

Letter

No. 38

Subject
"Nihilism"

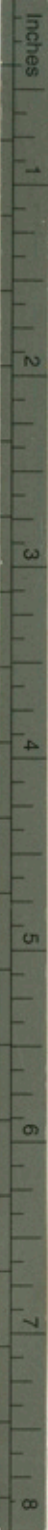
Green

17-27

Chapin
William

2.
by way of interviews with
intelligent fellow creatures,
supposed to be "an courant"
rather than through an over-
hauling of books pamphlets
and other masses of printed
matter bearing on the subject.

We have found that pro-
vided the victims belonged
to the brainy class of human-
ity, we have always had cause
to congratulate ourselves
on the success obtained with
~~the~~ ^{our} newly patented apparatus
called the "Interviewing^{er}" warren-
ted endurable if not entirely
painless. It made us get
our knowledge fast enough,
cheap enough and with much
comfort. Hence the most im-
mediate result always was
a feeling of



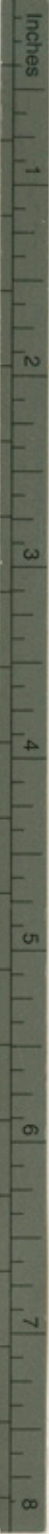
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3.

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

We never resisted the im-
pulse, but ^{always} ~~we~~ the mighty
weapon and started in as we
purpose to do ~~again~~ now.

For some time past our
mind has been running
on "Nihilism". What "Anarchy"
meant me thought had been
clearly enough shown by
the Chicago Events. Was
Nihilism to be considered
as its twin brother, or only
closely related to ~~the former~~ ^{it}
or ^{as something} ~~altogether~~ distinct in its
principles and aims?
What kind of connection, if
any, were found to exist bet-
ween these two and the other
two "isms" viz. Communism
and Socialism?



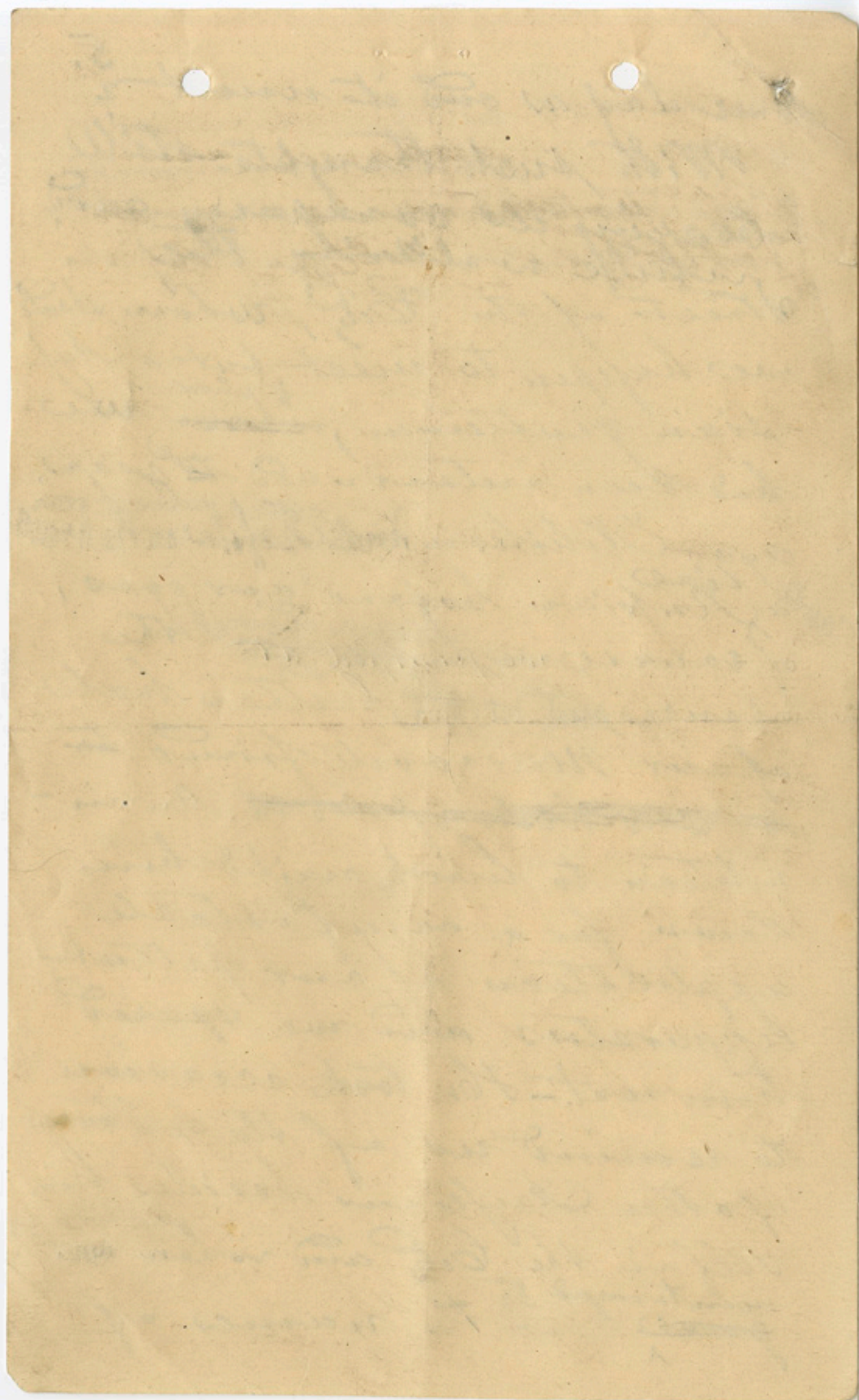
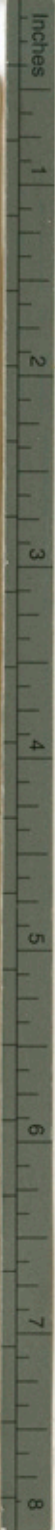
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41

