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Félix Pignal
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or, A Pardon for Cain
1854

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The Philosophy of Defiance

or, A Pardon for Cain

Félix Pignal

1854

… Give me any epithets you wish; I accept them all in advance. I have only one thought, and envision only one glory: it is to strike everywhere and always, as much as I can, at the principle of domination. *Satan, in his revolt, is my father, and, in his courage, Cain is my brother!*

… We do not take a single step in society without hearing that human beings must believe in a God, in a sovereign being, master of all things, according to whose absolute will everything occurs, whether for good or ill.

Well, I claim bluntly that this doctrine is the source of all our miseries and that those—too numerous, alas!—who maintain it, as much by cunning as through ignorance or fanaticism, constantly dig beneath our feet the abyss which must swallow us.

… Some mistreat others,—that is beyond doubt,—and in order to safeguard ourselves against rebellion, we have invented the belief in God.

I will go further, and say that in order to believe in a supreme being, the *mistreated* have no need of teaching; from that side, the movement of the soul is inevitable.

Yes, it is when we are, so to speak, abandoned by everyone, that our minds seek the support of an unknown being; and so long as he remains a brother to us, a friend, it is from him that we await the consolations that our sufferings demand…

… A tooth for a tooth! The law of the jungle. Such is the combat that we must still make against the divinity… First, why do we tremble at this audacity? Isn't humanity, under the weight of its sorrows, at bay, at the last extremities? So it no longer has anything to lose… Courage in the attack! Courage! Our servility offers us a glorious pretext which would, by itself, justify our rebellion. And since we honor a people when they know how to overthrow a tyrant, what would be the grandeur of our triumph, if we succeeded in destroying the principle of tyranny!

There is a fact, and it is that tyranny is an evil more violent than all the evils which could result from our independence. That is why each of us should seek to belong to ourselves, in order that human tribulations (if we must still have them) might not be the result of a shameful mistake, and that the vicious should always be disgraceful in our eyes, for God is an imaginary torch, so fatal to humanity that he guides it in paths contrary to its happiness and renders society guilty before the criminal that it punishes!

With God, man is given the odious chore of torturing his fellows and the victims the shame of patiently bearing the oppression!

Thus marches society, loaded down with the chains that it imposes on itself! Ashamed of the blood that covers it! Without respect for its own tears, and stuffed full with a crime which will choke it, if a plerosis does not save it from its last bout…

… But the only God which it seems tolerable for me to avow, assuming that name should not disappear from every language, has no absolute will over us: it is the intellectual fluid, having the universe for reservoir, which is refined in the springs of our imagination, more mysteriously still than the nutritious juices of the earth being distributed to the roots of the plants that absorb them. This

Scholars will never have been more sought after… Science will be an instrument of busy labor for those who feel themselves capable of working one of the fields of its domain… And each individual, being occupied with the work they prefer, will put into that work as much art, skill and intelligence as a great writer will use to describe some story. An individual who is in their true society, works with taste and pleasure, with no hostility towards anyone.

Thus, all your days will pass in prosperity and joy.

… The earth will be the homeland of everyone, and each will be able to contemplate its riches.

All people will love one another…

Oh, independence! Protector of humanity, inexhaustible source of happiness and satisfaction, seep into the hearts of the people, disabuse their minds of the artifices which delude and incite them, unblind their eyes, oh goddess! so that they can see your radiant halo, whose pure light weakens the monsters like the daylight wearies the owl! Mother of all pure liberties, let your name be sung, and let your name be blessed! Long live independence! War to authority!

fluid gives some abilities which are ruled by no other laws than those that we impose on them…

… Still, we dare to give him (God) the name of Almighty Father! A thing which undoubtedly imposes on us the title of Brothers… Truly, wouldn't it make you shudder with horror if you knew some less powerful father who would allow his own children to tear each other to pieces, before his very eyes! It is barbarians who have created this vampire in their image!…

How could we believe in liberty if the mind warps itself so easily in favor of dependency? As long as the mind will bear any *subordination*, the body must endure *servitude*. This is a deadly, but inevitable, consequence of every belief in God.

Thus, let us first teach the children their duties with regard to their fellows, instead of accustoming their imaginations to the mysteries, and later, if they want, they can discuss eternal visions. There will then be many fewer head cases and more honest folk in society…

… The tears, the moans—and the arms—of those who suffer, have still not been able to change anything about their appalling condition…

What good is it to revolt today, if tomorrow you reestablish or allow to be reestablished the colossus which crushes you; if tomorrow, in other forms, you reconstruct the teeth that bite you, the jaw that crushes you, the throat that swallows you, and the stomach which digests you; if tomorrow, in short, the authority that you have overthrown, is reborn fresh and even stronger, and consequently more violent and more redoubtable? What good is that? Tell me.

