

The Russian mote and the British beam



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Judge not, that ye be not judged.

Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat and swallow a camel. . . .
— *Matthew* xxiii, 24

Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye,
But considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?
— *Matthew* vii, 3

Oh the virtuous indignation, the roaring tempest raised in the tender souls of American and British philanthropists at the rumour that Russian authorities in Siberia are not as tender as they should be towards their political prisoners! What a hullabaloo of loud protests of “indignation meetings,” of gigantic gatherings to denounce their neighbours, while they keep prudently silent about the same misdeeds at home.

A monster meeting of some 250,000 men protested the other day at Hyde Park “in the name of civilization and humanity” against the brutal behaviour of some unknown Russian officials and jailors. Now, one can readily understand and entirely appreciate the feelings of the masses, of the oppressed, the suffering poor and the *hoi polloi* in general. These being “sat upon” from birth to death by the high and the wealthy of their own land, and having all, to a man, many a sore place in their hearts, must feel them vibrating with pain and sympathy with their brothers in sorrow of other countries. True, the energy expended at the said meeting might have been more usefully directed, perhaps, against local and colonial “Siberias” and “Dead Houses”; but such as it was, the impulse being genuine, every Theosophist regarded it with respect. But that to which every member of the Theosophical Society ought to refuse that feeling of sympathy is the hypocritical cant¹ in this matter of sundry editors who remain dumb in face of misdeeds at home, pouring all their wrath on the abuse of power and the brutality of Russian officers. This is enough to make an owl laugh in full daylight. That charges of cruelty should be brought forward, and leprous spots singled out on the body of Russia by England and America is a sufficiently curious piece of moral audacity; but that this attitude should be supported and even enforced, by certain editors, instead of being passed over in prudent silence, makes one think of the wise adage “whom the Gods would destroy they first make mad.” To the student of human nature a world of instruction is contained therein, and he feels thankful for this additional experience.

Bearing in mind that *Lucifer* has nought to do with the political situation in all this affair, let the reader remember, that it has, on the other hand everything to do with its moral aspect. Having its mission at heart, to wit: to bring “to light the hidden

¹ [Singing in a whining way, from the Latin *cantāre*, to sing. Cant was at first a beggar's whine, hence hypocrisy. Cf. W.W. Skeat's *Etymological Dictionary of English*, 1835-1912. — ED. PHIL.]

things of darkness,” it has naturally a good deal to say about drunken John and drunken Jonathan nodding so frowningly at drunken Peter, and so gravely moralising at him as though they were themselves sinless. Here the writer speaks first of all as a Theosophist and only secondly as a Russian; neither excusing Russia, nor accusing England and America, but simply throwing the full glare of the torch of truth on *facts* which no one can deny. And once this position established, the writer says: “How consoling and hopeful might have been for our growing society — that of the ‘Universal Brotherhood of Man’ — such exhibition of the noblest and most human feelings, had it not been marred by a few antecedent facts,” of which presently. Even as the “protest” against Russian cruelty stands now, all such show of pious regard for Christ’s command “love your enemies,” is spoiled by a disregard of that other injunction “thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are” Indeed, Europe might be asking now as of George Dandin in the comedy of Molière, «*Qui de nous deux trompe-t-on ici?*»² Could even a child be really deceived by such protests on the Continent? If all this display of indignation is likely to impress anyone eventually, it will be only those “inferior races” under the paternal sway and benevolent rule of their respective white rulers Hindus and Mussulmen, Burmese and Singhalese, upon listening to the reverberating echoes of pious horror from the West, are as likely as not to contrast the ferociousness of Russian jailors and prison houses with that of their own rulers, with the Calcutta “Black Hole” of famous memory, and the Andaman Islands; while the hapless and ever-kicked Negroes of the United States, the Red Indians dying of exposure and starvation in their frozen wilderness, and even some Chinamen who seek hospitality on the Pacific coast, may yet come to envy the lot of the “political prisoners of Siberia.” . . .