Laying awake one night ^{and}
thinking of what we had
read in the daily papers about
Philism in Russia, ^{the} ~~an~~
idea flitted through our
somewhat excited brains
that those four great "issues"
of our time ~~were~~ ^{would} 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
honours, 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} ~~struggle~~? 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 ^{5.}

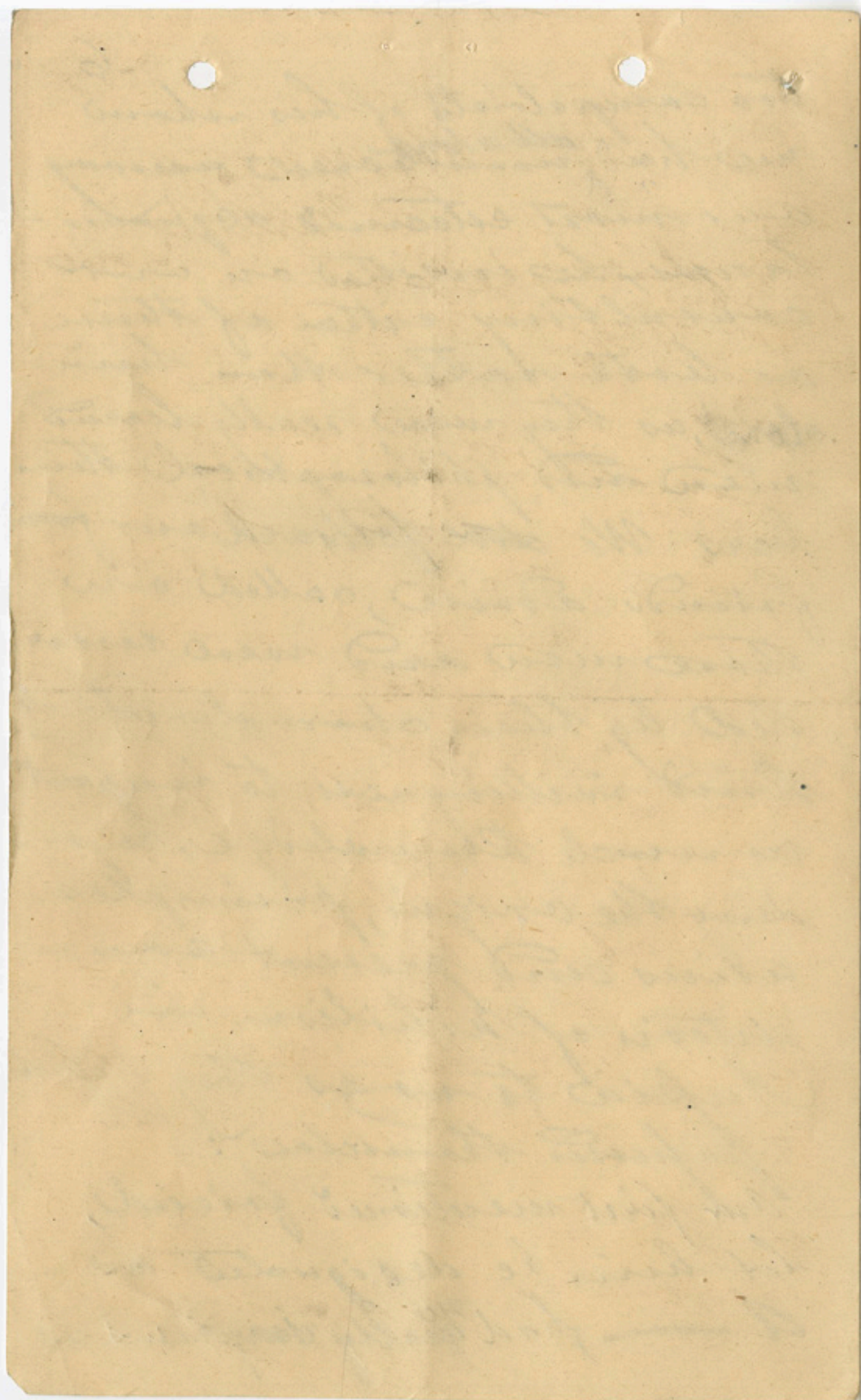
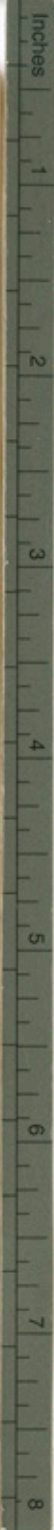
With such thoughts still
bearing us company and
while walking the
Streets of the City, whom should
we happen to meet but a Rus-
sian gentleman, ^{to whom} ~~whom~~ we
had been introduced ^{two} years
ago. "Nihilism and Russia on the brain
^{and} a Russian before our eyes,
of course we jumped at the
chance, and at the invitation
of our Muscovite friend to
~~talk to him of both~~. An in-
vitation 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 him-
self in the City and when we
mentioned ~~gave~~ the names of



6

two compatriots of his whom
we had ^{all along} ~~unintentionally~~ among
our most esteemed acquain-
tances, he insisted on our
consulting either of them
or both rather than him-
alone, as they were really learned
men and philosophical thin-
kers. We ~~did~~ followed our first
friend's advice, called on
those men and were rewar-
ded by their characteristically
kind willingness to impart
as much knowledge, regard-
ing the origin, principles
and present con-
dition of nihilism in
Russia to us as they
possessed themselves:

