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LEO TOLSTOY

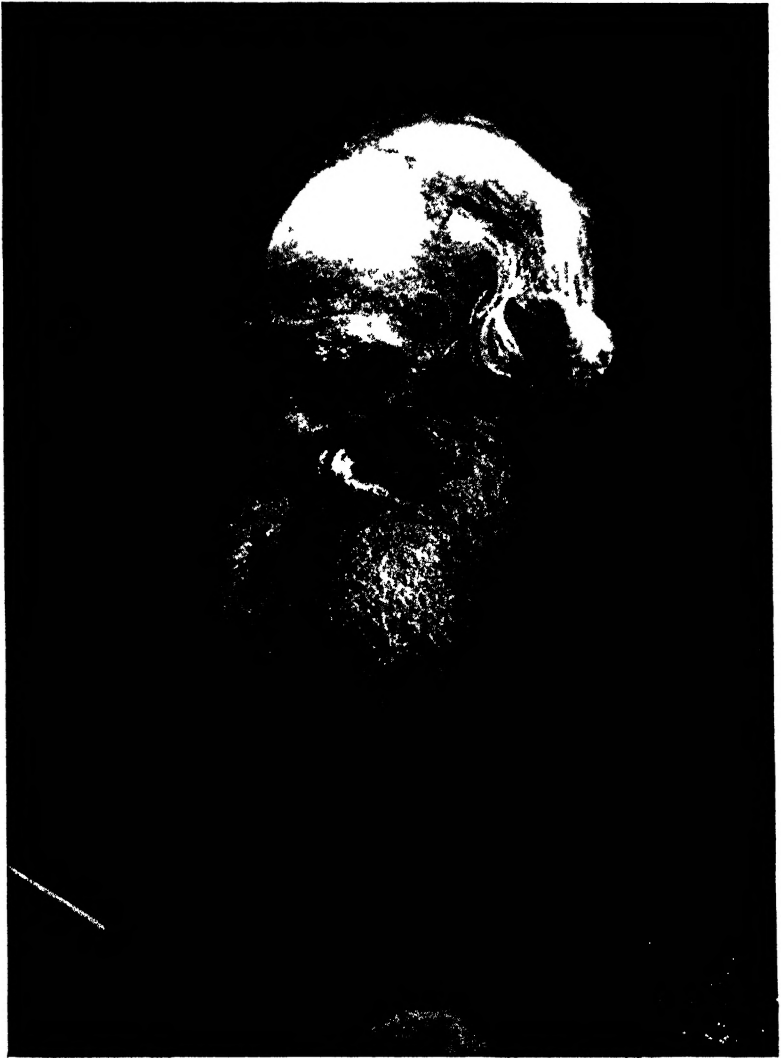
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Leo Tolstoy, taken in 1910



ERNEST J. SIMMONS

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LEO  
TOLSTOY

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*LONDON*  
JOHN LEHMANN



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I clearly realized that my biography, if it suppressed all the nastiness and criminality of my life—as they customarily write biographies—would be a lie, and that if one is going to write my biography, one must write the whole truth.

TOLSTOY

*TO*  
WINK AND DICK

## PREFACE

**T**HE PRESENT book has made full use of the vast amount of new manuscript and printed material about Tolstoy that has become available during the last twenty years in Russia. This material has significantly increased our knowledge of the man, of his life and thought and writings.

All dates are given in the "old style"—that is, they accord with the Julian calendar in use in Russia until after the 1917 Revolution. The Julian calendar was twelve days behind the Gregorian calendar in the nineteenth century, and thirteen days behind in the twentieth century.

Italicized words in the original Russian are preserved in the translations.

E. J. S.



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*Part I*

“Innocent, Joyous, Poetic  
Childhood”



## Chapter I

### PRINCES, GENERALS, AND SCOUNDRELS

ON THE walls of the large dining-room of the Tolstoy home at Yasnaya Polyana hung blackened ancestral portraits—seventeenth- and eighteenth-century men in wigs, uniforms, ribbons, and decorations, and women in their stiff gowns, laces, and powdered hair. At first the Tolstoy children were rather alarmed by these painted spectators from a mysterious past, but once the youngsters got accustomed to eating with the grown-ups the portraits ceased to bother them.

The only source of information, and one not wholly reliable, about the ancient founder of the Tolstoy family is the *Book of Nobility* (1686). In this account, medieval annals are cited to the effect that the Tolstoys derive from a certain Indris who in 1353 came to Russia from the West with his two sons and three thousand retainers. He was well received by the ruler of Chernigov in the Ukraine, where he adopted the Russian Orthodox faith. His great-grandson settled in Moscow and was honoured by the reigning Grand Duke, who bestowed upon him the surname Tolstoy, which means "fat" in Russian. Leo Tolstoy seems to have been of the opinion that his family was of German origin, and that his name was a translation of the German family name *Dick* ("fat"). But it is more likely that Indris, from whom Leo Tolstoy descended in a direct line in the twentieth generation, was of Lithuanian origin.

The first eleven generations of Tolstoys are known only by name, and it is not until the time of Peter I that history begins to record their activities. Leo Tolstoy's great-great-great grandfather, Peter Andreyevich Tolstoy, was a cowardly, cruel, and treacherous individual, but clever in the ruthless tactics of court intrigue and in what then passed for diplomacy. At first a partisan of Peter's half-sister Sophia, he quickly deserted her for the Tsar when she was defeated in the struggle for the throne. His subsequent career

## LEO TOLSTOY

was a varied one: he fought in the Azov campaign of 1696; was sent abroad with others to study naval science in 1697 and returned a confirmed Westerner. In 1701 Peter appointed him first Russian ambassador to Constantinople.

When war broke out between the two countries in 1710, the Sultan, who had little regard for diplomatic immunity, promptly threw the ambassador into the prison of the Seven Towers, and there he languished for almost two years. This disaster ultimately provided him with a device for the family coat of arms, which displays the seven towers, supported by two wolfhounds rampant. When he returned to Russia in 1714 Peter rewarded him for his services by making him a Minister of State. He accompanied the Tsar abroad in 1716, and his growing reputation for learning, unusual in those days in Russia, further endeared him to the pedantic Peter.

In 1717 Tolstoy won the special favour of his master by tricking Aleksei, the unhappy heir to the throne who had fled the country, into returning to Russia. Not only was Tolstoy a member of the tribunal that condemned the Tsarevitch, but there is much reason to believe that he helped to suffocate him with pillows in his prison cell.

The headship of the Secret Chancellery, large estates, and the title of Count were Tolstoy's rewards for his part in this sorry business. He became a close adviser of the Tsar, but despite his position of trust, or perhaps just because of it, Peter did not place much faith in the loyalty of his cunning counsellor. The Tsar is said to have remarked to the French minister that Tolstoy was a very able man, but in doing business with him "it was necessary to take the precaution of keeping a stone by you in order to smash his teeth in should he be disposed to snap." And in his cups Peter would fondly pat Tolstoy's head and say: "Head, head, if you were not so clever, I should long ago have ordered you cut off."

Indeed, in the end the clever Tolstoy reaped the whirlwind. Because he feared the young son of the murdered Aleksei—from whom he could expect no mercy—would become Tsar after the death of Catherine I, he plotted with a group to bring about the accession of Elizabeth, the daughter of Peter. The ruling favourite Menshikov, whose own daughter was betrothed to the Tsarevitch, learned of the conspiracy and had Tolstoy and others arrested.

The trial was rushed, and shortly before the death of Catherine, Menshikov persuaded her to deprive Tolstoy of his rank and of all

his orders and estates, and to sentence him to the Solovetski Monastery, that bleak prison in the White Sea to which Tolstoy himself had condemned victims of Peter's wrath. An old man of eighty-two, he set out under escort on his long journey, accompanied by his son who had been convicted with him. After a year on this desolate island the son died, and Tolstoy himself died a year later (1729).

The family fortunes were considerably repaired by Peter Tolstoy's grandson, Andrei Ivanovich Tolstoy. He served in the army and held several high administrative posts, and in 1760 the Empress Elizabeth restored to him the title of Count as well as some of the confiscated estates of his grandfather. Little is known about his personal life, but he appears to have been a most exemplary husband. One evening his wife (she was probably only fourteen at the time) departed for a ball without her husband, who was unable to attend. On the way she suddenly remembered that she had neglected to bid him the usual farewell, and she at once returned only to find him in tears over this lapse of wifely devotion. Nevertheless, she was apparently a model spouse, for she bore him twenty-three children over the space of twenty-five years, an accomplishment that won for their household the nickname of "the great nest."

One of this nest of children was Ilya Andreyevich Tolstoy (1757-1820), the future grandfather of Leo. His round, fat, good-natured face among the stern-visaged ancestral portraits on the dining-room walls at Yasnaya Polyana seems to reflect the pleasure that he always found in the company of amiable guests. Leo Tolstoy said of him that he was "a man of limited intelligence, very gentle and merry, and not only generous but senselessly prodigal, and above all very confiding."

In the characterization of old Count Rostov in *War and Peace*, Tolstoy has reproduced the essential traits of his grandfather, the peccadilloes softened somewhat and the nature rendered more lovable to suit the artist's purpose. A continuous round of feasting, theatrical performances, balls, outings, and card playing ended in the financial ruin of the grandfather. He could not bear to refuse a petitioner, for generosity was as instinctive as it was indiscriminate in him.

Even the fortune of his wealthy wife, Princess Pelageya Nikolayevna Gorchakov, was sacrificed because of her husband's extravagances. Finally, in order to secure a means of livelihood,

## LEO TOLSTOY

he obtained the post of Governor of Kazan. Luxurious habits, however, are easier to acquire than to dispense with, and grandfather Tolstoy continued to lead his prodigal existence—he ordered sturgeon for his table from Astrakhan, sent his linen to Holland to be washed, and maintained a domestic theatre and orchestra.

Although he was the soul of probity for a Russian governor of the time, grandfather Tolstoy's administration of Kazan was soon being furtively whispered about among the local gentry. He never took bribes (except the traditional ones from the liquor monopolists), a practice to which his more realistic wife was not averse. Perhaps it was his unconventional honesty as a government official that resulted in his being reported to his superiors in Petersburg for malfeasance. He was advised to resign, and an investigator was sent to Kazan to report on the conduct of his office. The kindly old man was so shaken by the charges that he died in less than a month after the order for his retirement.

## II

Nikolai Ilyich Tolstoy (1795–1837), the older son of Ilya Andreievich,<sup>1</sup> became the father of Leo Tolstoy. He was of medium height, well-built, active, with a pleasant face but with eyes that seemed always sad. Brought up as he was in a pleasure-loving household, his mind and tastes were formed to the lax social pattern of gentlemanly pursuits and occasional licence common among the landed gentry. To promote his physical well-being—or so it was imagined—his parents arranged a liaison between their sixteen-year-old son and a pretty serf girl. "That union," Tolstoy records, "resulted in the birth of a son, Mishenka, who became a postillion and who, while my father was alive, lived steadily, but afterwards went to pieces. Often when we brothers were grown up, he used to come to us begging for help. I remember the strange feeling of perplexity I experienced when this brother of mine, who was very much like my father (more so than any of us), having fallen into destitution, was grateful for the ten or fifteen rubles we would give him."

Before he was eighteen, and over the protests of his parents, Nikolai entered the army at the time of Napoleon's invasion of Russia. Since a near relation of his mother was Minister of War,

<sup>1</sup> There were three other children, a younger son who died and two daughters: Alexandra (1797?–1841) married Count K. I. Osten-Saken, and the younger, Pelageya (1801–1875), married V. I. Yushkov.

the young soldier encountered no difficulty in eventually obtaining the post of adjutant to another relative, a general in command of part of the active army. He saw action in most of the important engagements of the bitter campaign, but he soon lost his zeal for war. In October 1813 he was sent with dispatches to Petersburg, and on the way back to rejoin the army he and his orderly were captured by the French and sent under guard to Paris.

At the moment of capture, the orderly had the presence of mind to slip all his master's money into his boots. During the long journey to Paris, which took several months, the orderly never once dared to remove his boots, although he suffered extreme pain from the concealed coins. This devotion enabled his master to support the trials of captivity in Paris in relative comfort. Not until the Russians entered the French capital in March 1814 was he released.

Although Nikolai Tolstoy may have disliked the horrors of war, the army in times of peace was a pleasant enough haven for the next five years. He retired with the rank of lieutenant colonel in 1819, went to Kazan where his father was governor, and soon entered the civil service. His father's death in 1820 left him with an estate so encumbered with debt that he refused to accept his inheritance. The salary of a civil servant was now entirely inadequate to meet the new demands thrust upon him—the care of a distant relative and of a mother and sister who were accustomed to every luxury.

In such a situation the natural way out for a brilliant young man with a name and important connections was an advantageous marriage, and one was soon arranged. He married the wealthy Princess Marya Nikolayevna Volkonski in 1822, retired from the service, and settled down on his wife's estate at Yasnaya Polyana ("clear glade") to enjoy a large income from the efforts of some eight hundred serfs.

Despite his bride's wealth and the fact that he was virtually penniless when he married her, Nikolai's close bachelor friends must have wondered at his choice. Marya Volkonski (1790–1830) was already thirty-two, five years older than her husband, a ripe old-maid age in those days. Added to this disqualification was her very plain appearance; some even called her ugly. She was the only daughter of Prince Nikolai Sergeevich Volkonski, whose portrait on the dining-room wall filled the Tolstoy children with awe. It presented an impressive figure in a red caftan and grey wig, with a high forehead, thick overhanging eyebrows, and a piercing glance. His face bore a close resemblance to that of his famous grandson.



## LEO TOLSTOY

The Volkonskis traced their ancestry back to the Scandinavian Rurik, the traditional founder of Russia's first ruling dynasty. Nikolai Volkonski was an illustrious member of this proud line. In the reign of Catherine II he held high military and court positions, took part in the campaign against the Turks in 1780, and accompanied the Empress on her trip to the Crimea in 1786. When Volkonski had already achieved the lofty rank of general-in-chief, he lost it because he refused to marry Varvara Engelhardt, the niece and mistress of Potyomkin, who at that time was the Empress's chief favourite. Volkonski is said to have replied to Potyomkin's proposal: "What makes him think I would marry his strumpet?" According to another account, he lost favour in the Emperor Paul's reign because he incurred that mad monarch's displeasure by not appearing at a regimental review; he was dropped from the service but restored the next year (1798), when he was appointed Military Governor of Archangel. The prototype of Prince Bolkonski in *War and Peace*, he was a stern but wise landowner, opposed to the cruel punishments inflicted on serfs, and managed his large estate with an eye to the practical advantage of both himself and his peasants.

Yasnaya Polyana had been inherited by Volkonski from his father. The estate is a hundred and thirty miles south of Moscow and is situated in the Krapivenski district, about ten miles from the city of Tula. Volkonski had made many improvements: he built the original large manor house in which Leo Tolstoy was born, the two buildings that now serve as wings to the present central dwelling, and fine accommodations for his serfs. He saw to it that they always had enough to eat and sufficient clothing to wear—considerations of little concern to many landowners—and on holidays he provided them with recreation, such as games and village dances. The buildings he planned reflected his excellent taste and sense of beauty. Unlike the average Russian country gentleman of the time, he had no use for hunting, but he was well read in French literature and loved music. In the morning he would stroll along his lime-tree avenues, listen to the playing of his domestic orchestra, and enjoy the flowers and plants of his greenhouse.

Tolstoy's mother was severely brought up by her father. He tolerated no girlish nonsense in his deep affection for her, and himself taught her unwelcome lessons in mathematics, physics, geometry, and geography.

She was unusually well educated for a time when women were supposed to eschew learning as a social encumbrance. Perhaps her stern parent made the common mistake of trying to bring up as a boy the unfortunate only child that turned out to be a daughter, and one doubly unfortunate in that she was only two years old when her mother died.

Young ladies in aristocratic circles often knew French much better than their native language, but Tolstoy's mother spoke and wrote Russian correctly, and she also knew French, German, English, and Italian. Nor were practical matters concerning the management of the estate neglected in her rigorous training. On a visit to Petersburg when she was twenty her father obliged her to tour a number of factories, as well as museums, art galleries, and famous churches and palaces. She shared his love for music, played the piano well, and was credited with a unique talent for inventing folk tales and narrating them to children and grown-ups.

Unusual moral and spiritual qualities endeared Tolstoy's mother to all who surrounded her. Although quick-tempered, she exercised the utmost self-control. When provoked to fierce anger, her maid once told Tolstoy, she would go quite red in the face and even begin to weep, but she would never say a rude word—she did not even know any. Sincerity and simplicity dignified all her relations with people. Modesty was so deeply ingrained in her nature that she seemed literally ashamed of her own mental, moral, and spiritual superiority. Large, beautiful eyes transfigured her homely face and reflected the spiritual depths within.

Although an heiress and a member of a most prominent family, Princess Volkonski does not appear to have had many suitors. Her plain appearance and perhaps the jealous love of her severe father served to discourage them. As a mere girl she had been engaged to one of the sons of Prince Sergei Fyodorovich Golitsyn, who had married that same Varvara Engelhardt, mistress of Potyomkin, whose hand Volkonski had spurned. This coincidence, however, did not affect the friendship of the two princes, and the engagement of their children increased the intimacy of the two families. Before the marriage could take place the fiancé fell ill and died. Tolstoy observed that his mother's love for her deceased betrothed remained always in her memory as that poetic love which girls experience only once. As the years passed and the prospects of marriage faded, one may be certain that the belated proposal of

## LEO TOLSTOY

Nikolai Tolstoy was utterly without benefit of "poetic love" in the eyes of Marya Volkonski.

Like many Russian families in the restricted circle of nobility, the Tolstoys in both the male and the female branches were related through intermarriage to nearly every family of consequence in the nineteenth century. In general, they belonged to the landed gentry, and most of them went into government service. Their names fill the pages of Russian history and literature and adorn the honour roll of famous artists. In literature alone Tolstoy could claim kinship with famous authors whose names every Russian schoolboy would know—Pushkin, Chaadayev, A. K. Tolstoy, Odoyevski, and Tyutchev.

Obviously, the conglomerate strains that contribute to the Tolstoy line discourage the customary pious occupation of biographers of tracing "racial influences." Lithuanian, Scandinavian, and Tatar blood are mingled with the Slavic. Leo Tolstoy would have dismissed any such attempt with the proud assertion that he was a Russian. If God had favoured him with a second choice in the matter, he once thoughtfully admitted, he would choose to be an Englishman.

## Chapter II

### TUBBED AND SWADDLED

FROM THE deep well of memory Tolstoy brought to the surface recollections of his purely infant existence. He recalled a not unpleasant smell, probably from the bran with which his nurse rubbed him in the bath. His sensations on this occasion returned to him sharply across the years—the sudden awareness of his own tiny body with its visible ribs, the smooth dark wooden tub, the bare arms of his nurse, the noise of the warm, steaming, swirling water, and the smooth feel of the wet rim of the tub as he passed his little hands along it. Then there was the recollection of the family boggy name “Eremeyevna” that filled him and his sister with mingled fear and pleasure when whispered in a gruff, mysterious voice; and he remembered his agitation and tears over the depraved manner in which the family tutor kicked up his legs when they all danced in a circle.

It was this shadowy region between the unconscious and the conscious that principally occupied his thoughts in the few autobiographical notes that he jotted down in 1878 and added to in his *Recollections* twenty-five years later. The meagre catch in the net of memory only served to stimulate his speculation over the enormous chasm between the embryo and the newborn babe and the utter incomprehensibility between non-existence and an embryo. Autobiography was quickly sacrificed to the ineluctable difference between being and non-being.

Genius has no ancestors or descendants; it is an accident of nature and hence inexplicable in terms of human influences. The man who possesses genius, however, is subject to all the ordinary factors and circumstances that influence the average person. Tolstoy's heightened sensibilities made him even more susceptible to such influences, and among them his mother must be accorded a significant place. Although she died before he was two years old,

her moral and spiritual influence persisted to an extraordinary degree throughout his long life. The absence of any real memory of her only served to contribute to the idealized memory that his vivid imagination evoked.

Tolstoy heard about his mother from aunts and old family servants. Some of her extant letters and her diary provided additional information, but he was rather glad that no portrait of her existed (only a silhouette has been preserved), for it left his own beautiful image of her uncontaminated by reality.

Feminine sympathy, help, and love were essential to Tolstoy, and he sought them all his life. Everything he learned of his mother seemed to contribute to his imaginative conception of her as the very quintessence of feminine solicitude and no doubt intensified her spiritual influence over him. Three sons were born before him—Nikolai, Sergei, and Dmitri. Nikolai, who possessed unusual qualities, both as a child and as a man, was her favourite, and she lavished on him all the abundant affection of her loving nature. When Leo—often called by his pet name Lyovochka—came along on August 28, 1828, he displaced Nikolai, who was now old enough to be given over to the care of the family tutor, as his mother's favourite. She had to love someone, and the one love replaced the other. Her latest born she called "*mon petit Benjamin.*"

The children's early education was undertaken by their mother, who in the matter of moral direction derived hints from Rousseau's *Émile*. At the end of the day she graded the children's progress or lack of it on "tickets" and kept a diary in which she recorded her reactions to the lessons and behaviour of her charges.

The diary of Tolstoy's mother contains an interesting account of her efforts with Nikolai. "That diary," Tolstoy remarked, "portrays her passionate wish to do everything to educate Koko [Nikolai] in the best possible way, and at the same time how very obscure a perception she had of what such an education should be. She reproves him, for instance, for being too sensitive and crying over the sufferings of animals when he witnessed them. A man, in her view, had to be firm. Another defect she tried to correct in him was that he was absent-minded and said '*Je vous remercie*' to grandmamma instead of saying '*Bonsoir*' or '*Bonjour.*'" In general, she tried to encourage in her son manly and patriotic virtues, but moral and spiritual instruction took precedence over the practical. A kind heart pleased her more than a quick mind.

"I think that my mother was not in love with my father,"

Tolstoy wrote, "but loved him as a husband and chiefly as the father of her children." No more could be expected from this *mariage de convenance*. Morally and spiritually inferior to his wife, he could not understand her radiant nature, yet he proved an excellent husband in everything that made for happiness and prosperity in the household. Tolstoy's mother died on August 7, 1830, some five months after the birth of her only daughter, Marya (Masha), and after barely nine years of married life. The moving description of the death of the hero's mother in *Childhood* was unquestionably suggested by the accounts Tolstoy had heard of his own mother's death. The boundless love of a soul always striving towards the infinite, the eternal, and hence never at peace, is the dominating trait that runs throughout the whole characterization. Tolstoy believed boundless love to be the chief attribute of his mother's nature. In later life he rarely spoke of her to his own children, but when he did it was always with such tenderness and reverence that they thought of her as a saint.

## II

Tolstoy did not love his father as he did his mother, perhaps for the simple reason that the mystery that nourished her moral and spiritual influence was lacking. When he was old enough to be conscious of his surroundings, however, his father occupied first place in his esteem. His personality and even his handsome appearance in a frock coat and narrow trousers made an ineffaceable impression on the boy.

Nikolai Tolstoy was the original for the characterization of Nikolai Rostov in *War and Peace*. After his marriage he settled down at Yasnaya Polyana and managed his agricultural affairs with competence, just as young Rostov did at Bald Hills after he married Princess Marya. And some of the details of his existence as a country gentleman, such as his zeal for hunting, reappear in the novel. Unlike Rostov, however, Nikolai Tolstoy was lenient with his serfs. Leo remembered with pride that, with one exception, he never heard of corporal punishment on the estate when he was a child.

Education was not taken very seriously by landowners on the social level of Nikolai Tolstoy; landowners below his level were often illiterate. He had no fondness for pure science, but he read widely in the French classics and in political science and natural

history. Like young Rostov again, he endeavoured to build up a library, and he made a rule—the pious hope of many a collector of books—never to buy a new volume until he had read the old ones. His son found it hard to believe that his father obeyed this self-imposed rule with reference to the many-volumed *Histoires des Croisades* and *des Papes* that he found in the library at Yasnaya Polyana.

Apart from a few close hunting companions, Nikolai Tolstoy avoided the company of his neighbours. Nor did he allow himself to be drawn into the political activities of the local district. Like so many of the gentry who had taken part in the patriotic campaigns of 1812 to 1815, he was disillusioned by the later illiberal attitude of Alexander I and deeply disappointed by the reactionary rule of his successor. The result was an aloofness from all government service and an implied if not uttered condemnation of both the foreign and the domestic policy of his country.

Of course his son at that time did not understand the significance of this attitude, but he did fully realize that his father never humbled himself before anyone and never changed his debonair, gay, and often ironical tone. And this sense of personal dignity increased the boy's admiration of his father. The son was to possess this same consciousness of his own worth and the same unwillingness to humble himself before anyone, least of all before government officials.

Tolstoy pleasantly recalled the bright, happy demeanour of his father when he was alone with his family. His jests and yarns at mealtime kept grandmother, aunts, and children constantly amused. He would draw pictures for the youngsters which they thought the height of perfection. Just before bedtime the children would take their father's study by storm. As he smoked and read, they swarmed over the back of his huge leather divan to receive his good-night blessing. Sometimes they found him in the drawing-room, where he had gone to lay out Grandmother's game of patience; he was always tender and submissive to her. While she placed her cards and took a pinch from her gold snuffbox, one of the aunts would read aloud.

I remember once [Tolstoy wrote in his *Recollections*], in the middle of a game of patience and of the reading, my father interrupts my aunt, points to a looking-glass and whispers something. We all look in the same direction. It was the footman Tikhon who (knowing that

### TUBBED AND SWADDLED

my father was in the drawing-room) was going into the study to take some tobacco from a big leather folding tobacco-pouch. My father sees him in the looking-glass and notices his figure stepping carefully on tiptoe. My aunts laugh. Grandmamma for a long time does not understand, but when she does she too smiles cheerfully. I am enchanted by my father's kindness, and on taking leave of him kiss his white muscular hands with special tenderness.

### III

Tolstoy's mother had been the centre of a household that radiated possessive feminine love for her five children. After her early death the other women in the family circle drew closer to the motherless youngsters. And they occupy an important place in Tolstoy's childhood.

Tolstoy described his grandmother, Pelageya Nikolayevna Tolstoy, as a woman of small intellect who had been consistently spoiled by her father and then by both her husband and son. Although he suspected that she was jealous of his mother, she deeply loved her son and his children. All sought to please her as the chief person of the household, with the natural result that she grew capricious and often behaved to family and servants with little consideration.

With that arbitrary selectivity of memory functioning over a long stretch of years, Tolstoy's mind fixed on the picture of Grandmother in her white cap and dressing jacket, smiling with satisfaction at the children's delight over the large and wonderful bubbles that arose from her old white hands as she washed them with a special kind of soap. Another picture etched in his memory represented Grandmother in a yellow cabriolet placed in a clump of hazel bushes, the branches of which footmen bent down so that she could pluck the ripe nuts without leaving her seat. The children filled their own pockets, and Grandmother took the youngsters into the cabriolet with her and praised them. Grandmother, the nut glade, the pungent scent of the leaves, the footmen, the yellow cabriolet, and the hot sun all merged in his mind into one joyful impression of childhood.

Perhaps Tolstoy's most vivid recollection of his grandmother concerned the night he passed in her bedroom with Stepanich, the old blind storyteller, whose remarkable memory enabled him to repeat word for word stories that were read to him. His hearing



was so acute that he could indicate exactly the direction a mouse had taken by the sound it made in running across the floor. Tolstoy's sister related that the sightless Stepanich once interrupted a tale to remark that a mouse had just got into the oil that Grandmother used for her icon lamp. He often had his supper in Grandmother's room and recited one of his stories while she undressed and went to bed.

On one such occasion it was little Leo's turn to spend the night with his grandmother. He remembered her in the dim light of the icon lamp, propped up against the huge pillows, and dressed all in white and covered with white bedclothes. From the window seat came the tranquil voice of blind Stepanich droning the story of Prince Camaralzaman. Tolstoy could recall nothing of the tale, only the mysterious appearance of his white grandmother, her wavering shadow on the wall, and old Stepanich with his white, unseeing eyes.

Aunt Alexandra Ilyinichna Osten-Saken, the grandmother's oldest daughter, was the most unusual member of the Tolstoy family circle. Tragedy had wrecked her marriage. They had not lived together very long when her husband, a wealthy Baltic Count, showed signs of mental derangement. In a fit of insanity he shot her, almost fatally. While she was recovering, being pregnant at the time, he succumbed to another mad notion that she would betray him to his enemies, and he tried to cut her tongue out. Attendants rescued her, and Count Osten-Saken was shut up in an asylum. As a consequence of these terrible experiences, she gave birth to a stillborn girl, and friends, fearing to tell her of this new catastrophe, substituted the recently born child of a servant. She eventually returned to her parents' house, but after her father's death she and her ward, Pashenka, went to live with her newly married brother at Yasnaya Polyana.

Aunt Alexandra's misfortunes no doubt helped to deepen the Christian faith of a nature already intensely religious. Her favourite occupations were reading *The Lives of Saints* and playing devoted hostess to the numerous monks and nuns and half-crazy religious pilgrims who constantly visited Yasnaya Polyana. Tolstoy's religious mother also had a fondness for these holy people, who were familiar figures on large estates or any place where they could obtain alms. Her favourite among them, and the godmother of her daughter, was Marya Gerasimovna, who for some unknown reason masqueraded as a monk and assumed the name Ivanushka.

Aunt Alexandra took her under her own protection after the death of Tolstoy's mother.

There was nothing insincere in Aunt Alexandra's religious zeal. She led a truly Christian life, avoiding luxury, dressing in the simplest fashion, accepting no service that she could perform herself, and giving away her money to the needy. She carried her disregard of worldly niceties so far that she neglected to keep clean, and Tolstoy uncharitably recalled the acrid smell that always seemed to enter the room with her.

In his old age, when Tolstoy looked back upon the people who had been close to him during his childhood, the one he singled out as having the "greatest influence" on his life was Auntie Tatyana Alexandrovna Yergolski. She was not a real aunt and he could never remember the exact relationship—she was his father's second cousin. When she and her sister were left poor orphans, Tolstoy's grandmother, after praying before the icon, drew lots with another relative for possession of the girls. Tatyana fell to her and she brought her up as one of her own children. She turned out to be an unusual child, resolute, resourceful, and devoted to her benefactress. Her courage once challenged by her playmates, she promptly placed a red-hot ruler on her arm, apparently inspired to make this particular kind of test by the dubious example of Mucius Scaevola. She was in love with the son of her benefactress, like Sonya, who was modelled on her, in *War and Peace*, but appears to have given up Nikolai Tolstoy with less regret than Sonya surrendered Nikolai Rostov: their claims were sacrificed to wealthy brides. Six years after the death of his wife, Tolstoy's father asked his childhood sweetheart to marry him and act as a mother to his children. She rejected the first part of his proposal and gladly accepted the second: for the rest of her life she took the place of a mother to the Tolstoy sons and daughter.

Auntie Tatyana was about forty when she first impressed herself on the mind of the young Tolstoy. He remembered her then with her enormous plait of crisp, black, curly hair, jet-black eyes, and vivacious expression. And from the very beginning he loved her. When he was almost five, he recalls, he squeezed in behind her on the divan, and as she caressed him he caught her dusky broad little hand with its energetic cross-vein and began to kiss it and to cry from tender love of her. He never remembered one word of reproach from her, and her whole existence seemed to be devoted to service to others. She loved others not so much for the good

they did her as for the good she did them. Love, Tolstoy remarked, was her chief characteristic, and her influence "consisted first of all in teaching me from childhood the spiritual delight of love. She did not teach me that by words, but by her whole being she filled me with love. I saw and felt how she enjoyed loving, and I understood the joy of love. That was the first thing. And the second was that she taught me the charm of an unhurried, tranquil life."

## IV

Such were the people who surrounded Tolstoy in his infancy. The atmosphere, properly enough, was a feminine one, for he was still confined to the nursery upstairs and to the constant companionship of his younger sister. Dim recollections of being bathed and swaddled and of the secure feeling of boundless love, especially from his Auntie Tatyana, are all that he remembered before the age of five. But the world downstairs with his older brothers and their German tutor, Fyodor Ivanovich Rössel, the great world of men beyond the nursery with his father and the clever coachmen, with horses and dogs and hunting—all this awaited him. And many years later he recalled the change and resurrected all the poignant mixed feelings that attended this solemn event in his young life.