But what imposing pictures! On the other side of the “pond” the pathetic eloquence of Mr. George Kennan, the Siberian traveller, “who has just seen all this for himself, you see!” — drawing tears from the street-flags and forcing lamp posts to use their pocket handkerchiefs — without speaking of the coloured citizens, Red Indians and Chinamen. On this side of the Atlantic, Mr. Quilter, the editor of the *Universal Review*, showing like fervour on behalf of the “oppressed.” Mr. Adolphe Smith’s “Exile by administrative order,”³ adorned by what Mr. Stead calls “a fancy sketch of the flogging of *Madame Sihida*”(?)⁴ gracing one of the last numbers of the *Universal Review* produces likewise its effect. Moved by a spirit of lofty chivalry, its editor issued, as all know, a circular to M.P.’s, peers, judges, heads of Colleges and so on, to ask them “whether

- the present system of Siberian exile by administrative order” was not “a disgrace to a civilized nation”; and

² [Lequel de nous deux trompe-t-on ici?, Which of us two deceives the other?]

³ [See *Southland Times*, Issue 11486, 19th June 1890, p. 3, “How They Flogged Madame Sihida.”]

⁴ Were this “flogging” even proven — which it is not — still brutal and sickening as the fact would undeniably be, is it really any worse than the kicking by the police of women already knocked down by them; than the clubbing until mangled to death of men and crippled boys? And if one is reminded that the alleged “flogging” took place (if it ever did) in the wilds of Siberia, probably hundreds of miles away from any civilized centre, to speak of, and the well-proven “kicking and clubbing” right in the midst of the most civilized city in the world, namely, in Trafalgar Square, it does seem as if it were merely “six of one and half-a-dozen of the other.”

- whether the above mentioned authorities do not “consider that steps should be taken to call the attention of her Majesty’s Government to those outrages, in order that a diplomatic remonstrance should be addressed to the Czar”!

As this pertains to the domain of politics, and we do not care to trespass upon forbidden ground, those anxious to learn something of the replies are recommended to read the excellent summary of this curious incident on page 489 of the *June Review of Reviews*; but we must quote a few lines from it, in which the reader will learn

- 1 that some of the authorities appealed to are of opinion that “exile in Siberia is . . . a just and beneficent punishment . . . much better for criminals than our own (British) convict system”;
- 2 that the outrage on Madame Sihida “does not rest upon unimpeachable evidence,” the sketch recalling to the writer’s memory “an equally dramatic picture of a Polish prince chained in a convict gang to a murderer, a story which this prince’s brother subsequently declared was false.”

But that which cannot be disproved by any means is that other and far more legitimate agitation going on in England for long years, and now at its acme in this country, that for the enfranchisement of women, and *the causes which made it arise*. Most Theosophists have read Mrs. F. Fenwick Miller’s admirable address on the programme of the Women’s Franchise League;⁵ and many of our Theosophists belong to this League. And there are such as have declared that many women in England — even now, when many of the women’s “disabilities” so called, have been happily removed after centuries of *penal servitude* to their husbands — would gladly have consented to exchange places with “Madame Sihida,” whoever she is — not as a political prisoner perhaps, *but as a flogged woman*. What is the horror of being flogged (where brutal force is used, *there is no dishonour but martyrdom*), when compared with a long life of moral and physical slavery? Which of the female “serfs of sex”⁶ in *free* England would not gladly exchange her position as a wife and mother, for that of a wife and mother in *despotic* Russia? Why, ladies and gentlemen, who have fought in the “Married Women’s Property” agitation, for the “Custody of Infants’ Bill,” and the right of woman as an independent individual and a citizen, instead of the *thing* and her husband’s chattel that she was and still is — are you aware that in *despotic* “half civilised” Russia, the rights of women before the law are on a par with those of men, and in some cases their privileges far greater? That a rich woman marrying a man is, and has been, since the days of Catherine II, sole mistress of her property, the husband having no right to one penny without the wife’s legal signature. That a poor girl, marrying a rich man, having on the other hand a legal right to his property during his life and to a certain portion after his death whether he wills it or not, and also a right to the maintenance of herself and children *whatever she does*?⁷ Have you not heard that a woman holding property and paying taxes *is obliged to give her vote*, whether personally or by proxy? And that so greatly is she protected by law *that even*

⁵ The National Liberal Club, February 25th, 1890

⁶ “Woman’s Rights as preached by Women,” by a “Looker on.”