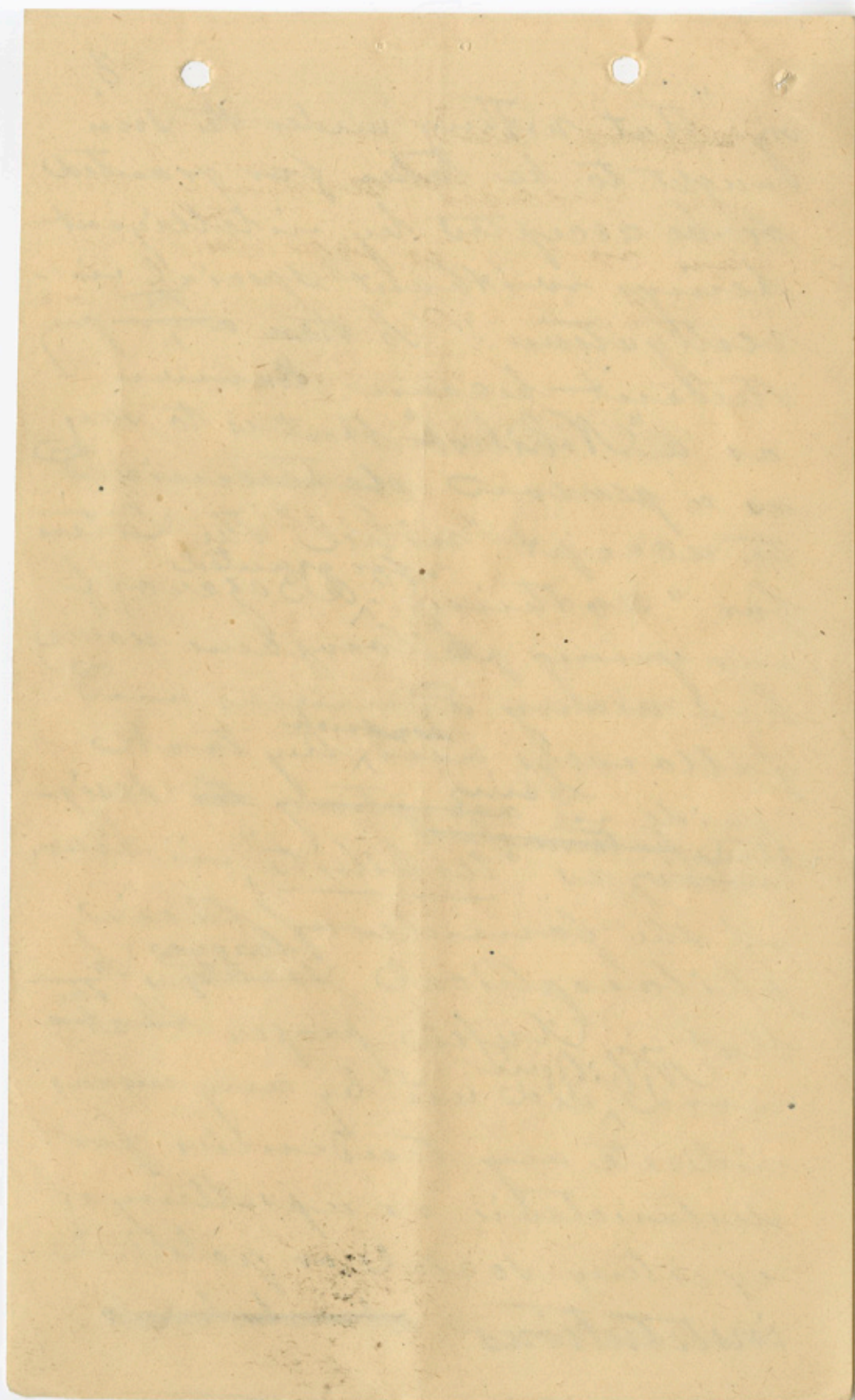
Our first mentioned friend,
let him be designated as
A — had really surprised us



by some of his statements and
convictions. He traced the ori-
gin of the word "Nihilist" to
the principal character in one
of ^{Evans} Turgeneff's celebrated novels
~~namely that of~~ "Father and
children". Although a novel
in form, the book ~~contains~~ ^{is}
~~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 coun-
try and to his fellow men,
had become somewhat con-
spicuous by the repeated eman-
cipation of one of his principles

8.
viz: "that nothing under the sun
ought to be taken for granted
or be accepted by intelligent
beings without special in-
vestigation." 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}. Bazaroff
(our young philosopher's name)
had many admirers and
followers and ^{as such} they took
pride in ~~accepting~~^{being} ~~the~~ ~~designated~~
~~as~~ ^{as} "Nihilists", in honor
of the founder of their
philosophical ^{League} Society, so
that in Russia proper ~~that~~^{the}
word ^{Nihilism} did not by any means
indicate any tendencies for
destructive or upsetting of
existing social or political
institutions, ~~at all~~.



9.
~~so strong~~, and for a long
time meant nothing more
than what is expressed in
the sentence "Accept Nothing
without examination".

Ivan Turgeneff, 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 tenden-
cies 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
 (Turgeneff) had made it
 the principal theme of many
 of his magnificently written
 stories, so that he was be-
 fore his death and is now
 still considered high au-
 thority on the subject. —
 While Turgeneff wrote,
 nihilism in Russia ~~was~~
 existed only as a theory
 and had ^{not} as yet ~~not~~ the re-
 volutionary sting attribu-
 ted 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

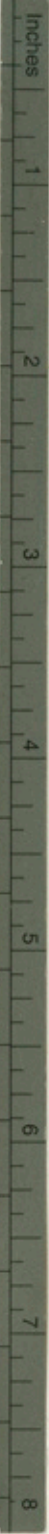
11.

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 nihilist 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.

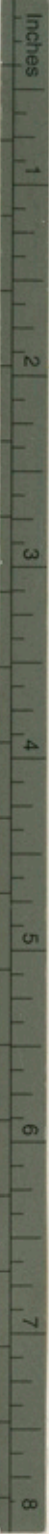
It provided however that all restrictions of the freedom of assemblage, of speech and of the liberty of the press shall be suspended during the

process of election ~~and~~ of 12.
during representatives and
during the session of the assembly - Does it not appear ^{from this} ~~that~~
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.



