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Jean Grave
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1912

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Colonization

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Colonization is extending too widely, in the present epoch, for anarchists not to have their say on this question. At a time when the so-called civilized nations are disputing areas of influence in Africa — in Tripolitania, in the Congo, in Morocco — dividing up the peoples like cattle, all of this hiding the most shady financial schemes, the pastors of peoples being no more than the business managers of financial sharks, tampers of crooked businesses, we must rise up against this hybrid product of patriotism and mercantilism combined — brigandage and highway robbery for the benefit of the ruling classes.

A private individual goes into his neighbor's house, breaks everything he lays his hands on, seizes everything he finds convenient for his own use: he is a criminal; "Society" condemns him. But if a government finds itself driven to a standstill by an internal situation which necessitates some external *diversion*; if it be encumbered at home by unemployed hands of which it knows not how to rid itself, of products which it cannot get distributed; let this government declare war against remote peoples which it knows to be too feeble to resist it, let it take possession of their country, subject them to an entire system of exploitation, force its products upon them, massacre them if

they attempt to escape this exploitation with which it weighs them down,—oh, then, this is moral! From the moment you operate on a grand scale it merits the approbation of honest men. It is no longer called robbery or assassination; there is an honorable word for covering up the dishonorable deeds that government commits: this is called “civilizing” undeveloped peoples.

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And let no one deem this exaggeration. No nation is reputed to be a colonizing one save when it has succeeded in getting out of a country the maximum product it is capable of yielding. Thus England is a colonizing country, because she knows how to “reward” her colonies with the prosperity of the people she sends out to rule them, how to gather back into her coffers the taxes with which she burdens them.

In the Indies, for instance, those whom she sends out make colossal fortunes. The country, to be sure, is completely ravaged from time to time by frightful famines that decimate hundreds of thousands of people. But of what moment are the details so long as John Bull can market his manufactured products and thereby succeed in obtaining, for his own advantage, what the soil of Great Britain could not produce? Such are the benefits of colonization!

Today, it is true, one must be disillusioned. India competes with the products of the “Motherland”. Never mind, the capitalists will transport their capital and factories there, and since the Hindus feed on a handful of rice, fortunes can still be built; too bad if the English workers pay the difference. In order to make them patient, they will be promised the empire of the world, and they will be launched against the Boers or the Germans.

In France it is different; we are not colonizers. Oh, reassure yourself; that is not to say we are any the less brigands, that our

conquered people are less exploited! No; only we are less “practical.” Instead of studying the peoples we conquer we deliver them over to the caprices of the sword; we subject them to the regime of the “mother country;” if these peoples cannot bend to it, so much the worse for them! They will disappear little by little under the degenerating influence of an administration to which they are not accustomed. What of it? If they revolt we hunt them like wild beasts, track them like deer, and pillage in that case is not only tolerated but approved; it is called a “raid.”

The ferocious beast which we train and keep, under the name of “soldier,” is let loose upon inoffensive peoples. The latter behold themselves delivered over to every excess which these unchained brutes can conceive: women are raped, children’s throats are cut, whole villages are given to the flames, entire populations are driven into the plains where they are destined to perish miserably. Is that all? Let it pass; it is a civilized nation carrying civilization to savages!

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Certainly, upon thorough examination of what goes on around us there is nothing illogical or abnormal in all this; it is, in fact, the result of our present organization. It is nothing astonishing that these «high feats» of arms obtain the approval and applause of the bourgeois world. The bourgeoisie is interested in these strokes of brigandage; they serve as a pretext for maintaining permanent armies; they occupy the praetorians who, during these slaughters, set their hands to more serious “labor;” these armies themselves serve to unload a whole pack of idiots and worthless persons by whom the bourgeoisie would be much embarrassed, and who, by virtue of a few yards of gilt stripes, are made their most furious defenders. These conquests facilitate an entire series of financial schemes by means of which they may skim off the savings of speculators in search of doubtful enterprises.

They will monopolize the stolen or conquered lands. These wars cause massacres of workers whose excessive numbers embarrass them; the conquered countries being in "need" of an administration, there is a new market for a whole army of office-seekers and ambitious persons whom they thus harness to their chariot, whereas had these latter remained unemployed its route might have been hampered thereby.