⁷ If separated (not divorced), and the husband is a public official, a certain portion is deducted from his salary and paid over to the wife.

a child born between nine and ten months after the husband's death is considered legitimate by law: simply because abnormally prolonged gestation does casually [sic] happen, and that the law states that it is more consonant with the law of Christ to forgive nine guilty women, rather than wrong the tenth who may be innocent? Compare this with the laws of free England with regard to woman, who until about eight or nine years ago was simply a slave, with less rights than a plantation negro. Read again Mrs. Fenwick Miller's paper⁸ and judge. Everything went against her receiving a higher education, inasmuch as she was to remain all her life "under the tutelage of some man." She had no right to her husband's property, and lost every right to hers, *even to every penny she earned by her own labour*, having, in short, no right to hold any property, whether inherited or acquired. A man deserting his wife for another woman, and leaving her and his children to starve, was not forced to support them, but had a legal right to every penny earned by his abandoned wife, as "the skill of her brain was not hers, it was her husband's." No matter what he did, or whatever crime he committed against her, she had no redress against him, could neither sue him, nor had even the right of lodging a complaint against him. More: she had no rights as a mother, English law recognizing only the father and the child. Her children could be taken away from her, separated from their mother forever, and there was no redress for her. Says Mrs. Fenwick Miller:

The wife had in the eyes of the law simply no existence . . . Even within the last two years, seven judges in conclave have declared the law to be today that a married woman is in this respect *still absolutely a slave, with no rights of free will in herself*. . . . Was this not slavery? . . . The woes and plight of the mulatto mother invented by Mrs. Stowe's genius set all England weeping; but English and Scotch mothers too — refined women, adoring mothers . . . — have seen their children torn from their embrace or have fled secretly and lived in desolate concealment with their little ones, as the only way to keep . . . near their breaking hearts the darlings of their souls. . . .

Herbert Spencer seems to have said the same long ago, in these words:

Wives in England were bought from the fifth to the to eleventh century, and as late as the seventeenth century husbands of decent station were not ashamed to beat their wives. Gentlemen (!) arranged parties of pleasure for the purpose of seeing wretched women whipped at Bridewell. It was not till 1817 that the public whipping of women was abolished in England.

Between 1817 and 1890 there are but a few years. But how many centuries old is English civilisation as compared to that of Russia, whose era of barbarism closed only with Peter the Great?

Who, then, except men capable of taking such undue if legal advantage of their mothers, wives, and children, would not confess that there is far less cruelty even in the *casual flogging* of a woman, than in such a systematic oppression, the lifelong torture of millions of *innocent* women and mothers throughout past centuries and to the present day? And for what reasons? Simply to protect the animal passions and

⁸ *loc. cit., supra*

lust, the depravity of men — the masters and the legislators. And it is the men of England who have refused, till forced in their last retrenchments, to abrogate such fiendish laws, and who still refuse to make away with many more as iniquitous, who call this solitary case of flogging “a disgrace to civilization”! And so it would be, if once proved, as are the heartless of England against her women. No doubt that of drunken, and therefore cruel, brutes among Russian jailors and prison officials there are plenty. But we trow⁹ no more than there are in other countries and probably less. And we would advise the editors who would agitate in favour of sending “remonstrances” to Russia, to first extract the beam from the eye of their own country and then only to turn their attention to the mote in the eye of their neighbour. For that “neighbour” is a country which protects at any rate her mothers and wives, while England lets her laws treat them simply as the goods and chattels of her men, and treats them as the dumb brutes of creation. If there ever was a real “disgrace to a civilized nation” it was the formation of numberless Societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals, before any one even thought of establishing a like Society for the protection of women and children, and the punishment of “wife-kickers” and wife-robbing rascally bipeds, such as are found in every class of Society. And why not rather turn the public attention to more than one “disgrace to a civilized nation,” taking place on British soil and in American lands, *e.g.*, to the revolting treatment by the Anglo-Indians of the millions of natives, from the highest Brahman to the lowest pariah, and the no less revolting attitude of the white Americans towards their black co-citizens, or the hapless Red-Indians? Cannibals inflict less torture on their prisoners of war than do the two cultured Christian nations in question on their coloured Brethren of the “inferior” races. The former kill and devour their victims, after which these are at rest; while the whites of England and America act worse than Cains towards their black subjects and citizens; they torture them mentally, when not physically, from their cradle to their tomb; refusing them every privilege they have a right to, and then turning round and spitting on them as if they were so many toads. Look at the unfortunate Red Skin! Deprived of every inch of his ancestral land, crowded off into the sea, robbed of his *supply* of blankets and provisions, the Indian is left to freeze and starve by hundreds and thousands, which he proceeds to do amidst catacombs of Bibles, a prey unfit even for the prairie buzzard . . .

