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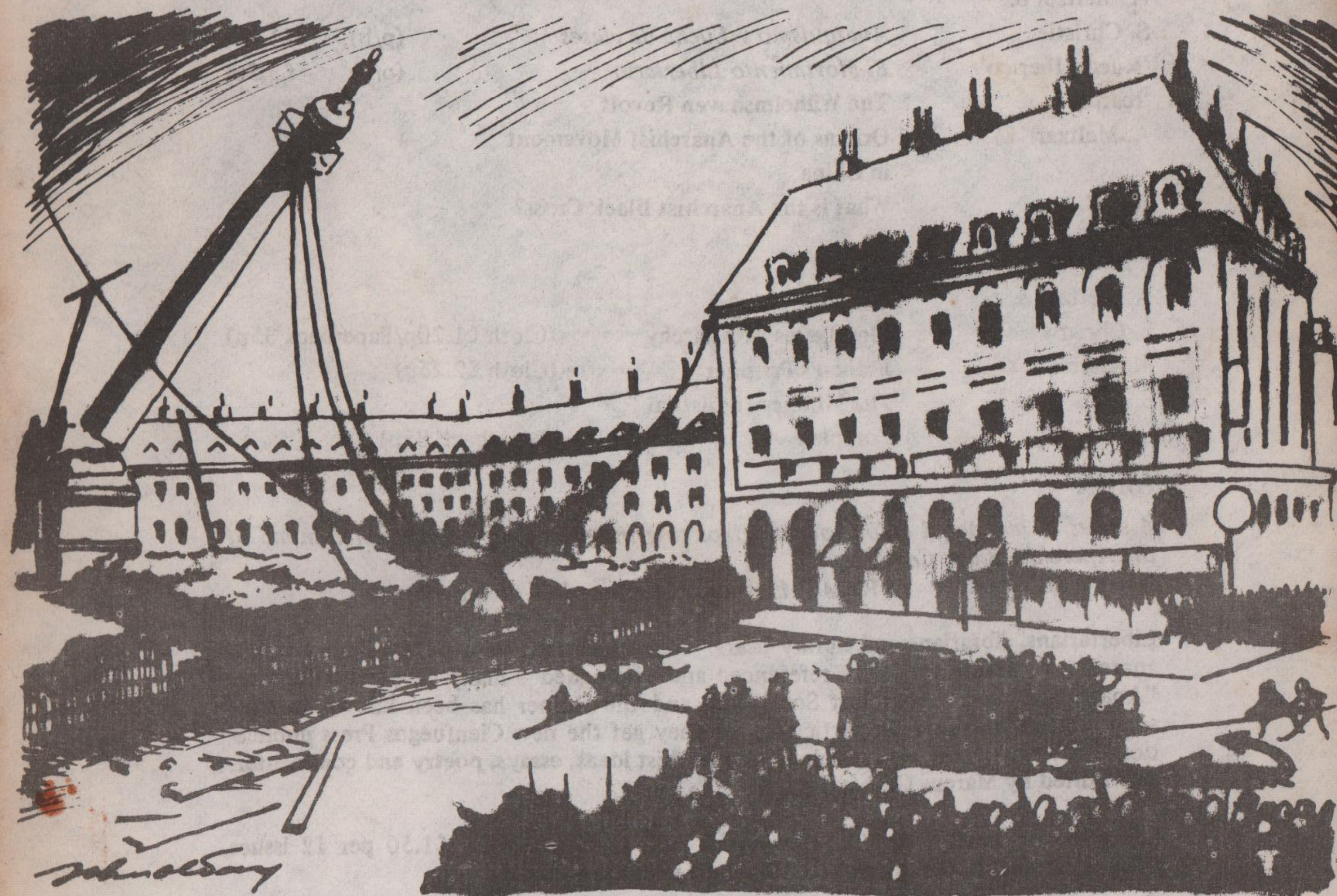
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Power and Liberty by Leo Tolstoy first published by Coptic Press 1968. This edition published by Simian January 1975.

## LEO TOLSTOY

Few writers have been so misunderstood as Leo Tolstoy. While not entirely an Anarchist, he was one of the pioneers of Anarchism insofar as he wrote against the State, against the Church, and for freedom and brotherhood. His view of the People, though sometimes expressed with naivete, is a lofty one: he admits no force less than humanity.

Insofar as Christianity means belief in a deity, or in the divinity of Christ, he was most certainly not a Christian. He did, however, accept the social teachings of Jesus of Nazareth as expressed in the Bible. One wonders if he regarded Jesus as Heine did Napoleon: the German writer praised the latter when he was dead and gone, but said he only used Napoleon "as a stick to beat the German people to wake up", and put him in his writings "merely as a character". Tolstoy uses Jesus as a stick to beat the Russian peasant, by talking to him in terms he can understand; his satirical references to orthodox Christianity make one wonder if he merely put Jesus there as a character, too. He calls for liberation; his idea of liberation is not entirely ours (he has a veneration for celibacy, for instance) but it woke up the Russian peasant at long last — or at least, it it roused the giant from its slumbers, before it turned over and went to sleep again under a new tyranny worse than the old.

In this essay, Tolstoy maintains his theory of great men as the myths and tickets of history. History, he asserts, must give up the idea that great men rule us, and busy itself with the discovery of the idea of humanity. One looks for the overthrow of the French Empire not in this or that decision of Napoleon, but in the various factors down to the corporal who enlisted for the bounty once too often. What causes that great motion, the People, to brim over into an historic event? Nobody nowadays believes that the French Revolution happened because Marie-Antoinette was somewhat careless with her jewellery; but many people believe that Churchill, or Stalin, "won the war", or that Hitler, personally, lost it. Moreover, the whole defence of Nazi war criminals — "we acted under orders" — is relevant to Tolstoy's critique: it is not your great men who order history. It is a combination of circumstances in which the great man acts merely as the reference-card in the history book. It is not denied that they too like all other individuals play their part in history; but that role is not so decisive as those who wish to avoid responsibility admit.

"The great are only great because we are on our knees".



## INTRODUCTION (From "Napoleon's Russian Campaign")

Several historians assure us that the victory of the French at Borodino was modified by the fact that Napoleon was suffering from the effects of a cold in the head. If it had not been for this cold, his arrangements before and during the battle would have displayed still more genius, Russia would have been conquered and the face of the world would have been changed.

