The Evolution of Liberty in Russia

By COUNT ILYA TOLSTOY

WITH the fall of the Romanoff dynasty in Russia the greatest stronghold of absolutism in the world came down. None of the victories on any front of the present terrible war can rival in importance this most significant triumph of the Russian nation. It was an almost bloodless revolution and had hardly any organized preparation. 180,000,000 people who yesterday were the slaves of the most despotic power on earth are today free citizens of a free Russia.

This is not merely the triumph of a nation. It is the victory of an ideal, that of liberty; it is therefore a triumph for all mankind.

If I were to be asked, Was it the peasants who instigated this revolution? I should answer no; our peasantry was voiceless, patient, and apathetic in its dark despair.

Was it the Russian nobility? No; for although they knew that many things were wrong in the country, and most of them admitted that reforms were necessary, they thought it better to postpone all vital changes until after the war.

Was the revolution brought about by the Russian army? No; for the armies were pluckily fighting a foreign foe, and soldiers should always be disciplined and conscientious, and not take part in revolts against their rulers during a war which endangers their families and their homes.

Was it the members of the Duma alone or the leaders of labor? Again I answer no.

The glorious Russian revolution was brought about especially by the increasing intellectual enlightenment of the whole Russian nation. This is the reason why the climax came so suddenly and unexpectedly.

Before speaking about the present conditions in Russia, I must say a few words about the views of my father, the late Leo Tolstoy, in relation to recent political changes. He never approved of revolutionists who desire to change the forms of government by violence. He used to say that the methods which they advocated were utterly opposed to the principles of true Christianity. His and their methods only seem to be alike, whereas in truth they are as far apart as the poles.

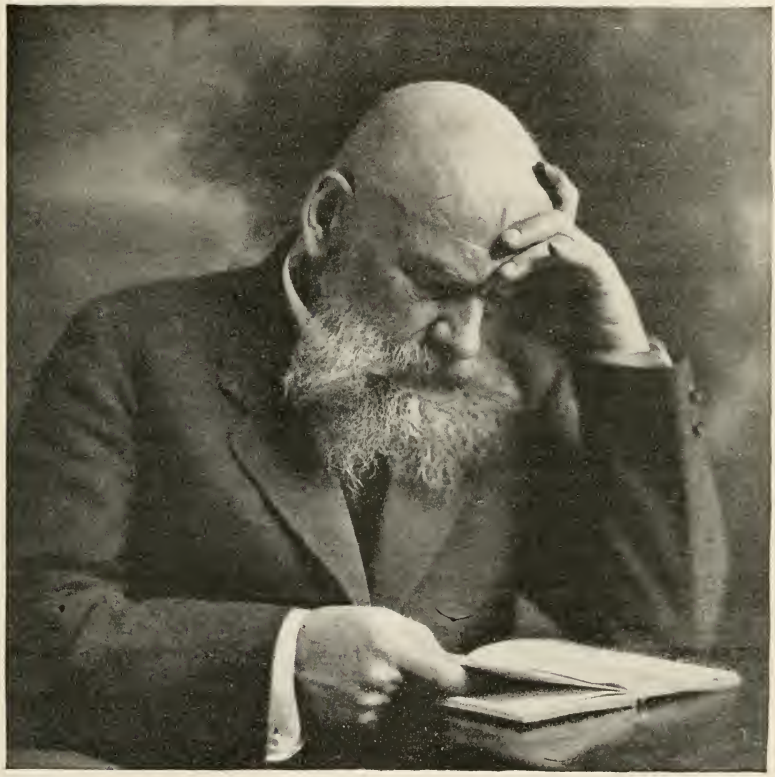
Believing only in the teachings of Christ, whom he regarded as the greatest interpreter of love and the brotherhood of man, Tolstoy affirmed Christ's ideal of non-resistance and repudiated the use of any kind of physical force. He therefore entirely disapproved of any form of government, because government cannot exist without force.

