

The Inevitable Revolution

Leo Tolstoy

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INTRODUCTION

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Leo Tolstoy died in 1910. His fame was world-wide and in his own life-time unique. He was known as the author of *War and Peace*, *Anna Karenina*, *Resurrection* and a vast output of tales, plays, essays, books, letters. He was known as one who had never feared to incur the wrath of both Church and State by undermining their theological and political justifications and by exposing injustice. He was known for the sincerity with which he tried to renounce riches and possessions and to earn his bread by his own sweat rather than by the royalties he renounced. Above all, perhaps, he was revered for the quality of his prose and the towering moral strength it represented. "When Tolstoy dies", said Chekhov, "everything will go to pot." It was a spontaneous tribute to the extent to which Tolstoy by his example and by his pen moved and inspired people and sustained their hopes in every part of the globe. Well, things have gone to pot alright. Chekhov's prediction turned out to be the under-statement of this century.

And Tolstoy? How does he stand with us? How do we react to the man who predicted and warned with such passion, with such moving eloquence and with such unerring diagnostic skill? It is true to say that his fame as an artist, as a teller of tales is even greater than it was in his own life-time. Yet, as thinker, philosopher and teacher, it is no less true to say that when he is not generally ignored, he is more often than not disparaged, derided, misconstrued and twisted into something different. Such masterpieces as *The Kingdom of God Is Within You* and *What Then Must We Do* are, it is true, still available through the *World's Classics*, but the Oxford University Press is probably unique in Europe in making them available. How are we to account for this paradox?

It is because Tolstoy radically challenges the basic assumptions on which our entire culture rests, and exposes as no other writer does our equivocations and evasions in the presence of a remorseless logic. The very way in which Tolstoy is ignored and suppressed is itself an exposure and indictment of our failure to practise our much vaunted liberalism in upholding open debate and freedom of thought. It is true that Tolstoy's pacifism has made a very wide impression on the thinking public, but this is generally dismissed as cranky sentimentalism or at best impractical idealism. Moreover, pacifists themselves have as a rule been genuinely appalled when they finally realised that Tolstoy really did mean what he said and meant business when he said that all violence, absolutely all force was wrong. This turns the conventional discussion of our ever growing problems upside down. For all humanitarians have tended to say: war, racial discrimination, oppression of workers, of women, of children, of beasts, are great evils, therefore we must organise to get the power to remedy these evils. To which Tolstoy replies: power, whether it be democratic, parliamentary or autocratic is power only if it is capable in the last resort of being enforced by violence.

It is the universal faith in this method of procedure that is the peculiar hallmark of the existing culture—a culture resting on and shaped by the religious belief which asserts the necessity and legitimacy of violence to maintain minimum unity and order if not actually to impose the will of the righteous on the unrighteous. This religious belief is quite false and is therefore the root cause of all man-made suffering, all evil. The true belief is that we are never justified in resorting to violence. Of course, this belief arouses in us strong fears. So, says Tolstoy, instead of putting all our energies into devising new policies, new political parties, new legislation to remedy problems which they never do remedy but only aggravate, let us direct our energies into overcoming our

fears of holding to the true religious belief in the law of non-violence or love, and we will find that our collective, seemingly insoluble, ever growing problems will for the first time begin to diminish.

The essay which follows was written in the last full year of Tolstoy's life when he was 81 years old, yet it is written with the undimmed lucidity and rigorous cogency which go to make up the uniqueness of his Russian prose. Tolstoy is renowned for the severity of his self-criticism and in particular of his own writings. Yet, speaking to a friend who was reading the manuscript of *The Inevitable Revolution*, he said: "It is a good book, even though I wrote it myself". So it is, yet in sixty-five years no one has ever bothered even to translate it. It is understandable that people should react with shock or reject something at variance with everything that they have been taught. But not to be willing even to consider Tolstoy's arguments suggests at least that we lack confidence in the rational basis of our culture. We simply cannot afford to go on ignoring Tolstoy's message

FOREWORD

I know that very many people, particularly among those who are called educated, will glance at this writing of mine and, understanding what the question is about, will simply shrug their shoulders, smile contemptuously and cease to read further. Still the old "non-resistance", they will say, how is it that he doesn't weary of it?

I know that this will be so, firstly, for people, called learned, who know that they are not in agreement with what I say; and secondly, for people who are to be found ardently pursuing governmental or revolutionary activities, for whom this writing of mine will present a dilemma: to acknowledge as nonsensical either all that they are doing and have been doing for years and for the sake of which they have sacrificed so much, or that which I say. This will be so for many so-called educated people, who in the most important questions of life are accustomed not to thinking for themselves and working out their own opinions, but to professing the creed of the surrounding majority, engaged in justifying their situation. But I know that all people who think for themselves and also the majority of working people, who have not been perverted by the piling up of empty, false knowledge, which is called in our time scientific, will be with me. I know this because in our time for people of independent thought as for the vast majority of working folk, the foolishness and immorality productive of unnecessary suffering for them themselves become more and more apparent with every day. These and others, already in our time, cannot but acknowledge in the end this truth, simple and now sharp clear to the eye, that for the betterment of life one thing only is necessary, to stop doing that which causes this suffering.

