heart overflowing with the purest love of humanity, and with the ardent ambition to be of service to his country and to his fellow men, had become somewhat conspicuous by the repeated enunciation of one of his principles

viz: "that nothing under the sun ought to be taken for granted or be accepted by intelligent beings without special investigation." So then ~~our~~ the young student became known as a "Nihilist" that is to say as a person determined to accept "nihil" the Latin for "nothing" for granted. Bazarroff (our young philosophers name) had many admirers and followers and as such they took pride in being ~~accepting~~ ~~the~~ designated ~~for themselves~~ as "Nihilists", in honor of the founder of their philosophical league society. So that in Russia proper the word Nihilism did not by any means indicate any tendencies for destruction or upsetting of existing social or political institutions, ~~as [illegible]~~,

~~so strong~~, and for a long time meant nothing more than what is expressed in the Sentence "Accept Nothing without examination".

Ivan Turgenieff, ~~who~~ died only five years ago in Paris France, whence his body was transported back to his native land and there buried with great honors.

He had become a great author of works of fiction with high tendencies for benefitting humanity, ~~and~~ reforming abuses and elevating the moral tone of the people, long before Nihilism was ever heard of in Russia. While it gradually became known in that country and

finally all over the world, he (Turgenieff) had made it the principal theme of many of his magnificently written stories, so that he was before his death and is now still considered high authority on the subject. — While Turgenieff wrote, Nihilism in Russia ~~was~~ existed only as a theory and had not as yet ~~not~~ the revolutionary sting attributed to it which it has at the present time. It proposed examination and urged investigation of everything existing. The popular idea of its meaning a desire to "destroy everything and to erect nothing" is an erroneous fallacy. The true mission of Nihilism in Russia has been more

than once proven by the nature of the demands made by its adherents at the hands of the Government. A letter was addressed to Alexander III a few days after the assassination of his father. The nihilists demands were as follows:

The Government shall call upon the people to elect representatives to a National assembly, which shall examine the affairs of the Nation. "We shall submit "unconditionally to whatever "decision this assembly may "come to" says the letter.

It provides however that all restrictions of the freedom of assemblage, of speech and of the liberty of the press shall be suspended during the

process of election ~~and~~ of ~~during~~ representatives and during the session of the assembly - Does it not appear from this that the Nihilists have no desire to force on the people any particular form of Government; but merely wish that for once - (it has not happened ~~to be so~~ for 10 centuries) - the people may be placed in a position to look into the state of their own national affairs, to see how they are governed and to judge whether improvements could not be introduced. Should the National assembly declare the present autocratic form of Government as best adapted for the wants of the Russian people, the Nihilists pledge submission to the verdict

Does not

~~And~~ the demand for a suspension of all restrictions of free press and free speech during the period of elections and of the sitting of the National Congress ~~does not that itself~~ show ~~on what means~~ where Nihilism places its reliance and its hopes for great results?

It has been stated that Nihilists represents Atheism, Communism and Socialism all combined.

Regarding the former we will state that Nihilism does not demand of any one to renounce his God because a certain authority has ridiculed the idea of His Existence, neither does it claim that one must or

aught to believe in the bible because a great many people claim for it divine origin.

"Bow down before no authority, says Nihilism, 'examine for yourself then accept or reject.'" But while Nihilism stands neutral in regard to religion, and although some Nihillists dying on the scaffold, have kissed the cross and made spiritual preparation for the world to come, yet the fact can not be denied that the majority of them are Atheists. On the other hand it must be mentioned that in Russia Atheism is common among all the intelligent classes of society whether they are or are not Nihilists; so

that it would be rank injustice to attribute Atheism to the latter in particular. ~~Possibly~~ The fact that the powers of the Czar include absolute sway over the church, to which if he should choose to do so, he can give any form or shape even to abolishing it altogether, ~~Has~~ may possibly have helped the intelligent classes of the people to a ~~better~~ different sort of conception in religious matters and induced them to appear as Atheists before the world, because in Russia, to adopt any creed differing from the Greek catholic, or to worship otherwise than as the Czar want it done, is a punishable crime. — Not even investigation of religious subjects is possible under

the present regime. Foreign missionaries are forbidden to step on the soil of Russia and religious discussions are prohibited by Law.
Now about Communism:
The word does not even sound bad, let alone its implying anything frightful when ~~it~~ mentioned in holy Russia, where in hundreds of Rural districts communism is found in actual operation, where the people still work in Common on land which they hold in common, and the produce of which they make use of in common.
Hence Communism can not be considered as part and parcel of Nihilism or of Nihilistic teaching

It continues to be practically adhered to by the most uneducated of Russia's sons – the peasants.