"When I was moved downstairs to Fyodor Ivanovich and the boys," he wrote, "for the first time in my life, and therefore more strongly than at any time since, I experienced that feeling which is called a sense of duty, a consciousness of the cross that every man is called upon to bear. I was sorry to leave what I had been accustomed to (accustomed to from the very beginning), and it was sad, poetically sad, to part not so much with people, with my sister, nurse and Auntie, but with my crib and its canopy and pillows, and this new life into which I was entering seemed fearful. I tried to find a happy side to this new life that awaited me; I tried to believe the kind words with which Fyodor Ivanovich lured me to him; I tried not to see the scorn with which the boys received me—the youngest; I tried to think that it was shameful for a big boy to live with girls, and that there was nothing good in the life upstairs with nurse; but at heart I was terribly sad, and I knew that I had irrevocably lost my innocence and happiness, and only a feeling of my own worth and the consciousness that I was fulfilling my duty sustained me. Many times since I have experienced

similar moments at the crossroads of life when entering upon a fresh course. I experienced quiet grief at the irreparability of my loss. I was unable to believe that it would really happen, although I had been told that they would move me downstairs to the boys. But I remember the dressing-gown with the cord sewn to its back which they put on me, and it seemed to cut me off forever from upstairs. And I noticed then for the first time not all those with whom I had lived upstairs, but the principal person with whom I lived and whom I had not remembered previously. This was Auntie Tatyana Alexandrovna. I recall her—short, stout, black-haired, kind, tender, and passionate. She put the dressing-gown on me, and, embracing and kissing me, she tied it around me; and I saw that she felt as I did: that it was sad, terribly sad, but that it had to be. For the first time I felt that life was not a game but a serious matter.”

## Chapter III

### THE GREEN STICK

**T**HAT LIFE is a "serious matter" may well be a rational conviction for the adult; for the child, it is a transitory impression inspired by changes that reality thrusts into his little world of make-believe. All the burden and the mystery that troubled the thoughts of five-year-old Lyovochka quickly vanished when he found his new life downstairs a glorious game indeed.

The happy, irrecoverable days of childhood stretch out before him like some illimitable terrain, mysteriously beckoning him to explore its sunny valleys and cool forests. After each day's wanderings he returns home, pleasantly weary and very hungry. The cup of milk and sugar finished, he curls up cosily in an easy chair, and healthy childish sleep weighs down his eyelids. He feels the gentle fingers of Auntie Tatyana running through his hair and hears her soft familiar voice, as though far away, tenderly urging him to bed. Her kiss on his forehead rouses him and his lips search for her hand. Soon he is tucked under the quilt, and he presses to him in a corner of the soft down pillow a favourite china toy—a hare or a dog—and hopes the morrow will be fine for an outing. Then he smilingly falls asleep, whispering a prayer to God to make everybody happy.

Once out of the nursery, Lyovochka discovered the world of nature—grass, leaves, flowers, trees, birds, and animals—in the picturesque surroundings of Yasnaya Polyana, and in his impressionable mind a lasting love for God's handiwork was born. Yasnaya Polyana, where he was to spend some seventy of his eighty-two years, was an ideal playground for a boy. Visitors entered the grounds of the estate through a gateway between white-washed brick towers that looked like two strangely shaped mushrooms topped by Chinese roofs. Grandfather Volkonski is said to have stationed guards in these towers.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>After Tolstoy had become master of the estate, the humble, low-born Chekhov, on his first visit to Yasnaya Polyana, lost courage when he came in sight of the aristocratic towers and ordered his puzzled driver to turn back.

## THE GREEN STICK

The way to the house led through a lane bordered with birch trees, their clean bark gleaming white where the sun struck it through the leafy shade. In front of the old manor house with its forty-two rooms was a flower garden, and behind extended a large park with ancient lime-tree alleys and several small ponds. On the edge of the estate the thick Zakaz woods were cut by the Voronka River. From the house, running through a clearing studded with springtime forget-me-nots, was the "bathing-trail" to the family bathhouse on the bank of the river. Across the undulating countryside in the distance stretched from east to west a long ribbon of imperial domain known as the Zaseka forest. It bounded on one side the extensive fields beyond the gates of the estate. From the road at harvest time one could see, where a strip of thick high rye had already been cut, a peasant woman reaping with even rhythm or bending over the cradle of her child that had been placed in the shade of the tall grain. In the cleared spaces the bright yellow field was full of sheaves, which black-bearded peasants loaded on their stubby carts.

But harvest time was also hunting time, and little Lyovochka was soon initiated into the traditions of the chase, sacred among Russian landowners. He remembered the young borzois following his father out into the field and growing excited as the high grass whipped and tickled their bellies. With their tense tails raised sickle-wise, they leaped gracefully over the stubble behind the horses' feet. Milka, the high-spirited, piebald favourite dog of his father, ran in front with expectant head raised, waiting for the quarry. The peasants' voices, the tramp of horses and creaking of carts, the merry whistle of quail, the mingled odours of wormwood, straw, and horses' sweat, the dark blue of the distant forest, the light lilac clouds, and the white cobwebs that floated in the air or stretched across the stubble—all these sights, sounds, and smells lingered in his memory when years later he described the first hunting experience of his childhood.

Then there was his recollection of the big grey wolf that the hunters caught alive and brought home in triumph. All stood around in awe as the trussed-up beast was unloaded from the cart. They held the wolf down with pitchforks, and it gnawed savagely at the cords while being untied. At a given signal the beast was released, and in a flash dogs, hunters, and horsemen flew after it downhill and across the fields. Much to the disgust of Lyovochka's father, the wolf escaped, only to appear again many years later in the

famous hunting scene in *War and Peace*, but on that occasion the wolf did not escape.

## II

Closer association with his brothers was of first importance in the new existence of the recent graduate from the nursery. They soon initiated Lyovochka into those exciting mysteries that are the peculiar possession of the world of childhood.

Curiously enough, black-eyed Dmitri (Mitenka) left little impression on Lyovochka during this period, although Dmitri was closest to him in age (only a year and a half older) and played with him more than the other brothers. He was a capricious, difficult child, and Tolstoy remembered only his excessive merriment and the fact that they got along well enough together.

The handsome, proud, yet sincere Sergei (Seryozha), however, Lyovochka admired to the point of hero worship. He was two and a half years older. Lyovochka, self-conscious and painfully aware of what others thought of him, was impressed by Seryozha's spontaneity of egotism and tried to imitate it. In fact, he imitated nearly everything Seryozha did: his keeping chickens, his coloured drawings of them, and the original way he fed his flock in the winter by poking long slivers of bread through the keyhole. The ease and sureness with which Seryozha got things done baffled his brother and at the same time aroused his adoration. Throughout his life Seryozha remained for Tolstoy an inscrutable, mysterious, and endlessly fascinating personality.

Nikolai (Nikolenka, Koko), who was more than five and a half years older than Lyovochka, was naturally the moving spirit among the brothers in all their childhood enterprises. Not only the fact that he was the oldest, but rare qualities of mind and spirit justified his leadership. Lyovochka deeply loved Nikolai, whose influence over him was enduring and important. Tolstoy believed that Nikolai resembled his mother in his indifference to what others thought about him, in his unusual modesty despite superior mental, moral, and spiritual endowments, and in his firm refusal to judge others. Turgenev used to say of him that he lacked only certain faults to be a great writer. Tolstoy added that he lacked the writer's principal fault of vanity but possessed to a high degree a fine artistic sense, a gay, light fund of humour, an amazing imagination, and a highly moral view of life. He related how Nikolai would invent folk tales, ghost stories, or shilling-shockers for hours

together, and so vividly did he realize characters and scenes that one forgot that they were all products of his imagination.

Nikolai's imagination and power of invention, perhaps inspired in this instance by his reading about freemasons and religious sects—he was a wide reader—created an exciting childhood fantasy that absorbed much of the attention and thought of the Tolstoy brothers for a brief period. (They ranged between the ages of five and eleven at this time.) Nikolai solemnly announced to them one day that he possessed a wonderful secret that could make all men happy. If it became generally known, a kind of Golden Age would exist on earth: there would be no more disease, no human misery, and no anger. All would love one another and become "Ant Brothers."<sup>1</sup> The children adopted the idea with enthusiasm and even organized a game of Ant Brothers. Boxes and chairs were covered with shawls, and they all cuddled together in the dark within the shelter.

Nikolai had disclosed the Ant Brotherhood to them but not the chief secret—the means by which all men would become everlastingly happy. He had written this secret, he said, on a green stick buried by the road at the edge of a ravine in the Zakaz forest. Apart from the green stick, there was also a certain Fanfaronov Hill, and he agreed to lead them up it if they would fulfil all the necessary conditions. The first was to stand in a corner and not think of a white bear. The second condition was to walk along a crack in the floor without wavering; and the third was to keep from seeing a hare, alive or dead or cooked, for a whole year. Of course, Nikolai strictly warned his brothers not to reveal these conditions to anyone. If they fulfilled them, and others that he promised to communicate later, then they would have one wish that would come true. And they had to tell Nikolai their wishes beforehand. Seryozha wished to be able to model a horse and a hen out of wax; Mitenka wished to be able to draw everything in life size, like a real artist; and the five-year-old Lyovochka, clearly puzzled, lamely wished to be able to draw things in miniature.

The children soon forgot about Fanfaronov Hill and the green stick. Tolstoy, however, traced to the Ant Brotherhood under the shawl-covered chairs his first childhood experience of love, not love of some one person, but love of love. Huddled together under the chairs, the Ant Brothers felt a particular tenderness for each other,

<sup>1</sup>*Moravskiye bratya*—"Moravian Brothers"—of whom young Nikolai had no doubt read, was probably mistakenly transformed by the boys into *Muraveinye bratya*—"Ant Brothers."



and they talked of what was necessary for happiness and how they would love everybody. When he was over seventy, he recalled the incident in his *Recollections*:

The ideal of Ant Brothers clinging lovingly to one another, only not under two armchairs curtained by shawls, but of all the people of the world under the wide dome of heaven, has remained unaltered for me. As I then believed that there was a little green stick whereon was written something which would destroy all evil in men and give them great blessings, so I now believe that such truth exists among people and will be revealed to them and will give them what it promises.

Two years before his death, Tolstoy dictated to his secretary, N. N. Gusev, the following: "Although it is a trifling matter, yet I wish to say something that I should like done after my death. Even though it is a trifle of trifles: let no ceremonies be performed in putting my body into the earth. A wooden coffin, and whoever wishes, carry it or cart it to Zakaz, opposite the ravine at the place of the 'green stick.' At least, there's a reason for selecting that and no other place." When he mentioned the green stick, Gusev observed, tears filled his eyes.

## III

If Lyovochka found anything serious in his new life downstairs, it was the irksome hours of study under the guidance of his first tutor, the German Fyodor Ivanovich Rössel. Children of the Russian gentry ordinarily learned languages from foreign tutors, although such instructors were often ex-tailors, cooks, or soldiers, who had found their way into Russia and exploited their language as a means of livelihood. Fyodor Ivanovich had been a shoemaker, a soldier, a rope-maker, and a bit of a Don Juan, if the story of his life that Tolstoy tells so effectively in *Boyhood* is authentic.

As a tutor, certainly, he had little to recommend him, except his unfailing kindness and affection for the Tolstoy children. His intellectual interests appear to have been discouragingly limited to the repeated reading of three works: a German pamphlet on the manuring of cabbage plots, one volume of a *History of the Seven Years' War*, and a treatise on hydrostatics. For good measure, he supplemented this learned feast with odd copies of the Russian periodical, *Northern Bee*.

Seated in an easy chair and arrayed in his quilted dressing-gown and red-tasselled skullcap, Fyodor Ivanovich heard with an air of

pedagogical pomposity endless recitations from a German dialogue book: "*Wo kommen Sie her?*" he would ask in his Saxon accent. And the pat answer would be droned back: "*Ich komme vom Kaffeehause.*" Failure to know the answer of the exercise book entailed the risk of being sent to kneel in the corner. Sadly Tolstoy recalls that corner of shame in *Childhood*. Vexed with aching back and knees, he picked plaster off the wall and then grew frightened that the noise of a particularly large piece falling to the floor might attract the attention of his absent-minded tutor. But Fyodor Ivanovich heard nothing, for he was once again deep in his treatise on hydrostatics. The kindly, sentimental tutor, however, was no tyrant. Perhaps more important than his German lessons were the virtuous precepts he encouraged of generous tolerance and loving-kindness towards all the poor and unfortunate of life, among whom he included himself.

Except for German, in which Lyovochka acquired considerable expertness, little else appears to have been within the teaching competence of good Fyodor Ivanovich. He may have fostered what seems to have been an attempt at a magazine on the part of his young pupils. In the vast collection of Tolstoy manuscripts in Moscow, two pages of note-paper, neatly ruled in childish fashion in pencil, have recently turned up. They are headed "Children's Amusements," with an indication that the contributions will be written by the four brothers. Beneath this is a sub-heading: "First Part. Natural History. Written by C.L.N.To, 1835," that is, by Count Leo Nikolayevich Tolstoy. Seven brief accounts follow, the first of which is entitled "The Eagle." It reads: "The eagle is the king of birds. They say about it that a certain boy began to tease it; it grew angry and pecked at him." Similar descriptions follow of the hawk, owl, parrot, peacock, hummingbird, and cock. This is the first manuscript of Tolstoy in existence, and it was probably written when he was seven years of age.

Among the gentry, French was an indispensable subject in the education of any child. No doubt Auntie Tatyana, who knew the language better than her own, was the teacher in this instance. She apparently laid a good foundation, for in later years Tolstoy's knowledge of French was perfect. He began his study of the language at a very early age, for when he was five he was given the task of teaching little Dunechka her letters in French. Dunechka was the illegitimate daughter of a distant relative of the Tolstoys, A. A. Temyashyov, a wealthy bachelor. He begged Tolstoy's

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father, to whom he was devoted, to bring up Dunechka in his household. In return, he offered to hand over a rich property, Pirogovo, if Tolstoy's father would set aside a dowry for the girl. So the quiet, broad-faced child became a member of the family and played with the brothers.

Once, Tolstoy recalls, she and Dmitri started a game of spitting a small chain into each other's mouth, but she spat it so hard and he opened his mouth so wide that he swallowed the chain. There was much wailing until the doctor came and calmed all concerned. Indeed, Dunechka gave way to tears as easily as her young teacher, whose propensity in this direction earned him the family nickname of *Lyova Ryova*, "Cry-baby Leo." On one occasion she grew weary with his efforts and stubbornly called incorrectly the French letters that he pointed out to her. The five-year-old pedagogue persisted and Dunechka burst into tears. So did Cry-baby Leo, and when the mystified grown-ups arrived on the scene, the desperate sobs of both master and pupil prevented them from uttering a word of explanation.

Up to the age of nine Lyovochka's formal education was neither systematic nor thorough. His own inclination, however, and the example of his elders over this period, unquestionably encouraged that informal but valuable kind of instruction obtained from reading good books. There is no actual record of such efforts, except his own story of being asked, when he was about eight, to read Pushkin to his father. He selected from the volume his favourite pieces that he had learned by heart, such as "To the Sea" and "Napoleon":

The wondrous fate has been fulfilled,  
The great man is no more.

"He was evidently struck by the pathos with which I spoke those verses," Tolstoy writes, "and having listened to me, exchanged significant looks with Yazykov [Tolstoy's godfather], who was present. I understood that he saw something good in that reading of mine and I was very happy about it." Not merely the effectiveness of his son's reading, but the choice of poems must have struck the father as unusual. For the poems mentioned, among Pushkin's best shorter pieces, are extremely advanced for an eight-year-old boy, and their selection at least suggests a degree of artistic taste and understanding even at this age.

A few of the thirty or more serf domestics of the Tolstoy were distinct personalities and important individuals in the household during Lyovochka's childhood. Their absolute dependence on master and mistress, true of servants among the gentry before the emancipation of the serfs, often engendered a nearness and devotion to the family quite uncommon in such a relationship.

There was toothless nurse Anna Ivanovna, a relic of grandfather Volkonski's boyhood, whose extreme age and witchlike appearance frightened the Tolstoy children. She was assisted by the much younger Tatyana Filippovna, who lived long enough with the family to become the nurse of Tolstoy's eldest son. The whole life of this simple peasant centred in her foster children, and she freely gave away to her wheedling husband and son all the money that she earned. With little Dunechka had come her own nurse, Evpraksiya, an ancient woman with a pendulous jowl like a turkey cock's, in which a ball moved around. As a special treat she would allow the Tolstoy youngsters to feel this growth in her neck. The deep-voiced, genial Nikolai, brother of Tatyana Filippovna, who always had about him the pleasant smell of the stables, was the family coachman. The children loved him and were much in awe of his skill with horses. The kindly butler Vasili Trubetskoi used to carry Lyovochka up and down the pantry on his tray, and the boy also sought to keep in the good graces of the footman, Tikhon, a former flutist in the serf orchestra of grandfather Volkonski and a comedian of some ability, and of the two handsome brothers, Petrushka and Matyushka, strong and skilful huntsmen.

Of all the domestics of his childhood, the one whom Tolstoy recalled with deepest affection was the housekeeper, Praskovya Isayevna. She too had served the family since the time of his grandfather. Lyovochka would go up to her little room and have long talks with her about all those matters of supreme importance in the life of a child. She would answer his eager questions concerning the military exploits of grandfather Volkonski, and no doubt she told him a great deal about his mother, whom she loved. His only unpleasant memories of her concern the time she struck him with a wet napkin for a boyish prank and the enema she administered to him by mistake—the operation apparently had been intended for one of his brothers. She was a rare character, however, and Tolstoy frankly admits her fine influence on the development of his sensibility. So

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instinctive were her love and kindness that it never occurred to him until after she had died to value them for their true worth. Only then did he realize what a wonderful being she had been.

On holidays the house serfs often mingled with members of the family in the festivities. This was especially true of the celebrations at Christmas time. All would dress in outlandish mummers' costumes—a bear, a goat, a Tatar, a Turk, or a robber. Sometimes neighbours would come, such as Islenev<sup>1</sup> with his three sons and three daughters, weirdly made up to represent a dressing-table, a boot, a cardboard buffoon, and other oddities. Bustling Auntie Tatyana quickly disguised the excited Tolstoy children. Little Masha was particularly attractive as a Turkish girl, and her brother Lyovochka thought himself very handsome as a Turkish man. He studied his burnt-cork moustache and exaggerated eyebrows in the mirror, and the expression of a majestic Turk that he tried to assume vanished in the smile of pleasure that came over his face. Music and country dances followed, and then the mummers, both serfs and gentry, formed a large circle and played traditional Christmas games. When the festivities ended, all the participants were treated to a variety of holiday dainties.

Suffering and misfortune always puzzled little Lyovochka. When returning from a walk with his tutor, they met the fat steward Andrei, followed by squinting Kuzma, the coachman's assistant, who was on his way to the stable to be flogged. Lyovochka was horrified, although floggings (rare at Yasnaya Polyana) were the common fate of serfs. And he was doubly grieved when Auntie Tatyana, who hated corporal punishment, told him—what he did not know then—that he could have prevented the beating. He was equally shocked and bewildered when he heard Temyashyov casually relate how he had sent his man cook to serve as a soldier—a terrible calamity for a serf at that time—simply because he had taken it into his head to eat meat during a fast. And when the butler, Vasili Trubetskoi, who used to carry him around on his tray, was transferred to another estate, Lyovochka grew fearful over the instability of life and experienced a still deeper sense of love and pity for Vasili. Even his kind tutor aroused his antipathy when he condemned his own dog to be hanged because her leg had been broken. The boy felt that something was terribly wrong if poor Bertha had to be hanged merely because she was suffering and ill.

<sup>1</sup>He was the grandfather of Tolstoy's future wife and is represented as the father of the Irtenev children in *Childhood*.

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The positive side of Lyovochka's sensibility was expressed in spontaneous outpourings of love and in eager attempts to win affection. With the unwavering faith of a child he believed that love for people was a natural disposition of the soul, or rather the accepted relationship among all peoples. Its absence, whenever pointedly evident, always troubled him. To the animate and inanimate world he imparted all the happiness of his own warm and loving imagination. On a summer picnic at Grumond, a charming little village about a mile and a half from Yasnaya Polyana, he recalls his joyous feelings evoked by the event: "The coachmen stand in the shade of the trees. The light and shadow speckle their faces, kind, jolly, happy faces. Matryona the cowherd runs up in her shabby dress and says that she has waited long for us, and she is glad that we have arrived. I not only believe, but cannot help believing, that all the world is happy. Auntie is happy while asking Matryona with concern about her daughters, the dogs are happy . . . the hens, the roosters, the peasant children are happy, the horses are happy, and the calves, the fish in the pond, and the birds in the trees are happy."

On another occasion, Lyovochka's father calls upon him to make up a charade for the company (he was unusually adept at charades). He promptly obliged by combining a letter of the alphabet with those of the word for a bird, which together spell out a "small house."<sup>1</sup> "While I am speaking they look and smile at me, and I know, I feel, that these smiles do not mean that there is something ridiculous in me or in my speech; they mean that while looking at me they love me. I feel this, and there is ecstatic joy in my soul."

Despite his uncommon sensibility, hair-trigger emotions, and a certain shyness, Lyovochka did not shirk the rough-and-tumble world of his three older brothers. "Lyovochka the bubble"—so they called him because of his stoutness as a child—took part in all their games and fought pillow fights with gusto. Indeed, it was his endless high spirits and intense enjoyment of life that seemed to set him apart as a child. He was like a ray of light, his sister Marya said. He would dash into a room with a happy smile, as if he wished to tell everyone about a new discovery he had just made. And she related that he was fond of jests, always tender, kind, yielding, and never rude. If he were petted, tears of joy would come into his eyes.

<sup>1</sup>He joins the Russian letter *b* to the word for "duck" (*utka*), which results in *butka*, "a booth" or "small house."

## Chapter IV

### “THE DESERT OF MY BOYHOOD”

ON A FINE January day in 1837, the family *brichka* and calash stood at the front door of the manor house at Yasnaya Polyana. The commotion attendant upon preparations for a long journey reigned throughout the house. Servants ran hither and thither, angrily shouting directions to each other, lugging boxes and portmanteaux and piling them on the vehicles. A motley group of barefoot children and peasant women, with striped kerchiefs on their heads and babies in their arms, stood around the porch and watched the packing with vagrant curiosity. Coachmen greased the *brichka* and hungry dogs furtively licked the smears on the wheel hubs. Finally, all was ready. Members of the family and domestics assembled in the large living-room for the traditional minute of silence before departure. Father Tolstoy, Grandmother, Aunt Alexandra, Auntie Tatyana, and all the children filed through rows of servants to receive their tearful farewells and customary kisses on the shoulder. Then with much crowding they arranged themselves in the vehicles. Little Lyovochka, with tears in his eyes, tenderly kissed the muzzle of his favourite dog, Milka, and got into the calash with his father. The coachman cracked his whip and they were off, down through the birch-tree avenue, past the white-washed brick towers, and out on the open road to Moscow.

The oldest son, Nikolai, was now fourteen, and the time had come to think of preparing him for the university. This required special tutoring that could be obtained only in the city. Besides, the other brothers were rapidly nearing an age when the elementary instruction of Fyodor Ivanovich would not be sufficient for their proper educational training.

For the irrepressible Lyovochka this first venture into the great world beyond the towered gates was a memorable event. The road was a child's story book of scenes and people foreign to his sheltered

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existence. Stolid-faced pilgrims with knapsacks of birch bark on their backs, legs swathed in dirty bands, and heavy bast shoes on their feet trudged by, their staffs swinging in a rhythmical up-and-down movement. They scarcely looked at him, and he wondered where they were going and why. A carefree postboy riding past and drawling a song suddenly convinced him that a postboy's life must be the height of happiness. The red scarified stump of a beggar's outstretched arm frightened him; and he was puzzled by the contemptuous look of a carter who whipped his shuffling horse past the calash. The family put up at inns and villages on the way, and no one paid the slightest attention to them. All this strange indifference worried Lyovochka. At last they approached Moscow with the golden cupolas of its forty times forty churches gleaming in the distance, and his father proudly pointed out to him the famous buildings of the city.

The sudden awareness in the life of a child that his family was really not the centre of the universe now for the first time came to Lyovochka. The villages and towns through which he had passed teemed with people who did not even know that he existed. Peasants failed to smile and bow, as at Yasnaya Polyana, and often they did not even bother to notice him. He began to wonder what could possibly interest all these people if they did not care about him and his father, grandmother, and aunts. This thought led him to speculate on how these strange people lived. Who taught their children? And how were they punished? The walls of his own childhood world at Yasnaya Polyana had finally crumbled and new horizons loomed in the distance.

## II

The family rented a large and expensive house in Moscow. Lyovochka now saw very little of his father, but he took long interesting walks about the unfamiliar streets with Fyodor Ivanovich. On one of these strolls the children wandered into a beautiful private garden. With its formal flower beds, pond, and fountains, it seemed like a veritable fairyland. The owner, who chanced to encounter the youngsters in their unsuspecting trespass, was so pleased with their enthusiasm that he guided them around and then invited them to come again. On their second visit, however, they were met by a caretaker who brusquely ordered them away. Tolstoy recalled the incident as one that aroused in his young mind a sense of the injustice and cruelty of people with authority.



In the summer Father Tolstoy went to Tula on business. On the way to visit his friend Temyashyov, he suddenly fell dead in the street. The theft of papers and money on his person led to the suspicion that he had been murdered by the handsome Petrushka and Matyushka, the two servants who had accompanied him on the trip. (A mysterious beggar subsequently restored the papers to the family in Moscow.) At that time it was not an unheard-of thing for serfs to kill and rob their masters. In the midst of family grief and distraction these suspicions were never pursued and the body was removed to Yasnaya Polyana for burial.

Nine-year-old Lyovochka's thoughts were strangely confused. Only after his father's death did he begin to realize how much he had loved him, and the event awoke in his sensitive mind a feeling of religious horror before the eternal questions of life and death. For some time, perhaps because he had not seen him dead, he refused to believe that his father no longer existed. While walking in the Moscow streets, he hoped for a long time that the next man he met would be his father. When he grew sad over his loss, it was largely in imitation of the grief of the grown-ups; and this sadness also seemed to endow him with a special importance that he valued. He rather enjoyed hearing people say of him that he was now a poor and unfortunate orphan.

Grandmother Tolstoy continually mourned the death of her son. Excessive grief unhinged her mind at times, and she imagined that she saw him in a neighbouring room and held long conversations with him. Her health was undermined and she fell dangerously ill. Lyovochka and his brothers and sister were led into Grandmother's room to take their farewell of her. She lay on a high white bed, clothed all in white, and he felt only repulsion when he kissed her still white hand, so swollen that it looked like a pillow.

Grandmother's serious illness did not act as a damper on the fun-loving Tolstoy children. One day, some eleven months after the death of their father, the brothers were in high spirits over the visit of their comrade Volodenka Milyutin. In honour of the guest, Lyovochka, Dmitri, and Sergei invented a curious kind of entertainment. They collected a lot of paper and proceeded to burn it, with noisy merriment, in the chamber pots. When the conflagration was at its height, their tutor dashed into the room, his face pale and his lower lip trembling. Instead of the expected scolding, he solemnly announced to the crestfallen boys: "Your grandmother is dead!"

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This second loss in the family in less than a year awakened in Lyovochka a depressing fear of death. Grandmother's corpse reminded him vividly and unpleasantly of the fact that he too must die some day. But the sad sight of her in the coffin, with her stern face and aquiline nose, and the grief of the various mourners, were compensated somewhat in his eyes by the fine new jacket of black material braided with white that was bestowed on him for the occasion of the funeral. And it pleased him, as when his father had died, to overhear the conversation of gossiping female guests who said: “Complete orphans; their father only lately dead, and now the grandmother gone too!”

### III

Death worked its swift changes on the diminishing household. Saintlike Aunt Alexandra now became legal guardian of the children. Expenses had to be cut, for the family property was placed in trust. On their walks the children were assigned the interesting task, which quickly turned into a game, of spotting “to let” signs. Lyovochka won. The apartment he discovered delighted the children, in the sense that miniatures always fascinate the young: its five small rooms seemed so cosy and intimate compared to the huge rambling houses they had lived in. And they were captivated by a mysterious machine in the courtyard driven by a horse that wearily plodded in an endless circle. Lyovochka took a more sober view of the novelty of straitened circumstances when he observed that the Tolstoy children received cheap presents at a Christmas party to which they had been invited, whereas his rich Gorchakov cousins were given expensive gifts.

Family reverses, however, did not relieve the Tolstoy brothers of the onerous burden of education. Shortly after their arrival in Moscow a rather foppish Frenchman, Prosper Saint-Thomas, was engaged as their new tutor. He had none of the kindly, generous qualities of humble Fyodor Ivanovich. Lyovochka was soon keenly aware of the difference and his relations with the new tutor left a very unpleasant and ineffaceable impression on him. As a pedagogue, Saint-Thomas was rather well-informed and fulfilled his duties conscientiously. As an individual, he possessed exactly those traits—frivolous egotism, vanity, insolence, and ignorant self-confidence—that were calculated to arouse his pupil's antipathy. Lyovochka at once recognized in the handsome young Frenchman a hidden

contempt for these "barbaric" Russians on whom he was obliged to waste his polished manners and cultural superiority.

Saint-Thomas failed utterly to understand the kind, loving, but essentially proud character of the boy. A climax was quickly reached in their relations over the tutor's threat to whip him. It was not fear that aroused Lyovochka's fury. Firmly rooted in him, even as a child, was the conviction that physical violence terribly humiliates one's human dignity and pride. He rebelled against the very thought of corporal punishment. How deeply this not uncommon childhood experience burned itself into his memory and affected his sensibilities may be gauged by his remarks about it almost seventy years later: "I now do not remember the reason for it, but I thought that it was a most undeserved punishment for Saint-Thomas, first to lock me up in a room, and then to threaten me with the rod. I experienced a terrible feeling of indignation, revolt, and aversion not only to Saint-Thomas, but towards that violence which he wished to exercise on me. This occasion was perhaps one reason for that horror and aversion for every kind of violence which I have felt throughout my whole life."

There has been a tendency to magnify the importance of this episode, as though as a child Tolstoy suffered a psychological hurt that left a permanent scar on his psyche. Nevertheless, not only had he been humiliated and his pride injured, but as he sat in the dark behind locked doors and listened to the merrymaking of his brothers downstairs, he was overwhelmed by the thought that he was an outcast whom nobody in the whole world loved. It was a terrifying thought for a boy of his loving nature.

## IV

Lyovochka's student existence at this time fortunately did not degenerate into that of the well-birched English schoolboy. Saint-Thomas, if not his pupil, learned a lesson from this first threat which was never repeated. Henceforth he buttered the self-esteem that always lurked beneath the apparent indifference of Lyovochka. He flattered his "*petit Léon*" with having a fine head, with being a "*petit Molière*"; and at the proper moments he could not restrain a "*quel homme il sera!*" And Léon's studied contempt gradually waned; he began to think that this French dandy, despite his faults, was not such a bad fellow after all. Here the little devil of vanity that he was to fight all his life raised its head.

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It was the custom to supplement a tutor's efforts with lessons from professors or university students in special subjects, such as history and mathematics. One of these student teachers summed up the capacities of three of the brothers for learning and Tolstoy commented on the judgment: “Sergei both wishes to and can, Dmitri wishes to but can't (that was not true), and Leo neither wishes to nor can (that I think was perfectly correct).” More modesty than truth is implicit in his agreement with the judgment on himself. The genius likes to fancy himself as unsuited to conventional education. Tolstoy was a poor student only when he elected to be, which was most of the time during his boyhood and youth. His assimilative powers were prodigious, but one aspect of his knotty originality was his refusal to assimilate unless his intellectual curiosity were aroused. Conventional educational methods failed to stimulate him as a boy, and this fact had a direct bearing on his remarkable experiment in education later.

Certainly the combined efforts of various teachers seem to have made little impression on Lyovochka from the age of eight to thirteen. The reading that influenced him most over this period, which he has listed, could hardly be regarded as choice pabulum for a child prodigy. It consists of the story of Joseph from the Bible, “The Forty Thieves” and “Prince Camaralzaman” from *The Thousand and One Nights*, certain Russian folk poems, Pogorelski's popular story “The Black Hen,” Russian folk tales, and Pushkin's poetry, especially “Napoleon.”

Some of his schoolboy exercises have been salvaged and published recently in Russia. Two of them are fables of Krylov that he appears to have written down from memory immediately after they had been read to him. The results reveal an excellent memory and something of that preference, so striking in his later literary work, for the simplest mode of expression. Then there are those eternal boyhood compositions on “Day,” “Night,” “Autumn,” and “Spring”; they never reveal anything except clichés of observation and mistakes in spelling which, in this instance, not even his teachers seemed competent enough to detect. Several descriptive and historical exercises are more interesting. “The Kremlin” and “Love of the Fatherland” (in French) betray the mawkish patriotism—so repugnant to him later—that was part of the educational pattern in those days.

Lyovochka's earliest attempt at poetry, “To My Dear Auntie,” written when he was twelve in honour of Auntie Tatyana's name-

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day, is among these rescued exercises.<sup>1</sup> This poem has no merit as verse, but is perhaps worth translating because it provides further evidence of his unusually deep feeling for this important person in his life:

The joyous wished-for day has come,  
And I can prove to you with glee,  
That I was not a silent child,  
When mother used to fondle me.

And now I clearly understand:  
All that you've done I've kept in mind;  
You sacrificed yourself for us  
With heart and soul so good and kind.

I understand now all the joy  
Of which this day for us is part;  
That God may bless you for your deeds,  
I wish it now with all my heart.

Perhaps to look upon us here  
Fortune may once again be sent,  
Then joys of former days will come,  
And we shall live in sweet content.