I

It would seem that those external conditions in which man finds himself in our time ought to have led him to the highest pitch of happiness. Land, suitable for cultivation and accessible to people, is so plentiful that all men could, with a surplus left over, use it for a prosperous life for everyone. Means of communicating thought and means of transport (printing, posts and telegraph, railways, steam and electric engines, aeroplanes and so forth), these are the means to what is most conducive to human well-being, the means to unity, leading to a high degree of

perfectibility. Means of struggle with nature, lightening the burden of labour, have been invented to such an extent that it would appear that everybody would be able to satisfy their needs fully without the hardship of labour depriving them of leisure and ruining their health. Everything exists to increase the well-being of people, but instead of this the people of our time suffer, are tormented in body and soul as they have never in previous times suffered and been tormented, and these sufferings and torments grow with every year.

It will be said that suffering always characterises the life of men. Yes, suffering is characteristic, but not those forms of suffering which the people of our time are now suffering. External sufferings are characteristic of human life, every kind of illness, floods, fires, earthquakes, droughts are also characteristic, and the periodic sufferings from intermittent wars or the cruelties of some rulers, but not those sufferings which everyone now endures without cease. Everyone suffers now: both those who wield power by direct force or wealth, and those who with continuing hatred endure their dependence on the powerful and wealthy. And they all suffer now not from external causes, not from earthquakes and floods, not from Neros, Ivan IVs, Genghis Khans and so on, but suffer from one another, suffer as a result of everyone being divided into two hostile, mutually detesting camps: the ones suffer from dependence on and hatred of those who rule over them, the others suffer from fear and feelings of contempt and ill will towards those over whom they rule, and others again from consciousness of the precariousness of their situation, from those endless utmost cruelties which are engendered and erupt from time to time, but without ever stopping the smouldering conflict between the two mutually detesting camps.

They suffer especially cruelly mainly because both they and the others in the depth of their souls know that the cause of their suffering is in them themselves, that it ought to have been possible to free themselves from those sufferings inflicted on them by themselves, but it appears to the one and the other that they cannot do this, that it is not they who are guilty but their enemies, and as they attack one another with great animosity so do they more and more aggravate their situation.

So the cause of the disastrous situation in which mankind now finds itself is a cause absolutely particular to, exclusive to, characteristic of our time alone.

II

From the earliest known times of men's collective life, we know that men have always united with one another, through their family, tribal, exchange, commercial ties, and still more by the subjection of the many to one or several rulers. Such subjection of the ones to the others, of the majority to the minority, was so common to all peoples and existed for such a long time that everyone, both those who ruled over the many and those who were in subjection to them, considered such an arrangement of life inevitable, natural and the only one possible for the collective life of men. The rulers considered that being destined by God himself to rule over the peoples, they had an obligation to try to the best of their abilities to use their power for a tranquil, peaceful and happy life for their subjects. And this was voiced many times in all the teachings of sages and also in the religious teachings of the most ancient and numerous sections of mankind: in Tao-Teh-King and the laws of Manu. The subjects too, considered such an arrangement of life foreordained of God, inevitable, and therefore obediently subjected themselves to the power, and supported it for the possibility of the maximum enjoyment of freedom in relation with those who

like themselves were dependent subjects. In such wise was this arrangement of life based on violence. And so mankind lived for centuries. It was so in India and in China; it was so in Greece and Rome and in medieval Europe; and however repugnant to the consciousness of mankind in our time, so it continues to be for the majority of men now too. Both in Europe and in the East, men have for centuries lived as subjects and rulers, and they continue to live now, not admitting for the majority any possibility of any means of unity whatever other than violence. Nevertheless, in all the religious teachings of the ancient world: in Brahminism, in Buddhism, in Taoism, in Confucianism, and also in the teachings of the Greek and Roman sages, side by side with the maintenance of the power of those ruling by violence, there was always expressed from different sides yet another teaching, namely that the love of men for one another is the best means of human intercourse because it provides for men their greatest well-being. This view has been expressed variously and with varying degrees of clarity in the different teachings of the East, but for 1900 years down to our own time this view has been expressed with striking and definite clarity in Christianity. Christianity pointed out to men not only that love is the means of human intercourse giving them wellbeing, but also that love is the highest law of the life of men and that therefore, the law of love is incompatible with the previous arrangement of life based on violence.

The chief significance of Christianity and that which distinguishes it from all previous teachings is that it proclaimed the law of love as the highest law of life in such a way as to admit of no exceptions and always requiring the obligation to fulfil it; and so pointed to those common digressions from the law of love which side by side with the acknowledged blessings of love were permitted in the previous arrangement of life, founded on the power of rulers and maintained by violence. Under the previous arrangement of life, violence, including therein killing in self-defence or defence of one's kin or fatherland, to inflict punishment on criminals and so forth, was an inevitable condition of social life. Christianity, however, putting love as the highest law of life, acknowledging all men as equals, advocating the forgiveness of all injuries, insults, violence, and the returning of good for evil, could not permit in any circumstances the violence of man against man, which always in its ultimate development demanded even killing. Thus Christianity in its true meaning, acknowledging love as the fundamental law of life, directly and definitely repudiated that very violence, which lay at the base of every previous arrangement of life.

Such was and is the chief significance of Christianity. But people, who adopted Christianity and for centuries lived in the complex governmental arrangements founded on violence, adopted Christianity partly not understanding its significance at all, and partly understanding, but trying to conceal it from themselves and other people; and took from Christianity only that which was not repugnant to their established mode of life. There thus sprang up on the original Christianity the teaching of the church, which united the teaching of Christ with the ancient Hebrew teaching, and which by various dogmas and decrees absolutely alien to Christianity so skilfully concealed the essence of Christianity that violence, so obviously incompatible with Christianity in its true meaning, came to be considered both by those suffering coercion and those imposing it not only not repugnant to the Christian teaching of love, but completely lawful and in accordance with Christian teaching.