But why go so far to the colonies for our instances and proofs, when cases of repeated flogging of women, aye of young girls not out of their teens, necessitate “Royal Commissions” at home? *Ruby, or How Girls are Trained for Circus Life*, by Amye Reade, a *shocker* founded on *facts* as the author claims, has brought forth the following in the *Saturday Review*:¹⁰

ROYAL COMMISSION — Mr. Gainsford Bruce, Q.C., M.P., has promised that as soon as sufficient evidence can be obtained to justify such a step, he will call attention to the matter in the House of Commons, with a view of inducing the Government to advise Her Majesty to appoint a Royal Commission to enquire into and report upon the treatment of children whilst being trained to the business of circus riders, acrobats, and contortionists.

⁹ [to believe, or suppose]

¹⁰ July 26th, 1890

MANCHESTER GUARDIAN says: — “*Ruby*, by Amye Reade. This book is notable on account of the charges brought by the authoress against a manager or managers in general of circuses. It is an indictment so tremendous that, if it can be proved, the authoress should not be content with representing a picture to harrow novel readers. She should collect her proofs and lay them before the Public Prosecutor. *Miss Reade asserts that in cases of contumacy girls of seventeen are stripped naked by the circus master and flogged by him till they are sick and faint and bleeding.*”

Among the members of Parliament who have “allowed their names to be used as indication of their desire to assist the author in her . . . efforts to bring before the public the horrible cruelties,” are Messrs Gainsford Bruce, Jacob Bright, Sir Richard Temple, *etc., etc.* Now, “Madame Sihida,” whatever she was else, was a murderess (political or not does not matter); but these unfortunate girls of seventeen are perfectly innocent victims.

Ah, gentlemen editors, of the two cultured champion nations of Christendom, you may play as much as you like at Sir Charles Grandison — that union of the perfect gentleman and good Christian — but who will believe you? Your protests are only suggestive of the Christian ethics of today, and are an insult to the ethics of Christ. They are no better than a glaring, instance of modern cant¹¹ and a gigantic apotheosis of hypocrisy. In the words of Lermontoff, the Russian poet,¹² all this comedy —

. . . would be too grotesque, in truth,
If it were not so heartrending!¹³

Read rather Bertillon’s *Les Races sauvages* and Charles Lüholtz’s *Au pays des Cannibales*¹⁴ — a French translation from the Swedish — if you would know what your friends accuse you of, while Russia is charged with her misdeeds only by her enemies, and those jealous of her growing power. Having just come across some reviews of these works, it is but right that our friends should have an idea of the charges published against England, or rather her colonies, and thus be given the means of comparing the Russian “mote” with the British “beam.” We were just preparing to blush for the alleged misdeeds of the former, which misdeeds, *if true*, would not be excused by any Theosophist on the ground that the Anglo-Indians and the Americans do far worse at home as well as in their colonies — when we saw a Russian review of these works which made us long to read the works themselves. We had known for years — that which the whole world knows — in what a civilized and Christian way the English and the Americans treated — not their prisoners, political or others, but simply their most loyal subjects and citizens, harmless Hindus and other “black heathens,” hard-working, honest negroes, and the much-wronged Red

¹¹ [Singing in a whining way, from the Latin *cantāre*, to sing. Cant was at first a beggar’s whine, hence hypocrisy. Cf. W.W. Skeat’s *Etymological Dictionary of English*, 1835-1912. — ED. PHIL.]