We should not fear to face the light. Let us not fear to acknowledge the imperfections of our human institutions. Let us open our minds wider to the light of truth, and we shall see for ourselves that we are not on the right path, that we have gone astray!

The causes of human calamities are deep rooted in the fallible nature of man, in his imperfect instincts, and in the great difficulty he finds in overcoming them. The most powerful and destroying instinct of all is that of egotism. Without conquering this instinct, how can we pretend to preach love, brotherhood, or the freedom of the soul? This instinct, when manifested by a person, we call egotism; but when manifested by a whole nation it becomes patriotism or nationality.

This is the instinct which separates people and divides them into nations. This sentiment of nationality is inflamed and glorified by all the governments of the world, with the result that the strug-

gle of the individual man against this sentiment is indeed most difficult. Only those who have reached the more commanding heights of the world of ideas are able to secure a broader vision and fully realize this evil.



COUNT ILYA TOLSTOY. FROM A PHOTOGRAPH

Leo Tolstoy believed that so long as armies and governments continued to exist, the abolishment of war was impossible. This belief he expressed publicly after the close of the first Hague Conference. It goes without saying that Tolstoy could never believe in securing peace by force; for, according to his convictions, force is evil, and is diametrically opposed to love and peace, and evil can never produce good.

The abolition of war is impossible by external means. Yet, nevertheless, war must be abolished. It is appalling, it is unthinkable, that humanity should continue along the dark paths of the past. But what is the remedy? Where is the right path?

The answer of Leo Tolstoy was clear and definite. The only way to overcome evil, he thought, was to arouse to activity in every person the highest virtues of the human race,—the virtues of love and self-abnegation,—and this activity can be reached only by the path of individual self-development. This is in accordance with the teachings of Christ and of all the greatest sages of the world. Here is the

source of life, the sun, toward which every blade of grass lifts itself, to which every new-born child extends his hand, and toward which we all aspire.

I know the current objection that this is merely a utopian ideal that can never be realized. I know this, but I also know that if the wise men of the East had not seen the star above their heads, they would never have found Christ. I may say, therefore, that every step toward the ideal is a step toward the realization of the kingdom of God on earth. Toward that end every son of God should take his way. We cannot arbitrarily dismiss dreamers, for it is from dreamers like Christ, Buddha, Confucius, Socrates, and others that the race has gained its most precious intellectual and moral legacies.

Every nation has its own history, and has had to make its own struggle for liberty. It has been said that every people has the kind of government it desires. This may be true, yet step by step with the development of the individual men that constitute it, a nation, when choked and hindered by the bonds of despotism, struggles to breathe the air of freedom. And the Russian nation struggled a long time.

Speaking of the present revolution, I wish to remind my American readers that the ideals of liberty were long ago inculcated by leaders of thought in Russia. Even before the beginning of the nineteenth century our greatest prose writers and poets suffered from the persecution of our despotic Government.

Later, in the reign of Nicholas I, there developed a revolutionary plot among the nobility known as the Conspiracy of December. It only resulted in the arrest and exile to Siberia of all the leaders, most of whom were great men, prominent by their birth, their education, their loftiness of thought, and the greatness of their achievements. Dostoyevsky was one of them. These men were the noblest characters of our country, and to this day the children and grandchildren of these exiled nobles are revered by all Russians because of the self-sacrifice of their forebears.

After this event reaction asserted itself with even greater severity. The entire period of the reign of Nicholas I was, in fact, one of the most reactionary in the whole history of Russia. The Crimean War proved Russia to be the most backward of all European nations. For this reason she was defeated, and in consequence Alexander II was at last compelled to grant liberty to the Russian peasantry. This was in 1861, only fifty-six years ago. In recognition of his action, the Russian people bestowed upon Alexander II the title of "Deliverer."

The communities of peasants were freed from slavery, and a considerable part of the land belonging to the nobility was allotted to them. They paid for their land in the form of taxes to the Government for a period of fifty years, and these payments were completed only a few years ago.