Regarding Socialism and its special ~~relations~~ connection with Nihilism their mutual relations may be fairly described as follows: Although in the Abstract Nihilism does not directly point to any particular form of political and social organization and though the bulk of its followers are either believers in Constitutional monarchy or outspoken republicans, it is well known that its most fanatically turbulent and most violent agitators, the

men that are always ready to do the fighting and the terroristic part in what they deem the necessary initiatory steps to bring about the change in the Government resolved upon; the individuals who supply the national demand for Martyrs and furnish the victims for the gallows of despotism, are Socialists. ~~In Russia~~ They are called by that name or by that of "Democrats" and they figure before the world as the "Will of the people Party." In Russia as well as all over the rest of the world these people insist on a change not only of the political

but also of the social
status of Nations. As the
name implies, the mem-
bers profess entire willing-
ness to submit to the will
of the people but at the same
time they have a platform
of their own, its principles being
democratic and socialistic,
and with such a platform
they wish to be looked upon
by the nation at large as a
party. Let us put down
here an extract from their
preamble and declaration
of principles:

"By our general conviction
"we are socialists and democrats
"We are convinced that only
"on socialistic grounds human-
"-ity can become the em-
"bodiment of freedom, equality

"and fraternity, securing
"for itself the general pros-
"perity and the full and
"harmonious development
"of man and of social pro-
-gress. We are convinced
"moreover that only the will
"~~will~~ of the nation should
"give sanction to any social
"institution and the develop-
"ment of the nation may
"be called sound only when
"independent and free and
"when every idea which is to
"receive practical application
"has previously passed the test
"of the national understanding
"and national will."

"We think therefore that
as socialists and democrats we
must recognize as our immediate
purpose the liberation of
the nation from the oppres-
sion of its present state by

creating a political re-
-volution with the object
of transferring the supreme
power into the hands of
the nation."

"We think that the will
of the nation should be expres-
sed with perfect clearness and
should be applied by a na-
-tional assembly freely elected
by the votes of all citizens
and provided with instruc-
tions from their constituents.
We do not consider this
as the ~~most~~ ~~perfect~~ ideal form
of manifestation regarding the
people's will but feel in honor bound
to accept it as the only one
~~one~~ possible to be realized in
practise."

"Submitting ourselves completely
to the will of the nation we,
as a party, feel bound to

appear before the country with our own programm which we shall propagate ~~before the~~ in advance of the coming revolution, recommending it to the electors during the electoral periods and which we shall defend in the National assembly. This programm consists of the following heads:

1. The permanent Representative Assembly to have the supreme control and direction in all General State questions.
2. In the provinces Self-Government to a large extent and in order to secure this, all public functionaries to be elected by the people.
3. Independence of the village commune ("Mir") as an economical and administrative unit.

4. All lands to be proclaimed "National property."

5. A series of measures preparing for a final transfer of the ownership of all manufactures to the workingmen.

6. Perfect liberty of the press, of conscience, speech, meeting, association and electoral agitation.

7. The right to vote to be extended to all citizen of legal age without any class or property - distinction.

8. Abolition of the standing army and replacing of it by a territorial militia.

Articles 4 and 5 being the only ones that contain socialistic demands, attention ought to be called to the repeatedly enunciated declaration

on the part of the Nihilists and socialists; that the will of the Nation alone can give sanction to political or social acts and that this sanction should be sought for peaceably by way of addressing the electors and of advocating it in the National Assembly.