Historians who believe that Russia was formed at the will of one man, Peter the Great; who believe that France changed from a republic to an empire and sent armies to Russia at the will of one man, Napoleon, naturally think that Russia retained some vestige of power after the battle of Borodino because Napoleon had a cold in the head on September 7th; and they are logically consistent in thinking so.

Plainly, if it depended on the will of Napoleon to give or not to give battle at Borodino, to make or not to make such and such dispositions of his forces, it is evident that the cold in his head, which influenced the manifestation of his will, must have been of great service to the Russian cause and that the valet who, on September 5th 1812, forgot to provide Napoleon with waterproof boots was the real saviour of Russia. When we have once started on this line of reasoning, the conclusion is inevitable; as much so as that reached by the ironical Voltaire when he demonstrated that the Massacre of Saint Bartholomew was due to the fact that Charles IX, suffered from indigestion.

But to those who do not believe that Russia was formed at the will of Peter the Great, that the French empire arose at the bidding of a single man, or that the campaign in Russia was undertaken at the sole behest of Napoleon, such reasoning will appear to be not only unreasonable and false, but contrary to the nature of human activity. To them the response to the question, **What is the cause of historical events?** is something very different. They believe that the progress of events is inevitable; that it is a result of the combined volition of all who participate in the events, and that the influence of Napoleon upon the progress of affairs is superficial and fictitious.

It is paradoxical to assert that the Massacre of Saint Bartholomew was the work of Charles IX because he gave the order to kill, and believed that the killing was done at his command. Not less paradoxical is it to affirm that the battle of Borodino, which cost the lives of eighty thousand men, was the work of Napoleon because he planned the engagement and gave the order to begin the attack. A sentiment of human dignity, which tells me that each of us, if he be not more of a man than Napoleon the Great, is at least not less than he, directs me to a solution of the problem justified by a multitude of facts.

At the battle of Borodino, Napoleon did not attack anybody or kill anybody. That duty was performed by his soldiers. He did not do any killing himself. The soldiers of the French army, in going to the battle of

Borodino to kill Russian soldiers, were obeying not Napoleon's orders, but their own impulses. The whole army of French, Italians, Germans Poles, famished and in rags, worn out by the campaign, felt at sight of the Russian army barring the road to Moscow, that the wine was uncorked, and they had only to rush in and drink. If at this moment Napoleon had forbidden them to fight the Russians, they would have killed him and given battle, for to them a battle was necessary. When they heard the proclamations of Napoleon which, in exchange for wounds and death, offered them as a consolation the homage of posterity, and proclaimed as heroes those who should fight through the Muscovite campaign, they cried "Vive l'empereur!" — as they cried "Vive l'empereur!" at the sight of the child holding the terrestrial globe at the end of a bilboquet stick; and they would have responded with the same *vivat* any nonsense proffered to them. There was nothing better for them to do than to cry "Vive l'empereur!" and fight in order to reach Moscow, food, repose, and victory. It was not at Napoleon's order that they undertook to kill their fellow-men.

The progress of the battle was not directed by Napoleon, for no part of his plan was carried out; and during the engagement he did not know what was going on before his eyes.

Hence the manner in which these men undertook to kill one another was **independent** of Napoleon, and not influenced by the action of his will, because it was determined by the will of the thousands of men who took part in the combat. But it seemed to Napoleon as if his will was the **mainspring of action**.

The question "Did or did not Napoleon have a cold in his head?" is of no importance to the historian than a cold in the head of the last stragglers from the ranks. It is still more insignificant because it is easy to prove the falsity of the assertions made by writers that by reason of this cold in the head Napoleon's dispositions and orders concerning the battle were less adroit than those he was accustomed to make . . . they were not in the least inferior to those of previous battles, they were, in fact, of absolutely equal value. But the dispositions and the combinations seem less fortunate because the battle of Borodino was the first battle that Napoleon did not win. The best plan and the most sagacious combinations in the world seem very poor when they do not end in victory, and the verriest tyro in military matters does not hesitate to criticise them. On the other hand, the feeblest plans and combinations appear to be excellent when they are crowned with success, and learned men devote entire volumes to the demonstration of their superiority.

Napoleon at Borodino played his sovereign part as well as in other battles — even better. He did nothing that could stand in the way of success; he accepted the most reasonable advice, he did not contradict himself, he was exempt from weakness, he did not abandon the field of battle — with all his tact and his great experience in war, he assumed with calmness and dignity the part of a fictitious commander.



# Power and Liberty

## Chapter 1

The object of history is to study the life of peoples and of humanity in general. Now to describe the life of humanity, or simply that of a single people, is an undertaking beyond the ability of man. Historians formerly had a very easy way of reconstructing the life of a people. They told about the actions of persons who ruled over a people, and the life of the nation was supposed to be summed up in the lives of these individuals.

To the question, "How is it that heroes were able to make whole peoples conform to their individual wills?" — the historians replied by proclaiming the existence of a divine will which subordinated peoples to the will of a single man. To the question "What power controlled the individual will of these heroes?" — they responded by declaring that divinity directed the will of the chosen man towards a predestined end.

In this way, all questions were answered by declaring faith in the divine will, and by maintaining that divinity participated directly in human actions.

Theoretically, the new historical school has refuted both theses. It denies the faith of the old historians in the subordination of man to divinity, and the belief that men are led to predestined ends, and it undertakes to examine, not acts of power, but the causes which are productive of power. Nevertheless, after theoretically refuting the ideas of its predecessors, we find the modern historical school following them in practice.

In place of men clothed with divine power and governed directly by the will of God, the modern historians give us heroes endowed with super-human talents, and these men of diverse qualities, from monarchs to journalists, are represented as moulding public opinion.

Modern history refutes the old theories without putting any new ideas in their place, and historians who have rejected the hypothesis of the divine right of kings, or the ancient belief in the decrees of the gods, have been obliged by the logic of events to resort to the same conception of history by asserting that peoples are guided by isolated individuals, and that there is an object toward which humanity is moving.

In the works of all the modern historians, from Gibbon to Buckle, notwithstanding their apparent disagreement and the superficial novelty of their conceptions, we find at bottom the same two old theories from which they have been unable to escape.

In the first place, historians describe the actions of persons who, in their opinion, have guided humanity. One historian finds his heroes only among monarchs, generals, and statesmen; another historian makes his selections from the orators, men of science, reformers, philosophers, and poets.