But the liberty of the people was only nominal, as they were entirely uneducated, subservient to an army of officials, and directed by petty local rulers almost as ignorant as themselves. Being also systematically corrupted by the use of vodka, the national poison, Russia could not arouse herself to liberty, and remained wrapped in a deep slumber, often dreaming, but never awakening.

From the sale of vodka the Government derived its principal revenue, and knowing that only ignorant people can be ruled autocratically, it purposely kept its subjects both intoxicated and uneducated. The primary schools of Russia, as I remember them from my childhood, were a disgrace to the nation. Only a small percentage of the peasants were taught to read and write, and even these few very badly. At the same time, owing to the lack of railroads, mails, and every other form of communication, it was extremely difficult for the people of Russia to come into contact with one another and with the benefits of civilization.

Their only instructors in morals were the priests, who were frequently more intoxicated than their flocks. Their club was a tavern, where they drank oceans of vodka, and their rulers were the cor-

rupt police, called in Russia *Ouriadnik*. These were the leeches who sucked the life-blood of the Russian peasantry.

Toward the close of the sixties and during the seventies the self-consciousness of Russia began to be aroused, especially the newly formed class, which was united in different political organizations were more or less radical. The aim of all these parties was the liberation of the people.

Of course they were persecuted by the Government. Czar Alexander II, however, had some progressive tendencies, and through the influence of one of his ministers he was finally persuaded to give the country a constitution. But poor Russia was unfortunate. The articles were already drawn up and were ready to be announced when the czar was killed by the bomb of an anarchist, and his son and successor, Alexander III, continued to perpetuate absolutism in Russia.

But the most reactionary reign of all was that of Nicholas II, who, now abdicated, was, I hope, our last Russian czar. His reign was the most unfortunate, the most sanguinary in the history of the empire. I cannot recall without horror the terrors that were perpetrated just before the beginning of the Russo-Japanese War. This was the time when my father refused to read the newspapers because he could not bear to contemplate the atrocities of the Government in its criminal struggle against the people. Every day we read the accounts of more capital punishments, and every day the reaction and the terrorism became more pronounced and cruel.

It was at this period that my father wrote his famous article, "I can no longer remain silent." It created the greatest sensation among all classes in Russia. It began with the words, "Again murders, again capital punishments," and was published in the leading Moscow paper; but it resulted only in the temporary suspension of the newspaper.

The working classes were aroused, and sometimes manifested their indignation by striking. Then began the ill-fated Russo-Japanese War, into which Russia was forced by the pecuniary interests of certain adventurers, among whom were included members of the imperial family. The war was not desired by the people, and was therefore unpopular.

On January 9, 1905, a great crowd of unarmed people whose only desire was to see the czar and tell him of their humble, but desperate, needs, were brutally beaten in Petrograd by the whips of the Cossacks and shot down by the soldiers.

During the whole of that year strikes and disturbances were frequent. The greatest of these occurred in October. This was a general strike of workers, involving the railroads, mail service, telephones, telegraphs, city waterworks, and electric plants. For several days both the Russian capitals, Petrograd and Moscow, were in darkness and without water or food. In the streets were barricades, and here and there the exasperated population fought the police and the soldiers with firearms. On October 17, 1905, the czar was forced to accede to the will of the people, and the first Russian constitution was drafted.

This constitution was not what the people desired. It was merely a suggestion of the real thing; but it was better than nothing, and Russia had to be satisfied, at least temporarily.

I well remember that evening when the news of the adoption of the constitution came to Moscow. I remember with what joy even strangers on the streets congratulated one another on this poor semblance of liberty. Order in the country was restored as if by magic, and industry was once again resumed.

That evening some of the constitutional leaders assembled in a club where we discussed the text of the manifesto issued by Nicholas II. The meeting opened with a powerful speech from Professor Paul Miliukoff, who was for a time minister of foreign affairs in the provisional Government.