Still better, there are peoples to exploit, to be yoked in their service, upon whom their products may be forced, whom they may decimate without being held accountable to any one. In view of these advantages the bourgeoisie need not hesitate; and the French bourgeoisie have so well understood this that they have launched headlong into colonial enterprises.

But what astonishes and disheartens us is that there are workers who approve of these infamies; who feel no remorse in lending a hand to these rascalities, and do not understand the flagrant injustice of massacring people in their own homes, in order to mould them to a way of living not natural to them. Oh, we know the ready-made rejoinders which it is customary to make to those who become indignant at too flagrant injustices: "They have revolted, they have killed our people; we cannot endure it. . . They are savages, they must be civilized. . . The needs of commerce require it. . . Yes, perhaps it was wrong to go among them in the first place, but the colonies have cost us too many men, too much money, to abandon them now," etc.

"They have revolted; they have killed our men!" Well, what else? What were we doing in their country? Why did we not let them alone? Did they ever come and ask anything of us? We have tried to impose laws upon them which they do not want to accept. They have revolted; they have done well. So much the worse for those of us who perish in the struggle; they should have refrained from participating in these infamies.

"They are savages; they must be civilized." Let any one take up the history of conquests, and then tell us which were

You, rulers, are civilizers? Come on! What have you done with those tribes that inhabited America and which disappear every day decimated by betrayals, those tribes of which, in defiance of the sworn faith, you tear off, little by little, the hunting grounds that you had recognized as theirs? What have you done with the tribes of Polynesia, which all travelers agreed in depicting to us as strong and vigorous peoples, and who are now disappearing under your rule?

You civilizers? But at the rate your civilization is going on, if the workers are bound to succumb to the struggle to which you deliver them up, you, in your turn, will not be long in succumbing likewise under your indolence and laziness, even as fell the Greek and Roman civilizations, which having reached the pitch of luxury and exploitation, having lost all the faculties of struggle, in preserving the faculty of enjoyment, succumbed much more under the pressure of their own bloated nervelessness than to the blows of the barbarians, who, entering into the struggle in the fullness of their strength, had no great trouble to overturn this rapidly decaying civilization.

As you have undertaken to destroy these races, not inferior, but merely latecomer, you tend in like manner to destroy the working class, which you also qualify as inferior. Day by day you seek to eliminate the worker from the workshop, replacing him by machines. Your triumph would be the end of humanity; for, losing little by little the faculties acquired by the necessity for struggle, you would return to the most rudimentary ancestral forms of society and humanity would soon have no other ideal than that of an association of digestive sacs commanding a nation of machines, waited upon by automatons, having nothing human left but the name.

decorate themselves with the name of travelers, seeing nothing in their travels but a good commercial or political deal. They have excited the animosity of these peoples against the whites by cheating them in their exchanges, by failing to keep their agreements, by massacring them, if need be, when they could do it with impunity.

Should we bring facts? Let's read the books by Octon Vigné, and *Chez les Hova* by Jean Carol. The atrocities of the Chanoines and the Voulets are not so far from us that we still cannot remember them. As for the exploits of the Italian "civilizers" in Tripolitania, they are of the present day.

Go to, go to, philanthropists of commerce, civilizers by the sword! Forbear your tirades on the benefits of civilization! That which you call thus, that which you disguise under the name of colonization, has a name perfectly denned in your code, when it is the act of a few obscure individuals: it is called "pillage and assassination by armed bands." But civilization has nothing in common with your highway-robber practices!

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What the ruling classes must have is new markets for their products and new peoples to exploit; for this they send out their Solcilletts, their de Brazzas, their Crampels, Triviers, etc., in search of unknown territories, there to open up factories which shall deliver these countries over to their unlimited exploitation. They commence by exploiting commercially and finish by exploiting in every way, when once these tribes have been brought under their protectorate. What they stand in need of is immense tracts of earth which they may gradually annex after having depopulated them;—do they not need plenty of room where into they may divert the surplus population which embarrasses them, and buy the parliamentarians who become their accomplices in the House [of representatives]?

the most savage,—those who were called so, or the "civilized." Which are in greatest need of being civilized, the conquerors or the inoffensive peoples who generally welcomed their invaders with open arms, and as the reward for their advances have been tortured and decimated? Take the history of the conquests in America by Spain, of India by England, of Africa, Cochin China, and Tonquin by France, and then boast about "civilization." Remember, too, that in these histories you will find recorded only the "great events," whose importance has left traces; but if you were to picture to yourself all the "little events" of which these are composed and which pass by unperceived; if you were to bring to light all the turpitudes which are absorbed in the imposing mass of the principal facts, then what would it be? You would recoil affrighted before these horrors!