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Does not
but the demand for a ⁽³⁾
suspension of all restric-
tions of free press and free
speech during the period
of election and of the sitting
of the National Congress
~~does not that itself show~~
~~on what means~~ Nihilism
places its reliance and its
hopes for great results?
It has been stated that Nihil-
ism represents Atheism, Com-
munism 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



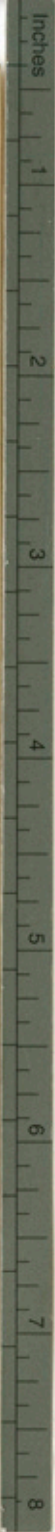
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14.
ought to believe in the bible
because a great many people
claim for it divine origin.

"Now ^{Down} before no authority,
says Nihilism, 'examine for
yourself then accept or
reject.' But while Nihil-
ism stands neutral in re-
gard to religion, and although
some Nihilists dying on the
scaffold, have kissed the
cross and made spiritual pre-
paration for the world to co-
me, yet the fact can not
be denied that the majority
of them are Atheists. On the
other hand it must be men-
tioned that in Russia Athe-
ism is common among
all those 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.

~~Probably~~ The fact that the powers of the Czar include ^{absolute} ~~the~~ sway over the church, ^{to} which if he should choose to do so, he could give any form or shape even to abolishing it altogether; ^{this possibly} may have helped the intelligent classes of the people to a ^{different} ~~higher~~ 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 that of 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.

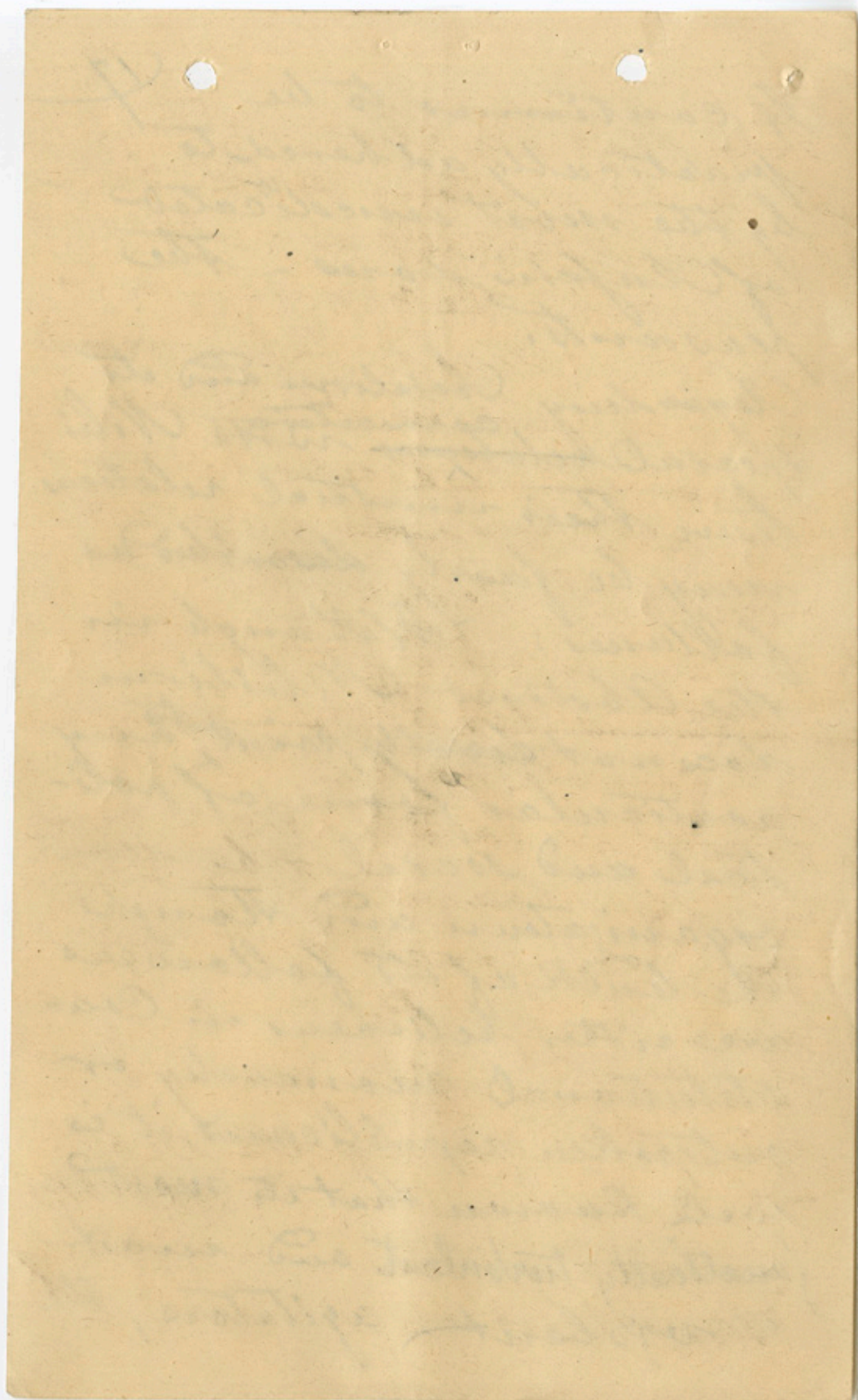
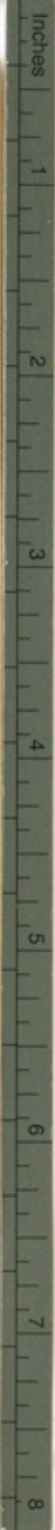
Now about Communism:

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 ~~the~~ 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.

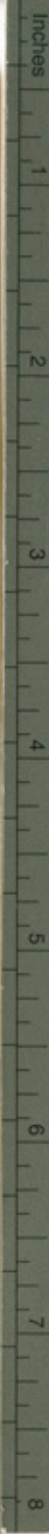
Hence Communism can not be considered as part and parcel of Nihilism, or of Nihilistic teaching.