He severely criticized the very evident defects of the constitution, the cowardice of the emperor in fearing to give his subjects greater political liberty, and espe-

cially the manner in which the members of the Duma were to be elected.

Despite all efforts of the Russian Government to influence the election of the members of the Duma, the first representatives of the Russian nation were democratic and liberal. The country was temporarily satisfied, and waited for the results which they hoped would be accomplished by the Duma. They waited in vain.

Nicholas II, fearful for his precious throne, and dreading lest the idea of liberty might be carried too far, issued his ukase dismissing the Duma. At the same time he altered for the worse the already defective method of electing representatives, a terrible blow to the people.

At first the members of the Duma refused to obey the royal ukase. Assembled in the city of Viborg, Finland, they attempted to continue their deliberations, and issued a public address to the people in which they advised the citizens of Russia not to pay taxes and not to enlist in the army until the Duma was restored. But this resulted only in the arrest of the deputies, who were sent to jail and deprived of all their political rights. This is a typical example of the methods employed by the Russian Government to rid itself of its most enlightened, most progressive citizens. The Dumas which followed were no more successful than the first one. Thus did the convulsions of liberty in Russia continue until the present time.

The period just preceding the European War was marked by moral decadence throughout Europe, and from this decadence Russia did not escape. The field of our literature was invaded by trashy detective-stories and unsavory romances not unlike many of the books which have been recently widely read in America. Art was contaminated by the influence of Futurism and Cubism. Classic dances were replaced by the tango and indecent performances; the political life of Russia was dormant.

Such was Europe's moral preparedness for the war. Nevertheless, at the opening of the conflict Russia appeared to be successful. After the invasion of East Prussia, the Russian army advanced in Galicia to Lemberg, and also to the strongest of the Austrian fortresses, Przemysl, and later to the Carpathians. But soon those heroes who had no fear of the enemies in front of them were compelled at last to yield to enemies at home, far back behind the firing-lines.

Quite unexpectedly Russia discovered that she was being deprived of munitions and guns. Then began the retreat of one of the world's greatest armies, equipped with shovels, and in some cases with sticks, instead of firearms, and supplied with shells that by some strange coincidence fitted only the guns of their enemy.

All Galicia and all Poland had to be surrendered to the Germans without a struggle. Treason was rampant throughout the empire; but, concealed behind the walls of autocracy, it was not readily detected. Only one of the arch traitors, an army officer, was apprehended. He was tried and hanged by order of the Grand Duke Nicholas.

The principal leader of the conspiracy, the minister of war, Sukhomlinoff, remained at large for a long time, and even continued unhampered his acts of treason. The German party of the Russian court, which has existed for generations, found its principal support in the wife of the czar. She had a most pernicious and ready tool in Rasputin, her personal friend and adviser.

That man was the most dangerous menace to the interests of Russia and her allies. A common peasant from Siberia, devoid of education, barely able to sign his name, Rasputin had an influence that one can hardly explain.

Was it the influence of an immoral fascination over her, such as he had practised upon other women of high society and the court, or was his influence due to the power of mysticism? Perhaps both.

However that may be, Gregory Rasputin was the unquestioned ruler of Russia until he met his death at the hands of an assassin a short time ago. One word from Rasputin to the czar was sufficient to displace a minister in the cabinet. All the

recent changes in the cabinet were made at the suggestion of this man, and all were equally bad. I will not say that all these ministers were disloyal to Russia, but among their number was Stürmer, the minister of foreign affairs and president of the cabinet. This man was appointed to the position for the specific purpose of concluding a separate peace with Germany. This was in 1916. He remained minister until a member of the Duma, Professor Paul Miliukoff, disclosed all of Stürmer's machinations and publicly branded him a traitor. After that he was dismissed, and his post given to Trepof.

The only organization which worked conscientiously in furnishing munitions and supplies to the Russian army was the zemstvos, or county councils, at the head of which was, until to-day, Prince George Lvoff, the present minister of the interior and premier of the free Russian nation.