I as a pledge of happy days  
Accept this day with rapture dear;  
For you I wish your stream of life  
May always be both bright and clear.

v

The kind of activity that went on in Lyovochka's mind while he was doing poorly in his dull lessons would have astonished his uninspired teachers. It is no secret that children stumble upon the eternal contradictions that lie at the basis of mature philosophies. The average child, however, asks his wondering questions about man's destiny, the soul, the future life, or ultimate happiness and goes on his cheerful way, satisfied or dissatisfied with the laboured answers of harassed parents. Lyovochka did not follow this

<sup>1</sup>The account of Nikolai's poetical efforts in *Childhood* in honour of Grand-mother's name-day is no doubt based on Tolstoy's memory of his labours over this poem for Auntie Tatyana.

customary procedure. His original mind obliged him to work out his own solutions to abstract problems, and more striking still, to attempt to put his solutions into practice.<sup>1</sup>

The idea occurred to Lyovochka that happiness depends solely upon our relation to external causes. It follows naturally that, if man can accustom himself to endure suffering, he can never be unhappy. No sooner was the conclusion reached than the budding philosopher attempted to practise it. In order to inure himself to severe pain, he would hold a large dictionary at arm's length for five minutes at a time, or go into the storeroom and lash his bare back so painfully that tears came to his eyes.

As might be expected, this Spartan treatment soon lost its charm, but meanwhile the incorrigible sage had adopted another theory that was a positive pleasure to subscribe to in practice. He suddenly remembered that death awaited him at any moment, and he wondered why people had not realized the obvious fact that they can be happy simply by enjoying the present and not thinking of the future. So for three whole days he completely forgot his hated lessons and did nothing but lie on his bed, reading a thrilling novel and munching gingerbread made with honey, on which he had spent his last kopek.

Lyovochka's abstract propositions were not always so easily resolved or their resolution so delighted to practise. The question of symmetry led him by a swift but illogical transition to a contemplation of eternity. He reasoned that there must be something to balance eternity after death. His conclusion was that man must have existed somewhere before life was given to him, only he has lost all recollection of this previous existence. As he gazed out of the window, trying to collect his thoughts on this novel idea before expounding it on paper, he caught sight of a horse in the courtyard. At once a tangential question popped into his head: What animal or man would the horse's soul enter into after it died? An older brother coming into the room at that point and smiling at his frowning concentration was sufficient to convince him that he was thinking nonsense.

This measure of humility did not prevent Lyovochka from becoming at times a stuffy little pundit. He grew vain over his philosophical powers and often imagined himself on the road to fame, pointing out new truths for the benefit of humanity. It is a

<sup>1</sup> In *Boyhood*, Tolstoy's account of the meditations of young Nikolai is largely autobiographical.

curious but understandable psychological fact, however, that the more he flattered his self-esteem in this respect, the more shy he grew about parading his worth before less favoured mortals. In the end, the young philosopher blushed, stammered, and became ashamed of his simplest words and ideas in the presence of others.

Religion, that indispensable subject of young and old philosophers, and one that was to play such a significant part in Tolstoy's mature thinking, was accorded little notice in his boyhood meditations. Lyovochka had been brought up in an atmosphere of female devotion to Russian Orthodoxy and dutifully said his prayers morning and night. But the seeds of faith do not appear to have been planted deeply. At best, he accepted religion perfunctorily as a kind of family tradition, the explanation of which had long since been lost. When Saint-Thomas had locked him up in the storeroom, his anguished thoughts dwelt upon God, but then only to question the justice of His Providence.

Years later, in his famous *Confession*, he recalled that at this time—he was about nine or ten—the boyhood friend of the Tolstoy brothers, Volodenka Milyutin, burst in one Sunday to announce that he had discovered a great secret in the *Gymnasium* where he studied. The secret was that God did not exist, and that everything taught about Him was a mere fiction. The older brothers took counsel with their young philosopher Lyovochka over this astounding bit of news, and they came to the conclusion that it was most interesting and very likely correct.

## VI

Things of the mind and spirit did not lessen Lyovochka's capacity for boyish fun and adventure, although failure to adjust himself to the changed conditions of his life over this period often soured his enjoyment. The new world of long pants and shoulder straps had to be explored; new acquaintances had to be tried by the exacting tests of boyhood friendship; and now some mysterious addition to his sensibilities obliged him to look hard at little girls, especially if they were pretty.

That inevitable indication of developing glands began to manifest itself: Lyovochka now grew very self-conscious about his appearance, which probably contributed greatly to his natural shyness. His broad nose, thick lips, small grey eyes, and tufted hair convinced him, and with some justice, that he was positively ugly. There were

moments, he admitted to himself as a boy, when he would have given anything in the world for a handsome face. He sucked some small comfort out of a long-remembered compliment that he had a “clever face and a pleasant smile.” None the less, he prayed for divine interposition in his misery, but God worked no miracles for him. Meanwhile, he was forced to compete with his more attractive comrades for the coy smiles of their mutual girl acquaintances.

The sexual impulse in Lyovochka awoke early; in a few more years it would rage lustily, to his alternate delight and disgust. He was only nine when he pushed down the stairs at Yasnaya Polyana Alexander Islenev’s daughter (his future mother-in-law), because this favoured girl was not paying sufficient attention to him.

Pretty house serfs were often both the innocent and the guilty initiators of Russian boys into the higher mysteries of love. And Lyovochka indulged in peeping-‘Tom activities directed against the women’s servant quarters. But when he was asked, as an old man, about his early “loves,” his first and most intense love, he said, was for little Sonya Koloshin. He told in *Childhood* how Nikolai (Lyovochka) went to bed after a children’s party and saw in the dark his charming Sonya with her large, lustrous eyes and shapely mouth, and he conversed with her in his imagination, using to his indescribable pleasure the intimate *thou* that he had been unable to say, despite her request, in talking to her that day. Unwilling to keep his secret, he woke his brother to tell him of his love, only to make the joyful discovery that he too loved Sonya (he wished all to love her).

But when the older brother translated his affection into terms of a desire to kiss Sonya’s little fingers, eyes, lips, nose, feet, and all of her, Nikolai was deeply wounded. The pure white poetic image was distorted by this realistic fleshly touch, and he wept from sheer mortification. With this incident of boyhood love still green in his memory, Tolstoy jotted down in his diary, at the age of sixty-two: “I have been thinking of writing a novel of love—chaste love as with S. Koloshin—in which a transition to sensuality is impossible and which serves as the best protection against sensuality.” Unfortunately, this projected novel was never written.

VII

Lyovochka’s earnest desire for love and friendship met with little success among his playmates. Shyness and an unattractive



appearance were not the only reasons. As the youngest of four brothers, he was continually placed in a position of inferiority. Always the "baby" to them and their playmates, an equality of friendship was denied him. They became heroes, not friends, when the need to love demanded expression.

On the whole, Lyovochka's boyhood was a lonely one, singularly lacking in attachments. Proud as he was, erratic, impulsive, conscious of his own worth, and already inclined to a discriminating analysis of people, his affectionate nature was turned in upon itself. He grew introspective, and much of the time he lived in a heroic world of his own creation.

Often, as he gazed out of the window during the study hour, ambitious fancies crowded his imagination. Most of them involved an abrupt change that would separate him from his family. Lessons in fencing and horseback riding, and playing at soldiers, turned his thoughts to the army. He would be a hussar. Generals would see how brave he was and lavish decorations on him. While sitting in the dark storeroom, awaiting the threatened whipping from his tutor, he saw himself free and in the colourful uniform of a hussar. He slashed away endlessly at the enemy with his sabre, and finally, shouting "Victory!" he fell exhausted from his wounds. The scene quickly shifted. With his arm in a black silk sling, he strutted along the fashionable Tverskoi Boulevard in Moscow. The Emperor saw him and asked his aide about this remarkable-looking young man. When he learned of his deeds, the Emperor thanked him personally and offered him his favour. Leaning on his sabre, the young hero protested his willingness to die for the fatherland on any occasion, and he demanded only one reward for his services: the privilege of slaughtering his tutor. The request was graciously granted, and he seized the hapless wretch. "*A genoux!*" he cried, only to be brought back to reality by the thought that at any moment his tutor might be in with the rod.

When the Emperor actually visited Moscow to lay the foundation stone of the Cathedral of Our Saviour, for two days Lyovochka was in a state of dizzying excitement. He flatly refused to study. Admonishments and threats were useless. Somehow, he felt, the radical change in his life was about to take place. He rushed along with the mobs to the Kremlin, and in the press had his foot run over by a carriage. But he continued to push and shout "Hurrah!" And when the monarch bowed to the crowds, Lyovochka happily

## “THE DESERT OF MY BOYHOOD”

felt that the salutation had been directed at him.<sup>1</sup> No less was he stirred by the sound of the galloping fire engines. He desired to dash out of the house and save someone heroically, and thus elevate himself in the eyes of all and change his whole life.

Some of Lyovochka's bizarre boyhood actions were no doubt a form of compensatory exhibitionism, for oddities of behaviour often find their inspiration in an imaginary heroic existence. Original he certainly was, but when he entered a drawing-room and carefully made his bow backwards, saluting each of the company in turn, we have the kind of originality that is prompted by the desire to centre attention upon one's self. On the same order is his shaving off his eyebrows, although in this instance he was being quite rational. The hero of a novel he admired had bushy eyebrows, and Lyovochka hoped that his would grow thick after the shaving. So they did. Another shaving incident lacked any rationale. While the horses were being changed on a journey, he disappeared from the carriage. When all was in readiness, they called for him. He stuck his head out of the station window and shouted that he would be right along. To his aunt's astonishment and chagrin, his head was half shaved.

Lyovochka's most striking bid for attention, however, almost ended fatally for him. While members of the family in the dining-room below were wondering what kept him from dinner, he was poised on the window sill of the study room upstairs. He was deeply concerned at this time with man's ability to fly, but mechanical means or the law of gravity had somehow been left out of his calculations. For he was convinced that he could fly by sitting down on his heels, clasping his arms firmly around his knees, and jumping off into space.<sup>2</sup> He took off, fell to the courtyard some eighteen feet below, and was picked up unconscious, fortunately suffering only a slight concussion. After a long sleep, he woke up as healthy as ever.

### VIII

All of Lyovochka's boyhood years between 1837 and 1841 were not spent in Moscow. With the exception of 1837, the family moved to Yasnaya Polyana for the summer months. And after Grandmother's death in 1838, the children were separated for reasons of economy: the two older brothers, Nikolai and Sergei,

<sup>1</sup>Tolstoy perhaps drew upon this experience in describing young Petya Rostov's attempt to see the Emperor in *War and Peace*.

<sup>2</sup>Tolstoy puts exactly the same notion of flying into Natasha's mind in *War and Peace*, only she does not actually jump.

remained at their more advanced studies in Moscow under the care of Aunt Alexandra; Dmitri, Lyovochka, and Masha stayed with Auntie Tatyana in the country, where their education was continued by transient tutors and seminarists. In the autumn and winter of 1840-1841, however, the whole family was reunited in Moscow. Financial difficulties were increased by the famine of 1840. A small property had to be sold in order to buy wheat to feed their own serfs. The children, feeling sorry for their lean ponies, stole oats from the peasants without the slightest notion that they were doing wrong.

The family had again assembled at Yasnaya Polyana for the summer of 1841. In August came the shocking news that their beloved and deeply religious Aunt Alexandra had died at the famous Kaluga hermitage founded by the fourteenth-century robber chief Optin. Auntie Tatyana at once set out for the hermitage, and the children were left in charge of their old tutor Fyodor Jvanovich and the half-mad religious fanatic, Marya Gerasimovna. They amused themselves with building a lofty throne for their dog. But the animal objected to this signal honour, jumped off its throne, and hurt its paw. The children accompanied the howling of the dog with their own wailing, and all the while Marya Gerasimovna in the next room monotonously intoned psalms in honour of the dead. This strange scene fixed itself in Lyovochka's memory in connection with the news of his aunt's death, for whom, as the family poet, he wrote an epitaph:

An unknown road hast thou travelled  
 In leaving this earth and its strife;  
 An envied quiet hast thou found  
 In the cloisters of heavenly life.  
 With hope of a future meeting  
 In that bourne beyond the grave,  
 Thy nephews honour thine ashes  
 And thy sacred memory save.

After the death of Aunt Alexandra, the guardianship of the children fell upon her younger sister, Aunt Pelageya Ilyinichna Yushkov, who lived in Kazan. She hastened to Moscow and heard the plea of the older brother, Nikolai, who was now in the first year of the university, not to desert them. Aunt Pelageya shed ready tears over the orphans and declared her willingness to "sacrifice herself." Her immediate decision was that they should all go to Kazan.

*Part II*

“ In the Service of Ambition,  
Vanity and, Above All,  
of Lust ”



## Chapter V

### UNIVERSITY YEARS

WHEN AUNT PELAGEYA finished appropriating "necessities" for the journey and the future existence of the Tolstoy children at Kazan, Yasnaya Polyana looked as though the Golden Horde had ravaged it. An immense amount of household equipment, and carpenters, tailors, mechanics, cooks, and upholsterers from among the skilled serfs were sent on ahead. The "complete orphans" with their various attendants and staples for the road set out accompanied by a long train of carriages and carts. The brothers grieved at parting with Auntie Tatyana. Their "second mother's" love and long service gave her a stronger moral claim to the children than that of their legal guardian, who always treated her with polite hostility. Aunt Pelageya could never forget that Auntie Tatyana, in her youth, had received a proposal from her husband, who still spoke with enthusiasm of "*Toinette*," and indiscreetly recalled before his wife how "*elle était charmante!*" Auntie Tatyana's love for her nurslings, however, never wavered in the face of this meanness or of the long separation from them.

For the children the trip to Kazan in September 1841 was a prolonged picnic. They halted frequently in the woods and fields on the way, gathered mushrooms, and bathed in the streams and ponds. On one occasion Lyovochka's urge to be original got the better of him again. When the coachman stopped to adjust the harness, he leaped out of the carriage and dashed ahead at full speed. Every time they attempted to catch up with him, he strained himself to the utmost, and the carriage overtook him only when he was a thoroughly exhausted youngster.

The happy travellers finally reached Kazan and were all lodged in the spacious Yushkov house. Kazan, a thriving old river port, mellowed with an ancient history of fierce Tatar-Russian strife, was at that time a town of less than a hundred thousand inhabitants.

Mongol influences still waged an equal battle with Slavic, and a typically small-town society tried desperately to assume metropolitan airs and culture.<sup>1</sup> Here Lyovochka was to spend the next five and half years of his life.

Through their connections with the Yushkovs, the Tolstoy brothers had a clear title to membership in the ultra-aristocratic society of Kazan. Aunt Pelageya's vanity, dearth of brains, and excessive sentimentality were somewhat compensated for by kindness and a deep but conventional religious feeling that eventually led her to retire to a nunnery. There was nothing religious about her husband, a well-to-do landowner. His dignified black moustache, whiskers, and spectacles gave an air of respectability to the satyrlike traits of his nature, but his weakness for the fair sex ultimately brought about a separation from his wife.

As the daughter of a former governor of the province, even though his memory was not exactly venerated by the local citizenry, Aunt Pelageya's house was one of the social centres of the town, and she cultivated only the "very best" people. With such an experienced preceptress, the Tolstoy boys were soon much in demand in the beau-monde, quite a new experience for them.

The immediate problem was the brothers' future education, one of the reasons for coming to Kazan. The town boasted an excellent university, not on a par with those of Petersburg and Moscow, but sufficiently reputable to attract scholars from Western Europe. Nikolai had failed promotion at the end of his second year at Moscow University, and he transferred to the Philosophy Faculty at Kazan. Two years later (1843), Sergei and Dmitri matriculated in the same field.

Meanwhile Lyovochka, too young to enter the university, had plenty of leisure to contemplate a career. His slight experience with formal education did not whet his appetite for more. Conventional book knowledge seemed an unnecessary obstacle to his grandiose schemes for the future. Aunt Pelageya, who sincerely wished his happiness, offered him a variety of advice. He ought to plan his career, she said, so as to become an aide-de-camp, and preferably an aide-de-camp to the Emperor.

Her greatest joy, however, would be to see him married to an heiress and the owner of as many serfs as possible. Soon this religiously minded but worldly lady, herself the purest of beings,

<sup>1</sup>Kazan is now the principal city of the Tatar Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic, and has a population of about 180,000.

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Tolstoy declared, strongly urged him to have relations with a married woman, on the principle that "nothing so forms a young man as an intimacy with a woman of good breeding."

Not all of this well-intentioned counsel was wasted, but still the university inevitably loomed up before Lyovochka, like some desert through which he must pass in order to reach green fields beyond. For he accepted his aunt's final advice to enter the university with the notion of preparing for a diplomatic career. Perhaps his decision was partly influenced by the fact that he would have to attend the Faculty of Oriental Languages, one of the most difficult and distinguished fields in the university.

Lyovochka busily set to work, under the general supervision of Saint-Thomas, who had come to Kazan with the family, to prepare himself for the entrance examinations. Special teachers were employed, and he studied Arabic and Turko-Tatar languages in the Kazan Gymnasium. Finally, in 1844, he was ready for the eventful May 29, when he would take his first test to prove his fitness to enter the university.

## II

Saint-Thomas accompanied his tutee to the examination hall. They drove up in a phaeton behind a smart trotter, as befitted the occasion. The sixteen-year-old Lyovochka, arrayed in dazzling white linen and a dress coat that he wore for the first time, was a model of sartorial perfection. As he glanced around at the comparatively shabby appearance of most of his fellow candidates, he grew self-conscious and ashamed of his conspicuous attire, and quickly took refuge in a feeling of superiority.

The first examination was in religion. That very morning he had walked along the shore of the lake, alternately reading his catechism for this examination and praying to God to help him pass it. And the thought had suddenly flashed through his mind that everything in the catechism was a lie. Fortunately, the good Archimandrite Gabriel who questioned him knew nothing of this momentary apostasy. Besides, he had a reputation as an easy examiner, and Lyovochka experienced no difficulty in receiving a strong "four."<sup>1</sup> The next day's tests, however, jarred his self-confidence badly. His average in universal and Russian history was a flat "one," but then

<sup>1</sup>Grading was in the basis of five to one, and would correspond roughly to our system of A to E: A=5; B=4; C=3; D=2; E=1.



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history had always seemed a "most boresome and laborious subject" to the future writer of historical fiction. Nor did the "one" he earned in geography and statistics appear very auspicious in the light of his projected career. The future diplomat, when asked to name the ports of France, could not think of a single city. Yet in such difficult subjects as Arabic and Turko-Tatar he did brilliantly, and in French he distinguished himself with a "five plus." In German also, perhaps thanks to the persistent efforts of kind Fyodor Ivanovich, he obtained a "five," and in English a "four." But his dismal work in history, geography, and statistics, along with a wretched "two" in Latin, proved to be fatal; the dreaded "refused" appeared on his final report.

Lyovochka did not allow failure to discourage him on this occasion, for a hankering after the special privileges and gay social life of the university student had taken possession of him. He applied for re-examination in the flunked subjects, and a little application enabled him to pass them. In the autumn of 1844 he matriculated at Kazan University.

At last a "man," no longer under the thumb of a tutor, Leo Tolstoy eagerly looked forward to joining the great and noble company of scholars. With a feeling of elation he dressed in his new student uniform, with its glittering gilt buttons, cocked hat, and a sword on his left hip; he received his own allowance and a trap with a spirited brown trotter for his private use. He also took up smoking, which was then the height of fashion for a young dandy. With money in his pocket and joy in his heart, he drove to his first class, hoping to meet a policeman on the way who would honour him with the customary salute to a student.

Tolstoy's initial enthusiasm for the university quickly diminished as his interest in the social aspects of student life increased. Often he failed to attend lectures, and at the mid-term examinations he did so badly that permission to return was denied him. This failure was more of a shock than he cared to admit. The glamour of his new uniform had not worn off. Nikolai had graduated in 1844, and Sergei and Dmitri, although not brilliant, had been advanced to the third year. At the moment he wished to emulate his brothers. A happy alternative was suggested: he could forget his diplomatic career and transfer to the Faculty of Jurisprudence. Had not all his lazy aristocratic acquaintances entered this field? It was notoriously easy; "a man must be a fool who cannot be a jurist" was the way the students dismissed it. At the beginning of the next academic

year (1845), Tolstoy was safely established in the Faculty of Jurisprudence.

This faculty was the scandal of the university and an ancient object of student ridicule. Its professors were mostly crotchety German pedants who mangled the Russian language and achieved that pitiful kind of academic individualism acquired by practising all manner of eccentricities. Students from various faculties went to their lectures simply to be amused by their queer behaviour. They would uproariously applaud funny Professor Kambeck, who would begin his course every year by shouting in atrocious Russian: "Roman Law! A capital R! A capital L! And also a period!"

Despite the prevailing atmosphere of levity in his new faculty, Tolstoy began, for the first time, to take a serious interest in his studies. A few of the subjects, especially criminal law, inspired him to make some effort, and he attended with regularity the lectures of one or two of the most brilliant professors. Although he did poorly in the midyear examinations, he acquitted himself very well in the finals and was advanced to the second year. For one with his intellectual interests, however, the third-rate Faculty of Jurisprudence offered little mental stimulation, nor could it compete with his passion for social activity.

### III

The aristocratic set that Tolstoy frequented in Kazan society was fabulous for its hospitality. Invitations were unnecessary in this closed circle. Friends visited each other freely, remained for dinner, chatted, and went home for a brief rest. In the evening they would be off to a ball, theatre, or concert, at the conclusion of which a Lucullan-like feast was sure to be served at someone's house. Guests rarely left before five or six in the morning, slept till noon, and began the whole procedure over again.

As an eligible, titled young bachelor, with the best of connections, Tolstoy was much sought after in this society. The three brothers (Nikolai had entered the army in 1844) had by now taken an apartment of their own and lived in style. Each had a serving boy, a luxury that Aunt Pelageya had foolishly insisted upon. With characteristic aplomb, Tolstoy had already classified society and determined his exact relation to each division. People fell into two broad classes: *comme il faut* and *comme il ne faut pas*. Inherent snobbery dictated the classification and his own preference. Like

Sergei, he wished to belong to those who were *comme il faut*, for they spoke excellent French, always had clean nails, and knew how to bow, dance, and converse with ease. What he most admired in this social class was its indifference to everything and its constant expression of elegant and contemptuous ennui. All others were merely boors, common, and besides, they wore untidy boots, a fault he could not abide.<sup>1</sup>

Although to be *comme il faut* seemed to him the height of human perfection, young Tolstoy had a positive incapacity for it. His failure caused him endless grief at this time. Much of the effort that should have been expended on studies was devoted to acquiring those graces which would enable him to shine at the dinner parties and balls of Kazan aristocracy. One look in the mirror would upset all his hopes. The face of a simple peasant stared back at him, and his big hands and feet seemed downright shameful. His muscular physique (he was practising gymnastics daily in the hope of becoming the strongest man in the world) was not well-proportioned, and clothes somehow never set him off as neatly as they did Sergei.

Tolstoy tried to make a virtue of such handicaps, and when this failed, he took refuge in queer and original behaviour, the customary retreat of the social misfit. To be outstanding was his aim; if he could not gain attention by natural graces, he would do it by calculated rudeness. When all talked, he was haughtily silent. If he elected to speak, he eschewed the usual empty compliments of fine society and endeavoured to impress people by a certain impolite frankness. "Old inhabitants of Kazan," writes one of them, "remember him at all the balls, evening parties, and gatherings of fashionable society, invited everywhere, always dancing, but not in the least pleasing to these worldly ladies as were his rivals among the aristocratic students; they always observed in him a stiffness and self-consciousness." One of his rivals remarked: "We called him the 'bear,' the 'philosopher' Lyovochka, awkward and always embarrassed."

The "bear" was a highly sensitive young animal, however, and his failure to achieve social success pained him deeply. As a participant in fashionable spectacles, where some talent rather than *politesse* was in demand, Tolstoy appears to have done well. The local newspaper records that he and Sergei acted in amateur

<sup>1</sup>Tolstoy devotes Chapter XXXI of *Youth* to his adolescent fervour to be *comme il faut*.

theatricals staged at the vice-governor's on behalf of the orphaned children of Kazan.

On another charitable occasion, at the university auditorium, with all the town's notables present, Tolstoy took an important part in one of a series of *tableaux vivants*, entitled "The Suitor's Proposal." With the usual fondness of the small-town newspaper for unnecessary detail, the reporter describes the scene:

The old fisherman caught the young man in his net and presented him to his daughter. The sturdy simpleton (Count L. N. Tolstoy) respectfully stood erect, placing his hands behind his back. He posed. . . . The father chucked him under the chin, and with a naïvely cunning smile exchanged glances with his daughter, who in confusion lowered her eyes. The effect of this picture was extraordinary—three times the audience demanded its repetition, and for a long time they thundered with applause. Best of all in the tableau was A. A. de Plani (lecturer in French); extremely unaffected was also the suitor, Count L. N. Tolstoy.

## IV

Success with fashionable ladies was one of the requisites of being truly *comme il faut*. Here again Tolstoy bungled. Marriageable girls in Kazan high society found him a rather boring cavalier and a poor dancer. One of them, Zinaida Molostvov, especially caught his fancy, but he had courage to admire her only from across the room. His shyness, alternating with moments of boorish behaviour and bursts of conversation that was intended to be strikingly original, bewildered and ever frightened these young things.

If he were inclined to put into practice his aunt's advice to form a liaison with a fashionable married woman, he would have been unable to survive the preliminaries of introduction. He ogled the ladies of quality from a safe distance, fell in love, and imagined scenes of delightful intimacies with them. But even the offer of an introduction to one of these intended victims terrified him, as though he were convinced that by mere acquaintance she would at once become aware of all his shameful thoughts. To his inordinately shy mind these fine ladies seemed clothed in impregnable triple bronze. How he wished to be like that Lovelace of a brother, Sergei, who seemed able to take with an easy grace all the good things that life offered him.

Yet Tolstoy's passions in his youth, as always, ran high. And the morals of young men of the gentry were, by prescription, singularly unconstrained. Wild oats were to be sown early under the common delusion that they would not have to be sown again. If Tolstoy's unattractive appearance and gauche manners could not win him success among Kazan's marriageable girls or women of quality, then he would take the other way.

Not much is known about Tolstoy's relations with loose women during his Kazan existence, but bitter references to them later suggest that his experiences made a deep impression on him. In dividing the years of his life for biographical purposes, he described the first period of "innocent, joyous, poetic childhood up to fourteen; then the terrible twenty years that followed—a period of coarse dissoluteness, employed in the service of ambition, vanity, and, above all, of lust."

When Tolstoy was only fourteen, Masha, a servant maid in Aunt Pelageya's house, aroused desires of which he was ashamed. Shortly after this he appears to have overcome his timidity. For Gusev once heard from Tolstoy's close friend, Marya Alexandrovna Schmidt, an interesting account of his first sexual experience. When he was writing *Resurrection*, his wife sharply criticized him for the chapter in which he described the seduction of Katyusha. "As an old man," she scolded, "aren't you ashamed to write such nastiness?" Tolstoy made no reply, but when his wife had left the room, he turned to M. A. Schmidt and said, almost in tears: "See how she attacks me, but when my brothers took me for the first time to a brothel and I accomplished this act, I then stood by the woman's bed and wept." In the 1880's he even confessed to a former inhabitant of Kazan that it was in the Kizicheski Monastery<sup>1</sup> of the city that "I had my first downfall."

Fleshly desires were at once alluring and repulsive to the young Tolstoy, but his strong moral repugnance received no encouragement from the dissolute Kazan society that he frequented. Smoking, drinking, gambling, and debauchery were the dress and loose ornament of his dandified comrades, and he admits that much of his waywardness was in imitation of the corrupt behaviour he found on every side. Apparently he paid dearly for it, and not merely in

<sup>1</sup>The discrepancy in the locale of the act is puzzling. One cannot suppose that the Kizicheski Monastery and the brothel he mentions were one and the same place, despite the amazing stories that have come out of Russia about the debauchery in monasteries. Apparently Tolstoy has confused several experiences of this nature in his youth.



Count Ilya Andreyevich Tolstoy,  
Leo Tolstoy's paternal grandfather



Count Nikolai Ilyich Tolstoy, Leo Tolstoy's father

moral suffering. For his first diary<sup>1</sup> in 1847 opens: "It is six days since I entered the clinic . . . I've had *gonorrhoea*, had it from that source whence it is customarily obtained."

Immorality is a necessary test of the moral fibre, for the plain distinction between right and wrong has nothing but a theoretical validity unless put to the proof by actual experience. Young as he was, Tolstoy had a highly developed moral sense, and every violation of it caused him infinite heart searching. In his youthful meditations he had already dwelt upon the question of love, as though seeking some idealistic conception that would purify his debauched thoughts. With the pedantic precision of a young philosopher, he neatly divided love into three kinds: beautiful love, self-denying love, and active love.<sup>2</sup> His own ideal for the moment partook of the best qualities of all three, and it gained substance in his dream of an imaginary woman. She had a bit of Sonya Koloshin in her, a dash of the chambermaid Masha as he had seen her washing the linen, and the external charms of a lady with pearls round her white neck whom he had noticed long ago in a box at the theatre.

The beautiful vision anchored in his mind and created an inexpressible longing. He sought *her* everywhere, and expectancy constantly titillated his hopes. But *she* appeared only in his imagination, usually when the mysterious light of the moon exalted him with a sense of beauty and a feeling of incomplete happiness. Then *she* stood before him, always sad and lovely, with her long plait of hair, full bosom, and beautiful bare arms, waiting for his embrace. As the moon rose higher and the shadows grew darker, something seemed to say to him that *she* was not the whole of happiness. The vision faded, leaving him with the ecstatic feeling that true happiness was nearer to Him, the source of all beauty and bliss. And tears of unsatisfied but agitating joy rose in his eyes.

## v

The shyness that made him uneasy in the company of women also stood in the way of friendship with his fellow students. Tolstoy carried his stuffy notions of *comme il faut* from the ballroom into the

<sup>1</sup> With some interruptions, Tolstoy continued the practice of keeping a diary, as well as various notebooks containing observations, plans, projects, etc., throughout the remainder of his life. This material, of immense biographical importance, is so extensive that it will fill thirteen volumes (with notes) of the Soviet Jubilee Edition of Tolstoy's entire works.

<sup>2</sup> These meditations on love are discussed in Chapter XXIV of *Youth*.



classroom. *Gymnasium* graduates and poor scholarship students he scorned. In his pride and affected indifference, he always refused to bow first. When the student who sat next to him evinced a tendency to become too familiar, Tolstoy would suddenly freeze the growing intimacy with an icy remark. Yet he really wanted this gay company to like him. He longed to take part in their escapades, and probably felt a secret admiration for the madcap prince from Siberia who held the whole street in a state of siege by indiscriminately shooting at passers-by from his attic window with an air rifle.

When Tolstoy made friends, and there were a few in this Kazan period, they always belonged to his aristocratic set. The best of them was Dmitri Alekseyevich Dyakov, a youth several years older than himself. Unusually fervent attachments among young people of the same sex are a common enough experience, but in such friendships Tolstoy's intense emotional nature brought him to the dangerous edge of unnatural relationship. This was strikingly true of his youthful affection for Dyakov, which may properly be described as love. The fact takes on an added interest in the light of his wife's foolish charge against him, when he was a very old man, of homosexual relations.

Some four years after this period (November 1851), in a remarkably revelatory passage in a loose leaf of Tolstoy's diary, he writes: "I was very often in love with men. . . . Of all these people I continue to love only Dyakov. For me the chief indication of love is the fear to offend or not to be liked by the person loved. It is simply fear. I was in love with men before I had any notion of the possibility of *pederasty*; but having learned about it, the thought of the possibility of such a physical union never entered my head. . . . Beauty always had much influence on my choice; however, there is the example of Dyakov. I never will forget the night, when we left Pirogovo (?), and, diving under the sleigh rug, I wanted to kiss him and weep. There was voluptuousness in this feeling, but why it occurred here it is impossible to decide, for my imagination did not paint lubricious pictures. On the contrary, I had a great aversion to them."

Utter frankness was the first condition of this friendship, and each vowed to tell the other his every thought, no matter how unpleasant. They were mutually responsive and their minds were tuned to the same philosophical key. Both worshipped an ideal of virtue and were convinced that man's mission in life was to perfect himself. The two perfectionists tried out their theory on a pretty

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girl whom they chanced to meet in Kazan. Her story of seduction moved them. Tolstoy offered to finance her until she got a job and could earn an honest living. She joyfully agreed and began to thank him. "Not at all," he magnanimously interrupted; "misfortune may happen to every one of us, and we must all help each other." When they met their attractive subject for reform a few days later, she freely confessed herself unable to lead any other existence than the sinful one she had grown used to. "So I could not convince her to return to an honest life," the worshipper of virtue concluded.

Thus virtue went unrewarded, but the perfectionists believed virtue was its own reward, and they serenely continued their theorizing. They would remain awake until almost dawn, arguing about abstract conceptions until words refused to yield their meaning and meaning ran all out of words.