From all the above stated facts our Russian friend A— who is a painter by trade with some journalistic aspirations, for which he he does not lack the requisite talent, has derived a firm conviction that Nihilism is a principle which has not now, nor ever has had anything to do with bomb throwing or with violence in any shape

Our other two friends, one of whom is a professor of natural science and prominent chemist, the other a physician, graduates from the medical colleges of Russia, France & Austria, we had the pleasure of meeting jointly very soon after our interview with friend A—
Both these Gentlemen are evidently lovers of their country, for which they predict a grand future but they are far from being political agitators. They have lived in the United States for several years, preferring our institutions to the obstructions to professional life as found in the dominions of the Czar. Their views on Nihilism agree and are as follows:

"At the present day there is hardly any distinction to be made between Nihilism and Socialism in Russia. A determined opposition to the absolute monarchical form of Government exists among the intelligent classes in all parts of the Empire, not excepting even persons officially connected with the Government, who of course keep their convictions a secret. The universal desire is "Reform". The degree and nature of such reform, the ways and means to be used to obtain it, are subjects for wide differences of opinion in the different provinces among the members forming the organizations that have now spread all over ~~of that~~ the vast dominion

which constitutes European and Asiatic Russia. Nothing like a real head-center or central revolutionary committee is known to exist. It really has no being, but there are numbers of leaders in spirit, courage intelligence and devotion, affiliated with the progressive party and who reside in England, in Switzerland France Germany, in America and in Russia itself, who from time to time manage to agree on the issuing of proclamations and appeals, at periods considered opportune for some act of terrorism against the Government and there appears never

to have been much difficulty in finding among the fanatically excited followers of the creed any number of willing tools, ready to risk liberty and life for the cause.
In that progressive party in Russia which there may be called Socialists or Democrats or Republicans or Nihilists (the later name has for some time past been given to all of them indiscriminately) there exists a great variety of opinions regarding, as we stated before, the nature of the Reform and the means to accomplish it. Some desire a constitutional monarchy with all its respective characteristics as: Transfer

of all Legislative power to the Representatives of the people, with control of the national finances, freedom of assembly of speech and of the press, responsible Ministry &c. &c. Others are striving for a Republic with more or less ~~of~~ radical changes in social institutions and laws; for instance, in such as refer to the possession of land and to protection of labor-interest from oppression by the powers of capital and monopoly.

But the point on which all these shades of opinion agree fully and towards which they all are tending, is the absolute necessity of abolishing the monarchy as

it now exists, with its omnipotence over life, property, yea over the very functions of the soul and mind of every individual in Russia from the prince in his palace ~~near the steps of the throne~~ to the peasant in his log cabin. And thus it is that we find the aspirations, wishes and demands of a hundred millions of people, facing an opposing array of Government-forces, organized as Civil service, as army and navy, as police and last but not least for a powerful ally, as the National Church —

A philosophical looker on

can hardly fail to see that whenever ~~our~~ the progressive party in this struggle against the so called conservatives, resorts to argument either in speech or in literature for the purpose of demonstrating the necessity of reform as a matter of National interest, but in opposition to the interests of the conservatives; the latter invariably ~~th~~ answer ~~to~~ such arguments by a resort to the use of brute force viz: Imprisonment, flogging, the knout ~~or~~ and rape of the executioner or banishment to Siberia with its well known horrors.

And again from this very "modus operandi" of the Government the opposition

imagines that it derives the natural ~~a~~ right to make use of terroristic measures in their turn not alone in retaliation ~~not alone~~ but as a natural consequence of their being deprived of any other means of resistance. When terrorism has thus been made a permanent institution in a country, the population of which from North to South and from East to West has always and justly so, been considered as excelling in mildness of manners, in hospitality, sociability, and a charitable and generous disposition, Russian statesmanship does not seem

to loom up as conspicuously grand, and distinguished for wisdom. What are safety valves or steamboilers?- Is there any other Government-Engine on the face of the Earth, (the Interior of Africa perhaps excepted) which does not possess some sort of a contrivance to guard against explosion. Meetings, public speeches, the daily press, the national literature they all serve as efficient safety valves; Abuses are endured, hardships and injustice are borne while there is hope for amelioration in the very struggle for the righting of wrong. But in holy Russia, God save the mark, the

Government, a giant in size and a giant in weight, actually sits down on and keeps on sitting down on the life protecting safety valve of its own mighty engine. x x x x x