Men lived, submitting to acts of violence and performing them, and side by side with this advocating the teaching of love, in obvious contradiction to violence. This inner contradiction has always dwelt in the Christian world and in accordance with the intellectual development of men became ever more and more obvious. In the other non-Christian larger half of mankind—Egypt,

India, China (I do not speak of the Mahometan world, which lived by a teaching proceeding out of Christianity) where there was also—in Brahmanism, in Buddhism, in Confucianism, and in Taoism— exactly proclaimed the teaching of love between men, living under the law of violence, the contradiction between these two incompatibles began to make its appearance but not so sharply and powerfully as in Christianity. But, although in the religious teachings of the East, in India, China this inner contradiction, the incompatibility of the law of violence and the law of love was not indicated with such clarity as it was in Christianity, in the non-Christian world, too, it was and is being worked out, it has grown ever more and more clear to men that change is inevitable from the old outlived principle of violence to the new law of love, entering from various sides the consciousness of men.

III

The recognition of the law of love entered more and more into the consciousness of men, obliging them to replace violence, but in the meantime life continued to proceed on the previous basis.

It continued thus for centuries. But there came a time when the truth that love is the highest law of man's life and that therefore violence, incompatible with love, cannot be the highest law of life, the truth, so characteristic of the spiritual nature of man and expressed more or less clearly in all religious teachings and particularly clearly in Christianity, notwithstanding all the efforts of the rulers and their assistants, entered the consciousness of men ever more and more and in our time has already begun more or less consciously to reach the majority of men. As it is impossible to extinguish a fire by heaping it up with shavings, so too was it impossible to smother, once it had arisen in men's consciousness and had been so clearly expressed in all religious teachings and being so near to the heart of mankind, the truth that the unity characteristic of man's nature is a unity based on love, and not on violence, on fear. And this truth, not, it is true, in its direct expression, but in the various situations and demands arising out of this truth, more and more frequently makes itself felt in the world as a whole, seeking its application to life. Thus, among the Christian peoples this truth appeared earlier than in other countries in the demands for equality of civil rights, equality of men (albeit only from a single government), in the abolition of slavery, in the recognition of the rights of women, in the teachings of socialism, communism, anarchism; this truth was manifest and is manifest in the great variety of societies and conferences for peace, is manifest too in the many so-called sects, both Christian and Mahometan, which directly repudiate the law of violence and seek to free themselves from subjection to it.

In the Christian world and in the Mahometan world close to it, this truth has entered more clearly into the consciousness of men. but also in the Far East this truth has not ceased to do its work. Thus even in India and in China, where violence is sanctioned by religious law, violence and castes in India are in our time now presented to men as something out of keeping with human nature.

Men all over the world, although still not acknowledging the law of love in all its significance, already feel the complete Impossibility of continuing in a life according to the previous law of violence and seek another basis for mutual intercourse, compatible with the spiritual growth of mankind.

There is only one such basis and thousands of years ago it was already expressed by the world's best men.

IV

The previous basis of the unity of men, violence, does not in our time inspire in men, as it previously did, a blind faith, but appears on the contrary something that is already repugnant to their consciousness.

A majority of men already feel more or less vividly the inevitability of arranging life on bases other than that of power. But old habits, traditions, upbringing, customs, chiefly the arrangement of life itself are such that men, wishing to undertake the tasks arising from the law of love, bring them to completion by means of violence, that is, by means of that which is directly opposed to that law of love in the name of which they are acting and doing that which they are doing.

So in our time revolutionaries, communists, anarchists, in the name of love, the welfare of the people, bring about their destruction by assassination. In the very name of love, again for the welfare of the people, governments set up their prisons, fortresses, penal servitudes, executions. In the name of love, the supreme blessing not of one but of all peoples, the diplomats establish their alliances, congresses, resting upon ever increasing and ever greater and greater armed forces. In the name of love again rich men, gathering wealth which they retain thanks only to laws maintained by violence, establish all their sorts of philanthropic institutions, the immunity of which is again maintained by such violence.

This is done in this way everywhere. The great evil of violence, unnoticed by men, is done in the name of the intention apparently to do good. And as it cannot be otherwise, this not only does not improve the situation, but on the contrary only makes it worse. And therefore the condition of the men of our time has become steadily worse and worse, has become far worse than the condition of men in the ancient world. It became worse due to the fact that in our time the means of violence increased a hundred times, but the increase in the means of violence increased as well the evil resulting from the violence. However cruel and brutal the Neros and Ivan IVs could be, they did not have at their disposal the means of influencing people which are now available to the Napoleons, Bismarcks with their wars, and the English parliaments with their suppressions of the Hindus, and our Russian Schlüsselburgs, penal servitudes, exiles. There were in old Slavia robbers, Pugachevs, but there were not these instruments of killing, bombs, dynamite, making it possible for a single weak man to kill hundreds. In former times, there was the enslavement of some to others, but there was not that general seizure of land such as there now is, and those difficulties in acquiring the necessities of life; and therefore there was not that desperate situation, in which millions of unemployed now find themselves, a situation incomparably worse than the situation of the earlier slaves: now the workers seek slavery, and suffer because they cannot find masters to own them. In our time, precisely in consequence of the non-recognition of the cause of evil lying in violence and the concealment of this evil behind good intentions, especially under the present means of social intercourse, armaments and the debauchery of peoples, the situation of the working masses has brought them to the most grievous straits, has raised to the highest pitch their resentment against the rulers and the rich in direct proportion to their reaching the highest degree of consciousness of the precariousness of the situation of the rulers and the rich and their fear of the working peoples and hostility to them.