These hours spent with Dyakov were among Tolstoy's happiest in Kazan. Their friendship brought out the finest qualities of his nature, and it is little wonder that the bond between them remained unbroken until Dyakov's death in 1891.

## VI

Long before the end of his second year in the Faculty of Jurisprudence Tolstoy had lost what little interest he had in the professors and their lectures. What would be termed a "gentlemanly C" in our colleges today satisfied him perfectly as a grade. Although he had deliberately selected this faculty as a "snap," his intellectual honesty and developing critical powers would not allow him to tolerate for long a situation that seemed profitless and a waste of time. It was not that he lacked interest in Roman and criminal law, psychology, logic, and the several languages and literatures in his curriculum, but he felt that they were being presented in a dull, unoriginal, and stultifying manner.

One day a fellow student and Tolstoy were late for a lecture in history. The punishment for tardiness would have done credit to army discipline: the culprits were locked up in a lecture room for the night. Such treatment was no anodyne for Tolstoy's growing hostility towards the university. His anger at first took the form of an arraignment of all poetry, apropos of a discussion of Lermontov's *Demon*. Then observing his fellow prisoner's copy of Karamzin's *History of Russia*, he at once fulminated: "History is nothing other than a collection of fables and useless trifles messed up with

a mass of unnecessary dates and proper names. The death of Igor, the serpent, the stinging of Oleg<sup>1</sup>—are these not folk tales? Why should any one have to know that the second marriage of Ivan the Terrible to the daughter of Temryuk took place on August 21, 1562, or that the fourth to Anna Alekseyevna Koltovski happened in 1572? Yet they demand that I learn all this by heart, and if I do not know it, they give me a 'one.' And how is history written? All adjust themselves to a measure invented by the historians. The terrible tsar, about whom Professor Ivanov lectures at present, suddenly in 1560 is transformed from a virtuous and wise man into a senseless, ferocious tyrant. How and why this takes place you do not ask."<sup>2</sup>

His student companion and sole audience had no defence against such logic. He had heard of Tolstoy as a "queer fellow" and a "philosopher" and now he had no doubt of it, but at the same time he felt a vague sense of something remarkable, exceptional, and inexplicable about this caustic youth. Before they went to sleep on the hard school benches, Tolstoy indulged his spleen in another outburst, declaiming sarcastically about the "benefits" of this "Temple of Science" and ridiculing its professors so effectively that in spite of himself his companion was obliged to laugh. "Nevertheless," Tolstoy concluded, "we have a right to expect that we shall go out of this Temple useful and informed people. But what do we get out of the university? Consider and answer conscientiously. What do we get out of this sanctuary to return home with to the country? Of what use will it be and for whom is it necessary?"

Tolstoy was only one of many great men who questioned in their youth the values of a traditional university education. Not merely chronic contradictoriness, of which he had his full share, accounts for his criticism of Kazan University, or his negative attitude, mentioned in a previous chapter, towards any learning that failed to stir his intellectual curiosity. To these must now be added his growing tendency to question all manner of accepted institutions and conventions. The man-made ordering of civilization was not something to accept on faith. There must be for him a constant reference to cause and effect, an endless asking of the why, how, and wherefore of constituted society. No compromise would do. He must be convinced.

<sup>1</sup> Tolstoy refers here to traditional stories in ancient Russian history.

<sup>2</sup> In this tirade may be seen the relentless future critic of conventional history books in *War and Peace*.

In his brief university career, Tolstoy experienced the deadening impact of stereotyped factual knowledge on a mind searching for ideas, first causes, and an understanding of life. He knew that factual knowledge was the beginning of wisdom, but he was being taught that factual knowledge was an end in itself. One of his discriminating professors, D. I. Meier, who recognized the superior mind of his indifferent student, tried to arouse his intellectual interests by setting him the task of writing a comparison of Montesquieu's *Esprit des lois* and Catherine the Great's *Nakaz*.<sup>1</sup> His enthusiasm caught fire at once, for the task demanded the kind of independent effort for which he had hitherto found no outlet in his university studies.

Tolstoy read everything he could obtain on the subject. In the diary he set down the results of his analysis of Catherine's *Nakaz*. Each chapter is carefully summarized, occasional comparisons are made to the *Esprit des lois*, and frequently Tolstoy offers his own interpretations and comments. His critical remarks are often unusually penetrating and independent for a youth of eighteen. But no suggestion of his future firm opposition to every form of governmental coercion is apparent in the analysis. He accepts the autocratic framework of the Russian State and the legal system that supports it. What is more surprising, he actually asserts that "positive law, to be perfect, should be identical with moral law," a statement at utter variance with his ultimate position. Only in the matter of condemning capital punishment does he display consistence with his later views. At the end of the analysis, however, he delivers a thwacking indictment of the *Nakaz*. For he points out that Catherine is really making an unsuccessful attempt to justify her own conception of despotism by appealing to the republican ideas of Montesquieu, and that her "petty vanity" in this respect has resulted in deductions wholly illogical. The *Nakaz*, he concludes, "confers upon Catherine more fame than advantages to Russia." For the most part, his tone towards the Empress is highly respectful, but many years later, in his *Restoration of Hell*, he called her "a stupid, illiterate, and lewd wench."

<sup>1</sup> The *Nakaz*, or "Injunction," was written by Catherine in 1766 as a guide to her Commission appointed to draw up a Code of Laws. In it she expounded her personal views on the rights of the State and on civil and criminal law. The *Nakaz* was heavily indebted to Montesquieu's *Esprit des lois* and to C. B. Beccaria's *Dei Delitti e delle Pene* (*On Crime and Punishment*).

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In the end, this independent bit of scholarly investigation did nothing to soften Tolstoy's mounting antipathy to the university. On the contrary, he gave it as the reason for leaving. "The university with its demands not only did not assist in such a task," he wrote, "but actually hindered it." The professors, he paradoxically maintained, obstructed his thirst for knowledge. The analysis of the *Nakaz* led him into reading an endless quantity of books, but all in one direction. "This reading," he wrote, "revealed to me limitless horizons. . . . I gave up the university precisely because I wished to occupy myself in this fashion. There I was obliged to work at and study things that did not interest me and were unnecessary."

Of course, such reasoning is an oversimplification. A variety of reasons contributed to Tolstoy's decision. He had done badly in the mid-term examinations of the second year, and now with a string of unsuccessful performances behind him, he could not look forward to the final tests with equanimity. Sergei and Dmitri would finish their studies at Kazan that year (1847), and two more years in the university without their company did not appeal to him. Then in this same year a division of property among the brothers had taken place. Leo had received as his share *Yasnaya Polyana* and several smaller estates, amounting to about 5,400 acres, along with 350 male serfs and their families. And at this time he began to express a real or imaginary sense of responsibility for all these human beings under his direct control.

On April 12, 1847, before the final examinations of the second year in the Faculty of Jurisprudence, he petitioned to be allowed to leave the university because of "ill-health and domestic circumstances." Two days later his petition was granted. The only memento that the most distinguished alumnus of Kazan University left behind him was his name scratched on a bench in one of the lecture halls.

## VIII

In place of a grade in Russian history on Tolstoy's mid-term examination that last year, his professor had written "extremely lazy," which was undoubtedly true in that much despised subject. In general, he was anything but lazy. Intense intellectual activity was part of his nature, and he read a great deal during this Kazan period, principally in the summer vacation months which he spent at *Yasnaya Polyana*. Most of this reading, apart from what he had

done for his analysis of Catherine's *Nakaz*, had little relation to the prescribed work of his university courses.

He gobbled a quantity of French novels by Sue, Dumas, and Paul de Kock. Their fictions seemed entirely real to him, and he discovered in himself a likeness to their characters, both heroes and villains. Less adventurous fiction and some poetry—Sterne's *Sentimental Journey*, Dickens's *David Copperfield*, Gogol's *Dead Souls* and *Tales*, Turgenev's *Sportsman's Notebook*, Druzhinin's *Polinka Saks*, Grigorovich's *Anton Goremyka*, Lermontov's *Hero of Our Times*, Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*, and Schiller's *The Robbers*—he admitted had a marked influence on his artistic sensibilities. There was much else in belles-lettres, but his questing mind favoured sterner stuff—the New Testament, philosophy, and political science. He plunged into Hegel, who was then all the rage among the illuminati, and, like most youths of the time, he read Voltaire, whose scepticism, perhaps because it lacked high seriousness, had no pronounced effect on him.

The author who stirred Tolstoy most at this time and had a permanent influence on his thought was Rousseau, whose complete works he read. He worshipped him, he said, and in place of the cross which good Orthodox believers wear round their necks, he wore a medallion portrait of Rousseau. So similar was Rousseau's thought to his own that it seemed as though he had been the author of many of Tolstoy's pages. Tolstoy frankly admitted that the *Confession* had a "very great" influence on him and the *Nouvelle Héloïse* and *Émile* an "enormous" influence. He could be severely critical of Rousseau, however, and the fundamental difference between them he himself pointed out later: Rousseau repudiated all civilization, whereas he simply repudiated pseudo-Christianity.

In his summers at Yasnaya Polyana Tolstoy appropriated some of the more garish aspects of Rousseau's back-to-nature teaching in a youthful attempt to live as befitted a practising philosopher. With perhaps a feeling of relief he discarded in the country the social strait jacket of *comme il faut*. He rigged up for daily wear a loose canvas garment, which had the added advantage that it could be used as a nightshirt, and he went about in it in slippers and bare legs. His favourite occupation was communing with nature or lying down under a bush in the garden with a thick lexicon for a pillow. He allowed nothing and no one to interfere with his philosophical musings or routine. A group of young ladies unexpectedly arrived for a visit, and the philosopher was hastily summoned from his

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retreat in the garden. He made his appearance in the living-room in his Diogenes canvas robe, slippers, and bare legs. When Auntie Tatyana remonstrated, he replied with some heat that conventional propriety should not be confused with the comfortable manner in which he was dressed.

Clothes may make the man, but Tolstoy knew well enough that a dearth of them does not make the philosopher. Behind his posing was much real intellectual effort. Apart from his intensive reading, he was also thinking and writing, all of which he regarded as a kind of extracurriculum activity. Several fragmentary compositions of this time reflect the fearless quality of his mind, already indicated in his boyhood, in ranging over philosophical and abstract notions.<sup>1</sup> In "Philosophical Notes on Rousseau" he expatiates on the powerful influence of women for good in society and on the demoralizing effect of luxury on morality. In another piece, without a title, the young philosopher attempts to formulate rules for living and to define his own nature. On the margin are scribbled notes for future discussion: "From the very beginning I abandoned all prejudices, since I found nothing satisfactory in them." A longer article, rather expansively entitled "On the Purpose of Philosophy," concludes that the purpose is to show man how he should instruct himself, and, since he lives in society, how he ought to define his relations to people.

No doubt other compositions of this period have not survived, including one on symmetry which was lying on Tolstoy's desk when a student friend of his brother, pockets loaded with bottles for a carouse, descended on their apartment. He proceeded to read the article which seemed so brilliant that the friend was convinced it had been copied from some famed authority. When Tolstoy came in, he asked him for the name of the author. Tolstoy blushing admitted that the article was his, whereupon the student laughed his disbelief.

## IX

Shortly before Tolstoy had entered the university, perhaps somewhat inspired by the singular devoutness of his brother Dmitri, he suddenly developed an enthusiasm for the picturesque ritual of the Russian Orthodox Church. He prayed, went to

<sup>1</sup>These interesting compositions, probably written when he was eighteen or nineteen, have been published in complete form for the first time in the Soviet Jubilee Edition of Tolstoy.

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confession, took communion, and revelled in the thought that never had there been a young man with a soul as beautiful as his. This religiosity did not last long in the midst of the unholy pleasures of Kazan society. By the time he was sixteen he had ceased to believe the religious precepts taught him as a child. He did not deny the existence of God, but what sort of God, he could not say; he did not deny Christ and His teachings, but the substance of these teachings was not entirely clear to him. In short, while still quite young he had drifted into the familiar position of educated people with regard to dogmatic religion: he refused to accept the Church, but all his reason and senses obliged him to believe in God. It is necessary to remember this attitude of his youth, for his religious development, which was highly significant later, starts from this point.

The only faith that gave impulse to Tolstoy's being at nineteen was a belief in self-perfection. All his awakening moral and intellectual powers were concentrated on this ideal of life. By perfecting himself morally, mentally, and physically, he would achieve happiness. With that perennial faith of youth in the efficacy of "rules of life" to transform our human failings into inhuman perfections, he earnestly drew them up, quantities of them. The first series, in January 1847, is not very promising: "(1) To get up at five, go to bed at nine or ten, and perhaps sleep two hours during the day. (2) To eat moderately, nothing sweet. (3) To walk for an hour. (4) To fulfill all my written injunctions. (5) to [have] one woman only, and then only once or twice a month. (6) To do everything possible for myself."

These elementary rules were soon developed into an elaborate design for living, almost metaphysical in their complexity and discouragingly inclusive in scope. He set down rules for the development of the will, with various subdivisions, rules for the development of the memory, of bodily and intellectual activity, of talents, of judgment, and so on. There were rules to scorn wealth, honours, and the opinion of society not based on reason; to love all to whom he could be useful; to care nothing for the praise of people whom he did not know or disliked; and each day to express his love for all kinds and degrees of humanity in some manner or other.

Tolstoy's rules of conduct far outstripped his observance of them. Nor did he ever fail to remind himself of the fact. In his diary he jotted down: "It is easier to write ten volumes of philosophy than to put a single precept into practice." He did not realize



then that his soul must be entirely cleansed of sin and temptation if he were to achieve self-perfection. Man may develop but he does not change. What he is in his youth so will he be in his old age. Tolstoy recognized this. If he sinned, it was because he did not know himself.

But even as a youth he heard the divine voices in him urging him to perfection. He wanted everybody to know and to love him, and he cherished the hope of some unusual good fortune that would make him famous. Often, however, he did not hear the voice during this period of his youth, because he did not always believe in himself. He believed in the people round him, who fostered his animal instincts, his pride and worldly ambitions, and frustrated his desire for self-perfection. With his life in Kazan partly in mind, he wrote in *Confession*: "With all my soul I wished to be good; but I was young, passionate, and alone when I sought goodness. Every time I tried to express my most sincere desire, which was to be morally good, I met with contempt and ridicule; but as soon as I yielded to nasty passions, I was praised and encouraged." This was a phase of the dualism that waged its mighty battle in the heart of the youthful Tolstoy, and the struggle cast a shadow over his whole life.

## X

The thought of leaving Kazan caused Tolstoy no regret. His experience there had been disillusioning and the moral fabric of his nature had been stretched to the utmost. He now intended to spend two years in the country, and in contrast to the existence he had been leading in Kazan, this new period was to provide him with a purpose and aim in life. He wrote in his diary: "I would be the unhappiest of mortals if I could not find a purpose in life—a common and useful purpose, useful because my immortal soul by virtue of its development will pass naturally into an existence superior and more suitable to it."

► If we may judge from the programme of work that he outlined for himself a few days before leaving for Yasnaya Polyana, then he must have regarded his departure from the "Temple of Science" as a real opportunity to learn something. He intended, he wrote, "to study (1) the whole course of jurisprudence necessary to pass the final examinations at the university. (2) To study practical medicine, and to some extent its theory. (3) To study French, Russian, German, English, Italian, and Latin. (4) To study agriculture,

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theoretical and practical. (5) To study history, geography, and *statistics*. (6) To study mathematics, the *Gymnasium* course. (7) To write a dissertation. (8) To reach a reasonable degree of perfection in music and painting. (9) To write down rules [for conduct]. (10) To obtain some knowledge in the natural sciences. (11) To compose essays on all the subjects that I shall study." His intention to take the final examinations in the Faculty of Jurisprudence was no doubt prompted by the desire for a diploma, which would secure him certain privileges in the civil service.

Tolstoy seemed to relish the notion of abandoning the gay society of Kazan for the solitude of the country. For shortly before he set out, he wrote in his diary that the disorderly life that fashionable people accept as a consequence of youth is really nothing other than the consequence of early spiritual corruption. "Solitude," he maintained, "is equally beneficial for the man living in society, as society is for the man not living in it. Let a man but withdraw from society and retire into himself and his reason will soon strip off the spectacles through which he has hitherto seen everything in a corrupt light. . . ."

This longing to escape the corrupting influence of society, however, did not spoil the pleasure of a very liquid farewell that his aristocratic comrades tendered him. They accompanied him out of the town with many embraces sealed by potatoes deep.

## Chapter VI

### MÀN ABOUT TOWN

UNLIKE Horace on his Sabine farm, young Tolstoy could not sit contentedly among his Yasnaya Polyana cabbage patches. For there were those everlasting "rules of conduct" to observe and his vast "programme of work" to fulfil. After all, he had not abandoned the city for the country merely to exchange the pleasures of worldly society for those of rustic simplicity. The incessant worm of perfectibility gnawed continually at his conscience.

In a separate "Journal of Daily Occupations" that Tolstoy kept at this time, he obliged himself to list his tasks for each day and opposite them his rate of performance. A typical day's planning, the third after his arrival at Yasnaya Polyana, reveals this debit-and-credit system of human endeavour in all its pathetic failure:

5 to 6, practical agriculture	} Nothing done
6 to 9, letters	
9 to 10, drink tea	
10 to 11, set copybooks in order	
11 to 1, book-keeping	
1 to 1.30, lunch	
1.30 to 3, Italian	
3 to 5, English	
6 to 8, Russian history.	

Day after day debits piled up against similar good intentions. He observes plaintively in his diary that it is difficult for a man under the influence of what is bad to develop into what is good. If only he could cease to be dependent upon extraneous circumstances, then the spirit would take precedence over matter and he could achieve his proper destiny. "Extraneous circumstances" appeared in the form of a visit from Dunechka (his childhood companion) and her

husband. They "robbed me of feeling contented with myself by the impression they produced on me." For the loving couple poignantly brought home to him all the zest for life that he was denying himself in the country for the sake of his "purpose." Perhaps with the bitterness of envy he jotted down in his diary the next day the following new rule: "Regard feminine society as a necessary evil of social existence, and as such, to be avoided as much as possible. In fact, from whom do we learn voluptuousness, effeminacy in everything, and many other vices if not from women?"

## II

Only a genius would formulate such a rule, but certainly no genius ever violated self-made rules of conduct with more regularity than Tolstoy. After two months of rustic seclusion, all his good intentions seemed like so much precipitated nonsense. Yet he did not surrender without a final struggle the ideals that had helped to inspire this country retreat.

In leaving the university for Yasnaya Polyana, part of Tolstoy's plan was to devote much of his effort to the affairs of the estate and the well-being of the several hundred serfs over whom he was now absolute master. His aristocratic notions of social classes permitted him to regard the enslaved position of the peasantry in the traditional manner—as something ordained by God. Many changes would take place in his intellectual and spiritual life before he began to think that peasants were the equals or even the superiors of his own noble class. Now, as their new master, he accepted his serfs as a responsibility, and he had simply a humanitarian desire to improve their lot. With the effort to perfect himself mentally in abeyance, he turned with enthusiasm to his new "purpose in life"—to do good for the peasantry. In this, he was sure, he would find real happiness.

Little direct information exists of Tolstoy's first attempt to reform his fellow men. In 1852, however, he planned a large work, "The Novel of a Russian Landowner," in which he intended to depict the relations between a master and his serfs. He attached much social significance to the proposed novel, the purpose of which he described as follows: "The hero searches for the realization of an ideal of happiness and justice in a country existence. Not finding it, he becomes disillusioned and wishes to search for his ideal in family life. His friend introduces him to the thought that happiness

does not consist of an ideal but may be found in continual vital work that has for its purpose the happiness of others." Only the first part of this novel, "A Landowner's Morning," was finished, and for the material Tolstoy drew heavily upon his experiences with the peasants of Yasnaya Polyana in 1847-1848.

The autobiographical aspects are clearly discernible. The nineteen-year-old hero of the story writes his aunt to inform her of his decision to leave the university in order to devote all his efforts to his estate and the welfare of his serfs. Her answer amounts to an acute piece of self-criticism on Tolstoy's part. One does not believe in arguments and rules but only in experience, she writes, and experience tells her that his plans are childish. "You always wished to appear original," she declares, "but your originality is really nothing but excessive self-esteem." The hero is not deterred by his aunt's practical advice, for he refuses to regard the poverty of his peasants as an unavoidable evil. He abolishes corporal punishment and provides schooling and medical aid for them. Like a ministering angel, he visits their wretched, filthy hovels, and in simple-hearted fashion pours out his willingness to devote his life to their happiness.

The hero's first fine rapture does not last long. Despite all his efforts, the peasants remain poor, shirk education, and do not improve morally. Somehow his plans all come to nothing. The serfs are suspicious and regard his offers of aid as just another trick on the part of the master to get more work out of them. Helplessness, deception, and trickery beset him on every side. Perplexed in the extreme and sadly disillusioned, he finally abandons his experiment.

This is no doubt a fair description of Tolstoy's own initial attempt to understand and help his peasants. All his life the disparity between experience and theorizing confounded him. He was like so many of the young men among the gentry at that time. Their characteristic traits are brilliantly described in the heroes of nineteenth-century Russian poetry and fiction, such as Eugene Onegin, Oblomov, or the "superfluous men" of Turgenev. They grew up on country estates, completely insulated from the real business of life. The profits of serfdom took care of their financial needs, and politics, the organization of society, or the concerns of the outside world played little active part in their youthful existence, although they were quite capable of talking and theorizing endlessly about them. Even the traditional civil or military careers

were regarded as mere gentlemanly formalities that customarily preceded an early retirement to the pleasant dead calm of rural seclusion.

This way of life played an important part in Tolstoy's development. His comparative isolation and severance from practical concerns intensified a natural bent for introspection. His own soul and state of mind became of much more importance to him than anything else in life. He pushed far ahead into the realm of abstract thinking and theorizing but lagged far behind in those everyday lessons that experience knocks into one in the daily struggle for economic security. His thoughts concentrated with extraordinary understanding on personal duty as revealed by the workings of his conscience and intellect, but often quite apart from any thorough comprehension of the practical affairs of the society of which he was a part. This dichotomy has obvious disadvantages, but it also lies behind his unique power to perceive the ills of society and devise a way of life that would circumvent if not solve them.

Tolstoy's lack of experience prevented him from realizing that centuries of slavery had rendered serfs incapable of believing in the sincerity of a master who desired to help them. Masters had always tricked, abused, and cheated them, and the very fact that he was their master made it impossible for them to have any faith in him. His failure troubled his conscience, depressed and saddened him, as though he were being tormented by a reminder of centuries of crime committed and unatoned for by members of his own social class. In the depths of his soul he began to feel that only by ceasing to be the master of these serfs could he win their belief in him.

### III

At this time Tolstoy resembled both the town mouse and the country mouse of the ancient fable, for he liked both places. Rather, he could not be contented with one while away from the other. Now that he was in the country, all the glittering prospects of the city—fame, love, social pleasures, adventure—drew him like a magnet. The lofty purpose of his rural isolation was soon shoved aside, and his failure with the peasants quickened a desire to escape. So urgently did he feel the need to get away that he galloped after the carriage of his future brother-in-law, who was off to Siberia to clear up his affairs before marrying Marya. Only the fact that he had forgotten his hat prevented him from going along.

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Shortly after this episode (October 1848), Tolstoy was on his way to Moscow. The moral walls in which he had recently immured himself were lightly vaulted, and he plunged into the mad egoism of unfettered pleasures. The Kazan period of social activity was lived all over again, only now he had the larger and more fashionable world of Moscow to play in, and in the meantime he had acquired some poise and self-assurance.

The twenty-year-old Tolstoy needed no introduction to the upper levels of Moscow society. The drawing-rooms of the best homes were open to a bright youth of good family and comfortable income, and he could aspire, he said, to any damsel he chose. Numerous relatives of high social standing supported his claims to attention.

Tolstoy stayed at first with distant relatives, the Perfilyevs,<sup>1</sup> and then moved to quarters of his own. His first letters to Auntie Tatyana dealt largely with money matters and requests for articles that he had forgotten to take with him, again including his hat. Soon he adopted for his aunt's benefit the bored air of the youth who thinks he has arrived socially. He described his many visits to the homes of people of consequence and complained that his daily occupations were constantly upset by callers. Before a month was up his tone changed somewhat. "There is nothing either good or bad to tell you about myself," he wrote. "My existence is neither too worldly nor too retired; I'm neither amused nor bored. . . ." Another month and the familiar note of moral despair crept into his saga. "I've grown quite debauched in this social existence," he wrote. "Everything bores me frightfully; I'm dreaming again about life in the country, and I intend to return to it soon."

The beginning of the next year (1849), however, found Tolstoy in Petersburg instead of the country. He had had a second thought. It was comforting to contemplate the quiet of Yasnaya Polyana amid the noisy pleasures of the city, but then he had never sampled the pleasures of the capital of All the Russias. They apparently took him by storm. "I intend to remain here forever," he wrote enthusiastically to his brother Sergei at his Pirogovo estate. Proudly he announced that he was with his comrades Ozerov and Fyozov, and that he had already visited the Laptevs, Obolenski, Musin-Pushkin, Milyutin, and the Islavins. "And many others have been introduced to me and I to many. In brief, it has turned out that

<sup>1</sup> V. S. Perfilyev served as the prototype, in certain features, for Stiva Oblonski in *Anna Karenina*.

there are many more acquaintances here than in Moscow; and they are of a *much higher quality*," he underlined, with a resurgence of the *comme il faut* of his Kazan days. The letter has all the earmarks of having been written with glass in hand amid the promptings of jolly companions. One of them, K. A. Islavin, a rakish friend of the Tolstoy brothers, scribbled a postscript to Sergei: "Hello Pirogovo landlord! Hello terrible possessor of 313 Pirogovo slaves! What are you doing? Are you still sighing over your beloved Masha?"

With its manifold possibilities for a career, Petersburg seemed to Tolstoy a veritable Eldorado. He decided to turn over a new leaf. This city "has a great and good influence over me," he wrote to Sergei in the same letter. Here everyone was busy and it was impossible to lead the aimless life of Moscow. Although he was sure that his brother would not believe him, he insisted that he had already changed. "You will say: 'For the twentieth time now you have changed, but nothing comes of you, the emptiest of fellows.'" This time the transformation was real, he told Sergei, for he had at last convinced himself "that one cannot live by speculation and philosophy. One must live positively, i.e. be a practical man." And this newest discovery would be utilized at once, for he declared his intention of taking the examinations for the Faculty of Jurisprudence so that he might obtain his degree and enter into government service. Renewed determination rather than progress was reflected in this old ambition.

Sergei had had abundant experience with these sudden shifts in his brother's enthusiasms. He jocosely wrote back his disbelief in the announced "change," and then took the occasion to warn Lyovochka against the card sharps of Petersburg. "With your scorn for money," he cautioned, "you may well lose a large amount." The advice went unheeded and Tolstoy rapidly accumulated gambling debts. Letters to Sergei over the next few months were filled with urgent requests to sell his woodlot and his horses in order to raise money. Cards became a passion with him. Like Dostoyevsky, he imagined it possible to contrive a rational system that would assure success, and he actually drew up an elaborate series of "Rules for Card-Playing." As might be expected, the rules proved futile in the face of bad luck, and their principal precept of moderation was always forgotten in the excitement of play. In the course of the next few years his gambling habit was to bring him to the verge of financial ruin.



The fact that neither in his letters nor in his diary did Tolstoy show the slightest flicker of awareness of the absorbing political and literary activity of Petersburg's brilliant intellectuals at this time betrayed as nothing else could the nature of the company he kept and his single-minded preoccupation with himself. The February Revolution of 1848 in France had inspired in oppressed Russians the hope of reform in the viciously bureaucratic and reactionary regime of Nicholas I. The great literary critic Belinski and his followers in Petersburg had advocated a Russia modelled on the more advanced civilization of Western Europe. Revolutionary murmurings were in the air and repression was brutal. At the very time that Tolstoy was concerned solely with making a place for himself in the city's high society, the Tsar's police rounded up a group of radicals known as the Petrashevski Circle. Among them was the young Dostoyevsky, who had already won some literary fame. Dostoyevsky was on his way to a Siberian prison as a convicted revolutionist before Tolstoy grew weary of his loose Petersburg life.

Meanwhile, Tolstoy, on his own admission, had become a "practical man," and something had to be done about it. There were the university examinations to test his new resolution. Although he confessed that he knew absolutely nothing about the first two subjects—criminal and civil law—he put off his preparations until a week before the examinations. Then he plunged into study, working day and night, and passed both tests well.

Hardly had he accomplished this feat, however, when a pleading letter (May 1, 1849) was dispatched to Sergei: "I believe you are already saying that I'm the *emptiest of fellows*; and you are saying the truth. God knows what I have done! For no reason I came to Petersburg and I have achieved nothing decent here, except squander money and run up debts. It is stupid. Insufferably stupid!" He had a large debt of honour to meet, and he begged Sergei to arrange for the sale of one of his smaller properties. Failure to pay would mean the loss of his reputation. Such a price, he complained, for freedom and philosophizing.

In the future, however, all would be different, if only the present mess could be straightened out. He was going to give up the university once and for all and become a cadet in the Horse Guards. The Guards would soon leave for Vienna to help the Austrians quell the Hungarian rebellion. (The moralist had no thought now for the injustice of this cause.) With luck, he might get a commission

before the usual two years if he saw action. So please, he asked Sergei, send on my birth certificate, but before all else, raise the necessary funds to pay off my cursed debts.

Before two weeks had elapsed, the wind of events had shifted the young weathercock in Petersburg to a different direction. He replied to Sergei's offer of aid, coupled with a mild brotherly remonstrance, with regrets for the "various stupidities" of his previous letter, the chief of which, he remarked, was his intention of joining the Horse Guards. He reaffirmed his purpose of entering the university, and he would enlist in the army only if he failed the remaining examinations and if the war took a serious turn.

Even before his brother could answer, Tolstoy had shifted his ground again. A furtive letter to Auntie Tatyana pleaded for a few rubles, if only enough to take him back to Yasnaya Polyana. He baited the request with a promise to study for the civil service examinations that would enable him to obtain a post at Tula. This course would make it possible for him to spend the winter at Yasnaya Polyana and thus cut down his expenses. Years later he explained his sudden decision to leave Petersburg differently, and the simple reason carries conviction. "Spring arrived," he said, "and the charm of rural life again attracted me to my estate." In June he returned to Yasnaya Polyana with a talented but drunken German musician by the name of Rudolf.

## IV

After a summer at Yasnaya Polyana, where music, under the direction of the amiable Rudolf, occupied much of Tolstoy's time, he obtained a post in the Chancellery of the Tula Assembly of Nobles in November. This first practical endeavour proved to be no steadying influence. Such positions were purely nominal and he had almost as much leisure as at Moscow and Petersburg. He wasted it in gambling, drinking bouts, visits to gypsy haunts, and in the gay entertainments of the provincial society of Tula. Infrequent letters to Auntie Tatyana that winter revealed the emptiness of his existence. The only serious note in them was his concern over the impending birth of his sister's child.<sup>1</sup> "Bring forth! dear friend Mashenka," he cheerfully interpolated in one letter. "You cannot imagine how boring it is for a future uncle to be kept waiting."

<sup>1</sup> She had married V. P. Tolstoy, a distant relative, in 1847.

Tolstoy's stay at Tula was occasionally broken by visits to the estates of his sister and brother Sergei, and to Auntie Tatyana at Yasnaya Polyana. In the company of his kind foster-mother he always regained a sense of security and a feeling of contentment with himself and life. She watched over his material welfare, mildly scolded him for gambling excessively, and continually feared that he would make a bad marriage. At times he chafed over her limited understanding of the broader aspects of morality, but in her unselfish devotion to all whom she loved he saw a beautiful life of self-sacrifice.

He would arrive at Yasnaya Polyana, feeling ashamed and morally unclean after a prolonged period of carousing at Tula. Auntie Tatyana would greet him lovingly. By old custom, he would kiss her soft, energetic little hand and she his "dirty and depraved one," and then they would converse in French. Her gentle kindness and affection never changed. He would sit in an armchair through the long winter evenings and read while she played old maid, or he would hear her soft, childlike laughter as she chatted with the housekeeper. At such moments, he said, his finest thoughts came to him, the noblest responses of his soul.

During the summer of 1850 Tolstoy again stayed at Yasnaya Polyana. For a brief period in June he resumed his diary; he felt it a valuable exercise in self-judgment. From it we learn that he threw himself zealously into the study of music, practised faithfully on the piano, and even began to write a treatise, "The Fundamental Principles of Music and Rules for its Study." The subject so absorbed him, he remarked, that he experienced "the happiness of the artist, although in a very incomplete way." For a time, he actually contemplated dedicating his life to music.