¹² [Mikhail Yuryevich Lermontov, 1814–41, Russian Romantic writer, poet, and painter, sometimes called “the poet of the Caucasus,” the most important Russian poet after Alexander Pushkin’s death in 1837. Lermontov is considered the supreme poet of Russian literature alongside Pushkin and the greatest figure in Russian Romanticism. His influence on later Russian literature is still felt in modern times, not only through his poetry, but also through his prose, which founded the tradition of the Russian psychological novel. — Cf. Wikipedia]

¹³ [M.Y. Lermontov, Sonnet written in 1840 to Alexandra Osipovna Smirnova.]

¹⁴ [French title of his Norwegian work: *Blandt menneskeoedere*, 1887.]

Indians. But we were not prepared to believe that which is published in the *Races Sauvages* of Bertillon and *Au pays des Cannibales* by the well-known Swedish traveller in Australia, Charles Lühholtz.

Let us glance at the older work. Bertillon speaks of Tasmania, and shows that in 1803 there were still about 6,000 natives left, while just sixty-nine years later there remained of them but a legend, and a ghastly tale. In 1872 died the last of the Tasmanians. The country was swept out of its last *nigger*. How did it come to pass? This is Bertillon's tale:

To achieve such a sad result, the [English] did not stop before any kind of atrocity . . . They premised by offering £5 for the head of every adult, and £2 for that of every baby Tasmanian. To succeed in this chase after the native the better, the [English] brought with them aborigines of Australia, and used them as blood hounds. But as the extermination was found to work too slowly to suit the English, a *cordon* was organized, selected from Colonists, and among the garrison . . . and Arthur, the then governor of the island, was appointed as its chief. After this commenced a regular chase after the Tasmanians . . . The natives were driven into deep water, shot, as if by accident and those who escaped were driven into the mountains . . . soon perished . . . Some of the English even used arsenic and boasted of it. Some of the victims' skulls were exhibited as curious Trophies . . .¹⁵

Now this may, or may not, be true; it may, or may not, be exaggerated, just as in the case of "Siberian flogging" and cruelty to political prisoners. As the latter charge comes to us from Russia's enemies and sensation-loving travellers, so the tale of Tasmania is told by the same kind of traveller, and, moreover, one of a nation not generally friendly to England. But here comes something more modern and trustworthy, a charge from a decided friend of England and the Australians, and one who says what he has seen with his own eyes, heard with his own ears — namely, Charles Lühholtz, in his work called in the French translation, *Au Pays des Cannibales*. We quote from an ample Russian review of the work in the *Novoye Vremya*.¹⁶ According to the latter, the "enlightenment" of the inferior races and the savage-islanders by the civilization-spreading Englishmen did not stop at the Tasmanians. This is from Lühholtz's revelation, and it is ghastly!

There is a chapter in this work treating specially of the relations of the English colonists with the natives, and what deadly terrible relations! The life of a black man is worth nothing, it seems, and his rights to existence are on a par with those of a wild beast . . . To kill a native of Australia is the same as killing a dog in the eyes of a British colonist . . . More than this: no dog will be so cruelly treated in Europe. Its life, unless dangerous to men, will not be taken away without any cause. Not so for the native of Australia, according to the evidence of the Swedish author, who shows that there are young men who make a point of hunting the blacks every Sunday in the neighbourhood of their cities, systematically passing the whole day in that *sport*, simply *for pleasure's sake*. . . .

¹⁵ [pp. 223-24]