It continues to be 17.
practically adhered to
by the most uneducated
of Russia's sons - the
peasants.

Regarding Socialism and its
special ~~relations~~ ^{connections} with Nihil-
ism their mutual relations
may be fairly described as
fallacies: Although in
the Abstract Nihilism
does not directly point ^{to any}
particular form of poli-
tical and social
organization and though
the bulk of its followers
are either believers in Con-
stitutional 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 revolutionary 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 Austria 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 Prussia as well as all over the rest of the world these people insist on a change not only of the political



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19.
but also of the Social
States 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 hum-
"anity can become the em-
"bodiment of freedom, equality

and fraternity, securing (20.)
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
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."

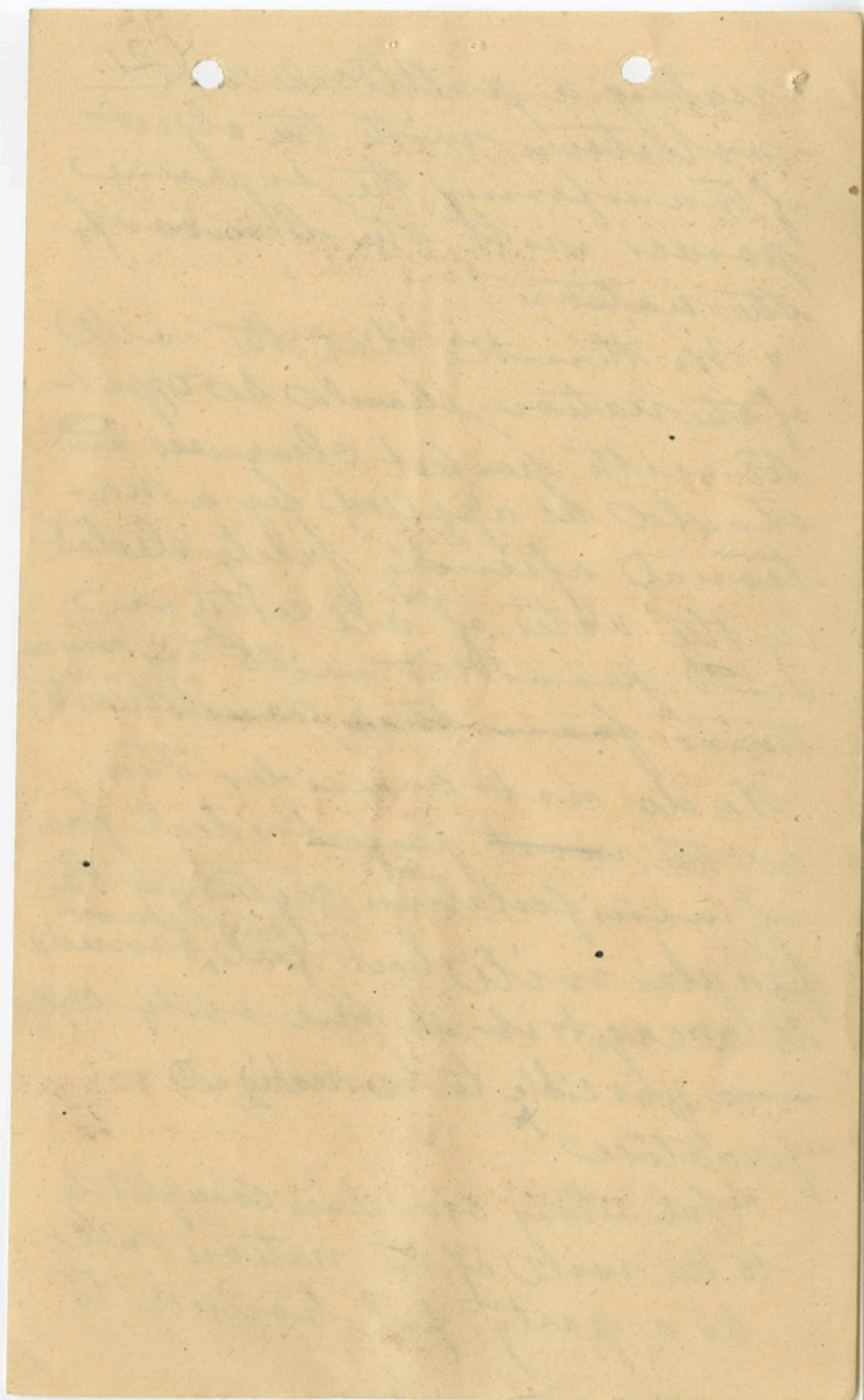
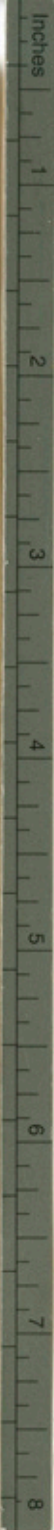
"We think therefore that
as socialists and democrats we
must recognize as our immediate
purpose the liberation of
the nation from the oppres-
sion of its present state by

creating a political re- (21.)
-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 expressed
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
practice.

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



appear before the cam-
 try with our own pro-
 gramme which we shall
 propagate ^{in advance of the coming} ~~before the~~ revolu-
 tion, recommending it to
 the electors during the
 electoral periods and
 which we shall defend
 in the National assembly.
 This programme 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 com-
 mune ("Moir") as an economical
 and administrative unit.

(23.)
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.

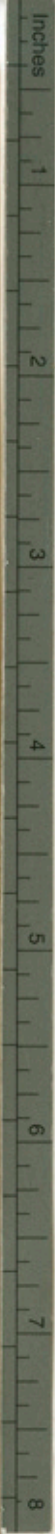
8. Abolition of the standing army and replacing of it by ^a territorial militia.