For a number of years, the democracy was astonished to see its soldiers so scattered and discordant; but I say that nothing is less astonishing. The division of interests divides the interested parties… Let us console ourselves, however, for despite everything nature is emerging and the democracy, refining itself, is inclined to fol-

low nature's laws. So there is no longer but one cry: the call for independence…

… Property, such as it exists today, is the fruit of a law upheld by some skilled sorts who want to live at the expense of those that they dominate. Like all human laws, it is unjust and murderous, not really creating happiness for anyone, not even those that it protects… Understood as it is presently, property is the source of all evils!…

… It is not, however, property alone that stems from the meanness, the cruelty, the vengeance, and the laziness of which so many of our fellows are accused!

Misfortune makes us mean, the lack of everything makes us thieving and disheartened, and a false principle warps humans to the point of not loving their fellows, of being harmful rather than devoted to them.

To maintain this principle and perpetuate its crime, we feign to guarantee the public repose by increasing the number of police, by building new prisons, by doubling or tripling the wages of those who forge the chains or fasten them to the feet of the exploited poor. Ah! If instead of exhausting us, misfortune gave us intelligence, we would see something else entirely, despite the multiplication of the police!…

… If there is, in this world, some real power, it is indeed the reign of tyranny, that colossus with numberless claws, which constantly tears at all the peoples whose palpitating breasts call for liberty.

Certainly, we can find nothing more deplorable than the evils that overflow the earth because of this murderous principle. The kings, who should be for us only free conventions, which we should change as the future brings us new ideas, because often the next day we do not know how to content ourselves with what made us happy the day before, are for most of us heavy chains that hold us riveted to misfortune, while the traitors who attach themselves to us wander at their ease the fields of our prosperity!…

perfectibility, an eternal competition will establish the price, stimulated by that progressive perfection whose limit is found in the fictions of eternity, if it is to be found at all.

Some communal bazaars will be established in each locality, and the products which are lacking will very quickly give some advantages to those who can fill this void, in order that each commune or hamlet will soon have its necessities within reach. The fruits of the labor of the producers will fall directly to the consumers, without any increase of price above their real value, except for the costs that the staffing of the bazaars to which these products will be entrusted will entail.

However, no one will be required to stock their products at the communal fairs, so that they still remain free to negotiate directly with other producers or consumers, if they judge it proper…

There will always be individuals of superior talent. And for this reason, individuality could not be merged, without suffering subjection, into a collective liberty. Besides, whoever says individual liberty, says it all; for a collective liberty can only be created under the will of several individuals.

Thus let those who judge it appropriate unite in life, duties and labor. And let those whom the least subjection would offend remain individually independent.

The true principle is thus very far from requiring inviolable community. However, for the harmony of certain labors, it is obvious that many of the producers will establish themselves in societies, for the advantages that they will find in the union of their strengths. But once more, communism will never be a fundamental principle, because of the diversity of our intelligences, needs and wills.

Thus, excluding the jobs of judge, priest, policeman, thief and torturer, our new society will offer to each of its members the means to live in a perfect ease, no longer wearying themselves for vain glories and sordid lusts.

In each community, they will establish some institutions for the young…

liberty, there is only some monstrous hybrid, which everyone must hound as they would a beast suspected of rabies.

Down with governments, down with tyranny, and long live independence! Long live love and friendship.

… No more governments, and no more taxes. No more cutthroats, and no more blood. No more greed, and no more hate. The future is for all. And it is thus that you will love yourselves in your brothers.

Establish yourselves in revolutionary communes; even in the smallest places always cry: Down with the governments! Let each of you participate in the discussions in their town, in order to debate their interests.

As your well-being will depend on the same cause, you will never have a guide except the same reason, the same spirit. It is thus that intelligence will really prevail…

Don't concern yourself with the lazy: there will be none, for individuals who work freely for themselves need work as much as recreation and could not do without it without suffering.

That sees bizarre, doesn't it? There are so many today who are lazy and live splendidly.

With regard to the majority of those, I do no know what to tell you, except that since you have tolerated them thus far, we have to feed them: habit is a second nature.

Besides, they will disappear like the old soldiers of the Empire.

The principle which must, by its own power, bring into communion the interests of all its members, will promote industry as much as agriculture; consequently, your moral and material necessity will be to establish a balance between the agricultural products and those of industry. And being dependent only on your needs, that equilibrium can never been upset enough for the products of each of you to stop flowing, always with the same regularity.