The diary and "rules" always went together; a fresh crop of the latter, led off by a long series demanding gymnastic exercises, was now assiduously cultivated. Development of the body had become almost a fetish with Tolstoy and was to remain so for the rest of his life. The fine physique he acquired through constant exercise stood him in good stead in several serious illnesses. Sad experience had impressed upon him his inability to abide by moral rules. He now approached the subject with unintentionally amusing candour. Moral rules that "never change," he would eschew; only "resolutions temporal and local" that could be altered if the occasion demanded would be set down for observance. Even these simple day-by-day injunctions often proved too much for his willing spirit

but weak flesh. "Yesterday," he wrote, "in addition to leaving undone what I had set for myself, I betrayed my rule. But I shall not betray this one any more—not to *have* a single woman in the country—except on certain occasions which I shall not seek out but will not avoid."

Within three days after this entry, the transgressor let his diary lapse again. Five months later Tolstoy was in Moscow. He had obtained a leave of absence from his Tula post, to which he was destined never to return. Provincial society, country solitude, and home-made moral rules had apparently once more been sacrificed to a desire for the pleasures of the metropolis.

In Moscow while taking an inventory of the quiet existence he had led in the country, he announced in the diary that rural life had effected "a great revolution" in him. At last he had ceased "to frame castles in Spain and plans which no human capacity could execute!" He would no longer despise the convictions of others and dismiss as unworthy of notice the ordinary concerns of mankind. There was no glory in profligacy, he reasoned, when inferior beings could surpass him in this respect. "I've come to Moscow with three aims," he candidly admitted to himself: "(1) to gamble; (2) to marry; (3) to obtain a post."

With an unexpected degree of persistency, Tolstoy now devoted himself to what he was later to despise most—worldly success. He wrote out his own "Rules for Society." Among them are such precepts as: always to seek associations with men higher in the world than himself; to ask for dances at balls only with the most important ladies; never to express his feelings; never to allow anyone to offer him the smallest insult or sarcasm without paying double for it.

In the approved manner of the fashionable fop, Tolstoy's letters to Auntie Tatyana were now filled with drawing-room chitchat and the latest society scandals. He belonged to the exclusive English and Nobles Clubs, paid court to important dignitaries, and dined and wined with this or that prince and princess. And like any typical gallant, he flirted with his hostess or fell a little in love with her. Occasionally he forgot his manners and succumbed to a genuine passion for her, as he did with the young wives of at least two of his hosts. He even began to go to church again for what seemed to be fashionable rather than sincerely religious reasons. Then there were the purely bachelor amusements of the young man in society. Gambling, riding, fencing, gymnastics, and wrestling

with the local strong man helped to fill out his day. At night, carouses with his set at exclusive restaurants were usually followed by visits to brothels or breakneck rides to shady establishments on the outskirts of the city, where they listened until dawn to the haunting melodies of gypsy choruses and made love to exotic gypsy girls.

Practical affairs were not forgotten. They were intended to be a vital feature of this new dispensation that banished castles in Spain. But his success in this respect was as fugitive as ever. Once again, and now for the last time, he resurrected that pale corpse of a university degree. He suddenly felt the need to demonstrate his will power and settled upon the determination to finish his studies in the Faculty of Jurisprudence as an appropriate test case. A single reference in the diary to reading his old friend Nevolin's *Encyclopædia of Law* is the first and last shred of evidence concerning this new effort in a dead cause. He also disinterred his former ambition for a post in the government service, and at this time he was not above seeking the support of influential officials. Another possibility, however, soon took its place—renting a posting station on one of the imperial mail routes. After a few practical gestures had been made, this scheme also came to nought. Meanwhile, gambling debts again rendered his situation precarious.

During the whole tenure of this demeaning bid for worldly success, Tolstoy's merciless self-criticism never ceased. In the end, it saved him from a way of life entirely inimical to his deepest hopes. Sins venial and unpardonable, trivial and deadly, he charged against himself with discouraging meticulousness. There is a suggestion of exaggeration and perverted ardour in this relentless self-castigation, but his sincerity is undeniable. Day after day even the slightest deviations from his accepted norm of perfection in character are duly itemized in the diary: meanness, boasting, haste, want of solidity, diffidence, sloth, presumption, affectation, pride, showing off, indecision, false shame, lack of stability, absent-mindedness, over-self-reliance, lying, thoughtlessness, gluttony, faint-heartedness, apathy, quarrelsomeness, self-delusion, and a lack of discrimination. It would seem that there was no human weakness he did not possess, certainly none that he was unwilling to admit. At this time, inspired by the notable example of Benjamin Franklin, he also kept a "Franklin Journal,"<sup>1</sup> devoted solely to listing and appraising all his failings.

<sup>1</sup> Franklin's works were well known in Russia and highly regarded.

The most significant aspect of this unhappy Moscow visit was the birth of the creative artist. Tolstoy began to observe closely the life around him and to experience an irresistible urge to describe it on paper. At the fashionable balls and dinners he attended no detail escaped him. He would sit at the window of his bachelor apartment and watch all the unfolding comedy and tragedy of street life. A policeman strolled by and the observer wondered who he was and what kind of existence he led. A carriage drove past the window and he asked himself who was in it and what the rider was thinking. The house across the street served as a starting point for a guessing game about its inhabitants and all the intimate details of their inner lives. What an interesting book, he imagined, could be written about such people.

Hitherto Tolstoy had scribbled a fair amount on philosophy, music, and rules of conduct. In the meantime, the artist's urge to understand and describe life had been imperceptively growing within him. In a sense, the diary he had been keeping on and off for four years was an unconscious apprenticeship in the novelist's art of selection and analysis. Although dealing primarily with his own inner experiences, the diary reveals at this early stage one of the principal features of his process of creation: his intense interest in fixing upon the semiconscious, suppressed motives of his actions. Even the unique rational approach to the study of his own nature, everywhere apparent in the diary in his love for classifications and subdivisions of all manner of human attributes, suggests his later talent for conquering the subconscious by an application of lucid understanding. Indeed, the transition from the self-analysis of the diary to his dissection of imaginary characters was an easy and natural one.

During these five months in Moscow, there is much evidence in the diary and letters of Tolstoy's new interest in literary expression. In one letter he admired the attempt at authorship of one of his young friends, and pointedly remarked that "at least, he gains his bread honestly, and more bread than 300 peasants bring"; and in the diary he noted the necessity of translating from foreign languages in order to improve his style. Finally, there was the terse promise to himself (December 8, 1850): ". . . I intend to write a story of gypsy life should I find time." Succeeding references show that he worked on such a tale, but whether he finished it is

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unknown. On January 18, 1851, an entry in the diary reads: "To write the history of my childhood." There is no evidence that he worked on this project during his stay in Moscow, but he pursued it later and it resulted in his first published piece of fiction, *Childhood* (1852).

In jotting down, as was his custom, his plans for the next day, Tolstoy wrote in the diary on March 25, 1851: "Rise at five and work at history of today until ten." He fulfilled this design, working over it for the next few days and returning to it later. The effort is the first known piece of Tolstoy's fiction. It is a considerable fragment of what was intended to be a long work under the title of *A History of Yesterday*.<sup>1</sup> In its present form the fragment embraces a detailed description of an actual evening he spent at the home of Prince and Princess Volkonski,<sup>2</sup> which he eventually intended to subordinate to a larger design. This fragment is a unique performance for a beginner. In its infinite detail, concerned largely with a minute analysis of his conscious and subconscious thoughts and feelings reacting to particular situations, the work has the distinct flavour of Proust and Joyce. The immediate model, however, was Sterne, whose influence is clear in the frequent digressions, in the mixture of trivial observations with commonplace aphorisms, and in the transformation of all the unexpected and confused associations of thought that enter the hero's head as he falls asleep. The young Tolstoy revelled in his newly discovered powers of analysis, but this exuberant abandon never again appeared in his fiction.

## VI

Spring was filling the air again, always a harbinger of restlessness for Tolstoy. "Not long ago," he wrote to Auntie Tatyana, "I read in a book that the first tokens of spring affect usually the moral side of man. With the renewal of nature one also wishes to be renewed. One regrets the past, the time badly spent, and one repents weaknesses, and the future appears like a bright hope before us; one becomes better, morally better." In truth, he was morally sick of his Moscow life and felt the need of renewal. At this opportune moment, the arrival from the Caucasus of his beloved brother Nikolai, whom he had not seen for four years, settled the issue. He

<sup>1</sup> The work was published only after Tolstoy's death, and it has never been translated into English.

<sup>2</sup> Tolstoy was much attracted to the wife, Princess L. Volkonski, who served as the model for the "little princess," wife of Andrei Bolkonski, in *War and Peace*.

decided that he would keep Nikolai beside him as long as possible during his furlough and then accompany him to his battery in the Caucasus.

At the beginning of April, Tolstoy returned to Yasnaya Polyana. He had little time to enjoy the quiet pleasures of the country, for the next three weeks were filled with preparations for his trip. Visits had to be made to his sister and Sergei. The swift momentum of city life still clung to him. He tried to keep up his gymnastics, music, run the affairs of the estate, and do a little writing (he planned two pieces, a description of a dream and of a day's hunting). Nor, it seems, had he left his easy city morals behind him. "After dinner I spent the evening in prowling about and experiencing voluptuous desires." Struggle as he might, he could not put temptation, in the form of pretty peasant girls, behind him.

Two days after this entry, he wrote in his diary: "Sensuality tortures me. Not so much sensuality as the force of habit. I'm convinced that in another place I would not even look upon her who now, because I've already had her here, obliges me powerfully to struggle with passion and yet give way to her more often." The very next day, however, he confessed in his diary: "Yesterday could not forbear signalling to some one in a pink dress, who looked attractive from a distance. I opened the back door. She entered. I couldn't even bear the sight of her; foul, repellent. I even hate her for causing me to break my rule. The feeling of duty and aversion argued against it, lust spoke for it; the latter conquered. I repented terribly; never before have I felt this as now. It is a step forward."

The sincerity of Tolstoy's repentance may have been reflected in his serious preparations for the religious observance of Easter. He even wrote a homily, though, he said, a bad one.

On the whole, his four-year record since leaving the university had been a dismal one. Now almost twenty-three, he had failed to obtain a university degree, to find happiness in improving the living conditions of his serfs, or to secure a position in the civil service or army; nor had a modicum of success in high society satisfied him. All this was disillusioning for a youth keenly conscious of his high capacities. But as he set out with Nikolai for the Caucasus at the end of April, 1851, the young Tolstoy was dimly conscious that his past had been enriched by the stuff of life if not by material success.



## Chapter VII

### A CADET IN THE CAUCASUS

TRAVELLING together is like living together. If the enforced intimacy fails to breed contempt, it makes travellers inordinately sensitive to each other's slightest fault. On the road, Nikolai complained of his brother's cleanliness. Changing one's shirt "twelve times a day," as he put it, seemed excessive. The fastidious Leo, on the other hand, admired nearly everything about his older brother, except "his dirtiness." Several years of soldiering in the Caucasus had made Nikolai a bit forgetful about social amenities; it had also strengthened his independent nature, which now manifested itself in the itinerary that he planned.

Instead of taking the direct southern route to the Caucasus by way of Voronezh, he decided to head south-east for Saratov, in order to cover the long stretch from there to Astrakhan by boat down the Volga. A delightful prospect; and the additional attraction of a northern swing through Moscow and Kazan increased Leo's enthusiasm for the plan.

As though Tolstoy had a premonition that it would be long before he again saw his companions of civilized ease, two days in Moscow were crowded with calls on numerous friends. Nor did he omit to test his will power by gambling (he won four hundred rubles on this try) and by a visit to his favourite gypsies. With amazing frankness he dashed off a report to old maid Auntie Tatyana: "As you believe that *I'm a man who tests himself*, I went among the plebs in the gypsy tents. You can easily imagine the inward struggle I experienced there—for and against. However, I emerged victorious. That is to say, I gave nothing but my blessings to the gay descendants of the illustrious Pharaohs." After a hurried sitting with Nikolai for a daguerreotype, they were off.

A week in Kazan was passed merrily in visits to relatives and friends of his student days. There were dinners, concerts, and balls,

and much champagne. Leo's snobbery vexed his simple soldier brother. A gentleman drove past them, leaning on his cane with ungloved hands.

"That man is a scoundrel," remarked Leo.

"Why?" asked his puzzled brother.

"Because he is without gloves."

"But why is he a scoundrel if he doesn't wear gloves?" Nikolai demanded with an ironical smile. Leo was stumped, for he suddenly realized that any explanation would sound foolish.

The memory of a girl's face may have contributed to Tolstoy's willingness to go by way of Kazan. She was the same Zinaida Molostvov whom he had known and liked in his university days. Then, timidity on both sides had rendered dumb a mutual attraction. Five years had changed Zinaida, but had hardly made Tolstoy any less shy in the presence of a virtuous young woman. She was not a beauty, but the qualities of her mind that he now discovered, her wit, humour, and warm heart, rekindled his interest. He fell in love, and in that brief week no opportunity was missed to be in Zinaida's company. She obviously reciprocated, but for both of them love was apparently a secret thing, expansive only in hidden ways. He recalled how they stood in the side path of the archbishop's garden. It was on the tip of his tongue to declare himself, and she too almost hinted. Nothing was said, for at that moment words would have spoiled their felicity. He explained later that he had desired to perpetuate by silence "this pure yearning of two souls for one another."

Tolstoy left Kazan with this undeclared love buried in his heart. It sprouted poetry on the way. "I'm so intoxicated with Zinaida," he wrote to his sister, "that I've even had the hardihood to compose some verses:

While towards Syzran I lingered,  
And my own wound I fingered . . .

Syzran," he pedantically adds in a footnote, "is a village in the Simbirsk government." Then he concluded: "Just now Alyosha entered with tea and broke the thread of my thoughts." Like Coleridge's man from Porlock, the servant cost us the remainder of this only known love poem of Tolstoy, but perhaps without any loss to immortal verse.

It did not strike Tolstoy as paradoxical that the wings of love

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were bearing him swiftly away from the young lady of his heart. Soon all thoughts of Zinaida were forgotten in the attractions of the constantly shifting panorama of the strange country through which he was passing. The brothers reached Saratov, loaded their carriage on a boat, and with the aid of sails and oars made their way down the Volga to Astrakhan. From there they set out in the carriage again for their destination.

The trip made a lasting impression on Tolstoy. He described these days as the best of his life, and he once remarked that he could have written a whole book about the journey. For Russians at that time, the wild, spectacular Caucasus was a land fabled in song and story. Its mountains, precipices, and rushing torrents, its beautiful Circassian women and fierce, untamed tribesmen, had been the rich inspiration for exotic tales and poems of Marlinski, Pushkin, and Lermontov.

On the way, Tolstoy had plenty of leisure for thought. As he left civilization farther and farther behind, his consciousness of past mistakes was also left behind in the hope of a new life in which there would be no mistakes, no remorse, nothing but happiness. All that he had cared for most in the gay society of the city seemed trivial now as new and ever newer beauties of nature unfolded. Then one morning, for the first time, he saw the mountains—pure white gigantic masses with delicate contours, the clear fantastic outlines of their summits showing sharply against the far-off sky. He felt all the infinitude of their beauty, and with it a sense of complete freedom from his past. On the thirtieth of May, after about a month on the road, the brothers arrived at the Cossack village of Starogladkovskaya, where Nikolai's battery was stationed. The spell of strange places was quickly broken and, somewhat disillusioned, he asked himself in his diary how he had got there and with what purpose.

## II

Starogladkovskaya nestled in a hollow on the left bank of the Terek River, which served as a border between the Grebensk Cossacks and hostile Mohammedan hill tribes. Here Tolstoy spent the next two and a half years, although he made frequent trips to surrounding villages, forts, and watering places. The banks of the river were thickly wooded and well stocked with deer, wolves, wild boar, hares, and pheasants. To the north stretched the Nogai steppes, and to the south, beyond the Terek, were the Great

Chechnya River, the Kochkalov range, and in the distance the snow-capped peaks of the Caucasian Mountains.

The village consisted of a single street of reed-thatched huts, adorned with carved gables and high porches. Surrounding them were kitchen gardens, dark green poplars, and acacias with their delicate pale verdure and scented white blossoms. The inhabitants, a Cossack sect of Old Believers,<sup>1</sup> were a proud, independent people. They retained the Russian language and their ancient faith in all its purity, although they had intermarried with the native Chechenians and adopted their manners and customs. Plundering and war were their chief characteristics and swaggering bravery a cult. They acknowledged none but Cossacks as human beings and despised everybody else, especially Russian peasant soldiers. Drunkenness they regarded as a rite, the non-practice of which was considered apostasy. The Cossack women were in nominal subjection to the men and did most of the heavy farm work, but they were endowed with a peculiarly emancipated masculine character. A combination of the purest Circassian type of face with the broad powerful build of northern women gave them a strikingly handsome appearance in their colourful, semi-Oriental dress. In their relations with men they enjoyed complete freedom, especially the unmarried girls.

The native setting interested Tolstoy more than the battery of Russian soldiers quartered in the village. Ever since the successes of Ivan the Terrible in the sixteenth century, the Tatars had been gradually pushed back to the south until the Russians came in contact with the hard-fighting hill tribes on the northern slopes of the Caucasian Mountains. After Georgia, situated to the south of the Caucasus, had been brought into the Russian Empire in 1801, it became highly desirable to conquer the territory lying between the Terek and the newly acquired country. The Russians had constructed a whole string of Cossack outposts along the northern banks of the Terek and the Kuban, and from these they carried on their warfare against the natives. This prolonged border fighting had reached a critical stage by the time Tolstoy visited the Caucasus, for the Chechenians were ably led by the aggressive Shamil, who had skilfully organized resistance. Not until after the Crimean War was this romantic chieftain finally subdued.

Tolstoy was well received by the officers of the battery, and all the more so as the brother of Lieutenant Nikolai Tolstoy who was

<sup>1</sup> Old Believer is a general name for the sects that separated from the Russo-Greek Church in the seventeenth century.

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admired by his comrades in arms. They were a typical group of soldiers of the line, brave, hard-drinking, incessant gamblers, and for the most part, poorly educated. The commander, N. P. Alekseyev, was an exceptional individual and a general favourite with both officers and soldiers. He presented an unusual appearance, for one of his ears had been bitten off by a horse. Extremely pious, he spent whole hours in prayer, kneeling and bowing to the ground, and his dislike of vodka frequently led him to lecture the young officers, in a kindly spirit, on the evils of strong liquor. Tolstoy thought him vain, and often amused himself at dinner by pretending to drink, in order to provoke the commander to deliver his temperance sermon that always ended with an offer of sweets instead of vodka. Many of these officers had come to the Caucasus as to a promised land, in order to repair their fortunes after reverses of one sort or another back home. A few of them became the heroes and villains of Tolstoy's Caucasian tales.

### III

Several days after his arrival, Tolstoy followed his brother to the near-by fortified camp of Stary Yurt, which served as a protection for Goryachevodsk. Here many invalids availed themselves of the excellent mineral springs. A few weeks later he wrote a letter to Auntie Tatyana in which he described the camp and his new life. His tent looked out on a magnificent view of the mountain. Enormous rock structures were intersected by torrents of hot water that gave off a white vapour covering the whole upper part of the mountain in the morning. The water was so hot that one could boil an egg in it in three minutes. He spent hours gazing on the savage beauty of the place and idly watching the handsome Tatar women wash clothes by stamping them with their feet in adjacent pools. The ferruginous baths, he added, helped his rheumatism.

A passage in the diary at this time belies this picture of contentment. An inexplicable despondency, he wrote, filled his soul and saddened him. While he nurtured a feeling of love for all that was beautiful, for mankind and nature, and yearned to express it, he encountered only coldness and ridicule. The cause of his despondency, he reasoned, was an application to the serious things of life too early. He took refuge in an indifference to life. There was nothing to look forward to save death—a gratifying thought.

Yet how could he explain to himself, he asked, that "I can recall with pleasure the fact that I've ordered a saddle on which I shall ride in my Circassian costume, and that I shall run after Cossack women, and fall into despair because the left side of my moustache is worse than the right, and that I shall spend two hours trying to rectify the matter before a mirror?"

Perhaps something of this disillusion grew out of Tolstoy's confused feelings for Zinaida Molostvov, for his thoughts returned to the girl he had left behind in Kazan. He confessed in the diary that he was ignorant of what men call love. Was it like religion—a pure and lofty sentiment? He doubted now that he had any such feeling for Zinaida. And then he began to suspect his very doubts. "Shall I never see her again?" he wrote. "Shall I one day learn that she is married to a Beketov?<sup>1</sup> Worse still, shall I then see her in her gay cap, with the same clear, frank, merry, love-filled eyes as of old? Not yet abandoned are my schemes of journeying back to marry her; I'm in love, although I'm not entirely convinced that she would constitute happiness for me."

Tolstoy did nothing to demonstrate his affection. He might easily have settled the matter by a letter, but he avoided this, significantly contented to transmit his timid regards through the medium of a Kazan correspondent. "If you do not think it improper," he wrote, "you had better say to Zinaida Molostvov, *que je me rappelle à souvenir.*"

In the meantime, he forgot love while wooing God and fighting the devil. It was night at Stary Yurt, a week after Tolstoy's arrival. He sat on a drum in the tent, writing his diary. The candlelight outlined sharply the shapes of pistols, Circassian sabres, poniards, and trousers hanging along the canvas walls. The evening noises of challenging sentries, of a soldier coughing in his sleep, and the distant baying of a dog disturbed his thoughts. He was searching for a certain frame of mind, a view of things, a form of life which he was unable to define. He began to pray to God. "It is impossible to convey the blissful feeling I experienced in prayer . . ." he jotted down in his diary. "Yet, if prayer be defined as a petition or thanksgiving, I was not praying. Rather, I was yearning for something lofty and good. What that something was I cannot explain, although I clearly recognized what I desired. I wanted to become fused with the All-Embracing Substance. I besought It to pardon my sins. . . . I could not separate the feelings of faith, hope and love from my

<sup>1</sup> A. N. Beketov. Tolstoy was jealous of his attentions to Zinaida.

general feeling. No, the feeling I experienced last night was love for God, uniting in itself all that is good and renouncing what is bad."

This sudden religious rapture under the impact of new scenes plainly anticipated the direction Tolstoy took many years later in his dramatic search for the meaning of life. Now, the irrepressible urges of youth tripped him up in his sincere yearning after the lofty and good. "Not an hour had passed," continued his record, "before I almost consciously heard the voice of vice, vanity, of the empty side of life. I knew whence this voice came; I knew that it had destroyed my state of blessedness. I struggled but yielded to it, and I fell asleep, dreaming of fame and women. But it was not my fault; I couldn't help it."

The day after (June 13), Tolstoy congratulated himself in the diary upon exorcising the devils of vice, especially that of gambling. The very next entry (July 3), however, reads: "I wrote the above on June 13, and I have entirely wasted my time since then, for on the same day I was so carried away that I lost at cards 200 rubles of my own, 150 of Nikolinka's [his brother], and got into debt for 500 more—total 850.<sup>1</sup> Now I shall restrain myself and live prudently. I went to Chervlyonnaya, got drunk there, and slept with a woman. All this is very bad and troubles me deeply. Indeed, never have I spent more than two months well or so that I was satisfied with myself. Last night I lusted again. It is good that she would not give herself. Loathsome! But I write this as a punishment for myself."

The excitement of a raid of the Chechenians took Tolstoy's mind off his personal failings. He gladly accepted an offer to volunteer. The raid, led by Major-General A. I. Baryatinski, commander of the left flank of the Caucasian army, had for its objective a Chechenian village up in the hills. Such actions were simple enough. The enemy invariably gave way slowly before the advancing Russians, and the village was taken and sacked. When the raiding party withdrew, the Chechenians, like American Indians in frontier warfare, kept up a deadly sniping from behind rocks and trees.

Tolstoy's only comment in the diary on his baptism of fire was a modest one: "Recently I took part in a raid. I didn't act well; was even unconsciously afraid of Baryatinski." The general, however, took a different view of his conduct. Shortly after the raid, he was presented to Baryatinski by Ilya Tolstoy, a distant relative, who

<sup>1</sup> Approximately \$459.



Leo Tolstoy at the time of his departure  
for the Caucasus in 1851





was travelling in the Caucasus. At the meeting, Baryatinski praised Tolstoy for his courageous bearing under fire in the face of mortal danger, and advised him to hand in his petition to enter the service as soon as possible.

## IV

Tolstoy thought the general's advice worth considering, and his brother Nikolai seconded it. Maybe it would put an end to his ceaseless indecision. He wrote to Auntie Tatyana: "I've finally decided to serve in the Caucasus. I have not yet determined whether it will be the military or civil service Under Prince Vorontsov.<sup>1</sup> My trip to Tiflis will decide the matter."

He sat at the open window of his hut at night and gazed out on the starry vault of heaven. It was pleasant at least to contemplate the notion of a settled occupation. A light breeze brought a scent of freshness. Frogs and crickets croaked and chirruped their monotonous noises. Memories of Katya, a Tula gypsy, banished his errant thoughts about a career. Seated on his knee one night, she had sung "Tell Me Why," and declared that she loved only him, and allowed to no one but him the liberties that required concealment behind the curtain of modesty. He had believed her artful gypsy chatter with all his soul, and under the spell of this charming memory, he burst into the melody of "Tell Me Why." The night air was filled with his animated singing, but the spell was suddenly broken by someone under his window inquiring if he were wailing a Calmuck song.

Four months passed before Tolstoy could make up his mind about the army. New companions, the beauties of nature, hunting, literary activities, Cossack women, and perhaps a rooted dislike for the responsibilities of a settled occupation, postponed his decision. In restless activity he shuttled back and forth between Groznaya, another fortified post, Sary Yurt, and Starogladkovskaya. Sado, a "peaceful" young Chechenets, who used to gamble with the officers, became his *kunak* (sworn friend). Since he could not write or count, he was regularly cheated until Tolstoy won his endless gratitude by offering to play for him. A present of Nikolai's old silver watch sealed the friendship. Henceforth, no test of devotion was too great or dangerous for Sado. If Tolstoy needed a horse, Sado cheerfully offered his and was deeply hurt if

<sup>1</sup> M. S. Vorontsov, Viceroy of the Caucasus.

the gift was refused. He learned that Tolstoy's brother Sergei was a lover of good horses, and he at once suggested going up into the hills to steal the finest mount for the brother of his friend. Although the son of a well-to-do father, Sado lived by such thievery. He was a *dzhigit* (a daring fellow), who considered it his prescriptive right to steal from the enemies of Russia, even at the risk of his life. And he often risked his life for a theft that would bring him a few rubles.

A more epic figure was Tolstoy's extraordinary friend Epishka Sekhin, whom he faithfully described as Eroschka in *The Cossacks*. Epishka was an ancient Cossack in whose hut Tolstoy and Nikolai were quartered. For many years he had been a notorious character in the surrounding country. Of gigantic size, unusually well-proportioned, and still very strong and lively despite his eighty years, Epishka made a striking figure in his bushy beard dyed red and ragged hunting clothes. He described himself as "a *dzhigit*, a thief, and a swindler." As a youth, he had distinguished himself as a most skilful horsethief and slayer of Chechenians. Nor had he always been too particular about whose horses he stole or what "enemies" he killed; the Russians had also been his victims, and he had twice spent time in Russian prisons. In his old age, he contented himself with hunting, drinking, spinning yarns, and singing native songs.<sup>1</sup>

Tolstoy spent much time with Epishka and learned a great deal from him about woodcraft and hunting. He was no doubt at this time peculiarly responsive to the old man's simple earthy philosophy, which offered a soothing solution for his own inner struggle between the good and bad impulses of his nature. God, Epishka firmly believed, made everything for the joy of man. There was no sin in any of it. Man was like an animal, declared Epishka. Wherever it went, there was its home; whatever God gave it, that it ate. It was a fraud to teach man that he would lick red-hot plates in hell for enjoying the things of this earth. For when man died, said Epishka, the grass would grow on his grave, and that was all. Undeniably this was a comforting way of life in that wild country, and despite the unrelenting prick of conscience, much of Tolstoy's stay in the Caucasus was influenced by the ancient Cossack's forthright hedonism.

<sup>1</sup> In 1908, the great-nephew of Epishka visited Tolstoy at Yasnaya Polyana, and at his request, Tolstoy presented his portrait to the people of Starogladkovskaya.

In his youth Epishka had prided himself on his prowess with the girls, and he had an eye for them even in his old age. The hero of *The Cossacks* rebuked Eroshka (Epishka) for this senile propensity, calling it a sin. "A sin?" roared Eroshka. "Where's the sin? A sin to look at a fine girl? A sin to have some fun with her? Or is it a sin to love her? Is that so in your parts? No, my dear fellow, it is not a sin, it's a salvation."

Under the strong influence of these wholly natural people, Tolstoy wanted to cease thinking, to forget the puzzle of his existence. He wished to turn his back on the civilization of sophisticated society, with its artificial etiquette, its obligatory chatter, and its modish dandies and damsels with pomatum-greased hair eked out with false curls. He yearned to live like nature, as these Cossacks lived. They fought, ate, drank, rejoiced, and died, without any restrictions, other than those that nature placed on the sun, the animals, and trees. To him they seemed beautiful, strong, and free, and the sight of them made him feel ashamed of himself.

The cloak of civilization could not be sloughed off so easily. By the time his twenty-third birthday had arrived, Tolstoy and his new hopes reverted to type. He noted in the diary that from August 28 (his birthday) he would try to live in conformity with the aim he had set himself. Future occupations must again be listed, and a revised Franklin journal kept. The old rules were resurrected, and his determination set down to work on a novel, to sketch, study the Tatar language, and read. Just one week after the celebration of the birthday that was to begin his reformation, he sadly recorded in the diary: "Unfortunately I remain always the same: in the course of several days I've done all the things I disapproved of. Abrupt changes are impossible. I had a woman, showed myself weak on several occasions—in simple relations with people, in dangers, in gambling, and I'm still held back by false shame. I've told many lies. . . . I've been very lazy; and even now I cannot *collect my thoughts*, and *I write, but do not wish to write.*" The bubble of buying a hut, marrying a Cossack girl, and settling down in the Caucasus had been pricked by the knife of conscience. The law of his being had to be fulfilled.

After jotting down a Chechenian song that he had heard, Tolstoy broke off his diary for 1851, and some seven weeks after this last entry, he left with his brother for Tiflis to take an examination for entrance into the army.

Most of the two months Tolstoy spent at Tiflis turned out to be a period of enforced quietude. To Auntie Tatyana he circumspectly explained that he had fallen ill with a "kind of hot fever"; to Nikolai, who had to leave shortly after their arrival, he frankly wrote: "Perhaps you think I'm entirely well. Unfortunately, I feel very badly. The venereal sickness is cured, but the after-effects of the mercury have caused me untold suffering."

The penance for his carelessness was much leisure that Tolstoy employed constructively enough. He lodged in the German quarter of the Georgian city, in a house surrounded with a garden and vines. This opportunity to brush up on his German pleased him, and to Auntie Tatyana he wrote: "You recall the advice you once gave me: to write novels. Well, I've followed it, and my endeavours, about which I shall speak to you presently, are literary. I don't know whether what I write will ever see the light of day; but it is work that amuses me, and I have persevered too long now to abandon it." Indeed, he completed the first part of *Childhood* during this period of convalescence.

On January 3, 1852, Tolstoy had easily passed the examinations to qualify as a cadet, a non-commissioned officer of artillery, but with his usual forgetfulness about personal documents, which in Russia were man's official passport from the cradle to the grave, his appointment was held up. When the papers finally arrived, an essential one—his honourable discharge from the Tula civil service—was lacking. Here was another delay, and he feared very much that he would lose an opportunity to participate in the coming winter campaign. He relieved the boredom of waiting by taking up billiards, at which game he quickly lost much more money than he could afford. Once again his financial plight grew desperate, for a gambling debt he had contracted several months before was about to fall due. The note was held by an officer and friend of Nikolai, F. G. Knorring, whom Tolstoy heartily disliked. In despair he prayed to God for aid. He was convinced that his prayer had been answered, for the next morning he received a letter from Nikolai, who wrote that Sado, Tolstoy's devoted Chechenian *kunak*, had won the note from Knorring and insisted on presenting it to his friend. Overjoyed by this "divine intervention" in a gambling debt, Tolstoy at once sent home for a revolver and a music box, which he knew would delight the generous Sado.

Worn-out with waiting for the documents that would assure him an appointment, Tolstoy used all possible influence in high army circles of Tiflis. His efforts finally succeeded to the extent of his being assigned to the 4th Battery (his brother's) of the 20th Artillery Brigade as a non-commissioned officer of the 4th class, but he was advised that his appointment would not be officially recorded until the arrival of his discharge from the Tula civil service. "You will not believe how this pleases me," he wrote Auntie Tatyana. "It will seem strange to you, that I do not desire to be free. I've been free too long in everything; and it seems to me now that this excess of freedom has been the principal cause of my faults, and that it is even an evil." The future hater of war expressed his pleasure more bluntly to his brother Sergei: "With all my strength I will assist with the aid of a cannon in destroying the predatory and turbulent Asiatics."

A definite and realizable purpose in life raised Tolstoy's spirits to a pitch of enthusiasm. On the way to rejoin the battery he wrote Auntie Tatyana that he had already undergone a moral change. Religion and experience, he said, had taught him that life was a test. For him it was more than a test; it was the expiation of his faults. This trip to the Caucasus, he now assured her, had been an inspiration from above. He would see it through. And then, in his expansive mood, he portrayed the future as he would have it.