We do not pretend to be prophets. x x x x

Let us illustrate a little; to reward our readers for following us so patiently; we are handing the pen over to a better man now this very minute. Here goes his story:

Some years ago the Chief of Police in Saint Petersburgh, Gen. Trapoff, was wounded by a pistol shot fired at him at close range by

a young woman named "Viera Sassulitch".
Trapoff had arrested a young man on suspicion of high treason, kept him in jail and had him flogged from time to time to ~~in~~ force him to denounce his alleged fellow conspirators.
The young man had been a friend and admirer of "Viera Sassulitch" — She was tried before a jury in the Capital of Russia and the jury found her "not guilty".
The action of acquittal by that jury showed the general disaffection of the people with so ~~[illegible]~~ plainly that the Government

at once resolved to pass and did pass a law that hereafter no case of a political crime should be tried before a jury, except one specially appointed by the Government. Under this new arrangement many cases have been tried since, but the Government has reserved to itself the option of either jury trial, in which case the jurymen are specially selected, or of having the accused tried, condemned and sentenced ~~and~~ by the judge alone without jury or even without the formality of any trial at all. —

To speak again of Vera Sassulitch, she was to

be rearrested and tried over again but some persons among the multitude of friends the Government had made for her, succeeded in spiriting her away during the first stages of the excitement caused by the verdict, and she was seen in Russia no more. Her name though has became a by word for the illustration of Russian justice and whenever it is spoken of or remembered it calls to mind the existence of the notorious branch

of ~~the~~ our Russiatic Imperialism namely the Terrible Third Section of the Ministry of the Household. Its head is always the general in Command of the Corps of Gens d'armes. It is a very large force of armed detectives either in full military uniform or in Citizens clothes; they are detailed in detachments or by twos ~~and~~ or threes and stationed everywhere, even in the most insignificant villages of Russia.

Any member of that Corps under a simple order

from a superior, can arrest, imprison and even transport to Siberia any person in Russia without warrant or any other process of Law whatsoever. —
Is it any wonder then that such institutions and such practices are no longer considered by the Russian Nation as compatible with the spirit of the 19th century and with the immense strides they have made since the times of Peter the Great towards civilization and science of the highest order. How can matters

continue to go on as they are now in a country whose literature need not fear comparison with that of any other in Europe.

True this literature has to be published abroad mostly and introduced into its own home by stealth, but it is nevertheless Russian literature to the very core, distinguished by touching originality and expressing, as we think in a masterly manner, the genius, the poetical humour and the true heart throbbings of a great people.

In honor of that literature of Russia we propose to conclude our present letter with a passage contained in Ivan Turgenieff's work: "Verses in prose". It is a poetical epitome of the tragical condition of Russia's patriots; its title is "The Threshold."

"I see a huge building, with "a narrow door in its front-"wall; the door is open and "a dismal darkness stretches "beyond. Before the high "threshold stands a girl - a "Russian girl.

"Frost breathes out of the im-"penetrable darkness and with "the icy draught from the depth "of the building there comes "forth a slow and hollow "voice: O thou who art wan-ting to cross this threshold,

"Does thou know what awaits
" thee?
"I know it, answers the girl."
" Cold, hunger, hatred, derision,
" contempt, insults, a dungeon,
" death even?
"I know it.
" Complete isolation, and
" separation from all?
"I know it. I am ready,
I will bear all sorrows
and miseries."
"Not only if inflicted by Enemies but when ~~it is~~ done
" by kindred and friends?
" Yes even when done by
them"
" Well are you ready for
" self sacrifice?
" "Yes"
" For an anonimous self-
sacrifice? You shall die

"and nobody, nobody shall
"know even whose memory
"is to be honored?

"I want neither gratitude
nor pity. I want no name"

"Are you ready for a crime?
The girl bent her head:
"I am ready even for a
crime."

The voice paused a while be-
fore renewing its questio-
ning.

"Dost thou know" it said at last,
"that thou mayst loose thy
faith in what thou be-
livest now, that thou
mayst feel that thou
hast been mistaken and
hast lost thy young life
in vain?

"I know that also and
nevertheless I will
enter"

"Enter then"!

The girl crossed the thres-
and a heavy curtain
behind her -

someone