Thus, nothing can prevent or constrain any longer the free exchange of your products, and as it is these alone which can satisfy the void of your needs, each will trade at will. Then, the beautiful, the solid and the convenient still being capable of an incontestable

Labor, which should be for individuals only a subject for *leisure* has become mind-numbing under this *insufferable* and *bloodthirsty* empire, because many are required to give of themselves beyond their strength to feed their own executioners!…

… What!… There is not a single place on earth which is not stained with the crime of slavery and oppression. Not a city which has not resounded, as many times as there are grains of sand in its walls, with the cries of the ill-fated and despairing! Could the inner man, whose nature a false principle has still not been able to change, reflect on his unfortunate fellows without a secret power awakening in him, to sleep again only when it has found the salutary concoction with which the poor are spoiled?… The poor are thirsty, and the only drink they demand… is liberty! But an absolute liberty, a liberty without intermediary, a liberty with no other laws than those which germinate in the people. Finally that liberty which is born from independence, and which could only be hostile to those who oversee the workers in order live on their sweat and blood!!

Now, in order to enjoy that liberty, it is necessary to prevent tyranny, and as we have already said: The king is certainly not the only tyrant in a kingdom.

A king is only the summit of a governmental pyramid, the base of which is calculated to maintain it.

As long as that base is not broken up, it would be useless to sacrifice ourselves to knock down its peak in order to acquire liberty…

… To cut off the head of a king, but allow the principle which requires him to remain, a principle which demands that so many other kinglets fatten themselves at the expense of the proletariat, is just like trying to stop the current in a rapidly flowing river with a saber blow!… Laugh in the faces of the idiots and schemers who, on the basis of similar stupidities, will cry out to you: To arms!… I have said, or have meant, that to obtain true liberty we must wait for the governmental pyramid to be broken apart, by itself even!… I stand by it…

Far from encouraging that bloodthirsty, liberticidal intoxication, I would always strive for silence, so as not to have to bemoan the atrocities of a revolution of barbarians or to water with our tears the places stained with the blood of those who could have become our friends

Let us suppose that a government is broken up. It is then that we must show the courage and resolution to prevent its reconstitution in any other form. For, in order to exist, power must be homicidal, murder being the daily fruit of its instinct for preservation.

For independence, and for her daughter liberty, we will sacrifice ourselves! To arms, to arms!! But for our fellows, the seditious have only silence… For, far from freeing the world from the claws which clasp it, we will only enslave it more…

Truly, we could only laugh at a republican who wanted, at all costs, to change one government in order to reestablish another! What then does this madman—this troublemaker—want? Some trouble and disorder, fifty savages in exchange for one barbarian. One hundred deputies for a prince. Finally a thousand cankers for an ulcer. Is it really worth the fuss for such horrors!!

No, no, I will never be republican to the point of swapping the ugly for the dreadful. And I will not even trouble myself to see if the barricades in the street are deserted or occupied, as long as people are not disposed to discuss at least these four points.

1° The earth, being rightly regarded as the principal part of our inheritance, is inalienable in any form and transaction;

2° All uncultivated earth returns to the public domain to be distributed as an immoveable instrument of labor;

3° The products of labor alone are considered as trafficable, individual properties;

4° All domestic service is regarded as degrading and whoever serves a master will no longer be a citizen…

… I reflect in passing, that some are capable of believing that I would diminish the number of revolutionaries!!… If I should diminish anything, it would only be, in any case, the number of those

who call themselves republicans and who, most often, are only a bunch of brutes who will cut the throats of the so-called reds and whites, because they are of another color.

So much the better. Then we would know, and if the war between us is a war to the death, we will at least have the advantage of knowing why. While today, you hardly dare to approach in broad daylight certain individuals who cry to you in an insolent voice: Long live the republic!… Well, whoever wishes life for any government, also supports a coterie existing at the expense of those whom it governs. Whoever says: Long live absolutism! says long live lies. Whoever says: Long live a governmental republic! says long live hypocrisy! But those who say: Down with all governments!! says down with murder! Long live independence! Long live truth!…

Let the liberals, the radicals, and the bourgeois republicans choose. And if they want to continue to exploit the miserable workers, let them say: Long live absolutism!…

The earth is the mother of everyone. Each has a right to the land, as they have a right to the rays of the sun which warms us, and should not command it any more than they would the air of which they breathe a portion to invigorate their blood.

Now, if the earth is subject today to the laws of commerce, like an ordinary bit of merchandise or any product, it is a crime against humanity which affects the majority of us, and which has become the source of all our evils and which puts humans below the savage beasts, which despite their fierce spirit only appropriate that which conforms to the needs of their nature

Thus there are two very distinct camps among us: that of the *governors* and that of the *governed,* and there are also only two principles: that of lies and that of truth…

… The governments tremble, so rejoice (worker!); they totter, so hold yourself in readiness; they fall, so attack! But among their ruins, soaked with the blood of your fathers, never let the audacious dare to cry: Long live the power!… or crack their skulls, for power is authority, and authority is tyranny. With the last… there is not