V

It is becoming more and more impossible for the life of the people of our time, both rulers and those over whom the rulers exercise their power, to continue. And this is felt keenly by the ones and the others. Life was possible for mankind with its division into tens of hostile governments, with its emperors, kings, troops, diplomats, with its robbing the peoples of the produce of their labour for armaments and the maintenance of troops, when the peoples still thought naively each on its own account that it alone was the true people, and that all other peoples were enemies, barbarians, and that it was not only praiseworthy to give up one's labour and life in defence of one's people and government, but that it could not even be otherwise, that this was as natural as eating, marrying, breathing. Such a life was possible for men, when men believed that poverty and riches were essential conditions of life, predestined by God; when the rulers and the rich not only had no doubt of the lawfulness of their position, but took pride in them in their souls before God, considering themselves the elect, a special breed of men, and men of the people "mean", occupied in manual labour or even trade, considered an inferior race of men, while the subjects and the poor believed that the rulers and the rich were special breeds of men, predestined to power by God himself, so that their life as subjects and as poor men was itself predestined by God.

Such a life was possible in the Christian world when it had not entered the heads of people, whether rulers or subjects, to doubt that religion, Catholic, Orthodox or Lutheran, which allowed not only the complete inequality of men but their direct enslavement, considered possible and even praiseworthy the killing of men; when men believed in this artificial religion to a degree that it was not necessary to defend it either by conscious deceit or by violence.

It continued thus for centuries, but there came a time when all that made such a life possible began little by little to be destroyed, and finally the people of the whole world and especially of the Christian world have come to recognise, more or less clearly that they are not the only ones, German, French, Japanese, Russians, living in the world, that they are not the only ones who want to uphold the advantages of their people, but that all peoples are in that same situation, and that therefore all wars are not only ruinous for the mass of the peoples who do not get from war advantages of any kind but only privations, but also absolutely meaningless.

In addition men in our time have come to recognise more or less clearly that all the taxes collected from them do not serve their welfare, but are squandered largely to their injury in war and in the luxury of the rulers, that wealth is nowhere preordained from on high, as was represented to them previously, but is the fruit of a whole series of deceits, extortions, acts of violence upon the labouring peoples. Everyone in our time knows this in the depth of their souls, both rulers and rich, but they do not have the strength to give up their position, and by rude violence or deceptions or compromises they struggle to hold on to their position. Therefore now, when all men, all apart from those divided from one another by different nationalities, crushed and wishing to free themselves, or wishing to retain their hold over those who are subjugated, are still everywhere divided into two embittered, mutually hostile camps; the ones workers, deprived of their fair share, abased, and conscious of the injustice of their position, and the others powerful and wealthy, also conscious of the injustice of their position, but for all that, hanging on to that position at all costs, and these and the others in order to attain their ends ready to perpetrate and, to perpetrate against each other, the greatest crimes—deceptions, thefts, spying, killings, dynamitings, executions—the position of men being such, it evidently cannot continue.

The truth is that there are still some who want to persuade themselves and the workers, that we are on the point of yet one more convincing explanation of existing injustices, one more, the most wonderful theory of the future arrangement of life, one more small effort to overcome the enemy—and at last there will be established that new order in which evil will be no more and all men will prosper. There are assuredly such men, and among the rulers too. These men try to persuade themselves and others that mankind cannot live otherwise because it has lived thus for centuries, for millenia; that it is not necessary to change anything, that it is necessary only, since this is not disagreeable, to suppress strictly with force all attempts to change the existing order, and not refusing the “reasonable” demands of the people, lead it firmly along the path of moderate progress and all will be well. There are men who believe this in the one camp and the other, but already people do not believe them, and the two hostile camps are ever more and more sharply divided: greater and greater grow the envy, hatred, anger of the workers towards the powerful and wealthy, and greater and greater the fear and hatred of the powerful and wealthy towards the workers and those deprived of their fair share, and ever more and more do both sides infect one another with their mutual hatred.

VI

The situation of men of our time is terrible. The reason for this terrible situation is that we, the men of our time, live not in accord with that world view, which is characteristic of our consciousness, but in accord with that world view, which for thousands of years down to our era was characteristic of our predecessors, but now no longer satisfies our spiritual demands. The reason for this is that while we more or less clearly recognise already that basis of love, which, replacing violence, can and must unite people, everyone still lives by that violence which in earlier times united men, but is now already out of character, repugnant to our consciousness and therefore not only does not unite but now only disunites men.

Can an old man be happy or more precisely not be unhappy if he wanted to live the life of a young man, or an adult wanting to live the life of a child? In the same way a man would not attempt to continue to live the life of a previous age no longer in keeping with his character, and if he were to be unreasonable, he would be brought by his sufferings whether he liked it or not to the inevitability of living in conformity with his age. It is exactly the same with human societies and with the whole of mankind, if it is guided in its life by a consciousness not in character with its age, but by that which it has already long outlived. And this very thing is now being accomplished by the mankind of our time.