Frequently the Government, supported by the czar, attempted to discredit and abolish this organization. They did not succeed, because the whole population of Russia was behind these popular county councils, because even the most ignorant muzhik appreciated their value.

Russian munition factories were until recent times almost all in the hands of Germans. This was altered only under the continued pressure of protests from the workers.

The Russian population, especially in the large cities, now began to suffer from lack of food. This was due to the inefficient and corrupt management of the government railroads and to speculation.

Prices began to rise abnormally. Russia, which formerly produced so much sugar that she was able to export great quantities to England and Persia, now discovered that she did not have enough even for her own consumption.

Russia used to have bread enough not only for herself, but even for half of Europe; yet now she suffered from a famine in flour, and there were times when both Moscow and Petrograd were without the bare necessities of life, with grain and meat decaying in the warehouses of the stupid and greedy agents of the Government.

Tons of rotten meat were burned in Petrograd before the eyes of the people who for weeks had been deprived of meat.

The same criminal irregularities occurred in the manufacture of munitions. The blowing up of ships in the port of Archangel, the explosion of powder factories in Petrograd, and similar destruction of munition factories in the United States cannot easily be explained as accidents. All these disorders were known not only to the educated people of Russia, but also to the peasantry and the soldiers. All felt that some radical and fundamental changes had to be made.

Only one who understands the Russian character can properly understand the patience and forbearance of the people in such trying circumstances, and their unfaltering faith in themselves and their future. Had not Russia undergone in the past worse sufferings than these? But at last the cup of their patience overflowed. After the murder of Rasputin, who was killed with the connivance of certain members of the royal family, the czar completely lost his head. When the riots caused by high prices and scarcity of food in Petrograd broke out, he issued a ukase dissolving the Duma, by that act depriving the country of the only national organization representing the people, of the political body in which they had faith and to which they could look for guidance and leadership.

That ukase was the last drop in our cup of bitterness. The representatives of the Duma disobeyed it, and with one accord the whole people revolted against their oppressors and formed solidly behind the delegates of the nation. The police were unable to suppress this movement, and for the first time in the history of Russia the sixty thousand soldiers of the garrisons refused to obey the commands of their officers, some of whom, indeed, favored the people. By this act the Russian army proved that they were the true sons not of the rotten government of the last of the Romanoffs, but of free Russia.

This revolution, accomplished with the loss of only a few hundred lives, proves that the whole nation was weary of absolutism and ready for a new form of government. I am sure that the soldiers at the front will stand by the people and support them, because they also are tired of treason and disorder.

I do not know what form of government will be adopted in Russia. I hope it will be a republic, but I am sure that we shall never return to the despotism of the past. I know personally many of those who are now in power. They have been my friends for years.

Long ago, before the constitution was granted in Russia, there was an association of the most prominent people. It formulated the main outlines of a more desirable form of government. Their meetings, which I attended, were secret and under government espionage. Nevertheless, these people continued to meet. They were the chief exponents of the most liberal thought of the time. I rejoice to say that many of those progressive men are now in power, representing free Russia. They are Prince Lvoff, the premier; Professor Miliukoff, late minister of foreign affairs; Professor Manuiluff, minister of education; Ridichiff, governor-general of Finland; Gutchkoff, Rodzienko, the president of the Duma; and many others of the leaders of that body, who are now supporting the present Government.

Knowing these people and acquainted with their political views, I can predict some of the changes which are likely to take effect in Russia. Indeed, many of these are taking place at present.

First, direct election of representatives.

Second, freedom of speech, of the press, and of religion.

Third, the autonomy of Finland, Poland, and probably of the other nationalities on the outskirts of Russia.

Fourth, the abolition of all restrictions upon the rights of the Jewish people in Russia.

Fifth, a responsible cabinet of ministers.

Sixth, amnesty of all political prisoners in Russia and Siberia.

Seventh, the proper settlement of the land question.