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

24.

on the part of the Nihilists
and Socialists: that "the
will of the Nation alone
can give sanction to poli-
tical 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 printer 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



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Our other two friends, one of whom is a professor of natural science and prominent chemist, the other a physician, graduated 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:

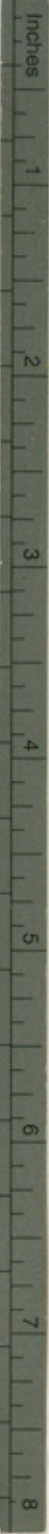
At the present day there is hardly any distinction to be made between Nihilism and Socialism in Russia. A determined opposition to the absolute monarchical form of Government exists among the intelligent classes in all parts of the Empire, not excepting even persons officially connected with the Government, 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 ^{the} vast domain.

which constitutes Euro. 27.
pean and Asiatic Russia.
Nothing like a real head-
-center or central revolution-
-ary 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 con-
sidered opportune for
some act of terrorism
against the Government
and there appears never

(28.)
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 latter 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.

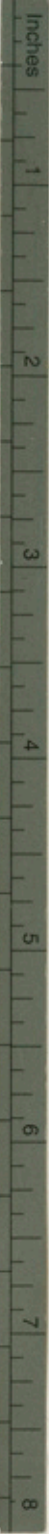
Some desire a constitutional monarchy with ^{all} its respective characteristics as: Transfer



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of all Legislative power 29.
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



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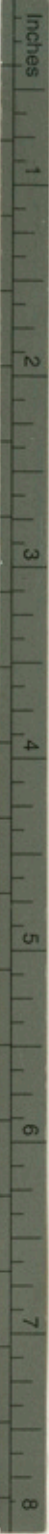
it now exists, with its (30.
omnipotence over life, pro-
perty, yea over the very func-
tions of the soul and mind
of every individual in Russia
from the ^{in his palace} prince near the
~~steps of the throne~~ to the
peasant in his log cabin.
And thus it is that we
find the aspirations, wishes
and demands 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 power-
ful ally, ^{as} the National
Church -

A philosophical looker on

(31.

can hardly fail to see that
whenever ~~the~~ ^{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 con-
servatives; the latter invariably
~~answer to such arguments by~~
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.

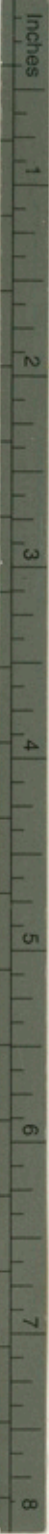
And again from this very
"modus operandi" of the
Government the opposition



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imagines that it derives the natural
~~the~~ right to make use of
terroristic measures in
their turn, ^{not alone} in retaliation ~~not~~
~~alone~~ but as a natural con-
sequence of their being
deprived of ^{any other} means of resis-
tance. 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
wildness of manners, in hospi-
tality, sociability, and a
charitable and generous
disposition. Russian states-
manship does not seem

to loom up as conspicuously
 grand, and distinguished for
 wisdom. What are safety val-
 ves and 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, hard-
 ships and injustice are borne
 while there is hope for ame-
 lioration in the very struggle
 for the righting of wrong,
 but in holy Russia,
 God save the mark, the



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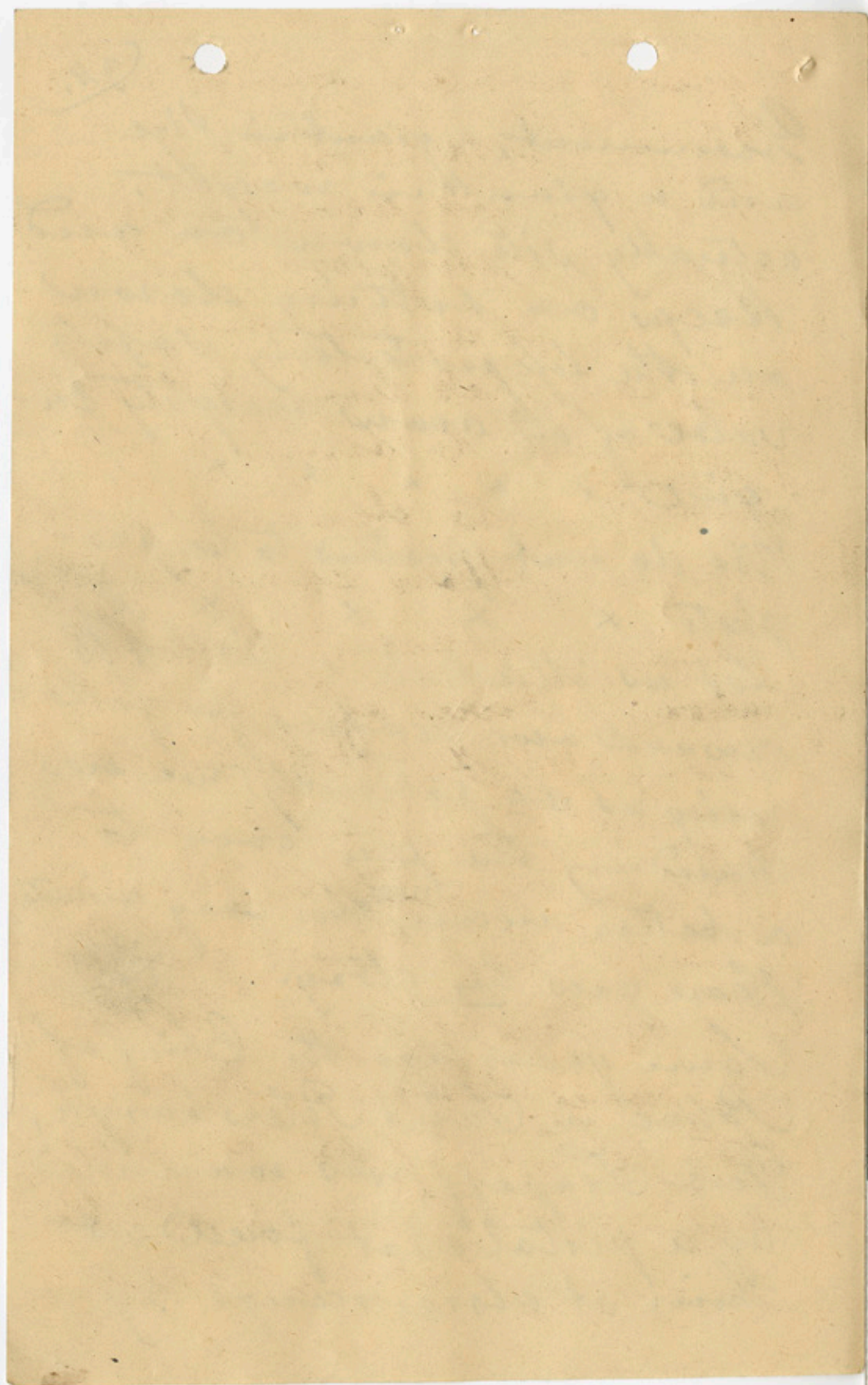
(34.)