In the second place, historians believe they know the end toward which humanity is guided; but to one historian that end is the greatness of the Romans, the Spaniards, the French, and to another historian it is liberty and equality, or civilisation in the little corner of the globe we call Europe.

In 1789 a revolution began at Paris; it grew, spread out, and resulted in a movement of peoples from west to east. Several times this movement towards the east met with a counter movement from east to west. In 1812, it reached its final limit, Moscow, and with remarkable similarity there followed an inverse movement from east to west which, like the former, carried with it the peoples of central Europe. This counter movement returned to the departing point of the preceding wave, Paris, and subsided. During this period of twenty years, many fields remained fallow, houses were burned, millions of men were ruined, others were enriched, others emigrated, and millions of Christians who professed to love their neighbours met and killed one another.

What is the meaning of all these occurrences? What is the origin of all these facts? What was it that forced these men to burn each other's houses and cut each other's throats? What was the moving power in this series of circumstances?

For the answer to those questions let us look to history whose mission is to teach humanity to know itself.

If history takes the old point of view, it replies, "God to reward or to punish his people, gave power to Napoleon and guided his will that he might accomplish the divine purpose."

This reply is, at any rate, clear and conclusive. One may or may not believe in the divine mission of Napoleon, but for him who does so believe, the history of our times is intelligible and harmonious.

But the new historical school cannot resort to this explanation because it does not believe in the old doctrine that divinity directly controls human action. It simply says, "You would know what this movement was, why it took place, what was the force that controlled it? Well, then, listen to me:—

"Louis XIV was proud and presumptuous; he had such and such a mistress, such and such a minister, and he governed France very badly.

"The successors of Louis XIV were also incompetent and they governed France more badly. They also had such and such favourites and such and such mistresses.



"Then there arose at Paris a group of men who proclaimed that all men are free and equal. The result of their teachings was that people in France began to cut one another's throats. These men killed the king and many of the nobility.

"At this moment a man of genius named Napoleon came to the surface. He was always successful; that is to say, he killed a great many people, because he was a great genius. For this reason he set out to kill the Africans, and he killed so many and showed so much ingenuity and cunning in the killing, that when he came back to France he said everybody must obey him.

"He made himself emperor, and again set out to kill men; this time in Italy, Austria and Prussia. But in Russia, the Emperor Alexander suddenly resolved to re-establish order in Europe, and he declared war on Napoleon. Napoleon therefore led six hundred thousand men into Russia, seized Moscow, and then fled from the city.

"The Emperor Alexander, by the advice of Stein and others, formed a European League against the disturber of the peace. Those who had been Napoleon's allies became his enemies, and the coalition marched against the new forces he had got together. The allies entered Paris, forced the emperor to abdicate and sent him to the Island of Elba, without depriving him of his title, or failing to show him all possible tokens of deference, although both before and after that time he was regarded as a bandit and an outlaw.

"Then began the reign of Louis XVIII, a prince who, up to that time, had been an object of derision to the French, and also of the allies.

"Napoleon shed tears at taking leave of his old guard, abdicated, and went into exile. Now a number of statesmen and diplomatists talked to one another at Vienna, and thereby greatly increased the welfare of several peoples and diminished the welfare of others. At this moment, Talleyrand succeeded in getting possession of a certain armchair, and in this way moved back the frontiers of France.

"The diplomats and sovereigns had differences, and they were about to set their armies at work cutting each other's throats, when Napoleon came back to France at the head of a battalion. The French, who detested Napoleon, submitted, and the discontented allies once more set out to fight with France.

"Napoleon, the genius, was sent like a bandit to St. Helena. There, in exile, separated from his relatives and from his dear France, he died a lingering death, while telling the story of his life for the benefit of posterity.

"Meanwhile, a reaction took place in Europe, and all the sovereigns began once more to oppress their peoples."

Do not regard this sketch as a parody, or as a caricature of the narratives which historians have produced with regard to this epoch. It is in fact a mild summary of the contradictory and baseless assertions to be found in all the books written about the period in question — the Memoirs, the

Universal Histories, the Histories of Civilisation.\*

The replies seem strange and even ridiculous to us, because history, as the new school understands it, is like a deaf person who answers questions that no one has asked.

If the object of history is to describe the movements of peoples and of humanity, the first question demanding an answer will be:

"What is the force that sets people in motion?" If this question is not answered, all that follows is unintelligible.

The new historical school replies that Napoleon was a great genius, that Louis XIV was very presumptuous, and that such and such a writer had published such and such a work. These affirmations are perhaps true, and humanity does not dispute them, but they bring us no nearer the solution of the problem in which we are interested.

We might accept the reply as satisfactory if we recognised the direct action of the divine power which is self-sufficient and which governs people by means of Napoleons, Louis XIVs and great writers. But we no longer believe in the direction manifestation of divine power, and so, before talking to us about Napoleon, Louis XIV and the great writers, historians must show us the connecting link between these men and the movements of people.

If divine power is to be replaced by a new source of action, we must know in what this force consists, for on this particular point the interest of history is concentrated.

The new historical school apparently takes it for granted that this force is known, and that there is no necessity of demonstrating its existence; but he who studies the historical accounts of recent times will not be able to discover in them the new force, and he will doubt whether after all it is wholly clear to historians themselves.

\*And is still to be found in such histories. With an alteration of names and places, such narratives are written still of modern history. — Ed.

## Chapter II

### 1 THE CONTRADICTIONS OF HISTORIANS

WHAT IS THE FORCE THAT SETS PEOPLE IN MOTION? Biographical historians and those who write the history of a single nation ascribe this force to the power which is inherent in heroes and emperors. According to their stories, events are accomplished solely through the will of a Napoleon, an Alexander, or some other personage whose actions they describe in detail.



Their reply to the question "What is the force that produces events?" is satisfactory only as long as the facts are collected by a single historian. When historians of different nationalities and divergent opinions undertake to describe the same event, their conclusions are worthless, for each of them understands the moving cause in a different and often in a contradictory way.

One assures us that the power of Napoleon is the cause of certain events; another finds the origin of the events in the power of Alexander; and a third brings forward still another person as the source of action. Moreover, these historians contradict one another, even when they try to explain the force upon which the power of a given person depends.