We do not know and cannot know the conditions of birth, or origin or disappearance of individual men nor of mankind, but within the limits of time accessible to us we know and know indubitably that the life of mankind has always been subject to and is subject to that self-same law of gradual growth and development to which the life of the separate individual is also subject. As in the life of each separate individual we see that a man is guided in the main direction of his activities by his understanding of the purpose of his life, that is, by his conscious or unconscious religious world view, so we see the same thing in the life of the whole of mankind also.

And as the life of the separate individual does not cease to change parallel with its growth, that is, in accordance with the change of the general understanding of the purpose of his life, precisely in the same way does life also, not ceasing to grow, not ceasing to change and unable

not to change, move forward to a more reasonable life for the whole of mankind. And just as the forward movement of the separate individual is always naturally, almost inevitably delayed by his having mastered the habits of the previous age that he has lived through, he does not willingly nor quickly grow with them, often deliberately trying, as he abandons the activities of the previous age, to justify by various rationalisations thought up from his previous life which though continuing is already out of character, so in just the same way does mankind also naturally kept back through inertia in the previous already outlived mode of life, justify to itself these delays by artificial religious beliefs and equally false scientific constructions.

There are many superstitions from which men suffer, but there is none more general, more ruinous in its consequences than that superstition according to which men persuade themselves that the consciousness of mankind (that which is expressed in the teachings of the purpose of life and of the guidance for behaviour flowing from it, called religious) that this consciousness can be brought to a halt and be one and the same for all the epochs of the life of men.

Thus it is with that superstition, impelling human society to live according to religious and scientific teachings which always lag behind the current developing consciousness of humanity, and this has always been one of the principal sources of those ills that have befallen human societies. And the more these ills have continued to occur, the more the bulk of mankind has been subjected to these delays in movement and the longer have they lasted.

It happens sometimes that these delays take hold and are expressed especially clearly and are resolved in a single small part of mankind, but it also happens that these delays take hold of the life of the whole of mankind, as is now happening.

So, for example, delays in the movement towards a more reasonable life for a single part of mankind, produced by abuses in the church of Rome, extending to the extreme corruption of the essential teaching of Christ, held sway over only a small part of mankind, falling under papist superstition incongruous with the consciousness of men, and the ills, arising out of the Reformation and the wars consequent upon, continued for a relatively short time.

But it also happens that the whole of mankind and not just certain peoples, and as regards the principles of life common to all peoples, and not as regards private questions or any parochial question whatever, religious or social, lives for centuries incompatibly with its consciousness. And then ills, flowing from such brakes on life, brought about by the fact that men's consciousness is already incompatible with their religious principles, continue for a particularly long time and are particularly great. And such is the position in which now lives not a part but the whole of mankind, in consequence of which, while under universal inertia still continuing to be guided for unity one with another by the violence which was formerly inevitable and common to all peoples, men ever more and more clearly already recognise another higher principle of love, obliging them to change the previous way of violence.

VII

Three, two centuries ago men, called to the colours at the command of the head of the government, did not for a moment doubt that however difficult that which was demanded of them might be, they in going to war, were doing not only a good but an inevitable, necessary thing, sacrificing their freedom, labour, life itself in a sacred business: the defence of the fatherland against its enemies, above all the fulfilment of the will of the sovereign provided by God. But nowadays, ev-

ery man who is driven to war (universal military conscription has particularly helped to destroy the fraud of patriotism), everybody knows that those against whom they are driven are men such as themselves, who are also deceived by their governments, and knowing this, already they cannot fail to see particularly in the Christian world the whole senselessness and immorality of the business into which they are forced. And understanding the senselessness and immorality of the business to which they are summoned, they cannot fail to despise and hate those men who force them.

In exactly the same way formerly men, handing over their taxes, that is, their labour to the governments, were convinced that this handing over to the government was inevitable for important and necessary activities; but, that apart, they considered those men who disposed of these products of their labour scarcely as holy, sinless men. Nowadays almost every worker considers the government if not as a gang of thieves, as men who in all circumstances are concerned with their own interests and in no wise with the interests of the people, and the unavoidability of placing his labour at their disposal only as a temporary calamity, from which he desires with all the strength of his soul and hopes by one means or another soon to be delivered.

Two hundred, even one hundred years ago people looked at wealth as worthy of respect and at the amassing of wealth as a virtue and respected the rich and tried to imitate them, whereas now people, and especially the poor despise and hate the rich in as much as they are rich, and all attempts by the rich by one means or another to ingratiate themselves with the poor evoke in the poor themselves only a still greater hatred towards the rich.

In previous times the rulers and the wealthy believed in their position, and knew that the working people believed in its lawfulness and the people actually did believe that their own position and that of their rulers were predestined. Now, however, they and the others know that there is no justification of any kind for the rule of the government nor for the wealth of the rich, nor for the crushing of the workers in order to maintain the rulers and the rich in their position, but that in order that the workers might free themselves from being crushed, it is necessary both for them and for the others to spurn the use to this end of every means possible: deceits, bribery, killing. Both the ones and the others do this, and what is worst of all, doing these things, in the depth of their souls the majority know that nothing is achieved by this, and that the continuation of such a life becomes ever more and more impossible, and they seek and do not find a way out of their situation. But that the way out is unavoidable and one and the same for all grows ever clearer and clearer to people. There is only one way out: to free oneself from that formerly characteristic human belief in the inevitability and lawfulness of violence and to master the belief that answers to the present stage of mankind's growth, the only one professed in all the religions of the world, the belief in the inevitability and lawfulness of love, excluding, come what may, the violence of man over man.