It is interesting that this imaginary picture anticipates the ideal family happiness that he came to love. After experiencing all the adventure that life might send him, he told how he would return to Yasnaya Polyana for good. There he would live the peaceful country life that his father had enjoyed before him. He would marry and have children, who would call the ageing Auntie Tatyana "grandmother." Everything would remain in the household as it had been when he was a child. Around the table at night he would tell of his life in the Caucasus, and Auntie Tatyana would recall her precious memories of his parents, over whom they would weep together tender tears of gladness. His brother would visit. Nikolai, good and noble as always and still a bachelor, would invent tales for Leo's children, who would kiss his hand in gratitude. And Leo's wife would make Nikolai's favourite dishes for him. Then they would all talk, and Auntie Tatyana would call them "Lyovochka" and "Nikolenka," as in their childhood, and she would gently scold him for eating with his hands, and Nikolenka because his hands were not clean. If he had a choice, he said, between

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being made Emperor of Russia or of realizing this dream, he would choose the latter. "You know me too well," he concluded, "and you know that perhaps my only good quality is sensibility. It is that quality to which I am obliged for the happiest moments of my life." Curiously enough, this ideal of happiness did come true, and with more realization of its charming details than anyone has a right to expect in daydreaming.

### VI

At last Tolstoy was off to the wars, a soldier in uniform, though still lacking an official appointment. The Viceroy of the Caucasus, Prince Vorontsov, had received an imperial order to put an end to the long resistance of the Chechenians. Two Russian columns moved from opposite directions to effect a junction and thus trap the enemy. Tolstoy was with the main column and on the seventeenth and eighteenth of February he saw some fierce fighting in which the Russians were victorious. With the wanton destruction common in frontier fighting, everything was put to fire and sword. Despite a mature sense of the horror of war, Tolstoy frankly admitted that he also retained a childish feeling of bravado. He was oblivious of the flying bullets and made a point, with death all around him, of trying to present an attitude of smiling indifference. When an enemy shell struck the wheel of the gun he was aiming, he escaped death by a miracle. In the diary, however, he remarked about his behaviour under fire: "My state at the time of danger opened my eyes. I loved to imagine myself entirely cold-blooded and calm in danger. But in the affair of the 17th and 18th I was not so." During this campaign, he was cited twice for the coveted Cross of St. George, but once again the fact that his discharge papers from Tula had not yet arrived prevented the award's being made.<sup>1</sup>

After the campaign, Tolstoy's battery returned to its base at Starogladkovskaya. Here he remained for the next four months, except for brief visits to the neighbouring towns of Kizlyar and Oreshyovka, a trip to the Caspian shore, and a longer journey

<sup>1</sup> Although he had received his official appointment as a non-commissioned officer on February 13, 1852, this seems finally to have been made without benefit of his Tula discharge papers. For he was cited for the St. George Cross on February 17; the presentations were made on March 19, and he says in a letter: "Twice I had an opportunity to be presented with the Cross of St. George and have not been able to receive it because of a few days' delay in this damned paper." The discharge papers arrived one day late, March 20.

to Pyatigorsk to receive treatment for dysentery. He was also bothered by severe toothaches and rheumatism. The diary over this period is unusually detailed. It reveals clearly that he compensated for his restricted physical activity, due to ill health, by an intense concern with his own thoughts and with reading and writing.

Contemplation of his life in the Caucasus up to this point filled Tolstoy with regrets. Gambling, sensuality, and vanity, he asserted, were the three evil passions that he had most to contend with. He was proud of the fact that of late he had avoided all occasions to gamble, without any consciousness of deprivation. Sensuality was a more difficult matter. The demands of the body, intensified by a vivid imagination, could be overcome only by strength of will and prayer to God. Even as he thought these thoughts he was trying hard to resist the attractions of his pretty landlady at Pyatigorsk.

Vanity, he despaired of banishing. "It's like syphilis," he noted. "When driven out of one part, it reappears, with added force, in another." At times he wondered if the pride that comes from vanity did not poison his capacity for friendship. With a touch of snobbish rationalization, he wrote to Auntie Tatyana: "I try to make the fewest acquaintances possible and to avoid intimacy with those that I already have. They grow accustomed to my manner and no longer importune me, and I am certain they say that I am a *queer fellow* and a *proud man*. I do not behave so because of pride, but because I am made that way. There is too great a difference in education, sentiments and manners between those I meet here and myself for me to take any pleasure in them." Yet he observed with some chagrin that Nikolai was friendly with all and loved by all.

Tolstoy was not entirely satisfied with his explanation. He agreed when his Cossack friend Epishka once told him that he was a man who could not be loved. A naturally warm heart and sympathetic nature, however, stood in the way of the snobbery that he had practised since his university days. In a striking passage in the diary at this precise time (March 29, 1852), he suggested another explanation.

"There is something in me," he wrote, "that obliges me to believe that I was not born to be what other men are. But whence does this proceed? From a lack of agreement, an absence of harmony among my faculties, or from the fact that I really stand on a higher



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level than ordinary people? I'm older, and the time of development is passed or is passing; and I'm tortured with a thirst, not for fame—I have no desire for fame and despise it—, but for acquiring great influence for the happiness and benefit of society. Shall I die with this wish a hopeless one?" He was perfectly sincere. From boyhood he had treasured the conviction that he was different; genius had whispered softly in his ear. But the prevailing feeling over these years had been one of defeat and unfulfilled hopes.

Tolstoy's commonplace existence at Pyatigorsk, to which he went in May, was certainly not flecked with the promise of future fame. The town had little to recommend itself. It seemed to him like a Caucasian Tula. Society consisted of landowners—the inflated term for all visitors coming to drink the mineral waters—who looked down upon the local citizens. Then there were the army officers, who regarded the native entertainment as the height of bliss. They pretended that they had come for treatment only, and hence they limped about on crutches, wore slings and bandages, caroused, and told stories of hair-raising adventures with Chechenians. Concerts, the theatre, and promenading along the boulevard were the chief amusements. Ironically, Tolstoy called the life "purely Parisian," and he was vastly annoyed at having to salute these officers in epaulets, blue pantaloons, tightly drawn belts, and boots with enormous spurs. He faithfully followed his doctor's orders, bathed in the mineral waters and drank from the springs.

In June Tolstoy heard the news that Zinaida was going to marry. Strangely enough this sudden termination of a romance that he had run away from caused him little concern.<sup>1</sup> "The fact vexes me," was his only comment, "the more so because I have felt so little perturbed."

## VII

On July 3, 1852, Tolstoy wrote to N. A. Nekrasov, distinguished poet and editor of the *Contemporary*, Russia's leading progressive magazine: "My request will cost you such little effort that I am sure you will not refuse to grant it. Look over this manuscript, and if it is not suitable for printing, return it to me. If you appraise it otherwise, tell me what it is worth in your opinion and print it in

<sup>1</sup> Tolstoy, however, never forgot Zinaida. Almost fifty years later, when she had long been dead, her nephew visited him, and Tolstoy questioned him about his aunt with obvious feeling.

your magazine. I agree in advance to any cutting that you may find necessary, but I desire that it be printed without any additions or changes in the text." He then went on to say that the manuscript was the first part of a novel under the general title of "Four Epochs of Growth," and that the appearance of the later parts would depend upon the success of the first. The letter concluded on a flattering note, prompted by his own anxiety over the worth and soundness of his first sustained effort to write fiction: "I am convinced that an experienced and well-intentioned editor, especially in Russia, by virtue of his position as a constant intermediary between author and reader, can always indicate in advance the success of a work and the public reaction. Therefore, I await your answer with impatience. It will either encourage me to continue a favourite occupation or oblige me to cease at the very beginning."

With the letter Tolstoy sent the manuscript of *Childhood*. For over a year now, very early in the morning, or late at night after hunting, carousing, or a day of activity with the battery, he had worked away at his novel. Sometimes in his enthusiasm over a particular chapter, he would read it to the critical and talented Nikolai or to a friend who dropped in, but he nearly always regretted these premature hearings. His periods of enthusiasm were very rare in the process of creation. More often he expressed acute dissatisfaction. Three separate drafts were written out, and a fourth, done by a copyist, also received Tolstoy's corrections. Notations in the diary on the progress of the work reveal the stern demands he made on himself artistically at the very outset of his literary career. Time and again he noted that the writing went badly, the re-writing worse. "Without regret, I must destroy all unclear places, prolix, irrelevant, in a word, everything unsatisfactory, even though they be fine in themselves." Unswervingly he adhered to his own rule that no addition, however talented, could improve a work as much as a deletion. He fluctuated between satisfaction and utter dislike, and on occasion contemplated abandoning the work. At times he began to doubt that he possessed any ability. "Have I talent comparable to that of recent Russian writers?" he asked himself in the diary and answered, "Positively no." Later speculation on this subject, however, left him undecided. Then there were rare and wonderful moments when he read over a particularly successful passage and felt that genius must have guided his pen. "I reread the chapter 'Sorrow,' and while so doing wept from my very heart." He believed, like Gogol, that any work, in

order to be good, should come singing from the author's soul. This can truly be said about *Childhood*, despite all Tolstoy's misgivings.

Almost two months passed before Tolstoy received Nekrasov's reply. It "drove me silly with joy," he noted in the diary. The famous editor agreed to print *Childhood* in his periodical, and added: "Not knowing the continuation, I cannot say definitely, but it seems to me that the author has talent. In any case, the author's bent and the simplicity and realism of the contents constitute the unquestionable worth of this production." He concluded with a request for the continuation and a plea that Tolstoy reveal his name. (He had signed the manuscript with the initials of his first name and patronymic—"L.N."—and only Auntie Tatyana and Nikolai were aware of his efforts to publish.)

A further exchange of letters followed, in which Tolstoy asked for payment, and Nekrasov replied that it was a custom for the best periodicals not to offer an honorarium for the initial work of an author, but that he would pay him the best rates for any succeeding contributions. And he softened this disappointment by saying that he had now read the work in proof, that he found it still better, and that he had absolutely no doubt about the author's talent.

At the end of October, Tolstoy read the published *Childhood*, but the mutilations of the censor and editor robbed him of some of the beginner's rapture at seeing his first work in print. He sat down and wrote a blistering letter, which on second thought he failed to send to Nekrasov; but a more tempered effort later was vehement enough. First he scolded the editor for altering the title to the *Story of My Childhood*. Of what concern to anybody, he asked, was the story of his childhood? Then he went on to ridicule the changes that had been made, asserting that in reading the printed version, he experienced the feeling of a father who saw his child's hair mutilated by an inexperienced barber. He ended on a pleasant note, however, agreeing to accept the fine financial offer of Nekrasov for future works (fifty kopeks a printed sheet, or about half a cent a word), and saying that he would send him something when he had it ready, but warning him once again never to tamper with his productions.

Tolstoy's vexation at the disfiguring of his brain child was soon dissipated by the news of its enthusiastic reception. *Childhood* won praise on all sides, and the public was curious to learn the new author's name. Shortly after reading his novel in print, Tolstoy

went to a neighbouring post to hunt with some fellow officers. In a hut he came across an issue of *National Notes* in which he found a highly laudatory review of *Childhood*. He lay on a cot and read the account, dwelling greedily on every sentence of praise. The last one must have made his heart jump: "If this is the first production of L.N., then one ought to congratulate Russian literature on the appearance of a new and remarkable talent." Tears of joy came to his eyes, and he obtained a special thrill of pleasure from the thought that the comrades sitting around him did not realize that it was he who was being praised in such lofty terms.

To fatten the young author's self-esteem came letters from Sergei and Auntie Tatyana, telling him that everybody was reading and raving about *Childhood*. Panayev, co-editor of the *Contemporary*, was avoided by his friends because he insisted upon cornering them on the street and reading extracts from the new work. Turgenev, who was under the impression that Nikolai, Tolstoy's brother, was the author, wrote to Nekrasov to tell him to encourage the author, and to convey his interest, greetings, and praise to him. In far-off Siberia the exiled Dostoyevsky wrote to a friend to ask him who was the mysterious L.N. whose recent story had so excited him. Tolstoy, like Turgenev and Dostoyevsky, had caught the public eye and that of the critics with his first published work and at once revealed himself as a coming new force in Russian literature.

There can be no question of Sterne's influence on *Childhood*. (It had already been evident in "A History of Yesterday".) Throughout this period Tolstoy read the *Sentimental Journey*, translated a part of it, and in the diary are warm appreciations of Sterne. Sterne's lively but refined humour, brilliant wit, love of humanity, and acute sensibilities, as well as his various tricks of style, attracted Tolstoy. In the several drafts of *Childhood*, however, one can observe the care with which he tried to eliminate obvious traces of this influence, but the final version still owes much to Sterne. And several succeeding works are also indebted to him. Töpfer's<sup>1</sup> influence is of less consequence and is mostly limited to the possibility that Tolstoy was inspired to write about childhood by the treatment of it in the *Bibliothèque de mon oncle*.

*Childhood* is a highly original work. What particularly impresses the reader is Tolstoy's skill in evoking childhood memories and associations that all have forgotten or only dimly remembered, but

<sup>1</sup> R. Töpfer was a Swiss writer, whose *Bibliothèque de mon oncle* appeared in 1832 and was translated into Russian in 1848.

which, when recalled with feeling, seem infallibly true and delightful. At this time Tolstoy criticized Pushkin's historical romance, *The Captain's Daughter*, because the interest in events predominates over the interest in details of feeling. It was precisely the feelings of his characters that Tolstoy was primarily interested in, and in the psychological reasons why they felt thus or thus. In the Introduction to *Childhood*, he warns his readers that they must be understanding in order to appreciate the book, for he writes it from the heart, not from the head. More than that of any other major novelist, Tolstoy's fiction is autobiographical. This is no reflection on his imagination or power of invention, but the life he transposed into art was largely his own life of recorded experience and observation, rendered effective by penetrating analysis and by his subtle choice of significant psychological and real detail. The convincing realism of his fiction is rooted in autobiography. Although *Childhood* draws heavily upon his own experiences, there is a great deal of sheer invention in the work. Many of the characteristic qualities of his mature art are already apparent in this first extensive effort. The customary initial period of imitation and immature attempts was avoided in his artistic development. With little faltering and no false moves, he mounted at the first try the immortal steed of great art.

Lack of money, as well as the natural urge to write, kept Tolstoy working on two other pieces during this same year (1852). He sent off to the *Contemporary* his long short story, "The Raid," the first of several works that grew directly out of his Caucasian experiences. The central incident is the action he took part in as a volunteer the year before, and several of the leading figures are modelled on officers he knew well. The tale has more substance than a mere narration of an exciting military exploit. He deliberately set out to treat realistically the themes of war and Caucasian life, which had been romantically handled in the exotic tales of his predecessors, Marlinski, Pushkin, and Lermontov. He had still not divested himself entirely of the poetry of war, but he questioned its justifiability in "The Raid." Of course, the government censor saw to it that only the "poetry" remained, and Tolstoy complained to his brother that all the good in the story had been struck out or mutilated. A recently published unexpurgated edition showing passages deleted from the original draft reveals Tolstoy as well on the way towards that opposition to war which eventually resulted in his utter condemnation of it. In his artistic treatment of the theme

of war at this time and later, he was much influenced by Stendhal. Like Stendhal, he suggested the evil, crass egoism and vanity of the pseudo-heroic by a ruthless analysis of conventional thinking about military glory. But in "The Raid" he was not blind to the heroism of the simple unambitious plain soldier or officer, and his narration of incidents in this connection provides the main charm of the tale.<sup>1</sup>

## VIII

After completing *Childhood* in July, Tolstoy spent most of the remaining months of 1852 in doctoring himself. Despite his powerful physique, he was subject to a variety of illnesses that he endeavoured to regard as a moral good for which he ought to thank God. While he was still at Pyatigorsk, his physician ordered him to neighbouring Zheleznovodsk to try the healing powers of the mineral springs there. He left with the consolation that Pyatigorsk had been the first town in which he had committed no follies, and hence, he remarked, it was unnecessary to carry away with him any repentance. His stay lasted only three weeks, and he set out for Starogladkovskaya. Soon, poor health again forced him to go for a week's treatment to Kizlyar, after which he rejoined his battery.

Difficulties at home did not add to Tolstoy's peace of mind. With the aggravating indifference in practical matters of one "not born to be what other men are," he fully assumed that the troublesome affairs of his estate at Yasnaya Polyana would be conscientiously supervised by Auntie Tatyana, or by Sergei or his brother-in-law. To complicate matters, he was everlastingly sending home orders to sell this or that bit of property to raise money for his mounting debts. These commissions were not always carried out to his liking, which fact contributed to his present indecision with regard to terminating his army service. The freedom that he had so lightly signed away, in order to destroy "the predatory and turbulent Asiatics," seemed all the more desirable now that military life in the Caucasus had lost its novelty. The routine of Starogladkovskaya, he remarked, might even cause one to become something of a fool. Drill, manœuvres, and firing off cannons, he said, disturbed the regularity of his life. Rather caustically he noted in the diary that drill was necessary to maintain

<sup>1</sup> During this year he also worked on *The Novel of a Russian Landowner*. And he began *The Cossacks*, a masterpiece that he did not finish until ten years later.

the discipline essential for the existence of a military class. And the drill habit, he declared, brought men to a state of mechanical obedience by means of petty threats, an obedience which not even the most cruel punishment could produce. Such thoughts were to reappear many years later in his denunciation of militarism. Meanwhile, he discovered that he had a maximum of two more years to serve before he could hope for a raise in rank, and he earnestly desired this promotion before he left the service.

Tolstoy's intellectual concerns, which often discouraged the friendly advances of unintellectual officers, were a welcome refuge during these months of illness. Apart from writing, he read anything he could get his hands on in this frontier town, and he also sent home for books. There was not much to be had in fiction, but he read Pushkin, Lermontov, and Grigorovich, Rousseau, Dumas, and Sue, and Sterne and Dickens. The last two especially delighted him. "What a charm has *David Copperfield*," he wrote in his diary. Dickens became his favourite English author. He generously admitted to his "tremendous influence"<sup>1</sup> and called him the most Christian of all English novelists. Dickens's affection for ordinary people and his constant concern for the betterment of his readers won Tolstoy's admiration.<sup>2</sup> •

Tolstoy read with pen in hand, jotting down his reactions in the diary. His thoughts at this time about literature, and his own relation to it in the light of his dawning career, seemed to fluctuate with the uncertain state of his health. "Literature is rubbish," he wrote, "and I should like to set down rules and a plan of estate-management." Sometime later, he observed that "the most agreeable books are those in which the author seems, as it were, to try to hide his personal opinion yet remains true to it wherever it is revealed. The most insipid books are those in which the author's point of view changes so often that it gets quite lost." Contemporary literature was declining, he decided, because authors were producing too many light books for the sake of commercial gain. In order to write well, he told himself, one must know not what to write, but what not to write. "Better with conviction and absorption to write something good and useful. One will never grow

<sup>1</sup> A good case can be made out for the influence of *David Copperfield* on *Childhood*.

<sup>2</sup> In a letter in 1904, he paid the following tribute in English: "I think that Charles Dickens is the greatest novel writer of the 19th century, and that his works, impressed with the true Christian spirit, have done and will continue to do a great deal of good to mankind."

weary of such a work." For "in some people," he noted in the diary, "the fire of inspiration changes into a candle to work by. Literary success that satisfies one's own self is obtained only by working at every aspect of a subject. But the subject must be a lofty one if the labour is always to be pleasant."

In view of Tolstoy's contemptuous regard for history during his university days, it is quite surprising to find him confessing now, in a letter to Auntie Tatyana, that he had finally accepted her wise advice and was reading history and liking it. He read Hume, Thiers, Michaud, and later Karamzin. As usual, his critical sense was uppermost, and in that alarming spirit of grandiosity with which youth plans, he dashed off in the diary: "Must compose a true and just history of Europe of the present century. There I have an aim for my whole life. Few epochs in history are so instructive as this one, or so little debated—debated without prejudice and truthfully, as we now debate the history of Egypt and Rome. Wealth, freshness of sources, and historical impartiality are a perfection unknown to us." His reading of Plato's *Politics* and Rousseau's *Contrat Social* suggested a vaster task: "Will devote the rest of my life to drawing up a plan for an aristocratic, selective union with a monarchical administration on the basis of existing elections. Here I have an aim for a virtuous life. I thank Thee, O Lord. Grant me strength." This huge plan went the way of the other, but he was beginning to feel his way towards an entirely different union of mankind, conceived in the spirit of God and founded on brotherly love.

Thoughts about reading and literature in the diary are few in comparison with those about God and immortality, about good and evil. The effort to make clear to himself the object and meaning of his life integrates all the separate periods of Tolstoy's spiritual and intellectual development. His effort now, filled with the same doubt and uncertainty as before, resulted in thoughts that were unusual for a youth barely twenty-four. Many of them anticipated his mature religious conception of life.

Simplicity, Tolstoy remarked, is the first condition of moral beauty, and clarity the best token of truth, but conscience is man's most reliable guide. "That man whose purpose is his own happiness is bad; he whose purpose is the opinion of others is weak; he whose purpose is the happiness of others is virtuous; he whose purpose is God is great." But does a man whose purpose is God find happiness? Rather, man finds happiness in doing good, and the voice of



conscience is that which distinguishes good from evil. "Both inclination and fate," he concluded, "point out the road that we must choose; but always we labour with the aim of attaining goodness."

In the Caucasus Tolstoy's thoughts turned to God and religion with a sincerity that he had never before experienced. He prayed every morning and found a new efficacy in prayer, because it "was not harmful and was moral solitude." Several moving prayers he set down in his diary over this period. Doubts, however, always lurked in the corners of his mind. He could never succeed, he said, in deriving an idea of God as clearly as the idea of virtue. For "the idea of God comes of man's recognition of his own weakness." By the end of his second year in the Caucasus, he had arrived at a perfectly honest and conventional creed which he wrote down in the diary: "I believe in the one, incomprehensible, and good God, in the immortality of the soul, and in the eternal reward for our deeds; I do not understand the mysteries of the trinity and the birth of the Son of God, but I honour and do not reject the faith of my fathers."

The fundamental rule of behaviour that lay at the base of his whole future religious philosophy Tolstoy recognized clearly at this time: "To live in the present, i.e. to act in the best possible fashion in the present, this is wisdom." He already knew, as he was to preach many years later, that happiness depended not upon circumstances, but upon oneself. His entry in the diary on his birthday was almost as severe as that of the preceding year, except that he added a note of hope for the future: "I'm now 24; yet I have done nothing. I feel that not in vain have I been struggling for 8 years with doubt and passions. For what am I destined? This the future will reveal. Killed 3 woodcocks."

## IX

The beginning of 1853 brought war again. Cadet Tolstoy prepared for action. Mars banished the muses, and in the excitement, contemplation gave way to martial fervour. The hill tribes were gathering, ten thousand of them, and the wily old warrior Shamil was prepared to prevent the attempt of a large Russian force to cut down the forests from Khobi-Shavdonski heights to the Argunskoye gorge in an effort to kill off the Chechenians in this territory or drive them into the Black Mountains. Fierce fighting ensued.

On February 17 Tolstoy distinguished himself in a major attack in which his battery silenced the guns of the enemy. The campaign broke the back of Shamil's resistance.<sup>1</sup>

The campaign also ended Tolstoy's brief period of moral resistance. In camp, drinking, cards, and wenching were the order of the day between attacks. He complained sadly of Nikolai's fondness for vodka, then got drunk himself, picked a fight with Ensign Yanovich for trying to break his fingers, and threatened to challenge him to a duel. He imagined how he would magnanimously give the ensign the first shot and then hold his own fire. The affair ended with mutual apologies, but Tolstoy earned the scowls of the officers for his tactless behaviour.

Tolstoy's bravery in the attack of the 17th once again won him a recommendation for the St. George Cross. There was nothing he wanted so much as this little silver testimony of courageous conduct under fire. He stayed up so late over a game of chess that he failed to appear on duty the morning the award was to be made. Instead of presenting him with a medal, the commander of the brigade had him clapped in the guardhouse. From his prison he heard the drums beat and the band play while the awards were conferred, and he yielded to utter despair. On still a third occasion, sometime later, he was again scheduled to receive this coveted prize, a St. George Cross allotted to his bravery, but upon a hint from his colonel, he gave way to an old soldier of the line for whom the reward meant a pension for life.

When the battery got back to Starogladkovskaya at the end of March, Tolstoy continued to live as he had on the campaign, like a gambler who fears to count how much he owes. His wild Chechenian *kunaks*, Sado and Balta, were always at hand to lead him into some adventure or other. He was still quartered in Epishka's hut, and the ancient Cossack, with his roaring basso, quaint language, and inexhaustible supply of yarns, provided endless entertainment. They would sit up until dawn drinking *chikhir* (native wine), while Epishka related unbelievable stories of his prowess as a hunter, of the souls he had "released" from the bodies of his enemies, of the Chechenets he snared with his lasso at the very edge of his village, and of his mighty success in stealing horses and the hearts of Cossack maidens.

In this latter competition, Tolstoy had again entered the lists. Running through the diary at this time are frank references to

<sup>1</sup> Tolstoy's short story, *The Woodfelling*, is based on this action.

Solomonida, Oksana, Kasatka, Fedosya, Teodorina, Aksinya, and others. "Everything young acts strongly on me," he confessed; "every woman's bare leg seems to me to belong to a beauty." In vain he tried to abide by his rule of exhausting himself with hard physical labour when he felt the ache of strong desire, and to no purpose did he tell himself over and over again that the pleasure was brief and the remorse great. He followed a girl to the public baths, and at night reckoned up his expenses for the day: "25 rubles for the horse; 1 rouble, 30 kopeks for the girl; a rouble for the cab; 70 kopeks for trifles; 58 rubles remain." As on previous occasions, the cost of his promiscuity could not always be tallied in rubles and kopeks. "Kasatka," he wrote, "rewarded me with some mercury, which made me very sad." He feared, without cause, that he had contracted syphilis, but finally decided that even this misfortune might be a mixed blessing: "Yesterday, at the thought that my nose might fall in, I imagined what an immense and beneficial impulse this would give me in the direction of moral development."

At Starogladkovskaya a very noticeable change now took place in Tolstoy's relations with his fellow officers. With simple folk, such as Epishka, soldiers in the ranks, or peasants on the road, he was unusually successful in winning their confidence by his firm, straightforward, uncondescending manner. He felt that these common people were far above his own class by virtue of the work they accomplished and the privation they endured. "There is evil in them," he remarked, "but it is better to say of them (as of the dead) only what is good." With his officer friends, his equals, or those who pretended to be his equals, he was standoffish, always afraid that they would underestimate him. He did not feel at ease with them, because he was convinced that they could never sympathize with his interests. His own standards were beyond their understanding. "Once for all," he wrote in the diary, "I must become accustomed to the thought that I am an exception, and that either I am ahead of my age or am one of those incompatible, unadaptable natures that are never satisfied. . . . I have not yet met a single man who was morally as good as I, and who believed that I do not remember in my life an occasion when I was not attracted by what is good, was not ready to sacrifice everything for it." But his natural conviviality and the desire to be liked by all, which had been strong within him from his boyhood days, finally reasserted themselves. His hut became a common meeting

place for the officers. They dropped in at any hour for a drink of vodka or to chat. Some of them he even impressed into service to copy his manuscripts. When he could curb his sharp tongue and hypercritical nature, they enjoyed his jollity, humour, and superb story-telling ability.

One day Tolstoy and Sado were in a convoy of stores from Fort Vozdvizhenskaya to Fort Groznaya. Although regulations strictly forbade anyone detaching himself from the convoy, because of the danger of being cut off by roving mountaineers, he, Sado, and three mounted officers, impatient with the slow pace of the infantry, rode on ahead. Tolstoy and Sado ascended a ridge to see if any of the enemy were in sight. A large band of them suddenly appeared a short distance away. Shouting a warning to their three comrades below, Tolstoy and Sado galloped for the fort, less than three miles away. The Chechenian band divided, seven of them taking up the pursuit of Tolstoy and Sado and the rest dashing after the other officers. These men had been slow to take the warning, and two of them were severely wounded before reaching the convoy. Meanwhile, Tolstoy, who had been trying out Sado's spirited new horse and might easily have escaped, refused to desert his friend, who was mounted on Tolstoy's slow ambler. The Chechenians drew nearer and nearer, while Sado tried to keep them at a distance by threatening them with an unloaded gun. The enemy could have shot them down, but apparently they desired to take them alive, especially the renegade Sado, whom they no doubt wished to torture. Fortunately, a Cossack guard at the post saw their plight. A rescue party at once galloped out and the Chechenians fled.<sup>1</sup> "I was almost taken prisoner," was Tolstoy's only mention of his narrow escape in the diary, "but on this occasion behaved well, though I was too sentimental."

In July, Tolstoy went to Pyatigorsk to see his sister, who had come with her husband for medical treatment. After some two years of separation, he was delighted to set eyes on Marya, but soon after their meeting he wrote home to Sergei to complain feelingly of the fact that neither she nor her husband had given the slightest evidence of any love for him. He was becoming peculiarly sensitive over his failure to inspire in people the deep devotion of which he himself was capable. Two days before this letter, he wrote in his diary: "Why does nobody love me? I'm not a fool, not deformed, not a bad man, not a dolt. It is incomprehensible."

<sup>1</sup> Tolstoy used this incident in his tale, *A Prisoner of the Caucasus*.

For the next four months Tolstoy wandered in aimless fashion from town to town in the neighbourhood of Pyatigorsk, restless, uneasy in his mind, and not always well. He took up spiritualism and held séances around a table in a sidewalk café. His principal diversions, however, were women and gambling. In August he lost at cards the large sum of three thousand rubles, although in an effort to pay up his outstanding debts he was trying to live on ten rubles a month.

Tolstoy's restlessness and depression were largely induced by the uncertainty about his immediate future. He had not intended to enter the army when he came to the Caucasus, but once having joined he was ambitious for advancement and tangible rewards. He had had a reasonable expectancy of promotion after six months of acceptable service. But two years had passed and he was still a cadet. His brave behaviour at the action of this year (1853) had resulted in a recommendation for a commission. Again, the lack of necessary documents was delaying this promotion, although the usual red tape of the military was also partly responsible. He had written to Aunt Pelageya to use her influence, and in July he had sent an angry letter to his commander, Baryatinski, complaining vehemently of the shabby treatment he was receiving from the man who had strongly urged him to enter the army. Finally, his patience worn out, and against the advice of Auntie Tatyana and Sergei, he sent in his request for a discharge. And when the lack of documents delayed this also, he asked for a furlough.

In the meantime, Russia had declared war against Turkey, and retirement was forbidden until the end of hostilities. Tolstoy had to reconsider his desire to leave the army. His hopes centred on the possibility of obtaining both his promotion and a furlough, and finally a transfer to the army in action against the Turks on the Danube. On October 6, he wrote to his relative, Prince M. D. Gorchakov, head of the General Staff and commander of the Danubian armies, for a transfer. Weighing the possibilities of success, he returned to Starogladkovskaya to await an answer.

## X

During 1853 literary activity was an effective counter-irritant for "Moral deterioration." "Only work can afford me pleasure and profit," he jotted down in the diary. Initial success drove him on. A rigid schedule of work was laid out. Every spare moment he

had his pen in hand. Excited over a piece, his "heart fails," and he "trembles" on taking up his copybook. He read an article on the literary characteristics of genius, which awoke in him "the conviction that I am a remarkable man for my capacity and my eagerness to work." Fame seemed within his grasp.

Tolstoy at first worked hard on *Boyhood*, the continuation of *Childhood*, but lost interest before he finished. In this work there are fewer autobiographical elements and more fiction, but it is too much overlaid with sentiment that borders on sentimentality. For a literary composition to be attractive, he felt that it should be directed by a consistent thought and penetrated by a consistent feeling. These conditions were lacking in *Boyhood*. The wonderful evocative atmosphere of *Childhood* is thinner in the sequel, perhaps because of the greater emphasis he placed upon analysis. Yet this analysis is uncannily convincing, responsive to all the evasive simplicity of a boy's inmost feelings. Some of the descriptive passages, such as the beautiful chapter on the storm, which with his own stern judgment he pronounced "excellent," foreshadow similar passages in later works. He kept the manuscript by him for further correction until after he left the Caucasus.

Tolstoy's moral dissatisfaction with himself at this time no doubt hindered the free functioning of the introspective process so necessary for a sustained effort on *Boyhood*. But this same dissatisfaction he turned to excellent use in a short story, "Notes of a Billiard-Marker," which he wrote with rapt concentration and enthusiasm in four days. He informed Nekrasov when he sent him the manuscript (September 17) that he valued this tale more than *Childhood* or "The Raid." The story has a scant autobiographical framework in the external facts of gambling with the billiard marker and the hero's first sexual experience, but Tolstoy also drew upon his own inner sufferings in his powerful analysis of the hero's moral disintegration. The tale has unquestioned autobiographical significance as a revelation of Tolstoy's spiritual distress at this time.