Thus Thiers, who is a Bonapartist, declares that the powers of Napoleon were due to his virtues and his genius. Lanfrey, who is a republican, affirms on the contrary that the power of Napoleon depended upon his cunning and his talent for deceiving people. Thus historians, by thus denying each other, deprive each other of support, and destroy at a single blow their conception of the force that produces events; and the essential question of history remains unanswered.

Those who undertake to describe the life of all the nations show in their books of universal history how inadequate is the conception of the biographical historians with regard to the force that produces events. They will not admit that this force comes from the power inherent in heroes and emperors, but maintain that it is the resultant of several forces directed in different ways.

In describing a war or the conquest of a nation, the author of a universal history looks for the cause, not in the power of a single person, but in the combined actions of several persons who have taken part in the progress of events.

It is plain enough that the power of historical personages, who are themselves subjected to certain conditions, ought not to be regarded as the force that in itself brings events to pass. But we find the same authors of universal histories having recourse also to the idea of power, which they regard as a force in itself and as the cause and producer of events.

In the narratives of these historians we find a certain personage put forward as the product of his time, and his power as the product of different forces, and then this power is regarded as the exclusive force which produces events.

Gervinus, Schlosser and others demonstrate that Napoleon is the product of the Revolution, of the ideas of 1789, etc., and then they go on to show that the Russian Campaign and other displeasing events are simply the result of Napoleon's misdirected will, and they further demonstrate that the ideas of 1789 were checked in their development by the arbitrary power of Bonaparte.

It seems then, that the Revolution and the life of this whole period produced the power of Napoleon, and that this power stifled the ideas of the Revolution and suppressed the new germs of life.

A contradiction so strange is not accidental. We find it continually arising. All historical narratives are a tissue of similar contradictions. The result is that those who have undertaken to write universal history have stopped half way.

In order that component forces may give a certain resultant, the sum of the component forces must be equal to the resultant. Historians always forget this law, and to justify the result they are obliged to add to their inadequate component forces an unexplained force which acts upon and through the different elementary known forces.

A biographical historian, describing the campaign of 1813, or the restoration of the Bourbons, declares boldly that all these events were produced by the will of Tsar Alexander. But Gervinus, from the point of view of the universal historian, disputes this idea of the historico-biographer, and attempts to show that the campaign of 1813 and the restoration of the Bourbons was produced, not alone by the will of Alexander, but by the influence of Stein, of Metternich, of Madame de Stael, of Talleyrand, of Fichte, of Chateaubriand, and of others.

This historian evidently decomposed the power of Alexander into the different factors, Talleyrand, Chateaubriand, Madame de Stael, etc. But the sum of the factors, that is, the influence of Chateaubriand, plus the influence of Talleyrand, plus the influence of Madame de Stael, is not equal to the result — to the fact that millions of Frenchmen submitted to the Bourbons.

And so the historian, to explain the fact, is obliged to admit once more the power he denies, and with it make up the resultant of his forces. In other words, he is obliged to recognise an inexplicable force which acts upon his elementary forces.

In this manner reason those who write universal history, and they are thereby at variance with writers of special histories and finally contradict themselves.

Those who have undertaken to relate the history of civilisation have pursued the road marked out by the universal historians, but they are not satisfied by looking for the force that produces events in certain writers or certain beautiful women, so they seek for it principally in civilisation, that is to say, in the intellectual life of peoples.

These historians are entirely consistent with the theory of universal history from which they start. If we can explain historical events by the fact that certain persons had such and such relations with one another, why may we not explain the same events by the facts that such and such writers published such and such books?

From the innumerable manifestations that accompany every event of life, these historians select one, intellectual activity, and declare it to be the cause of all events.

Yet in spite of all their efforts to maintain this theory, we must grant them certain concessions before we admit that there is any relation between the movement of peoples and their intellectual life.



It is quite impossible to demonstrate that the intellectual life governs the actions of historical personages, for the theory is set aside when we find the events like the horrible massacres, battles and executions of the French Revolution following arguments in behalf of equality and fraternity.

But even if we grant as true, all the subtle dissertations with which histories of civilisation are filled, even if we admit that peoples are controlled by an indeterminate force called the Idea, the essential question of history still remains unanswered.

In addition to the power of monarchs and the influence of statesmen and great ladies, we now have a new force, the Idea, the relation of which to the masses is not manifest.

We may admit that Napoleon truly possessed power, and that for this reason certain events followed; we may, even, by making further concessions, acknowledge that Napoleon and other influences caused events; but how can we believe that, as a direct consequence of the *Contrat Social*, Frenchmen set to work to cut each other's throats? To believe this, we must see the relation uniting the new force to the event.

Since it is certain that there are relations between all things simultaneously existing, there must be some way of discovering a bond between the intellectual life of men and their historical life, just as we can show relations between movements of humanity and commerce, industry, agriculture and anything else. The difficult point to understand is why the intellectual life of man should be, as the authors of histories of civilisation affirm, the cause or expression of the life of humanity.

We can explain the assertion by means of two facts:—

(1) History is written by scholars who naturally think that the life of of their class is the basis of the life of humanity in general, just as merchants, farmers and soldiers like to imagine that they are making history; we do not find this point brought out in historical works, because merchants, farmers and soldiers do not write history.

(2) The intellectual life, education, civilisation, the ideal, are so many indeterminate conceptions under which we are able conveniently to arrange words still more vague, and thus adapt them to all possible theories.

Without passing judgement upon their intrinsic value (for it is possible that histories of civilisation and universal histories are of some use) we find them to possess one singular characteristic. After seriously analysing in detail religious, philosophical and political doctrines as the causes of events, they never fail when they have a historical fact to relate — the Russian Campaign, for example — they never fail to describe this fact as a consequence of power; they declare positively that the Russian Campaign was the product of the will of Napoleon.

In this way, historians contradict one another without knowing it. They prove that the new force they have imagined does not explain historical events, and that the only way of understanding history is by admitting the theory of power which they have attempted to put aside.

### Chapter III

#### THE IDEA OF POWER

A locomotive is in motion. What makes it go? The moojik replies that it is the devil; another says it moves because the wheels go round; a third assures us that the cause of motion is the smoke which the wind bears away.

The moozhik will not give up his opinion without a struggle. He is convinced that his explanation is the most satisfactory and complete to be found. To undeceive him, you must prove to him that the devil does not exist; or another moozhik must explain to him that it is not the devil, but the German engineer, who makes the locomotive go.