Before this decisive step which is impending in our time for all mankind, the men of our world and time now stand in indecision.

But whether men want to or whether they do not want to, they cannot not undertake this step. They cannot not undertake it, because the religious belief which was the basis of the power of one set of people over the others, has outlived its time, and the new belief in conformity to the time, in the supreme law of love ever more and more enters into the consciousness of men.

VIII

It would seem that the ills > flowing from the violence inflicted by people on one another ought to arouse in them the thought that they themselves might be guilty of these ills. And if men are themselves guilty, and I am a man, might it be that I too am guilty, it would appear that each might say to himself, and then ask himself, in what is my guilt in the ills suffered by myself and by all men?

So it would appear ought to be the case, but the superstition that some people not only have the right, but are also called to and are able to arrange the life of other people, on account of a duty to a life based on violence, is to such an extent rooted in the customs of men, that the idea of their own participation in the wretched arrangement of the life of the people does not enter anyone's head. Everybody accuses each other. The ones accuse those who, in their opinion, are responsible for arranging their life and arrange it not in the way that they consider necessary. Others again, arranging the lives of people strangers to them are dissatisfied with those whose lives they arrange. And both the ones and the others think of most complicated and difficult questions, but one question alone they do not set themselves, and that one, it would appear, the most natural question: what must I do in order to change that arrangement of life which I consider bad and in which in one way or another I cannot not participate.

“ Love ought to take the place of violence. We admit that this is so, men say, but how, by what road ought and can this revolution take place? What is to be done so that this revolution shall be realised in order that a life of violence shall be replaced by a life of peace, of love? ”

What is to be done ? ask alike both rulers and subjects, revolutionaries and people in public life, implicated in the question: What is to be done ?—always a question concerning how the life of men ought to be arranged.

Everyone asks how the life of men ought to be arranged, that is, what to do with other people? Everyone asks what is to be done with others, but nobody asks what is to be done with me myself?

The superstition of the immutability of religion, engendering the recognition of the lawfulness of the rule of some men over others, has given rise to yet another superstition, flowing from the first, which most of all prevents people from going over from the life of violence to the life of peace, of love, the superstition that some men ought and are able to arrange the life of other men.

So that the principal reason for the stagnation of men in the arrangement of life, already acknowledged by them as false, consists in the astonishing superstition (proceeding from the superstition of the immutability of religion) that some people not only are able but also have the right to determine in advance and arrange by violence the life of other people.

Once people have freed themselves from this customary superstition, it would immediately become clear to all that the life of every combination of men is arranged only in so far as each person arranges his own life for himself. And men would understand this, both those who arrange the life of others and also those who are subjected to this arrangement, so evident would it become to all that all violence of man over man cannot in any way be justified, but is not simply a violation of love nor even of justice, but also of common sense.

So the deliverance of men from those ills which they are living through in our time, lies first of all in freeing themselves from the superstition of the immutability of religion and then also from the false religious teaching, already outlived by the men of our time, of the divinity of power and flowing from it the recognition of the lawfulness and usefulness of violence.

IX

“ Fine, love instead of laws, made effective by violence. Let us admit that the recognition by all men of love as a means of uniting with each other instead of violence would increase men’s welfare, but it would increase it only when all men would have acknowledged for themselves the obligation of the law of love ”, is usually said. “ But what will be the fate of all those who, themselves renouncing violence, are living among people who have not renounced it? These men will be robbed of everything, will be tormented, these men will be the slaves of men living by violence.”

Thus always and everywhere the defenders of violence say one and the same thing and they do not try to understand that which is embraced within the law of love itself.

I will not speak of the fact that, whether violence has at any time whatever defended the life and tranquillity of men, it has on the other hand been on a countless number of occasions the cause of the greatest ills which could have occurred if the people had not permitted the violence. I will not speak of all those horrors which from the most ancient times have been perpetrated in the name of acknowledging the inevitability of violence nor of the horrors of the wars of the ancient world and of the Middle Ages, nor of the horrors of the great French Revolution, of the 30,000 communards of the year ’70, of the horrors of the Napoleonic, the Franco-Prussian, the Turkish, the Japanese wars, of the suppression of the Indians, now the affair with the Persians, now the perpetration of the butchery of the Armenians, the killings and executions in Russia, nor of the millions of the unending death roll of the workers from want and hunger. We are not in any way able to weigh and decide the question as to whether there would have been or will be greater or less material ashes from the application in social life of violence or of the law of love, because we do not know—and cannot know—what would have been if at least a small number of men had followed the law of love, and the majority [had lived by violence]. This question cannot be decided either way either by experiment or by reason. This question is a religious-moral question and therefore is decided not by experiment, but by the inner consciousness, as all religious-moral questions are decided not by consideration of what is more advantageous, but by that which a man recognises good and what is evil, what is a duty and what is not.

In nothing so much as in the attitude of people of our world to the question of the application to life of the law of love and the understanding of non-resistance to evil by violence indissolubly connected with it, is so evident the complete absence in men of our time not only of Christian belief, but even of any religious belief whatever, and not only of any religious belief whatever, but even an understanding of what religious belief consists.

“ The law of love, excluding violence, is not observed, because it could come about that a scoundrel might under our eyes kill a defenceless child,” people say.