In 1853 Tolstoy also wrote "Christmas Eve," an unfinished short story of a young man's dissipation in Moscow; he continued "The Novel of a Russian Landowner" and *The Cossacks*; and he began "Caucasian Reminiscences," and "The Woodfelling." This represents a considerable amount of literary activity for a single year that was broken up by an extensive military campaign. And all he wrote was done with extreme care. Of *Boyhood* alone, the length of a short novel, there were three full versions.

## LEO TOLSTOY

It is interesting to observe that at this time Tolstoy began to evince a concern for the absence in contemporary literature of what he thought should be its one aim—morality. He even went so far as to say that “it would really not be a bad thing in every literary work (as in a fable) to write a moral—stating its aim.” This conviction gave him an idea: “to edit a periodical, the sole aim of which would be the dissemination of works morally useful, for which contributions would be accepted only on the condition that they were accompanied by a moral, the printing or non-printing of which would depend on the author’s wish.” Nothing came of this strange idea, nor did he see fit to subscribe to it in his own fiction. Although his tales and novels nearly always possess a strong moral content, it never obtrudes upon the essential artistic unity of the work. But after 1880, he was to return to this idea of his youth, and it influenced his aesthetic theory and practice.

## XI

Back at Starogladkovskaya Tolstoy marked time, waiting for an answer to his request for a transfer. The remote and quiet life of Yasnaya Polyana beckoned to him once again. He agreed with Schiller that no genius can develop in solitude, but he was willing to take this risk if only he could get away from the Caucasus. Nikolai had already resigned from the service, and he felt lonely without him. Much of his leisure was spent in his favourite sport of hunting, which was no anodyne, however, to the depression he felt over the futility of his present existence. So strong was the desire to reform that he tried to do a good deed every day, once giving away his horse to a passing Cossack for lack of a less expensive opportunity to appease his conscience.

On January 12, 1854, Tolstoy received the welcome news that he had been transferred to the 5th Battery of the 12th Artillery Brigade in active service on the Danube, and his request for a furlough was also granted. A week later, he joyfully set out on the trip to Yasnaya Polyana.

Tolstoy’s two and a half years in the Caucasus were a momentous period in his life. They provided a severe moral and physical test from which he emerged a maturer and more highly developed man. In his efforts towards self-perfection, he was inclined to magnify his moral failings. The remarkable fact is that he had any moral scruples left, when one considers the customary loose

living of frontier soldiers and the easy morals of the natives. The sternly subjective picture of himself reflected in his diary and letters must be corrected by the objective appraisal of his friends and associates over this period. The natives held him in high esteem. They admired his simplicity, honesty, and generosity, his expert horsemanship and unquestioned bravery, which won for him their highest commendation, the title of *dzhigit*. And once he learned not to demand too much from the officers, he gained their respect and even their admiration. When he left Starogladkovskaya, his friends Zhukevich and Alekseyev, his colonel, who had borne much from him, wept sincere tears of regret. On the road home, his thoughts dwelt upon these comrades of the last two years for whom he formerly had no respect, and he admitted to himself that in the end he had become fond of them, because he had finally learned not to pick people out, but to see what was good even in the bad ones.

Although Tolstoy had repeatedly expressed dislike for his Caucasian existence, with that common perversity of man he was able to look back on it as one of the best periods of his life. Only a few months after he left, he remarked that he had begun to love the Caucasus with a posthumous but strong affection. He never attempted, however, to rationalize his loneliness and unhappiness there, or the fact that life had seemed to lose all sense for him then. Rather, he regarded it as a crucible in which his finest qualities had been severely tested. It was both "a grievous and splendid" time when he had scaled the heights of thought and enjoyed the first, unforgettable rapture of the author who has succeeded.

Tolstoy's trip home was uneventful, save for an unusually fierce blizzard that inspired his short story, "The Snowstorm." He arrived at Yasnaya Polyana on February 2, 1854.



## Chapter VIII

### MY HERO IS TRUTH

**A**T YASNAYA POLYANA the cadet from the Caucasus received a hearty welcome. Tolstoy found the affairs of his estate in good order, and himself "out of date, amended and aged." The chief defect and peculiarity of his character, he presently decided, was that he had remained morally young too long, and that only now, at the age of twenty-five, had he acquired an independent, masculine view of things. He tested it that same day on a certain Mavrikiya, a pretty girl who distracted him at his prayers in chapel.

After a hurried visit to his sister's estate at Pokrovskoye, Tolstoy returned to find his three brothers awaiting him. Their reunion was joyous. Infinite talk amid infinite tobacco smoke lasted far into the night; then all four made up a bed on the floor and continued their chatter. Only Dmitri worried Tolstoy. Always strange and unconventional, Dmitri's deeply religious and chaste nature had lately succumbed to worldly temptation. His morbid conscience, like that of some character out of Dostoyevsky, had compelled him to pay for the release of his first prostitute from a brothel and make her his common-law wife. Moral and physical doom seemed already stamped upon his face and mind.<sup>1</sup>

A few days after their meeting, the brothers went to Moscow together. Tolstoy lavished money on military equipment, for news of his promotion to the rank of ensign had reached him. He next made his way to Dmitri's estate in the Kursk district, and from there, having first taken the precaution to write his will, he set out for the active Army of the Danube on March 3.

Nine days later Tolstoy, almost sick with fatigue, arrived at Bucharest; he had travelled some fourteen hundred miles by way

<sup>1</sup> Certain traits of Dmitri have perhaps entered into the characterizations of Prince Nekhlyudov in *Boyhood* and Nikolai Levin in *Anna Karenina*.

of Poltava and Kishinyov, and most of it in rickety conveyances. Instead of the atmosphere of war he expected to be plunged into, he found the city disappointingly peaceful.

Russia's gratuitous guardianship of the Holy Places of Jerusalem and her pretended concern for the fate of Orthodox Christians in Turkey had been the ostensible reasons for a break with that country. In reality, Nicholas I wished to distract the minds of his oppressed people from the annoying subject of reforms; then, he also had an interest in establishing his influence over Turkey in order to control sea traffic in the eastern Mediterranean. In July 1853, Russia had mobilized her armies and occupied Moldavia and Wallachia in order to force Turkey's compliance with the Tsar's demands.

Turkey, however, was in no hurry to comply, for she had received unofficial assurances from the British of full support, despite that government's seemingly official support of Russia. With this uncertainty on both sides, hostilities progressed with caution. About the time Tolstoy reached Bucharest, the war had taken a new turn. In the preceding January, Britain, France, Austria, and Prussia had met to declare their concern over Russia's invasion of the Ottoman Empire. The principal, though unspoken, factor behind this opposition was England's determination to keep the Russians out of the eastern Mediterranean, for the Suez Canal had already been projected and England wanted no threat to these new lines to the east. France supported England, because Napoleon III had been offended by the snobbish Tsar; also, a successful war would help to prop up his insecure throne. Accordingly, England and France broke off relations with Russia in March 1854, and shortly after this, while Tolstoy was in Bucharest, the Russian armies crossed the Danube and laid siege to Silistria.

Auntie Tatyana had hopes that her darling would obtain the rather safe sinecure of adjutant to his relative, Prince M. D. Gorchakov, Commander-in-Chief of the Danubian forces. Tolstoy quickly paid his respects to the prince, and although he was kindly received, pride prevented him from making any direct overtures to the general. Since no one seemed anxious to use his services immediately, he was quite content to amuse himself with the ample pleasures afforded by Bucharest, the first European city he had seen. In the company of the prince's two nephews—"fine lads," he called them—he enjoyed his fill of Italian opera, the French theatre, and less cultured entertainment.

This tourist existence came to a sudden end on March 22, when Tolstoy was assigned to the 3rd Battery of the 11th Artillery Brigade, stationed at Oltenitza, not far from Bucharest. For the moment he regarded philosophically enough the fact that he had not been taken on the General Staff as an adjutant. In May, he was able to write to Auntie Tatyana: "I have a fit of conscience when I think that you believe me exposed to every danger, while I've still not smelt Turkish powder and live here tranquilly at Bucharest promenading about, occupied with music, and eating ice cream." He remained at Oltenitza only a couple of weeks, quarrelled with his battery commander, and finally obtained a post on the staff of Lieutenant General A. O. Serzhputovski, Commander of Artillery of the Army of the Danube. At first he admired the general and found the officers on the staff "for the most part, men *comme il faut*." After fulfilling several commissions that took him about the countryside, he returned to Bucharest for medical treatment.

Towards the end of May, Tolstoy rejoined General Serzhputovski's staff which was with the army before besieged Silistria. This time he got a smell of Turkish powder. At first he had eyes only for the beautiful poetic dress that so often adorns the ugly body of war. The Russian camp was pitched on the lofty right bank of the Danube, amid the superb gardens of the city's governor. From this elevated position Tolstoy took delight in gazing out over the smoothly flowing river, dotted with green islets; and beneath him he saw, as though they were in the palm of his hand, the clear outlines of Silistria with its network of fortifications. It was a queer sort of pleasure, he remarked, to look at people killing each other; for hours he would watch in the distance bloody skirmishes between Russian and Turkish soldiers. Day and night the cannonading thundered. The first night the furious firing frightened him; he thought an assault was taking place. But he soon grew accustomed to it and amused himself by counting, watch in hand, the frequency of the explosions, reckoning one hundred and ten to the minute. The dangerous business of carrying dispatches robbed the scene of its poetic charm. On one occasion the familiar practical joker of the army, wishing to test the young count's courage, led Tolstoy along a very exposed terrain with maddening slowness. Tolstoy showed no apparent concern over the flying bullets, but inwardly, he admitted later, he was sick with fear.

## MY HERO IS TRUTH

At this siege Tolstoy had an opportunity to observe the fine leadership of Prince Gorchakov. In a letter to Auntie Tatyana he described the old general's fearlessness under fire, his endless care for all the details of the action, and his sympathy for the sufferings of common soldiers and civilians. The prince became a hero in his eyes, and he now wished that his aunt's hope would come true, for he could imagine no service more worthy than that of adjutant to such a noble warrior. In this same letter Tolstoy told of the soldierly control of Gorchakov in a moment of bitter disappointment. With the utmost care he had planned the assault on Silistria, and the Russian forces had every hope of success. Shortly before the attack was to take place, an order came through to cancel it (the reason was the fear of Austria in the Russian rear). With not a word of criticism, Gorchakov cheerfully commanded a retreat, and on June 10 the Russian Army of the Danube began an orderly withdrawal to its own frontier.

## II

When the army reached Bucharest, Tolstoy requested General Gorchakov for a transfer to any place where the service was more active. Operations for fistulas, however, kept him in Bucharest for more than a month. When not ill, he indulged himself in the loose living that his conscience abhorred. With tiresome iteration he repeated in the diary: "I'm firmly resolved to dedicate my life to the service of my neighbours. For the last time I tell myself: 'If three days pass without my having done anything of service to people, I will kill myself.'" Although he continued to live—not very tranquilly, to be sure—it is difficult to discover any concrete examples of service to his neighbours over this period. On the contrary, in fits of anger he beat his servant and made himself obnoxious to many of his fellow officers.

By now Tolstoy had become almost a professional self-critic; such persistent preoccupation with his faults left little time for the practice of virtues. Yet, the "masculine view of things" that he had formulated upon his return from the Caucasus began to temper these endless moral eviscerations. Instead of always reaching for the moon and falling on his belly, he tried to achieve the practical limits beyond which moral virtue ceased to be anything other than an unattainable ideal.

As soon as he was alone, Tolstoy involuntarily returned to his

former ideal of perfecting himself; but now he at last realized that all along he had been confusing perfecting himself with perfection. "One must first understand oneself and one's defects well and try to correct them," he wrote, "and not set oneself the task of being perfect, which is not only impossible to achieve from the low point at which I stand, but which, when once perceived, one even loses hope of the possibility of achieving perfection. . . . One must take oneself as one is and try to correct the corrigible faults. A fine nature will lead me to what is good without a *notebook*, which for so long has been a nightmare. My character desires, seeks, and is ready for all that is fine, and for that very reason it is incapable of being consistently good."

One is tempted to shout: Eureka! In all his voluminous self-criticism, this was Tolstoy's first clear recognition of the limitations of his own nature and of the reasonable possibilities of improving it. And with the same insight, he now admitted that he loved fame more than goodness, and that his frequent inability to make friends arose from an inclination to show his superiority. Indeed, he quickly observed that when he curbed his tendency to appear majestic and infallible, his relations with people were pleasanter and easier. Lack of character, irritability, and laziness he set down in the diary as his three chief defects, and he repeated them at the end of his daily entries so that he would not forget.

The pleasures of Bucharest, like those of Moscow and Petersburg, sorely tempted Tolstoy, and the gay young blades among his army comrades beguiled him into gambling and "gadding about," a euphemism in the diary for pursuing loose women. Some of his abandonment was temporarily checked by unexpectedly meeting his commanding officer at a brothel. An occasional romantic interlude, such as his attraction for the landlady's pretty daughter, varied this dissipation. He furtively watched her from his window at night as she leaned out of hers. A barrel organ in the street played a familiar waltz, and as the sounds faded in the distance, the girl sighed deeply, and moved away from the window. "I grew so sadly pleasant," one reads in the diary, "that I involuntarily smiled, and long continued to gaze at my street lamp, the light of which was sometimes concealed by the branches of a tree swaying in the breeze, at the tree itself, at the wooden fence, and at the heavens, which all seemed better than before." The poetry vanished with a very unromantic concluding observation: "Ate beet soup while I have diarrhoea that keeps getting worse."

Despite romance, diarrhoea, dissipation, and other distractions, Tolstoy made a serious effort to continue his literary work at Bucharest. His reading was considerable, including both native and foreign authors, especially Goethe and Schiller. Like Mark Twain, however, he found "something ridiculous in the German language." He also read, in a German translation, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which had roused much interest in Europe. The book impressed him, not for its literary merit, but for the feeling it conveyed. The question of the emancipation of the serfs was in the air. He commented in the diary on a long discussion of Russian serfdom with one of his friends, and his reaction indicates that he had not progressed much beyond the youthful ideas in the early experiment with his own peasants at Yasnaya Polyana. "It's true," he wrote, "that slavery is an evil thing, but ours is a very benevolent evil." Nicholas I might have said the same thing at this time.

Nekrasov had written Tolstoy a very flattering letter about *Boyhood*, which had been accepted by the *Contemporary*. As usual, such praise encouraged him and he began to work hard on two other stories. This effort was cut short by an order to leave Bucharest with the staff of General Serzhputovski for the Russian frontier. He reached Kishinyov on September 9, and there he learned that he had been promoted to the rank of sub-lieutenant.

## III

Nicholas I had displayed some of the humility of common sense in ordering a withdrawal of his army from the Danubian provinces after Britain and France had broken with him in March. Some kind of peace should have been patched up at that point, but the dogs of war had been unleashed and a few territorial or diplomatic bones had to be thrown to them before their masters could call them off. Accordingly, the British and French had started the quite needless campaign of the Crimea.

As the allies sailed up the Black Sea coast, English officers in their flagship took off their hats and bowed ceremoniously to the helpless Russians who gazed at them from the shore. This expeditionary force landed at Eupatoria on September 2, the only resistance being a plaintive plea of the Russian governor that the disembarking enemy consider itself in strict quarantine.

The day before Tolstoy's arrival in Kishinyov, a battle had been fought on the Alma River in the Crimea. The British went up the

slope in the face of the enemy's fire as though they were marching at Hyde Park; their French allies, innocent of any prearranged plan of attack, fought a separate action by their side. As for the Russians under Menshikov, no one received any orders and every man did what he thought best. A victory for the allies was the result of the general mismanagement. A quiver of patriotism ran through the vast Russian Empire at the thought of the native land invaded for the first time since Napoleon. On September 11, the allies started their advance on Sevastopol, about thirty miles away, the only Russian naval base on the Black Sea.

The seriousness of their country's plight did not quickly dawn on Tolstoy and the young officers of Serzhputovski's staff. They found the lively, cosmopolitan society of Kishinyov highly diverting, and the war atmosphere only served to intensify the gaiety. Tolstoy did not lag behind his comrades in their carousing; his precious rules, though never forgotten, were broken with impunity in the excitement. The spice of royalty was added to the general liveliness by the arrival of the two young Grand Dukes, Nikolai Nikolayevich and Mikhail Nikolayevich, who were on their way to the front to bolster morale. To Tolstoy they seemed "to have the air of excessively good children and were very fine lads, both of them."

Rumours from the Crimea filled the air. When they were bad, gloom hung over the staff; a good report called for a celebration with champagne. Such was the news of the battle of Balaklava. The comedy of tragic errors of this ghastly campaign had already begun. After Alma, the allies, slowly moving on Sevastopol, were hindered by a lack of maps of the region, and those in the possession of the Russians were so inaccurate that a regiment, having marched all day away from the city, found itself back at Sevastopol by nightfall. Instead of attempting to take at once the poorly defended city from the north, as the Russians expected, the British and French marched leisurely around Sevastopol and set up their bases to the south. All this manœuvring gave the brilliant Russian engineer Totleben plenty of time to surround the city with a formidable system of defence works. The allies finally got around to bombarding Sevastopol on October 5, but failed to follow up with an assault. A week later a Russian force, under General P. P. Liprandi, attempted to relieve the fortress by a sudden attack on the English right and rear, aimed at their base at Balaklava. A fierce charge by the Heavy Cavalry Brigade checked the Russian

onset, but the more famous charge of the Light Cavalry Brigade in the wrong direction did not help the British cause. In the end, the advantage was with the Russians who had cut the only road between the British and their base.

The news electrified Tolstoy and his army friends. A group of them, chafing under their enforced inaction, had decided to form a society to educate the common soldier. In a few days this idea had changed into a plan to edit a popular army magazine to help maintain a good spirit among the troops. In simple language it would carry courageous exploits, descriptions of battles, and the biographies and obituaries of worthy, and especially of obscure, men. Soldiers' songs also would be printed. After some hesitation, Tolstoy backed the plan with enthusiasm and was chosen editor. He drew up a prospectus, taking care not to offend the traditional conservatism of the military authorities, and sent it to Prince Gorchakov for approval. The prince was pleased and submitted the prospectus with a sample number of the magazine to the Emperor. Tolstoy feared that the articles he and a friend contributed to the sample number were not quite orthodox enough. In order to raise money for the project, he sent home an order to sell the large house in which he had been born, a most painful decision for him.<sup>1</sup> The group of young altruists waited impatiently for an answer from the Emperor.

Several weeks later came the sorrowful report of the battle of Inkerman (October 24). A Russian force, superior in numbers, had been repulsed with a loss of more than ten thousand killed and wounded. Although rumours of treachery filled the air, the truth was that the obstinate courage, outmoded muskets, and poor marksmanship of the Russians were no match for the tough, stolid English and volatile, brave French with their modern Minié rifles. Like a slow, angry tide, the Russian forces ebbed back to Sevastopol. Both sides settled down to a winter of siege warfare.

Tolstoy's patriotism, like that of most Russians at the time, was tremendously aroused by tales of the heroic defence of Sevastopol. Fierce indignation stirred in him over the ugly rumours of betrayal and faulty leadership connected with Inkerman. In his diary he gave way to sentiments that would have shocked him

<sup>1</sup> This was the central structure built by grandfather Volkonski. When it was sold and removed, the wings remained. Eventually the present main structure at *Yasnaya Polyana* was erected in place of the original building.



years later. "Horrible slaughter!" he wrote. "It will weigh on the souls of many! Lord, forgive them! The news of this affair [Inkerman] has produced an impression. I met old men who wept aloud, and young ones who swore to kill Danenberg [commander of the Russian forces at Inkerman]. Great is the moral strength of the Russian people. Many political truths will come out and develop in these days of difficulty for Russia. The feeling of passionate love for the fatherland that is arising and flowing from the misfortunes of Russia will long leave its trace in her."

Tolstoy could not continue to remain at Kishinyov while his countrymen were dying behind the earthworks of Sevastopol. He felt ashamed of his very security when he heard that I. K. Komstadius, a young friend of the staff of the projected army magazine, had been killed at Inkerman. A request for a transfer to Sevastopol was finally granted. He left Kishinyov with a group of officers, and because of the blockade travelled by way of Odessa, Kherson, and Oleshko. At the latter place he was detained, he wrote in the diary, "by a pretty and intelligent Ukrainian girl whom I kissed and caressed through the window. At night she came to me. . . . My remembrance would have been better," he ruefully concluded, "if I had remained at the window." Meanwhile his friends had left him far behind. Would he be late for the storming of Sevastopol that was threatened? He hurried on and reached the city November 7.

## IV

The storming turned out to be just another rumour. Tolstoy had demanded a transfer to the besieged city, he told his brother Sergei, partly because he wanted to see the war, partly to get away from General Serzhputovski's staff which he had come to dislike, but mostly because of the feeling of patriotism that now strongly influenced him. When he saw the appalling conditions of Sevastopol and the spirit of the defenders, he was filled with an ardent desire for victory. Enthusiastically he wrote to Sergei: "The spirit among the troops is beyond any description. In the time of ancient Greece there was not so much heroism. Kornilov,<sup>1</sup> making the rounds of his troops, instead of hailing them with: 'Good health to you, lads!' says: 'If you must die, lads, will you die?' And the soldiers shout: 'We will die, Your Excellency! Hurrah!' And they

<sup>1</sup> Vice-Admiral V. A. Kornilov, who played a most distinguished role in the first days of the siege and was fatally wounded at the initial bombardment.

do not say it for the effect," continued Tolstoy, "for in every face one saw not jesting, but earnestness, and 22,000 men have already fulfilled that promise."

Russian soldiers have never been deficient in courage, but an inspired bravery took possession of the defenders of Sevastopol, especially in the early days of the siege when their strength was fresh and hopes high. In this same letter to Sergei, Tolstoy proudly described how soldiers nearly mutinied when ordered to withdraw from batteries where they had been exposed to shellfire for thirty days; how they snatched the burning fuses from fallen bombs; how priests fearlessly read prayers under fire at the bastions; and how women from the town were wounded and killed while carrying water to the troops. They were wonderful days, he declared, and thanked God that he had been spared to see such people live in this glorious time. He admired the French and British prisoners he talked with. They appeared morally and physically finer than the Russian soldiers, who seemed "small, lousy, and shrivelled up" in comparison. But he promised Sergei to tell of the brave deeds of these lousy, shrivelled heroes who would not be convinced that the enemy could take the city.

Shortly after reaching Sevastopol, Tolstoy received an answer to his petition to edit a popular army magazine. The Emperor's reply was "No." Ironically Tolstoy wrote to Nekrasov: "On my project the Emperor most graciously gave his permission to print our articles in *The Gazette*," the dull official publication of the Ministry of War. Tolstoy suspected that people in the capital, who feared the competition of his proposed magazine, had used their influence against it; another guess was that his plan did not accord with the government's views. Such reactions indicate his political naïveté, a kind of ignorance not uncommon among young men of his class. No one with even the slightest awareness of the black reactionary and bureaucratic nature of Nicholas I would have ventured to hope for his approval of a popular army magazine, the purpose of which was to educate and brighten, no matter how harmlessly, the lives of his millions of ignorant peasant soldiers.

Tolstoy's stay in Sevastopol on this occasion lasted only eight days. He was transferred again to another artillery brigade, and his battery was ordered to take up a position near Simferopol, a few miles from the besieged city. Five days after his arrival at his new post (November 20), he inserted in the diary a brief poem, among the very few verses that he wrote in his lifetime:

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When, tell me when I at last may start  
This aimless, passionless life to forsake?  
When cease to feel the wound deep in my heart,  
While still not knowing how to soothe its ache?

The wound that's pained me from life's dawn,  
This only God alone can know about;  
Of future nothingness the bitter pawn,  
Of sadness that wearies and wearying doubt.

v

For more than a month Tolstoy remained with his battery at the little Tatar village of Eski-Orda near Simferopol. The comparative quiet of this bucolic setting was a striking contrast to the thunder and slaughter of Sevastopol. Hunting, dancing, music, reading, and philosophical disputes with the officers took the place of warlike activities. Of late, however, the art of war had been much on Tolstoy's mind. Whatever his deficiencies as a soldier, and they were many, he was a keen observer of army detail. Like most intellectuals in such circumstances, he had a certain contempt for the professional military mind, and the tragic consequences of its inefficiency aroused his anger. By now sober reality had dulled the fine edge of his patriotism, and he began to see clearly that things were going badly for the Russians, and that they must completely reorganize themselves or fall. On a visit to Sevastopol on December 5 to obtain guns, he noted with satisfaction the improved order that had been introduced in the defence by the new commander of the city's garrison, Baron D. E. Osten-Saken. Such a hopeful turn of affairs perhaps emboldened Tolstoy to offer some suggestions of his own for improvements. On his next trip to Sevastopol (January 15), he visited the vital Fourth Bastion, talked with Totleben, and then presented to Osten-Saken a project for the reorganization of batteries. He also worked on another plan for the formation of rifle brigades as a means of overcoming the fatal inferiority of the Russians in small-arms equipment.<sup>1</sup>

How these innovations were received is not known. Perhaps they were placed in the same category as the suggestion of Tolstoy's friend, Prince S. S. Urusov, a brave officer and brilliant chess player. He proposed to Osten-Saken that a challenge be sent to the English to play a game of chess for the foremost trench in

<sup>1</sup> The drafts of these projects have been lost.

front of the Fifth Bastion, a trench that had already changed hands several times at the cost of hundreds of lives. At any rate, it is unlikely that the fresh views of a mere sub-lieutenant would be taken seriously in a military bureaucracy noted for impregnable traditionalism. That he got a hearing at all may be attributed to certain privileges he enjoyed as a relative of Prince Gorchakov, who had recently been appointed Commander-in-Chief of all the Russian forces in the Crimea.

The seriousness of the situation, however, deeply impressed Tolstoy and drove him on to a bolder attempt to reform, to which has been given the title "A Memorandum on the Negative Aspects of the Russian Soldier and Officer." This document is a bitter arraignment of the inhuman conditions, the graft and mismanagement, in the Russian army. "By virtue of my oath," he wrote, "and still more of my feeling for humanity, I cannot be silent about an evil that openly exists and obviously involves the destruction of millions of people and of forces of worth and of honour to the fatherland." With dogged factualness he described in turn the position of soldiers, lower officers, generals, and the commander-in-chief. A soldier is beaten if he smokes a pipe with a long stem, if he wishes to marry, or if he dares to notice how his superior steals from him. How many Russian officers, Tolstoy asked, are shot by Russian bullets? Our soldiers are brave, he said, because death for them is a blessing. "The majority of officers have one aim—to steal their fortunes out of the service, and they retire once they have achieved this end. . . . We have not an army," he concluded, "but a crowd of oppressed, disciplined slaves, confessed plunderers and hirelings."

There are a great many more forceful home truths of this sort in the memorandum, and Tolstoy ended it with an earnest appeal for reform. His original intention was to send the document to one of the Grand Dukes. Fortunately, he abandoned this idea and wisely kept his plan of reform out of circulation. The thought and indignation behind it, however, soon found another outlet in a purely literary work.

## VI

Another transfer in the middle of January moved Tolstoy to a new battery stationed on the Belbek River, about seven miles from Sevastopol. It was an unfortunate change. The chief interest of his captain, a huge, awkward brute, was in lining his pockets with the

battery's surplus funds. He was "the dirtiest creature imaginable," complained Tolstoy, "and the senior officer a nasty, mean, little Pole. And I'm bound to, and even depend on, these people." It was cold in the earth huts; there was not a single book to read and no one to talk to. In his disgust and boredom he sought relief in gambling. Just at this low point he received the five thousand rubles for the sale of his house, money that he had requested for the now abandoned plan of the army magazine. In two days and nights of steady playing, he lost it all and even went into debt. The fever gripped him; he continued to gamble in the vain hope of recouping his losses. His situation grew desperate. He thought of obtaining a leave, of procuring a transfer to Kishinyov, or of entering the Military Academy. Although he flattered himself that he played "scientifically" on the basis of the elaborate system he had worked out, his reputation as an unlucky gambler became a byword. A few of the officers tried to protect him by refusing to play with him.

Tolstoy's only solace during this unhappy time was his friendship with a shadowy young officer, A. A. Bronevski. "I have never encountered a better heart," he wrote of him to Auntie Tatyana, "or a character as noble as that of this man . . ." Probably out of a discussion with Bronevski emerged a most significant thought. For Tolstoy entered in his diary on March 4: "Yesterday a conversation about divinity and faith suggested to me a great, a stupendous idea to the realization of which I feel capable of dedicating my whole life. This is the idea—the founding of a new religion corresponding to the development of mankind: the religion of Christ, but purged of all dogma and mysteriousness, a practical religion, not promising future bliss but realizing bliss on earth. I understand that to bring this idea to fulfilment the conscientious labour of generations towards this end will be necessary. One generation will bequeath the idea to the next, and some day fanaticism or reason will achieve it. *Consciously* to contribute to the union of man and religion is the basic idea which I hope will improve me." The Ant Brotherhood's green stick on which was written the mysterious message of childhood days seems to have taken root.

At this time of deep personal discouragement amid the surroundings of war Tolstoy was suddenly illuminated by the spiritual incandescence that would brighten the road of the last thirty years of his life. But this seed of a new religion had been planted in him very early. For years, however, his quest for fame and selfish personal happiness left the seed unnourished in the dark earth of

his soul; and when it broke through at last the flower that grew was born of this same seed that bloomed prematurely for a passing moment in his rough soldier's camp on the Belbek.

For some eight months, since leaving Bucharest, Tolstoy had shirked his writing. In his present frame of mind, he was inclined to blame the army for his lapse. "A military career," he noted in the diary, "is not for me, and the sooner I get out of it and devote myself entirely to literature the better." A letter from his sister dispelled this gloomy thought. She told of her acquaintance with Turgenev (he eventually fell a bit in love with Marya), who lived not far from her estate, and of the famous author's lavish praise of her brother's ability. And his inertia entirely vanished after reading a very flattering review of "Notes of a Billiard-Marker," which had appeared in the January *Contemporary*. "This is pleasant," he observed, "and useful in that it inflames my vanity and incites me to activity." He at once got to work on *Youth*, the sequel to *Boyhood*. Sometime before, he had written to Nekrasov to offer him the material that he and his friends had intended for the stillborn army magazine. Nekrasov now wrote of his eagerness to publish such material, which Tolstoy had neglected to say was almost non-existent at that moment. This encouraging answer, however, inspired him to work on his own contribution, and he began the first of his three celebrated Sevastopol sketches.

Events interrupted Tolstoy's writing but also provided him with the opportunity for invaluable material. On February 18 Nicholas I had died, but his successor, Alexander II, decided to continue the war. Tolstoy heralded the new reign in his diary with the following observation: "Immense changes await Russia. One must work and be strong in order to take part in the great moments in the life of Russia." His own immediate part was to be a very dangerous one. On March 28 the allies began a terrific bombardment of Sevastopol. For ten terrible days the smoke-filled city cowered under a hail of cannon shot and exploding bombs from some two thousand guns. An assault was expected and Tolstoy's battery, along with many others, was ordered to Sevastopol.

## VII

The Fourth Bastion,<sup>1</sup> most southern and exposed point in the labyrinthine Sevastopol earthworks constructed by Totleben, was

<sup>1</sup> This fortification was called the Flagstaff Bastion by the English.

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under almost continual fire, and many men had died in its defence. Here Tolstoy was placed in charge of a battery of guns and served on a schedule of four days on and eight days off from April 3 to May 15.

Life at the Fourth Bastion, with the enemy lines scarcely two hundred yards away, was rendered bearable only by the rough tenderness of comradeship that often exists in circumstances of constant danger. In this early example of modern trench warfare, heroism was a matter of retaining one's humanity under the slow, disintegrating agony of ever-present death. The chief thing was not to think. Under these trying conditions, Tolstoy's nature expanded and exulted. He got on excellently with everyone. "What a fine spirit there is among the sailors!"<sup>1</sup> he wrote in the diary. . . . "My little soldiers are also grand, and I'm happy when with them." The next day: "The same Fourth Bastion, which I'm beginning to like very much. . . . The constant charm of danger, observing the soldiers with whom I'm living, the sailors, and the methods of warfare, are so agreeable that I do not wish to leave here, all the more so since I should like to be present at the assault, if there is to be one."

When not directing the fire of his battery, Tolstoy worked feverishly away at his manuscripts of *Youth* or the first Sevastopol sketch in the bombproof dugout, an oblong hole in the rocky ground covered with oak beams. The dull boom of cannon fire could be heard overhead, or the more distinct sound of a rat scratching among the stones. By the light of a candle a group of soldiers crouched in the corner and played "noses." Tolstoy wrote away undisturbed by their laughter when the winner smacked the loser's nose with the pack of cards. He took particular note of their rough humour. A soldier tumbled into the dugout and one of the group cried out:

"Hullo, brother! Why not stay outside? Don't the girlies play merrily enough out there?"

"They're playing such fine tunes as we never heard in our village," the newcomer retorted good-naturedly.