It is apparent from all these contradictions, that neither one nor the other can be right. He who attributes the movements of the locomotive to the fact that the wheels go round is inconsistent with himself, because from the moment that he begins to analyse the movement of the machine, he ought logically to discover the final cause of the motion of the locomotive in the force of the steam imprisoned in the boiler.

He who accounts for the motion of the locomotive by the smoke that the wind blows away, evidently seizes upon the first manifestation that attracts his attention, and denominates it a cause.

The only way in which we can explain the motion of the locomotive is by getting an idea of a force equivalent to the observed movement.

And so the only way of explaining the movement of peoples is by forming a conception of a force equal to the sum of the movements of peoples.

The different forces assigned to meet this law by different historians are not equal to the movements of peoples. Some of the historians have recourse to heroes, just as the moozhik finds use for the devil. Others discover force in diplomatic intrigues, and are like the man who explains the motion of the locomotive by the fact that the wheels go round. Others still, point to the influences of great writers, and resemble him who attributes the motion of the locomotive to the smoke driven away by the wind.

When anyone undertakes to write the story of a remarkable person, and does not include the history of all the men, without a single exception, who took part in the events under discussion, it is impossible not to attribute to the remarkable person a force which obliges other men to direct their activity towards a common end. Historians conceive of this force in the unique form of power.

The idea of power is the lever by means of which historians pry up material for history, as we understand history nowadays. He who breaks the lever, as Buckle did, and is unable to obtain another, is incapable of utilising historical material.



GREAT ARE ONLY GREAT BECAUSE WE ARE ON OUR KNEES





When we see authors of universal histories and histories of civilisation renouncing the idea of power, and yet constantly making use of it, we understand the impossibility of explaining historical events without the assistance of some such conception.

The relation between historical knowledge and the questions that pre-occupy humanity at the present time, is much like the relation between bank notes and coin.

Biographical histories and the histories of isolated nations resemble bank notes.\* They may circulate and be of service, but only as far as actual payment is assured. If we put aside the question as to how the will of heroes brings about events, we find some histories, like that of Thiers for instance, to be interesting, instructive, and even animated with a breath of poetry.

But just as doubt with regard to the value of bank notes arises from the fact that they are easy to make and may increase so fast that they cannot be exchanged for gold, so doubt concerning the value of historical works like that of Thiers arises from the fact that they are numerous and easily produced, and someone is sure to ask, in the simplicity of his heart, "BY WHAT FORCE WAS NAPOLEON ABLE TO DO THESE THINGS?" Someone there will be who will ask to have his bank notes of poetry exchanged for the pure gold of truth!

Authors of universal histories and of histories of civilisation are like men who save their bank notes by paying their face value in debased coin. Their money has the ring of the genuine metal, but it is not gold. Now, while spurious bank notes may deceive the ignorant, no one is deceived by spurious coin. Gold is of value only as a medium of exchange; universal histories will attain special payment only when they reply to the essential historical question, "What is power?"

Historical authors contradict one another when they reply to this question. Authors of histories of civilisation pass it over entirely and reply to questions that were not asked of them at all.

There is no use in making tokens resemble gold, because they pass current only as a conventional sign, or else circulate among those who do not know gold when they see it.

The works of historians who do not respond to the essential questions of history have merely a conventional value; they are accepted by the universities and are in demand among those who are fond of what they call "solid reading".

(\*Issued by private banks).

## Chapter IV

### THE POPULAR WILL

After thrusting aside the old idea of the submission of the will of a people to the will of a single man chosen by divine will, historical science is unable to take another step without falling into contradictions.

It must choose between two courses. It must either return to the ancient belief that God takes a part in human affairs, or it must clearly determine the meaning of the force which it calls power, and which it says, produces historical events.

Faith being destroyed, a return to the ancient belief is impossible at this day; it is therefore necessary to define the meaning of power.

"Napoleon gave the order for his troops to form and march to the war." This idea is so natural, so familiar, that we do not stop to ask why six hundred thousand men should go to fight at a word from Napoleon. He had the power and consequently his orders were obeyed.

The reply would be satisfactory if we could still believe that the power was given him by God. But as we no longer have this belief, we must find out what that power is that one man exercises over his fellow-men.

It does not consist in the physical superiority of the strongest over the weakest; the ability, like that of Hercules, to inflict death upon another. It does not consist in moral superiority so when they give us heroes, that is, men endowed with extraordinary strength of mind and intellect.

Power cannot depend upon moral superiority for, without speaking of heroes like Napoleon, whose moral qualities are doubted by many, history shows us that neither Louis XI nor Metternich was endowed with moral qualities, and yet they governed millions of men, while all the time they were morally beneath the least of those whose actions they directed.

If the course of power is not the physical capacity nor the moral quality of heroes, we must look for it outside of historical personages in their relations with the masses. This is the way in which jurisprudence conceives of power. Power is the united will of the masses, avowedly or tacitly transmitted to rulers chosen by the masses.

In the science of law, which is made up of dissertations on the way in which a state or power is organised, this definition seems clear enough, but when we apply it to history we find that some points are yet to be made intelligible. Jurisprudence looks upon the State and power as the ancients looked upon fire — as something which exists in itself.

According to history, the state and power are only phenomena, as fire is no longer regarded as a physical element but simply as a phenomenon.

This divergence of opinion enables jurisprudence to show in detail how power ought to be organised, and even to determine power which remains inert outside of time. But when history asks jurisprudence to explain facts which prove that power is modified in time, jurisprudence is unable to make any reply.



If power is the united will of the masses transmitted to a single person, was Poogatshef, the renegade Cossak, a representative of the masses? If not, why did Napoleon I recognise him as such? Why was Napoleon III when arrested at Boulogne, regarded as a criminal, and why, later on, were those who arrested him denounced as guilty?

After a palace revolution, where only two or three men are engaged, is the will of the masses represented by the new emperor?

In international affairs, is the will of the masses carried out by the conqueror?

Was the will of the Confederation of the Rhine incarnated in Napoleon in 1808? When the Russian troops went with the French troops in 1809, to fight against the Austrians, did Napoleon represent the will of the Russian people?