¹⁶ May 2nd (14), 1890, No. 5,080

A party of four or five horsemen prepares traps, or, driving the savages into a narrow pass, forces them to seek refuge on precipitous cliffs, and while the unfortunate wretches are climbing at their life's peril on almost perpendicular bare rocks, one ball after another is fired at them, making even those slightly wounded lose their hold, and falling down, break and tear themselves into shreds on the sharp rocky projections below. . . . A squatter in Long Lagoon has become famous for the immense number of blacks he has poisoned with strychnine. And this is no single instance. A farmer from Lower Herbert confessed to the Swedish traveller that he was in the habit of burning the dead bodies of the natives — to get rid of them, in order to destroy a too palpable piece of evidence. But this was only an extra precaution. For, although local law (on paper) punishes murder, it is in reality only *the killing of white men* which is called murder. English colonists have repeatedly offered to Lühholtz to shoot a few blacks, to get for him the native skulls he was in need of. . . . Before law a black savage is entirely helpless. "Were I, a native, I would kill every English colonist I met," said an exasperated Englishman, an eye-witness like himself, to our author. Another traveller, in his letter to Lühholtz, speaks of these British colonists as of "the most disgusting caricatures of Christians. . . . The English constantly throw stones at other nations for their behaviour to conquered races, while no words can express the horror and the indignity of their own acts towards the natives of Australia."

Thus, having swept off the face of the earth the unfortunate Tasmanians, the British colonists,

. . . with a cruelty a tiger might envy, destroy to this day the Australian savages. When the first colony of the province of Victoria was founded, there were about 10,000 natives in that district. In 1871, their number fell to 3,000; and in 1880 there were only about 800 left, in all. How many remain alive now we do not know; at any rate, the above cited figures show very eloquently that the civilizing influence of the enlightened mariners has born fruit and their handiwork is nearing its end. . . . A few more years, and the Australian aboriginal race will have disappeared from the face of the earth. The English province of Victoria, raised on the black man's lands soaked through and through with his savage blood and fertilized with his bones, will blossom the more luxuriously for that . . .

The Russian Reviewer ends with a paragraph which may be taken as a tit-for-tat to the English editor of the *Universal Review* and his colleagues. We give a *verbatim* translation of it:

Such is the soil on which that colonizing activity the English seem so proud of finds its vent. And it is this soil, furrowed in length and breadth by the brutal cruelty of the soulless English colonist, which proclaims loudly to the whole world that, to have right of throwing stones at other nations, it is not sufficient yet to be covered with an English skin. It is also necessary that the British soul should not be as black as are the bodies of, and the soil wrenched from, the poor natives; and that the hapless savages should not be viewed by their con-

querors as no better than the Egyptian mummies of cats; to wit: good only to serve as land-fertilizers for their masters' flourishing colonies.

And now we have done, leaving the detractors and self-constituted judges of Russia to their own reflections. We have lived in India and throughout Asiatic countries; and, as a Theosophist, we feel bound to say that nowhere have we found such a potentiality of cruelty and cant¹⁷ under the brown and black skins as under the white epiderm of the refined European, save perhaps, in the class of the gariwalas, the bullock cart drivers. If the reader would learn the characteristics of this class he will be told for his edification what is that personage. The gariwala belongs to that specimen of humanity to which speech was given to conceal its thought, and which professes its religion only because it serves its ends. While offering divine honours and worship to the cow and the bull, and never letting any opportunity of denouncing his brother gariwala to the village Brahman for disrespect to the (sacred) animals, he himself twists the tails of his team of oxen until these appendages of his Gods hang only by a few hairs and clotted blood. The gariwala, it is, then, who ought to feel a legitimate pride in finding himself acting on the same lines of whining cant as his masters — the *bara-sāhibs*. And coming so near, in his own humble way, to the policy of the two most civilized and cultured nations of Christendom, the gariwala ought perhaps to be promoted from the ranks of the *inferior* to those of the *superior* race.

We have but one word more to say. When Russia has as much said of her by her friends, as Lümholtz says of Australia, and others of India and America, then will every honest man and woman of Europe join in the indignation meetings and righteous protests against Russian atrocities. Until then the best advice one can to the English and the Americans is very, very old:

JUDGE NOT, THAT YE BE NOT JUDGED . . . for how wilt thou say to thy brother,
Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and behold, a beam is in thine own
eye?¹⁸

H. P. B.



¹⁷ [Singing in a whining way, from the Latin *cantāre*, to sing. Cant was at first a beggar's whine, hence hypocrisy. Cf. W.W. Skeat's *Etymological Dictionary of English*, 1835-1912. — ED. PHIL.]

¹⁸ [Cf. *Matthew* vii, 1-5; *Luke* vi, 37-42.]