These people do not ask what is to be done by them when they see a man being led to execution or when they see men training people to kill, or when they see the starving to death of people in the factories from the unhealthy labour of workers, women and children. All this they see and not only do not ask what they are to do in the presence of these things, but themselves participate in these affairs, in executions, soldiers training others to kill, in wars, in the starving of workers and in many other matters as well. But then, you see, they are all very occupied and worried by the question of what they are to do with the imaginary child that is being killed before their very eyes. The fate of this imaginary child moves them to such an extent that they cannot in any way admit that the non-employment of violence would have been one of the inevitable conditions of

love. Essentially what occupies these people, wishing to justify violence, is not in any way the fate of the imaginary child, but their own fate, their whole life based on violence, which in the presence of the negation of violence cannot continue.

To protect a child from being killed it is always possible to put one's own breast beneath the blow of the killer, but this thought, natural for a man, guided by love, cannot enter the heads of people living by violence, because for these men there are not and cannot be any others beside brutes— impelled to activity.

In reality the question of the application to life of the demands of love leads to the simplest of conclusions, a conclusion always acknowledged and impossible not to be acknowledged by men's reason, the conclusion, to be sure, that love is incompatible with doing to another what you would not yourself wish, and therefore incompatible with injuries, deprivation of freedom, the killing of other men, which is always inevitably included in the concept of violence. That is why it is possible to live by violence, not recognising the law of love as a religious law of love; and it is also possible to live in accordance with the law of love, not recognising the inevitability of violence. But to acknowledge the divinity of the law of power, that is, of violence, at the same time as the divinity of the law of love, that, it would seem, is impossible. Yet it is in this contradiction which cries to heaven that all the people of our time and particularly the people of the Christian world live.

X

“ But this is still the general mode of reasoning. Let us admit that I do believe in the law of love,” they say about this, “ what am I, what is Ivan, Petya, Marya, every man to do, if he acknowledges the justice of the fact that mankind has lived so long that it is inevitable that he enters on a new way of life? What am I, Ivan, Petya, Marya to do in order that that evil life of violence be destroyed and the good life in accord with love be established? What indeed must I, Ivan, Petya, Marya do in order to promote this revolution? ”

This question, despite the fact that it appears to us so natural, is strange, as strange as the question a man, ruining his life by drunkenness, gaming, profligacy, quarrelling might ask: what am I to do in order to improve my life?

However much one may regret the fact of replying to such a naive question, I will all the same reply for those to whom such a question can be necessary.

The reply to the question of what needs to be done by a man, condemning the existing arrangement of life and wishing to replace and improve it, is a simple reply, natural and one and the same for each man, over whom the superstition of man's violence has not gained the upper hand, it is as follows: First: oneself to stop doing direct violence, but also to prepare oneself for this. This first, secondly, not to take part in any violence whatever done by other people, and also in preparations for violence, thirdly, not to approve of any violence whatever.

1. Not oneself to do direct violence means not to seize hold of anyone with one's hands, not to beat, not to kill, not to do those things for one's own personal ends, but also under the pretext of public activities.

2. Not to take part in any violence whatever means not only not to be a chief constable, a governor, a judge, a guard, a tax collector, a Tsar, a minister, a soldier, but also not to take part in the courts as a petitioner, defending counsel, warder, barrister.
3. Not to approve of any sort of violence means beside not using any kind of violence for one's own advantage, neither in speech nor in writing, nor in deeds: not to express praise or agreement with violence itself or with affairs maintained by violence or based on violence.

It can well be that if a man shall so behave, repudiating the soldiery, courts, passports, payment of taxes, the recognition of power and will expose the oppressors and their adherents, he will be subjected to persecution. It is highly probable that such a man in times like the present will be tormented; they will confiscate his property, banish him, shut him in prison and perhaps kill him. But it can also be that that man who does not do any of this and on the contrary fulfils the demands of power, may suffer from other causes in precisely the same way and perhaps still greater than he who refuses obedience. And it can also happen that the refusal of a man to participate in violence, based on the demands of love, may open the eyes of other men and influence many to make such refusals too, so that the rulers will already not be in any condition to apply violence to all those refusing.

All this can be, but it can also not be. And it is for this reason that the reply to the question of what is a man to do, who acknowledges the truth and the application of life of the law of love, cannot be based on conjectured consequences.

The consequences of our actions are not within our power. In our power are only our actions themselves. The actions which characterise what a man does, and above all which characterise what he does not do, are based always on the man's beliefs alone. Let a man believe in the inevitability of violence, believe it religiously, and such a man will carry out violence not in the name of the happy consequences which he expects from the violence, but only because he believes. If then a man believes in the law of love, in precisely the same way he will fulfil the demands of love and will refrain from acts, contrary to the law of love, independently of any considerations whatever of consequences, but only because he believes and on that account he cannot act otherwise.

And that is why for the realisation in life of the law of love and the replacement of the law of violence, only one thing is necessary: that men should believe in the law of love in the same way that they now believe in the inevitability of violence. Only when people believe in the law of love at least approximately the same as they now believe in the inevitability of violence, will the question of how people, renouncing violence, are to behave with people perpetrating violence cease to be a question, and the life of men will be without any violence and the upheaval will assume a form of life unknown to us towards which mankind is heading and which will deliver it from those evils from which it now suffers

Is this possible?