These questions may be answered in three ways:—

1. We may hold that the will of the masses is transmitted unconditionally to their chosen ruler or rulers, and that any assault upon the power thus established is an attack upon power in itself.

2. We may admit that the will of the masses is transmitted to the ruler or rulers under known and determined conditions, and that all successful attacks upon the power thus established are due to failure on the part of rulers to observe the conditions under which they received their power.

3. We may regard the will of the masses as transmitted irregularly to rulers, under unknown and indeterminate conditions, so that variations in power arise from the fact that rulers fulfil the unknown conditions of power more or less successfully.

In these three ways historians explain the relations existing between the masses and those who govern. Certain historians (the same biographical historians of whom I spoke a little way back) who are so simple that they do not understand the meaning of power, seem to think that the united will of the masses is transmitted to historical personages without any conditions whatever; and so when these historians describe the power of a given personage they regard it as the only true power; and they look upon all opposing forces, not as power, but as violence, an assault upon power.

This theory may be applied to primitive and peaceable periods of history, but it cannot explain the stormy scenes in the life of peoples when several powers are in conflict. A legitimist historian undertakes to prove that the Convention, the Directory, and the Bonapartist government were violations of power; while the republic and the Bonapartist historians try to prove, one, that the Convention, the other, that the Empire, was the only legitimate power, and that all the other manifestations of power mutually invalidate one another; they are good for only children, and for very childish children at that.

Other authors, recognising the falsity of this conception of history, say that power is based only on the conditional transmission of the will of the masses to the rulers, and that these historical personages receive power only on the condition that they carry out the will of the people. But

what are the conditions? Historians do not tell us, and when they try to explain, they fall straightaway into contradictions.

Every historian establishes his own conditions according to the conception he has of the object of the life of peoples. One finds this object to be the greatness, liberty and wealth of the French people; another applies the same to the Germans; a third, to the Russians. But if we assert that the conditions are the same for all nations, we are obliged to admit that historical facts are nearly always at variance with the theory. If power is transmitted to rulers on the condition that peoples are assured possession of wealth, liberty and culture, how is it that Louis XIV and Ivan the Terrible came peacefully to the end of their reigns, while Louis XVI and Charles I, were condemned by their peoples and perished on the scaffold?

Historians reply that the bad government of Louis XIV had its effect in the reign of Louis XVI. But why was not Louis XIV obliged to bear the penalty of his own misdeeds? How was it that the penalty fell only upon Louis XVI? How much time is needed for the execution of such a penalty?

To these questions we get no reply, because no one can answer them. There is another phenomenon which historians cannot explain. There is an incessant transmission of the will of the masses from one person to another, especially in international relations, it seems, which is explained by historians to the effect that the will of the masses is not regularly exerted, and that in many cases the results are largely due to the weaknesses of diplomats, monarchs and party leaders. Therefore they explain historical events like civil wars, revolution, conquests, not as free transmissions of will, but as will perverted by this or that personage; that is, as a violation of power.

But historical events do not agree with this theory either.

Historians who declare that the will of the masses is transmitted to historical personages under unknown conditions, affirm that these persons possess power because they carry out the will of the masses so transmitted.

If the force that moves the masses is not inherent in historical personages, but is in the people, what part is to be assigned to these personages by history?

Historians declare that they express the will of the masses, and that their actions represent the action of the masses. We may ask if they express the will of the masses throughout the whole extent of their careers, or only on certain special occasions.

If the will of the peoples is expressed only by certain phases in the careers of historical personages, as the so-called philosophical historians think, must we not first of all determine what the life of the people is, that we may recognise the special occasions when the career of the hero expresses the will of the masses?

Confronted by these difficulties, historians invent a most vague and intangible abstraction to cover a great number of historical events, and they declare that the object of the life of humanity is to be found in this abstraction.



In the foreground they place liberty, fraternity, culture, progress, civilisation. Then they study the lives of those persons who have left some records of action (kings, ministers, generals, writers, reformers, judges) and determine how much these persons have contributed to the realisation of the idea evolved by the historians as the supreme object of the life of humanity, or in what manner they have distinguished themselves by fighting against it.

But they have not been able to prove that the object of the life of humanity is liberty, equality, culture or civilisation; or that the relations between the masses and historical personages are based upon the chimerical hypothesis that the united will of the masses is always transmitted to chosen men.

The activity of the life of millions of men who march to war, burn their houses, abandon their fields, and cut each other's throats, cannot be expressed by a description of the deeds and words of a few dozen people who never burned their houses, or tilled the soil, or killed their fellows.

History at every step demonstrates the insufficiency of this hypothesis. Can the revolutions of the end of the eighteenth century be explained by the lives of a few kings and their ministers and mistresses? Can the Crusades be explained by the lives of a few knights? Can we to this day understand the movement of peoples with no apparent reason who moved off to the east with Peter the Hermit at the head of a horde of vagabonds? Is it not still more inexplicable to find this movement checked at the very moment when the deliverance of Jerusalem was suggested? Popes, kings, chevaliers then besought their people in vain to go and conquer the holy land; the people were deaf because the unknown cause that had pushed them to the east had disappeared.

We do not find the life of the peoples in the biographies of writers and reformers. The history of civilisation reveals certain conditions of existence, and gives us the thoughts of this or that writer. It tells us that Luther had a fiery disposition and that Rousseau had a suspicious nature; but it does not explain why after the Reformation people cut each other's throats or why the French during the great Revolution hurried one another to the guillotine.

When we put together the two conceptions of history invented by contemporary historians, we obtain biographies of monarchs and of writers, but never the history of the life of the peoples.

## Chapter V

### AN UNTENABLE THEORY

We cannot summarise the life of peoples in the lives of a few individuals, for the bond uniting such persons to peoples never has been discovered. The theory which pretends to find a bond of union in the will of the masses transmitted to chosen historical personages is not confirmed by the facts.

The act of voluntary cannot be verified; whatever the event may be, and whoever is at the head of the affairs of state, we can always say that he is there for the reason that in him is incarnated the will of the masses. When we do this we are like a man watching a herd of cattle, and attributing their change of direction, not to the carrying quality of the food, nor to the whip of the drover, but to the movements of the animals at the head of the herd.

What is the cause of historical events? POWER. What is power. Power is the united will of the masses transmitted to a given personage. Under what conditions are the masses going to transmit power to a given person? On the condition that the person expresses the will of the masses. That is to say, power is power! Power is a word we are entirely unable to understand.