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 en-
gine. x x x x x

We do not pretend to be pro-
phets. x x x x

Let us illustrate a little; to
reward our readers for follo-
wing 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 Petersburg,
Geod Trapoff, was wounded
by a pistol shot fired at
him at close range by



35.
a young woman named
"Viera Sassulitch".

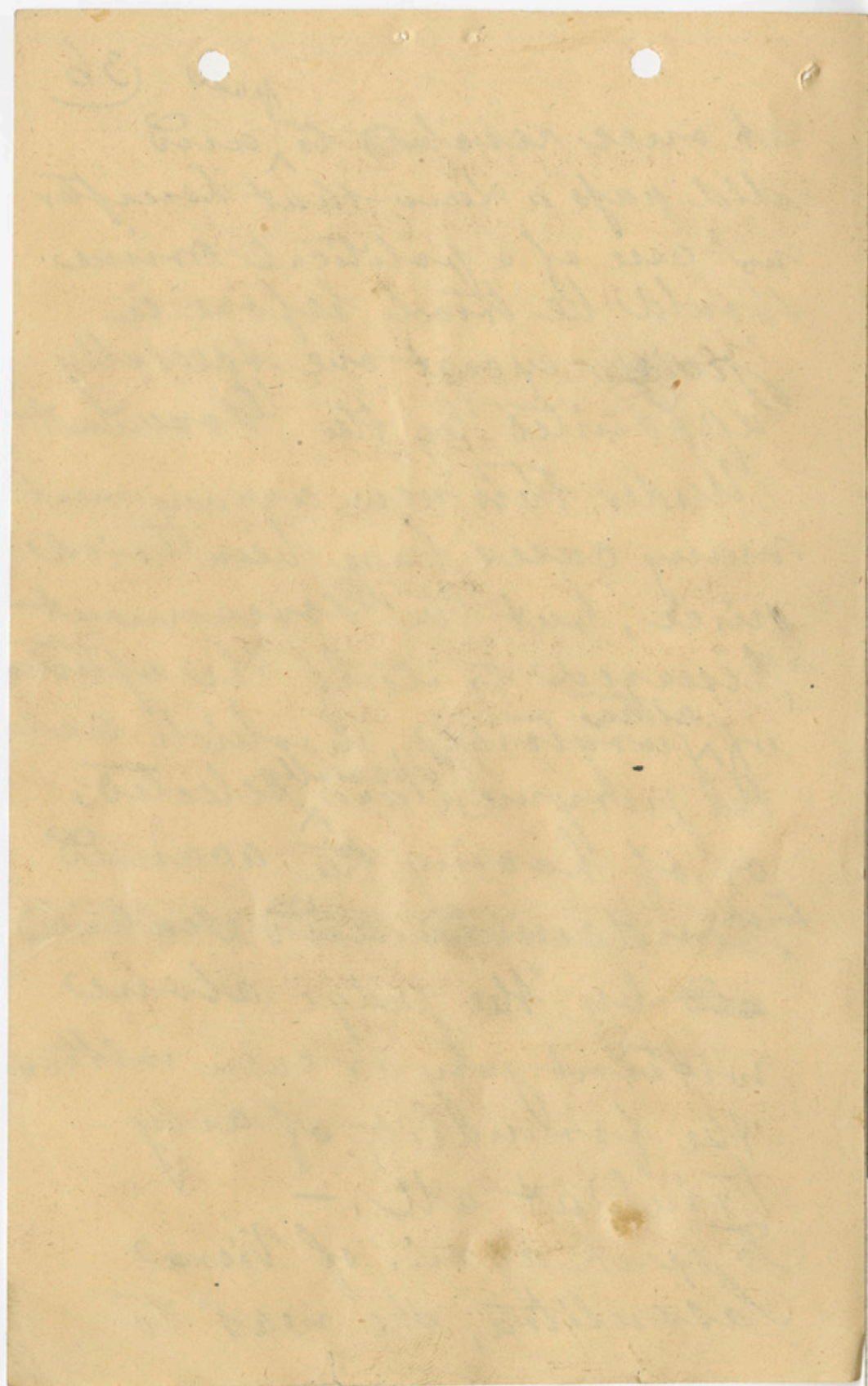
Trapoff had arrested a young
man on suspicion of
high treason, kept him in
jail and had him flogged
from time to time to ~~in~~
~~force~~ ^{force} him to denounce his
alleged fellow conspirators.

The young man had been
a friend and aid 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 the~~ ~~so~~ ~~unmistakably~~
plainly that the Government

pass 36

at once resolved to, 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 ^{specially} are 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 Viera
Lassulitch, she was to



37.