These are the principal changes that I see ahead, that all Russia earnestly longs for and will certainly have. Americans should be patient, helpful, and wary of false rumors. The weaknesses attributed to the new régime are the accumulated deficiencies of the autocracy. We shall remedy them as fast as we can.

Among these questions the most difficult of solution is that of the land. It is not a new one, but it is the most urgent, because eighty-five per cent. of the 180,000,000 population in Russia work on the land. This is the only means of existence. The present disorders, which I trust will soon cease, are due to the infamous inheritance of the late dynasty. The past mismanagement explains why the Russian people have always felt the need of more land. This has caused constant local upheavals in Russia. The sole ambition of the illiterate peasant is for land, more land, and again more land. This question will be the principal problem to face not only at the present time, but in the future.

All the government land, combined with that of the royal family and that belonging to the Russian monasteries, will never satisfy the peasantry. They will never be content until they obtain the lands of the large land-owners, who are mostly members of our ancient Russian nobility. This question cannot be settled by the abolition of property in land, because that would be an attack upon the principle of property itself. It cannot be determined by state purchase of the land, and therefore the question will remain, I fear, the most acute problem for Russia, and one which will not infrequently prove the cause of new disturbances in the future. The only solution must be found in an increased tax on land, and this principle leads us inevitably to the doctrine of the single tax as advocated by the great American economist Henry George.

Leo Tolstoy, who lived closer to the people than any other man in Russia, realized the needs of the Russian people

and their struggles for land. He devoted to this question a great deal of his attention, believing that the solution of the problem was in the adoption of the single tax. After studying Henry George's "Progress and Poverty," he became a confirmed believer in the latter's principles, and wrote several articles on the subject, particularly "The Great Iniquity" and "The Slavery of Our Times." He even consecrated to this ideal the whole of the second part of his great novel "Resurrection."

He also tried to interest the members of the second Duma and the president of the cabinet. But single tax interested only a few members of the more radical party. Henry George's followers in Russia are not many, and I fear that during the present crisis his beautiful ideal will not have adequate support, although I hope that at some future time his dream will be realized in Russia.

This, in brief, is the history of the evolution of liberty in Russia.

Does not the fact that the revolution was accomplished quickly and apparently without serious opposition prove that the people are now at last ready for free institutions? This is the fruit of several generations of earnest effort on the part of progressive leaders. It indicates the probable permanency of the revolutionary reforms now in progress.

He who has once seen the light will never again return to darkness. A people that has once enjoyed liberty will never again bow, will never return blindly, to absolutism. This I know, and in such knowledge I rejoice.

Rather let us look more deeply into the unsolved problems of humanity. My countrymen have now won individual liberty, and have thus been placed upon an equal plane with the inhabitants of other free nations. But this is not the highest standard. The souls of the people are still bound by the prejudices of patriotism and nationalism. The greatest evil of the human race is not yet overcome. I refer to war.

Capital punishment, which is the murder of one man by the state, is already abolished in Russia; but the murder of millions in war is still justified and glorified by all governments. The world must at last rid itself of this hideous nightmare. The only way to realize such an aim is to forget forever the prime cause of dissension among nations, the sentiment of nationalism.

You talk of war. You have opened recruiting offices in the streets. Everywhere I see soldiers. Do you know what war is? Let me tell you something about it, for I have met war face to face as a worker for the Red Cross in Russia.

I shall not speak of the hospitals, where I saw thousands of mutilated men. I shall not speak of the sufferings of these people, of the nights I spent hearing the unceasing cries of the wounded and the moans of the dying. Terrible as all that is, it is as nothing compared with the scenes on a battlefield after a fight.

I saw such a battle-field in Galicia. I rode over it alone on horseback. It was a dreary, dull autumn day. A drizzling rain was falling. Far ahead I saw the dome of a church shattered by shells. Through the twisted columns of the arch I could catch glimpses of the gray sky. Not far from the church were the trenches.