If abstract reasoning could be made to comprehend all human experience, humanity would examine the idea of power as science formulates it, and conclude that it is only an abstraction, and that in reality it does not exist at all.

Man, however, studies events in the light of experience, and in forming his conclusions is governed by reason, and experience teaches him that power is no vain conclusion of abstraction, but a real thing.

Whenever a historical event comes to pass, one or several men are at the top, and seem to be the prime agents of transformation.

Napoleon III, gives his orders, and the French start for Mexico.

The King of Prussia and Bismarck give orders, and the German troops enter Bohemia.

At the command of Tsar Alexander, the French submit to the Bourbons.

Experience shows us that in whatever way an event may come to pass, it is nearly always related in some way to certain persons who give the necessary commands.

Historians who follow the traditional method, and believe in the direct participation of the divinity in human affairs, find the cause of an event in the expressed will of the people who have the power, but this conclusion is not confirmed by reason or experience.

Reason shows that the expressed will of a historical personage — his words — forms but a part of the general activity that leads up to such and such an event, say a war or revolution.



And so, if we do not recognise the existence of a supernatural or miraculous force, we cannot possibly think that the words of any person will result in the movement of millions of men. If we do admit that words can be the cause of an event, history teaches us that on many occasions the will of historical personages has been expressed without any effect whatever, their orders disobeyed, and events brought to pass in direct opposition to their wishes.

Unless we believe that divinity has a part in human affairs, we cannot regard power as the cause of historical events. POWER, as experience teaches us, is **SIMPLY THE RELATION THAT EXISTS BETWEEN THE EXPRESSED WILL OF A HISTORICAL PERSONAGE AND THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF THAT WILL BY OTHERS.** To understand the conditions in which this relation exists, we must first of all recognise the idea of will with reference to man, and not with reference to divinity.

If God gives commands expressive of his will (as the ancients believed) the expression of his will is not subject to time or any determining cause, but is wholly independent of the event.

When, however, we speak of human commands as the expression of the will of men who are subject to the limitations of time and are dependent upon one another, we must understand the two conditions under which all historical events are produced, that we may know the relation existing between decrees and the events that follow. These conditions are:—

1. Continuity in time between the historical movement and the person who gives the command.
2. An alliance between the historical personage who gives the command, and the men who carry it out.

An event must be accomplished in the time, and it is impossible to execute a command unless it is preceeded by another command to facilitate its accomplishment.

A command is never a spontaneous utterance and it never can be related to a series of events. Every command is the result of some other command, and is related to the event only at the moment when it is fulfilled.

When we say that Napoleon I gave the order for his troops to go to war, we sum up in a single command a series of constructive commands, all dependent upon one another. Napoleon did not command the Russian Campaign to take place; it was beyond his ability to do so.

He ordered messages to be sent to Vienna, Berlin and St. Petersburg; his commands resulted in millions of orders which corresponded to the series of events that led the French Army into Russia.

At the same time, he constantly planned an expedition against England, but although he bestowed more attention upon it than upon any other enterprise, his plan was never carried out. His commands with regard to England had no relations whatever to events; with regard to Russia, commands and events were in harmony.

## IF A MAN WOULD HAVE HIS ORDERS CARRIED OUT, HE MUST GIVE ORDERS THAT CAN BE ACCOMPLISHED.

To distinguish between what can be accomplished and what cannot be accomplished is impossible, not only in an event of importance like the Russian Campaign, but under any circumstances, for all historical action is accomplished in the face of many difficulties.

For every order that is carried out, there are a great many orders that are not accomplished at all. Only the orders that can be accomplished form a consecutive series of the events. Our error in taking the event that precedes an event for the cause of that event, arises from the fact that, when an event occurs, out of thousands of orders given only those corresponding to events that are accomplished, are remembered; and we forget those that are not accomplished and incapable of being accomplished.

We say "Napoleon wanted the Russian Campaign and he brought it to pass". Now the fact is that we cannot in the recorded life of Napoleon find any such desire. We find simply a series of conflicting and indeterminate orders or expressions of will.

The given command is never the cause of the historical fact, but the two have a certain connection. To know what this connection is, we must remember another condition upon which all human orders are dependent. The person who gives the command must himself take part in the event. The relation that subsists between the man who gives the orders and the men who receive them, is what we mean when we speak of power.

Men unite into groups, and in these groups, in spite of the diversity of aims, the relations between the component parts are always identical. The majority take a direct part in the common action, and so form another group, while the minority have little or no connection with affairs, directly at least.

Of all the groups formed by men for purposes of common action the most important and best organised is the Army. Each army is composed of soldiers, who form the majority, then of corporals, various minor officers, then colonels, then generals . . . the number of each class diminishing as we ascend the military hierarchy, till we find supreme power concentrated in a single man.

The organisation of an army may be likened to a cone. The base, where the diameter is largest, is composed of soldiers; the successive sections are officers of superior rank, and at the summit of the cone sits the commander-in-chief.

The soldiers take a direct part in events; they kill, burn, pillage, and all the time they receive orders from their superiors and never give any themselves. The subalterns are less numerous and they participate less actively in what is going on, but they give orders. The officer of a higher rank does still less, but he gives more frequent orders. The general gives orders to the troops and tells them where to go, but he never fires a shot



himself. The commander-in-chief takes no part in the action, but issues general orders for the movement of masses of troops.

The same relations exist between men who are united for any common action, whether the end be industry, or commerce, or any other enterprise. When we examine an organised group and follow the different grades from the base to the apex of the cone, we find it to be a law that the more actively men participate in affairs the fewer orders they are able to give; and that the more orders they give the less are their numbers, until we find a single man who takes no part whatever in events, and who has nothing to do but give orders.

The relations between the men who give the orders and the men who receive them, is the essence of the idea which we call power. In examining the conditions of time under which events take place, we have found that an order is accomplished only when it is related to a corresponding series of events.

On looking into the relations that subsist between the men who command and those who receive orders, we have seen that, in accordance with their respective situations, those who give the most orders take the least part in events, and their action is limited exclusively to giving orders.

## Chapter VII

### THE RELATION OF COMMANDS TO POWER

When an event is in progress, everyone has an opinion and a desire in regard to it, and as the event is the result of the combined action of millions of men it is natural that one of the opinions or desires should be realised. Then the opinion or desire thus realised appears to us like a command which preceded the event.