XI

The solution not of the single question of the social arrangements, but of all, all the questions troubling mankind, lies in one thing, in transferring the question from the sphere which appears

to be one of breadth and significance but is in reality most narrow, insignificant and always dubious: from the sphere of external activities (having, allegedly, in view the welfare of all mankind, scientific, public activities), to the sphere, apparently narrow, but in reality most broad and deep, and above all, indubitable: to the sphere of the most personal, not physical, but spiritual life, to the religious sphere.

Only when each man does this for himself, asking himself, his real self, his soul what is necessary for you before God or before conscience (if you do not want to acknowledge God), and immediately there will be received the most simple, clear, indubitable replies to the most apparently complicated and insoluble questions, and in large part the questions themselves will be abolished, and all that was complicated, involved, insoluble, agonising, all will immediately become simple, clear, joyful and indubitable.

Whoever you may be: emperor, king, executioner, millionaire, gaoler, beggar, minister, thief, writer, monk, stop for a minute in your activities, and glance into that most sacred place, into your heart and ask yourself what is necessary for you, your real self in order to live through in the best manner those hours or decades which may still lie before you. And whoever you may be, if only you will sincerely and seriously ask yourself about this, you cannot not give to yourself that self-same answer which all men have given and do give to themselves as they have and do seriously and sincerely put to themselves this question: one thing is necessary to you, probably one thing only, that very thing which was always and is now necessary for everyone: wellbeing, true wellbeing, not such wellbeing as today can be wellbeing, but tomorrow can become harmful, and not such as would be harmful for yourself alone, but harmful for others, but that true indubitable wellbeing alone, such wellbeing as is wellbeing both for you and for all men both today and tomorrow and everywhere. But such true wellbeing is given only to him who fulfils the law of his life. This is the law that you know both by reason and by the teachings of all the wise men of the world and by the inclination of your own heart. This law is love: love for the highest perfection, for God and for all living things and in particular for those beings akin to oneself—men.

If only each of us would grasp this he would immediately grasp the fact that the cause of the suffering of ourselves and of all the world lies not in whatever evils are committed by men, guilty of wrong-doing, but in one thing alone: in the fact that men live in conditions of life, made up of violence, conditions contrary to love, incompatible with it, and that is the reason for that evil from which we all suffer, not in men, but in that false arrangement of life on violence, which men consider inevitable.

But if each man would grasp this—he would also grasp that the thief who steals and the rich man, amassing and maintaining wealth, and the ruler, signing the death sentence, and the executioner carrying it out, and the revolutionary throwing a bomb, and the diplomat, preparing for war, and the prostitute, profaning her soul and body, and the soldier shooting at whomever he is ordered to, all equally are not guilty, but do what they do only because they live according to a false belief in the [inevitability] of violence, without which they cannot themselves imagine life.

But let a man grasp this, and he will clearly see the entire injustice, the cruelty, the irrationality of blaming people, with their outlived belief in violence, and flowing from it the complicated conditions of life, leading to their actions contrary to love, he will grasp that men do ill not because they are guilty but because there exists the superstition of violence, which can in no wise be destructive of violence, and which can be destroyed only by each man freeing himself from this baneful superstition.

Emancipation from the superstition of violence lies in one thing: in freeing oneself from the general questions of imaginary importance of social life, by transferring all the efforts of the soul from the social sphere, of external activities, to the fulfilment of the demands of one's inner spiritual life. These very demands clearly expressed in the teachings of all the religious teachers of mankind, and also in the inner consciousness of every man; those demands consist in the increase in each man himself of the capacity of love.

XII

In our time the continuation of life on bases which are outlived and already sharply opposed to all men's consciousness of truth has become impossible, and that is why, whether we wish it or not, we must in the arrangement of our life establish the law of love in the place of violence. But how in effect is the life of men to be established on a basis of love, excluding violence? No one can answer this question, and moreover, such an answer is not necessary for anyone either. The law of love is not the law of the social arrangements of this or that people or government which can be furthered when you foresee or rather imagine that you foresee those conditions, under which the wished for change may be accomplished. The law of love, that will be the law of life of each separate individual, is in place of that law of life of the whole of mankind and that is why it would be senseless to imagine that it is possible to know and to wish to know the ultimate end of one's own life and still more of the life of all mankind.

The fact that we do not know and cannot even represent to ourselves how will be the life of men, believing in the law of love just as people now believe in the inevitability of violence, shows only that when we follow the law of love, we truly live, doing that which each ought to do for himself what as well he ought to do for the life of all mankind. We know that following the law of love we do that which we ought for ourselves, because only when we follow this law do we receive the greatest wellbeing. We know also that, following this law, we do that too which we ought [and] for the whole of mankind, because the wellbeing of mankind is in unity, and nothing can of its own nature so closely and joyfully unite men as that very law of love which gives the highest wellbeing to each separate man.

That is all that I wished to say.

Believing with my whole soul that we are living on the eve of a world-wide great revolution in the life of men and that every effort for the swiftest destruction of that which cannot not be destroyed and the swiftest realisation of that which cannot not be realised, every effort, however weak, assists the coming of this revolution, I could not, living in all probability the last days of my life, not attempt to convey to other men this, my belief.

Yes, we stand on the threshold of a quite new joyful life and entry into this life depends only on our freeing ourselves from the superstition, tormenting us ever more and more, of the inevitability of violence for the common life of men and on acknowledging that eternal principle of love, which has already lived a long time in the consciousness of men and must inevitably replace the principle of violence, outlived and already long unnecessary and only ruinous for men.

Leo Tolstoy

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