For ourselves, having spent some time in the naval service, we have listened to the description of numbers of scenes which prove that when a soldier arrives in a conquered country, he considers himself, by that mere fact, absolute master therein; for him the natives are beasts of burden, which he may order about at will; he has the right to seize upon every object which suits him; woe to the native that would oppose him! He will not be slow in teaching that the law of the sword is the only law;—the institution which protects property in Europe does not recognize it in another latitude. And in all this the soldier is encouraged by the officers who preach by example, by the administration which puts the cudgel in his hand that he may superintend the natives it employs upon its works.

How many repugnant actions are naively recounted to you as altogether natural occurrences! If you happen to say of some native who revolted and killed his oppressor, that he did well, you should hear the cries of stupefaction which greet your remark! "What! Since we are the masters, since we command them, they must obey us; if we let them alone they would all revolt, they would drive us out! After having spent so much

money and so many men, France would lose the country! She would have no more colonies!”

Behold what an effect military discipline and brutalization have upon the minds of the workers. They endure the same injustices, the same turpitudes, with which they are helping to burden others; and they no longer feel the ignominy of their conduct; they have come to serve, unconsciously, as the instruments of despotism and to boast of this role, not realizing its baseness and infamy.

The European civilizers, Italian, French or others, would do much better to take advantage of the land that is uncultivated at home, before going to steal those of others.

As to “the needs of commerce,” here, indeed, we have the genuine motive. Messieurs the bourgeois being embarrassed with products which they cannot dispose of, find nothing better to do than to go and declare war against poor devils powerless to defend themselves, in order to impose these products upon them.

To be sure it would be easy enough to come to an understanding with them; one might traffic with them by means of barter, not being overscrupulous, even, about the value of the objects exchanged; these latter being valueless to them save when attractive to the eye, it would be easy enough to get the best of them and realize fine profits therefrom. Was it not thus before the dark continent was penetrated? Were we not, through the intermediary of the coast tribes in communication with the tribes of the interior? Did we not get the same products then as we get now?

“Yes, it is possible that it was so, but the devil of it is that to operate in such a way takes time and patience; it is impossible to go in on a grand scale; one must figure on competition; ‘commerce must be protected.’”—We know what that means: two or three fast iron-clads, in double-quick order, half-a-dozen gunboats, a body of troops to be landed—salute! Civilization is going to perform its work! We have taken a people, strong,

robust, and healthy; in forty or fifty years from now we shall have them turned into a horde of anæmics, brutalized, miserable, decimated, corrupted, who will shortly disappear from the surface of the globe. Then the civilizing job will be finished!

If any one doubt what we here assert let him take the accounts of travelers, let him read the descriptions of those countries in which Europeans have installed themselves by the right of conquest: everywhere the native populations decrease and disappear; everywhere drunkenness, syphilis, and other European importations mow them down in great swaths, atrophy and anæmiate those who survive. And can it be otherwise? No, not when such means are employed! Here are peoples who have another mode of life than ours, other aptitudes, other needs; instead of studying these needs and aptitudes, seeking to adapt them to our civilization gradually, insensibly, not demanding that they take any more of it than they can assimilate, we try to bend them to it at a single blow, we break everything asunder; and not only do they become refractory but the experience is fatal to them.

How glorious might the role of the so-called civilized man have been, had he but understood it, and had not he himself been afflicted with these two pests, government and mercantilism,—two frightful plagues, of which he would do well to consider how to rid himself before seeking to civilize others.

The education of undeveloped tribes might go on peacefully and bring into civilization new elements, capable in the course of their adaptation, of putting new life into it. Let no one talk to us of the duplicity and ferocity of the barbarians. We have but to read the accounts of those truly courageous men who have gone into the midst of unknown tribes, urged on solely by the ideal of science and the desire for knowledge. Such persons have succeeded in making friends of these people, have gone among them, having nothing to fear; duplicity and ferocity came in only with these miserable traffickers who falsely