He who gives the orders is more occupied with talk than with action, and therefore evidently works less with his hands.

The larger the association formed for labour in common, the more important becomes the class of men who give orders and do not work. Men who unite in large numbers to work together at a common task, leave to those who take no part in action the responsibility of inventing and combining the results of their common action, and of justifying their action after it is completed.

People try to justify events by declaring them useful to national welfare. But those explanations are nonsensical and mutually contradictory. History refuses to uphold the theory that men must be killed to establish the rights of man, or that Russians must be slaughtered for the humiliation of England. But these explanations are necessary at the moment they are made; that is, immediately after the events to which they apply.

They relieve the men who have brought about the events from all moral responsibility. The imaginary object bears the same relation to the event that a cowcatcher does to a locomotive; it clears the road of moral responsibility.

Without these explanations, we could not possibly understand how millions of men could commit collective crimes, such as massacres and wars.

What is power?

What is the force that puts people into motion?

Power is a relation established between a certain person and other men, by virtue of which this person's part in action is inversely proportioned to the number of orders he can give before the event, and the number of reasons he can find after the event to justify the common activity.

Peoples are not put in motion by power, or by the ideas of writers, or by a combination of the causes in which historians believe, but by the action of all the men who take part in the event and who group themselves in such a way that those who are concerned most directly in events have the least responsibility.

In the moral relation, power is regarded as the cause of the event; in the physical relation, those who obey power are regarded as the cause of the event; but as moral activity is not possible without physical activity, the cause of the event is not wholly in power or in the men who submit to power; it is in the union of both. That is to say, the idea of causality is not applicable to the phenomenon under consideration. We come to a full circle, to infinity, to that ultimate limit of human thought which hedges in every theme which receives serious attention. Why did such and such a war take place? What was the cause of such and such a revolution? We do not know. We can only say that to bring about the event in question, men grouped themselves in a certain way and all took part in action; such, we say, is the nature of men, and such the law that governs them.

If history were concerned only with physical phenomena, that would be all we need say. But the historical law has to do with man. "I am free," he says, "and for that reason I am not subject to any law." If this were so, that is to say, if each could act according to his own desires, history would be simply a succession of accidents with no common bond. But if there be a historical law governing the actions of men, free will cannot exist, for the will of men would be necessarily subject to this law.

By reason, man analyses himself, but he knows himself only through self-consciousness. Without consciousness of self, observation and reason would be impossible. To understand, observe and reason, man must first of all be conscious of his own existence. Man is conscious of his existence only when he feels that he has the power of desire, when he knows his own will. Will, which is the essence of this life, man must conceive of as free, because he cannot conceive of it in any other way.



But when he selects himself as an object of study, and observes the necessity of taking food or the phenomena of cerebral activity, he finds his will is governed by an invariable law; and this law is a limitation of his will. Now what is not free must be limited. The will of man seems to him to be limited because he cannot conceive of it as free. You tell me that I am not free, and my only reply is to raise my arm and let it fall. Everyone will see that this illogical reply is an irrefutable proof of my liberty. It is the expression of a consciousness of self not subject to reason.

Every man accepts certain laws: he never struggles against the natural laws, such as those of gravitation or impenetrability, when he has once recognised their existence. Experience and reason also teach him that each of his acts depends upon his organisation, temperament and other influences, and yet man will not agree to those deductions.

When experience and reason teach him that a stone always falls to the earth, he regards the law as infallible, and always expects it to be accomplished. But when he is taught in the same way that his will is subject to natural law, he does not and cannot believe it. Experience and reason may prove to him time and again that under the same conditions and with the same temperament, he will always act in the same way; but when for the thousandth time he begins to act under the specified conditions with temperament unchanged, he is just as sure as in the first place that he has power to act in accordance with his own will.

Although it seems to be impossible, he feels sure it is true, for if he cannot have free will, he cannot understand life, and cannot go on living. If, therefore, when examined in the light of reason, free will appears to be a contradiction, we simply must conclude that the consciousness of free will does not come under the dominion of reason at all.

According to history, man, relatively to the life of humanity, seems to be subject to the laws that govern the historical life, but outside of this relation he seems to be a free being, and the question therefore is: Must the historical life of peoples, of humanity, be considered as the product of the free or of the involuntary acts of men?

The object of history is not the will of man, but the idea we form in regard to that will.

History does not, like theology, or ethics, or philosophy, attempt to solve the unsolvable mystery of the reconciliation of free will with the law of necessity.

History studies the life of man, in whom the reconciliation has already taken place.

Every historical event and every human action may be examined by itself, and no contradictions will be noticed, and at the same time each event may be regarded as being in part the result of a free action, and in part as being subject to the law of necessity.

Our idea of the greater or less part played by liberty in any given act often varies according to the point of view from which we examine this phenomenon, but every human act is invariably seen to be a reconciliation

between liberty and necessity. In every act there is so much liberty and so much necessity. The greater the amount of liberty, the less the amount of necessity, and inversely.

A drowning man who clutches another and drags him down to death; a starving mother who steals food for her child; a soldier who kills an unarmed man at the order of a superior; all are less guilty, that is less free and more subject to the law of necessity, the more clearly we understand their motives. They are more guilty the more firmly we believe that the man who dragged the other down was not drowning; that the mother was not starving; and that the soldier was not in the ranks.

The act of a madman or a drunkard seems to be less free and more obedient to necessity. In every case, the idea of liberty increases or diminishes according to the point of view from which the act is examined.

If we take a man away from his surroundings, his acts are free. A drowning man is less free (that is, more subject to the law of necessity) than his comrade who remains safely on the shore.

Similarly, the lives and actions of men who existed centuries before us, cannot seem to us to be as free as the lives and actions of our contemporaries, whose careers are not yet fully known to us. The idea we form with regard to liberty or necessity under this relation depends upon the greater or smaller lapse of time between the accomplishment of the act and the moment of pronouncing judgement. An historical result of the action of all the men who took part in it; but if the event is in the past, we seem its inevitable consequences. The further back we go in history, therefore, the less the events seem to have been free. The more therefore, we look into history, the more fully we are persuaded that the law of necessity alone is true.

The more ignorant we are of the cause of any act, whether it be a crime or an act of heroism, the more confident we are that the act was free.

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