He rearrested and tried over again but some ^{persons among} of 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 become a byword for the illustration of Russian justice and wherever it is spoken of or remembered it calls to mind the existence of the notorious branch

our (38.)
of ~~the~~ semi-asiatic Imperialism
namely the Terrible
Third Section of the
Ministry of the House-
hold. Its head is al-
ways the general in Com-
mand of the Corps of
Gend'armes. It is a
very large force of ar-
med detectives either in
full ^{military} uniform or in
Citizens clothes; they
are detailed in detach-
ments ^{or by twos} and ^{or} singly and
stationed everywhere, even
in the most insignificant
villages of Russia.

Any member of that Corps
under a simple order

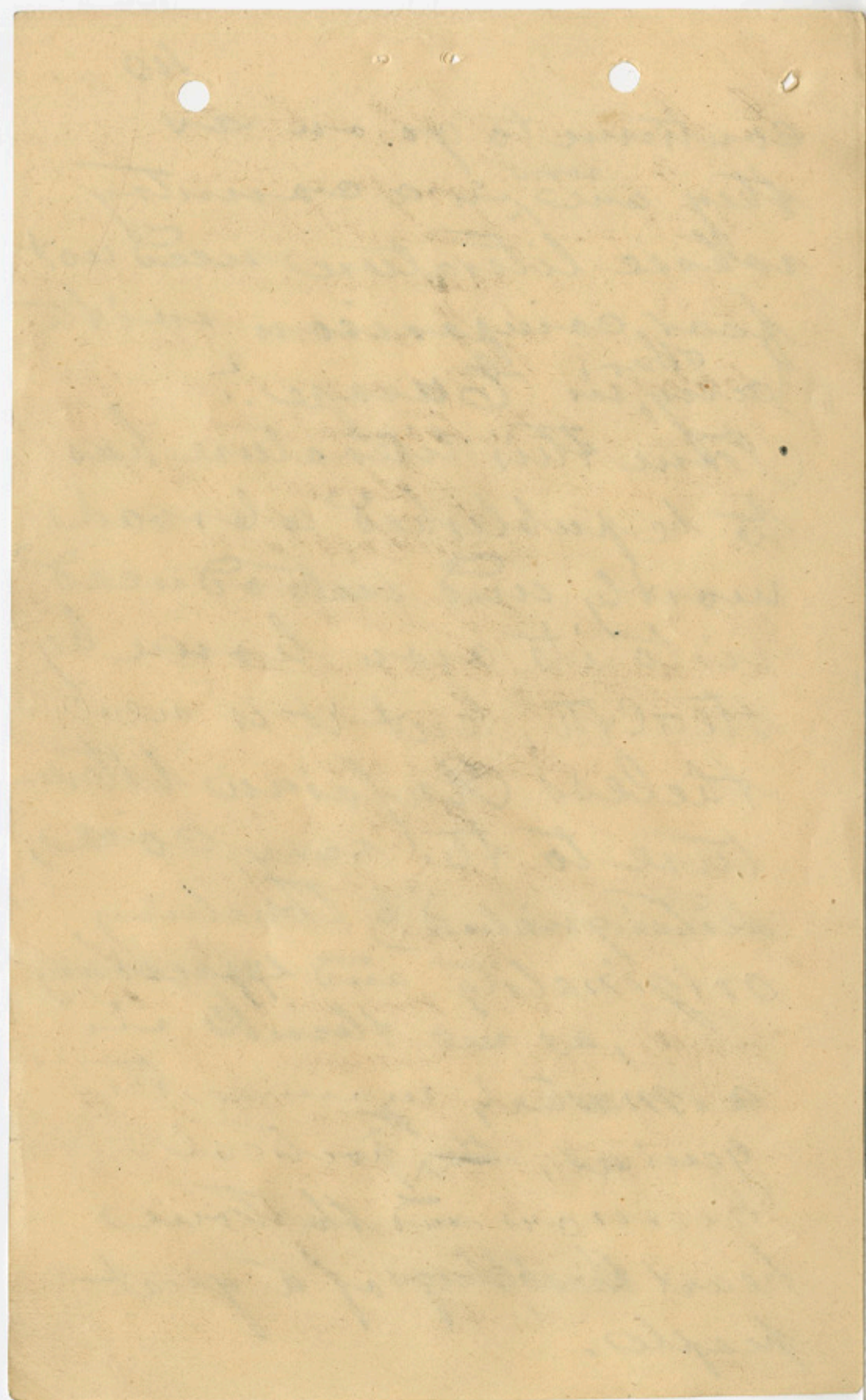
from a superior, can
arrest, imprison and
even transport to Siberia
any person in Russia
without warrant or
any other process of
Law whatsoever. -

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

40

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

True this literature has
to be published abroad
mostly and introduced
into its own home by
stealth, but it is never-
theless Russian litera-
ture to the very core,
distinguished by touching,
originality and expression,
as we think in
a masterly manner, the
genius, ~~the~~ ^{the} poetical
humour and the true
heart throbbings of a great
people.



(41.

In honor of that literature
of Russia we propose to con-
clude our present letter with
a passage contained in Ivan
Turgenev's work: "Verses in
prose". It is a poetical epi-
taph 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 ice-
" 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,



[Faint, illegible handwriting on aged, yellowed paper. The text appears to be a list or series of entries, possibly names and dates, but is too faded to transcribe accurately.]

"Does thou know what awaits
" thee ?

"I know it, answers the girl.

"Cold, hunger, hatred, derision,
" contempt, insults, a dangerous
" 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 mis-
" eries 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 annuinous self-
" sacrifice ? You shall die

[Faint, illegible handwriting on aged paper, possibly bleed-through from the reverse side.]

43.
"and nobody, nobody shall
" know even whose memory
" is to be honoured?

"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-
lievest now, that thou
mayst feel that thou
hast been mistaken and
hast lost thy young life
in vain?"

44.
"I know that also and
nevertheless I will
enter"

"Enter then"!

The girl crossed the thresh-
old and a heavy curtain
dropped over her -

someone

Inches

1

2

3

4

5