Nothing in the world gives a more impressive idea of chaos than deserted trenches after a battle: empty tin cans, torn bits of clothing, shattered shells, broken guns and rifles, twisted bayonets, dismantled artillery of all kinds, and everywhere, as far as the eye could reach, enormous cavities made in the earth by bomb explosions. Silence and death appeared where only a short time before were life and intense activity.

As I rode along one of these trenches my horse picked up his ears and shied at every object. In my heart I felt a sinking, a dread, as of a man entering a morgue or a graveyard for the first time.

Some distance ahead I saw in the bottom of one of the trenches a dark-looking object. It was a corpse. My horse shied as we passed. A step or two farther I found other bodies. Again and again I

saw them before me. As far as the eye could reach the whole field was dotted with these gray figures, stretched out, or piled up in every possible attitude.

Just in front of me, lying in a crater caused by the explosion of a shell, I saw two legs and the lower half of a man's body. I looked around for the other half of the trunk, but could not find it anywhere. A short distance away I saw a small wood. The trees were cut and hacked by shells, and the bark was stripped, so that the trunks and limbs were white and bare. Here had been the hottest part of the fight, and here were hundreds of corpses lying on top of one another, jumbled together in heaps. The dead bodies revealed most dreadful wounds, being torn by shells, or ripped by bayonets in hand-to-hand encounters.

Having my paints and brushes with me, I selected a pile of corpses that seemed to form a typical picture. Dismounting, I tied my horse to a tree and opened my cabinet. The shaking of the box in riding had caused some of the colored tubes to leak, among them the carmine. All the inside of the cabinet, the palette and the brushes, were smeared the color of blood.

While spreading the paints on the palette, I soiled my fingers, and my hands were red, as if I had touched blood. In front of me was this heap of corpses. On top was the body of a young Austrian officer, a boy not more than eighteen years old, with a beard just beginning to grow. I noticed his black, silken hair and a terrible wound in his open breast. His boots, like those of most of the corpses, had been stolen by some marauder.

I thought of this lad's parents, back home, perhaps hundreds of miles away in some peaceful village. I could see in imagination the father and mother of this boy and the parents of all the thousands who in the morning were alive and strong, but now were rotting corpses. Blood on my hands, blood on my palette, blood before me, blood, blood, blood; and I alone in the midst of it, in the gathering dusk of the evening.

I had begun to sketch the outline of my picture, but soon felt that I could no longer stand this awful pageant of death; so I closed the cabinet and ran to my horse. In order to reach it I had to jump across a trench. Making a good start, I sprang over the wide ditch. But to my horror I saw that I was about to land on the face of a corpse that was peering from the earth with cold, glazed eyes, staring up at me. In landing, I made a frantic effort to avoid it. Without a second look I mounted my horse and rode hastily away. Then suddenly from under his feet came the fluttering of wings as a frightened partridge flew up, startling both me and my horse. There was at least one other living creature besides me in that valley of death.

The world must finally rid itself of this nightmare. We may accomplish it by forever forsaking the prime cause of dissension among nations, the sentiment of nationality.

Do not charge me with being a dreamer, especially you Americans. Have you not already realized this dream? Have not your Stars and Stripes united the peoples of all nations? Is not your country a practical demonstration of the general brotherhood of man?

Was not this a dream in Washington's time? To-day it is a reality. So permit me to dream and to invite you to share with me this beautiful vision. Let us hope that, if not now, at some future day it will be realized in Russia also and throughout the whole world!

The day will come when we shall realize not only the brotherhood of individuals, but the essential unity of all mankind. The race must not only shake off the bonds of despotism, but must free itself from the slavery of national separatism. All are brothers, all children of the same Father.

The barriers which divide nations are artificial. I believe the time is at hand when these barriers will fall, like the walls of Jericho, before love's trumpet summons; when the banner of brotherhood and freedom will float forever over a new federation,—THE UNITED STATES OF THE WORLD.