Or some one of the group would leave the dugout, followed by a laughing shout:

"Look out, or you'll be getting your discharge in full before tonight!"

<sup>1</sup> Many sailors from the sunken and bottled-up Russian warships in Sevastopol Harbour valiantly aided in the defence of the city.

Here was rich ore for an author, and Tolstoy mined it assiduously at the Fourth Bastion. By the end of April he sent to Nekrasov his first sketch, *Sevastopol in December*. It was published in the June number of the *Contemporary* and aroused much favourable comment. Alexander II read it with emotion, had it translated into French, and is reported to have dispatched an order to "guard well the life of that young man."

Tolstoy's service at the dangerous Fourth Bastion revived in him the exalted patriotism that thrilled everyone during the early days of the siege. His first Sevastopol sketch described that time in brilliant genre pictures of the city and of individuals among its inhabitants and defenders. Nothing could have been better calculated to raise the flagging hopes of a nation sick with the carnage and suffering of Sevastopol. Tolstoy frankly and most effectively appealed to the patriotism of the Russian people by telling them of the noble spirit and simple, self-sacrificing heroism of the city's brave defenders.

Towards the end of his period of duty at the Fourth Bastion, Tolstoy's own spirits wavered. Was he good for nothing, he wondered, save cannon fodder? The wretched existence undermined his health, and daily exposure to mortal danger from the thudding cannon shots, bursting bombs, and whistling rifle bullets was reflected in his prayer in the diary at this time: "O Lord! I thank Thee for Thy constant protection. How surely Thou ledest me to goodness. And what an insignificant creature I should be if Thou shouldst abandon me. Do not desert me, O Lord! Help me, not for the satisfaction of my insignificant aims, but to achieve the eternal, great, and unseen aim of existence of which I am conscious."

He believed the soldiers' spirits were failing; their former stubborn conviction that Sevastopol would never fall had vanished. Deeply disturbed, he drafted a report to General Gorchakov (probably never sent), in which he predicted in burning words the capitulation of Sevastopol, unless something were done at once to recapture its defenders' indomitable spirit and enthusiasm.

Tolstoy had had his fill of the Fourth Bastion, and a letter at this point from his influential Aunt Pelageya to her relative General Gorchakov gave him some hope of realizing his ambition of an appointment as adjutant to the Commander-in-Chief. Instead, he was not entirely dissatisfied to receive charge, on May 15, of a battery of mountain guns stationed on the Belbek River, and



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without any regrets he soon left the Fourth Bastion to take up his new post.<sup>1</sup>

### VIII

While in charge of the battery, Tolstoy hardly acquitted himself with distinction. Although he loathed corporal punishment, he beat his soldiers in fits of temper. The swearing of officers at their troops disgusted him and he invented a meaningless "cuss word" to replace the most obscene of these oaths. Yet, when he left the service, his troops told his successor that never had they known such a swearer as Count Tolstoy. His defiance of army tradition irritated his equals, and on one occasion earned him a severe reprimand from his chief.

In budgeting for a battery, the government permitted a surplus over fixed charges, with the intention that it should be used for miscellaneous items. It became an accepted practice for commanders to pocket as much of this surplus as possible; in fact, they actually came to believe that the government connived in this "harmless" form of peculation. Of course, various "economies" were introduced in the matter of soldiers' supplies, in order to assure a surplus worth taking.

So settled was this tradition that Tolstoy, upon becoming commander of a battery, deliberately planned to use funds from the surplus to pay off some of his debts. His moral sense, however, convinced him that this would be stealing. When other battery commanders learned that he intended to turn back any surplus, they saw to it that he was summoned before General N. A. Kryzhanovski, Artillery Chief of Staff. The general roundly scolded him for prejudicing the legitimate "earnings" of the other commanders. Tolstoy stood his ground; he answered that the money was not his, and hence he would return it to the government.

In most respects, however, Tolstoy was well liked by his fellow officers. The more modest, manly, and understanding attitude he had fostered towards the end of his service in the Caucasus was continued in the Crimea. A few warm friendships sprang up. No one could ignore his straight, well-formed figure and the striking

<sup>1</sup> It has been argued that this transfer was made at the command of the Tsar, who wished to protect Tolstoy's life after reading *Sevastopol in December*. However, he could hardly have read the sketch before May 15, the date of the transfer. It is more likely that Aunt Pelageya's letter was the principal factor in the transfer. That is, Prince Gorchakov did not see fit to grant her request to make Tolstoy an adjutant, but he did remove him from a perilous post, and gave him what was in effect a promotion.

## MY HERO IS TRUTH

if not handsome face, set off by wonderfully thoughtful and penetrating eyes. His conviviality, the masterful way in which he told a tale, his fine sense of honour in all relations, and his brave bearing and generosity were commented on by his fellow officers. They marvelled at his strength, for he would lie down and lift from the floor two heavy men standing one each on his outstretched hands.

“Tolstoy inspired all of us,” wrote one of his Sevastopol comrades, “during the trying times of the campaign, by his anecdotes and couplets deftly struck off. He was really the soul of the battery. When Tolstoy was with us, we never noticed how the time flew, and there was no end to the general gaiety. . . . When the count had vanished, driving off to Simferopol, then everyone had a long face. One day passes, then a second, and a third. . . . At last, he would return, like the prodigal son, gloomy, worn out, and dissatisfied with himself. . . . He would take me aside, quite apart, and begin his confession. He would tell all—how he had caroused, gambled, where he had spent his days and nights; and he would condemn himself and suffer as though he were a real criminal. He was so distressed that it was pitiful to see him. That’s the kind of a man he was. In short, a queer fellow, and to tell the truth, one not entirely understood by me; on the other hand he was a rare comrade, the most honourable soul, and a man one never forgot.”

### IX

For the next two and a half months after taking charge of his battery, Tolstoy avoided reasonably well the excesses into which inactivity usually led him. He read Goethe, Thackeray, and Balzac, translated a poem of Heine, and finished the third and last version of *The Woodfelling*, which appeared in the *Contemporary* in September. Feeling that he had been influenced by Turgenev in this tale,<sup>1</sup> he asked permission to dedicate it to him. Turgenev was flattered and readily agreed.

On the day Tolstoy dispatched the story, he began work on another Sevastopol sketch. The writing absorbed him. He had taken an entirely new point of view, and when he sent *Sevastopol in May* to his publisher on July 4, he accompanied it with a letter, in which he wrote: “Although I’m convinced that it is incomparably better than the first, I’m certain that it will not be liked.”

<sup>1</sup> At most, the influence is very slight.

Tolstoy was right. The editors feared the sketch could not be published. They managed to get it past the censor with a few changes, but it was hastily recalled in proof. The President of the Censor's Committee, expressing surprise and anger that the editors had ever entertained the idea of printing such a piece, banned it because of the "ridicule of our brave officers, the brave defenders of Sevastopol." He ultimately reconsidered and passed the sketch, after making numerous deletions and changes. So completely altered were the whole narrative, tone, and intention, that Panayev decided not to publish. The President of the Censor's Committee, aware that he had virtually transformed the sketch into a propaganda document for the government, now insisted that it be printed. Panayev had to comply, but he refused to place Tolstoy's name to *Sevastopol in May* when it appeared in the *Contemporary* in September.

Tolstoy's first patriotic Sevastopol sketch had contributed greatly to his reputation, and he fully realized the fact. He wrote in his diary at this time: "Have only now reached a period of real temptation through vanity. I could gain much in life if I wished to write without conviction." *Sevastopol in May* is emphatic proof of the resolute manner in which he turned his back on this temptation. The idealizing patriotism of the first sketch has vanished. Longer service and broader experience had finally convinced him to take a stand that had always been his. War with all its cruelty, stupidity, and mock heroism was exposed. Boldly he declared at the end of this second sketch: "There, I have said what I wished to say. . . . The hero of my tale, whom I love with all the power of my soul, whom I have tried to portray in all his beauty, who has always been, is, and will be beautiful—is truth."

Under the uncompromising, dazzling light of truth, Tolstoy revealed the folly, hypocrisy, and utter futility of all this slaughter. The questions the diplomats had not settled, he remarked, still remained unsettled by powder and blood. All was vanity, vanity on the very brink of the grave. Officers were eager to climb on the shoulders of fallen comrades in order to reach the promotions their deaths had made possible. Every one of them was a little Napoleon, a petty monster ready to kill men to get an extra medal or one-third additional pay.

War became for Tolstoy the greatest of crimes, the antithesis of every Christian belief. With feeling he described the raising of flags of truce to enable the Russians and French to gather the mangled corpses that lay in the flowery valley between the opposing

lines of trenches. The air was filled with the smell of decaying flesh. While the bodies were piled on carts, French and Russian soldiers fraternized, borrowed tobacco, and laughed and joked in friendly fashion over their efforts to make themselves understood. At last, the grisly business of burying the dead was finished; the fraternizing ceased. "The white flags are lowered," wrote Tolstoy, "the engines of death and suffering are sounding again, innocent blood is flowing and the air is filled with moans and curses."

The Tsar's censor, of course, could not permit such truths to reach the great grey masses that were dying by the thousands at the earth-works of Sevastopol. When Tolstoy received the news that his sketch had been mutilated and printed, he wrote in his diary: "It seems that I'm under the strict observation of the Blues [the police] for my article. I wish, however, that Russia will always have such moral writers; but I can never be a sugary one, nor can I ever write from the empty into the void, without ideas, and above all without aim. Despite a first moment of anger in which I promised myself never again to take my pen in hand, my sole and chief occupation, dominating all other inclinations and activities, must be literature. My aim is literary fame, the good that I can accomplish by my writings."

Tolstoy's bitterness over the censor's arbitrary distortion of his sketch was somewhat assuaged by the indignation and praise of Nekrasov, who wrote: "The shocking disfiguring of your article has quite upset me. Even now I cannot think of it without regret and rage. Your work, of course, will not be lost . . . it will always remain as proof of a strength that was able to speak such profound and sober truth in circumstances amid which few men would have retained it. It is exactly what Russian society now needs: the truth—the truth, of which, since Gogol's death, so little has remained in Russian literature. You are right to value that side of your gifts most of all. Truth—in the form you have introduced it into our literature—is something entirely new among us. I do not know another writer of today who so compels the reader to love him and sympathize heartily with him as he to whom I now write. And I only fear lest time, the nastiness of life, and the deafness and dumbness that surround us, should do to you what it has done to most of us, and kill the energy without which there can be no writer—none at least such as Russia needs."

Nekrasov's fear was groundless; the last thing his budding author would do would be to turn his back on truth.

Literature could not overcome Tolstoy's feeling of boredom with the war as he remained inactive with his battery of mountain guns on the Belbek. He tried to amuse himself by visiting Bakhchisarai, the former capital of the Crimean khans, and by hunting wild goats on the Chatyrdag. "My service here in Russia," he noted, "begins to madden me just as it did in the Caucasus."

Others were also beginning to grow bored with the war. The horror, misery, and suffering of the past winter left the conviction on both sides that the siege could not go into another year. Thousands rotted from disease; hospital facilities for the wounded were totally inadequate; and so bad were conditions in Russia that two-thirds of the recruits sent from the interior died by the wayside of sickness and starvation. Alexander II ordered his army chiefs to take decisive action. On August 4 they attacked the allies on the Chernaya River, and before the day's fighting was over, the Russians were driven back with terrible losses. When Tolstoy's battery, which was moved up, was not called upon to fire, he volunteered for other activities. Much of the responsibility for the slaughter must be attributed to the muddling of the Russian generals. Around the campfire a collective effort by Tolstoy and his fellow officers to compose an army song on the event failed. Tolstoy tried alone, and the next day he offered to his friends a rollicking song that pilloried the generals. Soon the verses went singing through the army, and any peasant soldier would hum you:

On the fourth or thereabout,  
The devil sent us out  
To take that hill,

or the still more popular stanza:

So they all in council met,  
Each stiff-shirt and epaulet,  
Even copper Bek-kok.<sup>1</sup>

The authorship of the song was generally known, and Tolstoy's jibes at the High Command were probably part of the reason why he did not easily win promotion.

<sup>1</sup> Major-General A. P. Plats-bek-Kokum, chief of the military police of the Southern Army.

This defeat on the Chernaya River pretty much sealed the fate of the defenders of Sevastopol. On August 24, the sixth and last bombardment began. After three days of constant blasting, the city was reduced to ruins. At noon on the twenty-seventh a general assault took place. Tolstoy happened to be in Sevastopol at that time and aided in the defence. The Russians repulsed the allies at all points save one, the highly strategic Malakhov Redoubt, which was captured by the French. With this key point lost, further resistance was useless, and the Russians prepared an immediate withdrawal.

Tolstoy wrote home to Auntie Tatyana: "For the second time in my life, my birthday, the 28th, has been a memorable and sad day for me: the first was 18 years ago at the death of Aunt Alexandra, and now it is the loss of Sevastopol. I wept when I saw the city in flames and the French standards on our Bastions; in many ways it was a very sad day." He also requested her advice on his desire to leave the army. For after the fall of Sevastopol, subsequent inaction on both sides dwindled into peace.<sup>1</sup>

A short time before the fall of the city, Tolstoy had mentioned in his diary that he had suddenly rediscovered his former view of life, "the aim of which is welfare and the ideal is virtue." He blamed military society for his lapses, and now contemplated his reform with pleasure. The gesture in this direction was a plan to accumulate sufficient money to free his estate from debt and liberate his serfs. Further, the idea occurred to him to expose all the wretchedness of serfdom in his *Novel of a Russian Landowner*, and to point out the means of correcting it. At about this time he jotted down in his notebook<sup>2</sup> the following thought: "With the widespread use of the machine the number of people released for intellectual work necessary for the good of society will increase. The evil of the machine will become apparent when the people released by it remain unsuited and too developed for intellectual work." His social as well as moral consciousness had come to life.

All these good intentions were forgotten in the atmosphere of defeat that swept along with the retreating troops. Tangible results he obtained only in his literary aim: he continued to work on

<sup>1</sup> The most mismanaged campaign in modern history came to an end with everybody forgetting just why it had begun. At any rate, the only tangible result of the treaty was the exclusion of Russian warships from the Black Sea, a nearly irrelevant but costly gain that ceased to be enforced in a few years.

<sup>2</sup> Tolstoy's notebooks, not to be confused with his diaries, were records that he kept of thoughts, plans, literary projects, and miscellaneous reminders.

*Youth* and had started a new Sevastopol sketch based on the events of August. In truth, all his aims were literature, and in the diary he indicated that he was beginning to recognize the fact: "My career is literary. Write and write!"

Now he realized more than ever that military service was a serious hindrance. He eagerly accepted General Kryzhanovski's request that he collate the various reports of artillery action on the day Sevastopol fell, and draw up a comprehensive account that he would take, as a courier, to the military authorities in Petersburg. His study of the reports of these artillery commanders increased his contempt for military history. Years later he regretted that he had not kept copies of them as examples of the naïve and unavoidable falsehoods out of which military descriptions are compiled. And he imagined that his former comrades would have a good laugh on reading the incredible statements they made at the orders of their commanders, without knowing anything of what they wrote.

Tolstoy reached Petersburg on November 21, and he soon sent in his resignation. Sevastopol and its heroic dead were behind him at last, but he never forgot them. Like any old soldier who survives a famous battle, he could not conceal a feeling of pleasure at having been a participant. Nevertheless, his experiences at Sevastopol dated the end of his career as a militarist and the beginning of that of pacifist. Not that he at once began preaching the beating of bayonets into ploughshares. But at Sevastopol his mind had been stored with a wealth of argument and his heart with a feeling of implacable hatred for war. Arguments and feeling emerged in 1889 in a preface he was asked to contribute to A. I. Ershov's *Recollections of Sevastopol*. There, in brief form, he condemned the terrible bloodshed of the siege and pointed out its utter futility. What was more frightful than the suffering, mutilation, and death of man's body, he maintained, was the mutilation and death that war brings to man's soul.

Before Tolstoy's resignation went through, he was promoted to the rank of lieutenant for "distinguished bravery and courage" in the battle at the Chernaya River. Many years later he jocularly remarked of his military career: "I did not become a general in the army, but I became one in literature."

## Chapter IX

### RETURN OF THE HERO

LATE ON a December morning in 1855 the poet A. A. Fet, then an army officer on a furlough to Petersburg, called upon his friend Turgenev for a glass of tea and a chat. Noticing in the hallway a short sabre hanging on the wall, he asked the dignified Zakhar to whom it belonged. The servant answered in a low voice that it was Count Tolstoy's, a guest of his master. For an hour Fet and Turgenev conversed in whispers in the latter's study for fear of waking the sleeping count in the next room. "He's like this all the time," Turgenev smilingly explained. "He has come from his battery at Sevastopol, is staying with me, and has gone off on a tangent. Sprees, gypsies, and cards every night; then he sleeps like the dead until two o'clock in the day. I tried to restrain him, but I've given it up now." Tolstoy finally sauntered in and was introduced. In his reminiscences Fet remarks: "From the first moment I noticed in young Tolstoy an involuntary opposition to all commonly accepted opinion."

The Petersburg literary group was curious about the mysterious "L.N.T." and eager to welcome him as one of them. On the road he had received a letter from the excited Turgenev, who offered to go as far as Tula to meet him. Tolstoy accepted his generous invitation to stay at his apartment in the capital. If not exactly a military hero, he returned to Petersburg to find himself a literary hero. At first he revelled in the new experience.

With such a sponsor as Turgenev, the leader of the capital's literary world, Tolstoy was soon presented to all the important writers. In the 1850's the Petersburg literary set consisted of a group of self-indulgent men, whose concern for their own immortality did not prevent them from being interested in the social and political problems of the day. A relatively small and provincial group, it moved in a Masonic-lodge atmosphere of half-mystery and jealous devotion to literary ritual and comradeship. Their



favourite publication was the *Contemporary*, and its editors, Nekrasov and the less talented I. I. Panayev, were the artful instigators of frequent literary gatherings in the interests of their magazine. On such occasions the hostess was Panayev's wife, the beautiful black-eyed Avdotya. Gossip had it that the co-editors were also co-husbands.

Nekrasov and Panayev had been followers of Belinski, radical critic and leader of the Westerners, and they had turned the *Contemporary*<sup>1</sup> into the most living literary review in Russia and the rallying ground of all progressives. With the accession of Alexander II the hope of reform filled the air, and writers of the *Contemporary* helped to spread the liberal virus. There were, however, sharp degrees of liberalism among them, and a "civil war" had already broken out. Led by Chernyshevski and Dobrolyubov, the young radical contributors who had sprung from the people were beginning to attack the tired liberalism of Turgenev and the older aristocratic writers.

The sub-lieutenant fresh from Sevastopol took the *Contemporary* adherents by storm at the end of 1855. Tolstoy was perhaps too conscious of the fact that he was the lion of the moment; soon some of his admirers set him down as a cub, and nearly all of them eventually felt his claws. The day after his arrival he dined with Nekrasov. It was their first meeting, although they had been corresponding for three years. Nekrasov, the hard-living, democratic poet, clever gambler, and astute publisher, was much impressed by his young aristocratic author. He promptly wrote to V. P. Botkin, a rare critic and later a good friend of Tolstoy: "L.N.T., i.e., Tolstoy, has come. . . . What a fine fellow he is, and what an intelligent one! . . . A dear, energetic, generous young hawk! and, perhaps, an eagle!" At the dinner was A. V. Druzhinin, critic and author, and into his diary that night went an account of his meeting with Tolstoy.<sup>2</sup>

The next evening Turgenev did the honours.<sup>3</sup> A few days later the poet Ya. P. Polonski wrote in his diary (diary writing was

<sup>1</sup> They had bought this magazine, founded by Pushkin and Pletnyov, in 1846, by which time it had become an antique mouthpiece of aristocratic writers.

<sup>2</sup> Author of the highly successful novel *Polinka Saks*, Druzhinin was also a deep student of English literature and an unusually good translator. He rendered several of Shakespeare's plays, and among his finest criticism are articles on Dr. Johnson, Boswell, Crabbe, and Scott.

<sup>3</sup> Among those present were A. I. Goncharov, who would soon write his famous novel *Oblomov*, the novelist and dramatist A. F. Pisemski, the poet, A. N. Maikov, and the journalist, A. V. Nikitenko.

epidemic in those days) of meeting Tolstoy at the Chess Club amid a notable company of literary luminaries. Evening gatherings and introductions continued during December. At some of them he read parts of *Youth* or the recently finished *Sevastopol in August*. Next day the diaries and letters of his listeners registered enthusiasm. Magazines competed for his favour, and he promised contributions indiscriminately. The new *Russian Messenger* advertised "L.N.T., one of the most remarkable of our writers," as a future contributor; and *The Library for Reading* made a similar announcement.

Turgenev was delighted with his guest. He wrote to the elegant critic P. V. Annenkov, who in a review of *Notes of a Billiard-Marker* had already included Tolstoy among the immortals: "Imagine, for more than two weeks now Tolstoy has been living with me, and what I would not give to see you both together! You cannot picture to yourself what a dear and remarkable man he is, although I have nick-named him the 'troglodyte,' because of his savage ardour and buffalo-like obstinacy. I have grown to love him with a strange feeling that is almost parental." The troglodyte, however, would creep into the cave of his own mind and roar at the parental Turgenev who, although only ten years older, insisted upon watching over his guest "like an old nurse," as he expressed it.

At first Tolstoy was pleased and flattered with all this attention. At the Hôtel Napoléon he held an evening of his own for the *Contemporary* set and introduced some gay gypsy entertainers to take the minds of these literary pundits off shop talk. In his immaculate uniform, and faultlessly groomed, he conducted himself with severe decorum, as though he were acting according to a studied course of behaviour. With individuals he sometimes showed the temper of his mind, but in large groups he usually remained silent and observant. He was taking the measure of his admiring literary colleagues.

## II

Still in the army, Tolstoy had been detailed as an inspector in a Petersburg munitions factory. After a month he obtained a brief leave to go to Moscow, for there another literary group was eager to honour him. The stern Moscow Slavophiles, with their deeply rooted nationalist convictions, detested the Petersburg Westerners, and the progressive views of the *Contemporary* set. Tolstoy was

entertained by S. T. Aksakov,<sup>1</sup> distinguished writer and fervent Slavophile. The sons of Aksakov were introduced and the novelist and wit D. V. Grigorovich.<sup>2</sup> These sober, almost fanatical guardians of undefiled Russianism liked him. When old Aksakov wrote to Turgenev of the visit, he described Tolstoy as "wise and serious," "capable of understanding strict thought," and a man from whose future literary development he hoped much. And Tolstoy rather liked them. However, their "convictions"—a fashion word among intellectuals in Russia then—irritated him, as did the "convictions" of the Petersburg Westerners. He thought that both sets were tilting at windmills.

The serious illness of his brother Dmitri cut short Tolstoy's pleasant visit in Moscow. He hurried to Oryol and found Dmitri dying from consumption. The appearance of his childhood playmate shocked him—Dmitri's enormous hands hung to the two bones of his arms, and his wasted face seemed all eyes, the same beautiful, serious eyes as of old, but now fixed on him with a continually questioning look. His pock-marked Masha, the girl he had taken from a brothel, tenderly watched over him. All the evil thoughts Tolstoy used to have about Dmitri crumbled to dust, and he felt terribly depressed. He stayed only two days and returned to Petersburg by way of Moscow. There he learned that Dmitri had died on January 21. A naked reference to the fact is all that appears in the diary. Many years later he censured his behaviour:

I was particularly detestable at that time . . . I pitied Dmitri, but not very much. . . . It really seems to me now that his death troubled me chiefly because it prevented me from taking part in a Court spectacle that was then being arranged and to which I had been invited.

The details of that pathetic scene in Oryol, however, were not lost on Tolstoy the artist. They reappeared in the description of the death of Nikolai Levin in *Anna Karenina*, and even the pock-marked Masha lived again in Nikolai Levin's faithful, pock-marked Marya Nikolayevna.

<sup>1</sup> He wrote the well-known books *Family Chronicle*, *Years of Childhood*, and *Recollections*, which have been translated into English.

<sup>2</sup> Later Tolstoy met the high priest of Slavophilism, A. S. Khomyakov, and his acolytes, the Kireyevski brothers.

not by conviction, but by moral instinct. And moral instinct he could trust, but only his own. Here was the quintessence of individualism.

What Fet had described as Tolstoy's involuntary opposition to all commonly accepted opinion contributed to his antagonism on this and on similar occasions. In literary no less than political and social questions, he strove always for originality in discussion. Even Shakespeare was sacrificed to this passion. "How sorry I am that you are late," Panayev declared to a friend who called on him just as Tolstoy left. "What marvels you would have heard! You would have learned that Shakespeare is an ordinary writer, and that our astonishment and delight over Shakespeare are nothing more than a desire to keep up with others and the habit of repeating foreign opinions. . . . Yes, how curious! The man simply does not wish to know any traditions, either theoretical or historical."

The war was on. Tolstoy harried Turgenev, nor were other members of his group spared. He was invited to a dinner for the staff of the *Contemporary* at Nekrasov's. When someone praised George Sand's new novel, he abruptly blurted out his hatred for this favourite French author. And he shocked all present by declaring that if such women as George Sand's heroines really existed, then they ought to be bound to the hangman's cart and driven through the streets of Petersburg for the general edification. Avdotya Panayev, the hostess, whose worship of George Sand was common knowledge, preserved a pained silence. In an instant the room was in an uproar. But Tolstoy had ideas about George Sand and he maintained his point. Her love of sheer animalism in man, disguised with a cloak of poetry and aesthetic feeling, disgusted him.

The offended host Nekrasov hurried off a letter to Botkin: "But what nonsense, brother, he [Tolstoy] poured out yesterday after dinner! The devil knows what's in his head! He says much that is stupid and even nasty." And a day later Botkin received another letter on the same theme from the wounded Turgenev. "I've almost broken off with Tolstoy," he wrote. "He uttered so much nonsense and crudity on the subject of George Sand that it is impossible to pass it on. The dispute went far—in a word he angered everyone and showed himself in a most disadvantageous light."

Turgenev struck back, not very cleverly or successfully. He was no match for Tolstoy in an argument. With an ironical expression

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on his face, Tolstoy would listen to his opponent, piercing him with his penetrating glance, his lips pressed together in an expression of concentration that suggested he was thinking up some devastating epigram or an answer that would perplex by its unexpectedness. Turgenev complained that his young rival never believed in people's sincerity or spirituality, and he confessed that nothing was more disconcerting than Tolstoy's inquisitorial look which, when accompanied by a few biting words, goaded a man to fury. If we can believe Avdotya Panayev, who thought Tolstoy carried himself with an "affected jauntiness," Turgenev was not above evincing a most unparental spleen and literary envy behind his troglodyte's back. At Nekrasov's once, when Tolstoy was not present, Turgenev said of him: "Not one word, not one movement of his is natural! He is eternally posing before us, and I find it difficult to explain in a clever man this impoverished count's arrogance."

The boiling-over point was reached in a quarrel that Grigorovich humorously described to Fet. Again, the unfortunate Nekrasov's quarters were the locus. "You cannot imagine what a scene it was," said Grigorovich. "Ach, my God! Turgenev squeaked and squeaked, holding his hand to his throat, and with the eyes of a dying gazelle, he whispered: 'I can stand no more! I have bronchitis!' and with huge strides he began pacing back and forth through three rooms. 'Bronchitis?' Tolstoy growls after him. 'Bronchitis is a metal!' Of course, Nekrasov's heart sank: he feared to lose either Turgenev or Tolstoy in whom the *Contemporary* found excellent support, and hence began to beat to windward. We were all agitated and did not know what to say. Tolstoy in the middle room lay sulking on a morocco divan, while Turgenev, spreading the tails of his short coat by placing his hands in his pockets, continued to go back and forth through all three rooms. To avert a catastrophe, I went up to the divan and said: 'My dear Tolstoy, don't agitate yourself! You don't know how he esteems and loves you!' 'I'll not permit him to do anything evil to me!' exclaimed Tolstoy with dilated nostrils. 'Look how he keeps marching past me on purpose, wagging his democratic haunches!'

Not only the democratic haunches of the *Contemporary's* liberal aristocrats bothered Tolstoy: so did the radical haunches of Chernyshevski and his followers. He tolerated them for a brief time, but he soon turned on them also and their exiled oracle Herzen, who in distant London had highly praised *Childhood*. At the house of

a well-known sculptor, Tolstoy listened patiently while Herzen's latest work was being read aloud. After the reading, he boldly attacked this author's revolutionary writings, and was so convincing that he persuaded the host to abandon his enthusiasm for Herzen.

Despite his own proneness to anger in debate, Tolstoy severely criticized the splenetic and indignant attitude of the progressives in preaching their reforms. Only a loving man, he maintained, could see things clearly and do good. He jotted down his own definition of liberalism in his notebook: "There are two liberalisms—one that desires all people to be my equals, so that they should be as good as I am; the other wants all to be as bad as I am. The first is based on a moral Christian feeling, a desire for the happiness and good of my neighbour; the other is based on a desire for the unhappiness of my neighbour." These liberals were advocating equality and reforms when he knew that many of them were devoted to swilling, gambling, and immorality. The fact nauseated him. His own private life was far from exemplary, but he was willing to admit the fact and did not try to reform others.

Within a few months after his arrival in Petersburg from Sevastopol, Tolstoy had won for himself in the *Contemporary* circle the reputation of being a "savage" young man. At a card party one evening a letter arrived for Nekrasov from M. N. Longinov, a genial but not too reputable historian of literature and contributor to the *Contemporary*. Busy with his hand, Nekrasov requested Tolstoy to read the letter. Unfortunately it contained an aspersion on Tolstoy's liberalism. He read through to the end, said nothing, but went home and sent a challenge to Longinov. Nekrasov learned of the matter and pleaded with Tolstoy to withdraw his challenge or he would have to shoot it out with him, for Nekrasov insisted on assuming full responsibility for the mess. Tolstoy remained adamant. Longinov settled the matter happily by the simply unorthodox procedure of not answering the challenge. Three months later, in the peaceful seclusion of Yasnaya Polyana, it suddenly occurred to Tolstoy how offensive his behaviour had been. He at once wrote to Nekrasov to ask his pardon and promised to do the same with Longinov.

The diaries and correspondence of the *Contemporary* circle in 1856 indicate that their final judgment on Tolstoy was a mixed one of bewilderment over his views and conduct and admiration for his talent. They perceived in him an enormous literary and moral force, and the several groups trying to influence opinion

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on the magazine were willing to overlook his prickly and independent nature if they could gain his support. For a time he allowed himself to be swayed by the most conservative faction, principally by Druzhinin, and somewhat by Botkin and Annenkov. Eventually these willing survivors began to savour of the partisanship and the "force-of-convictions" school that Tolstoy abominated. His growing displeasure was reflected in the diary: "In the evening with Druzhinin and Annenkov; the former rather irksome." His entry the next day described the whole editorial staff of the *Contemporary* as "disgusting." And a few days later he jotted down: "Goncharov, Annenkov—all disgust me; especially Druzhinin, and they disgust me because I want affection, friendship, but they are not capable of it."

Of the whole Petersburg group at this time, only Fet retained Tolstoy's lasting friendship. And perhaps it is significant that Fet was the least "literary" of the circle, and the most conservative. Tolstoy's inability to get along was not merely a case of bad manners or of his irritating contradictory nature, of which he was entirely conscious. Konstantin Aksakov in a letter to Turgenev came close to the real reason why he antagonized his fellow writers: "Count Tolstoy was in Moscow. . . . A strange person! Why does he act so immaturely? Why so unsettled? . . . It seems as though there is still no centre in him."

This was true. Tolstoy had no moral or spiritual centre as yet; he was in the process of finding one. But this was a search he must conduct himself. He was not being reactionary in turning his back on the *Contemporary's* progressives, for he really shared some of their advanced views. Now, however, as later, his individualism would not permit him to subordinate his views. All must come from within himself. It was both an aesthetic and an intellectual pride. The thinker, like the artist, insisted upon originality.

## IV

The literary group did not monopolize Tolstoy's time, for his stay of six months in Petersburg was a repetition of his hectic social life of some four years before. He had acquired more poise and worldliness, and his fame as an author had widened the circle of his acquaintances and made him a much desired guest in the homes of prominent families where he occasionally read his stories. His capacity for light entertainment was undiminished; nor had the

stern conscience that censured his indulgence lapsed. There are frequent clipped references to the city's grisettes, particularly to an Alexandra Petrovna and an Alexandra Zhukov. The diary, that faithful chronicle of his sins, venial and unpardonable, records for April 21: "Gaddled about the Nevski and ended up at a bath.<sup>1</sup> Terrible! But absolutely the last time. This is no longer temperament, but simply habitual lechery." Apparently as a precaution for the future, he set himself the rule not to drink more than half a glass of vodka at a time, one glass of strong wine, and one tumbler of light wine. A few weeks later an entry relates how he and a friend went with two girls to an amusement park. "Disgusting!" he wrote. "Wenches, stupid music, wenches, an artificial nightingale, heat, cigarette smoke, wenches, vodka, cheese, wild shrieks, wenches, wenches, wenches!" And the next day he underlined: "*I make myself this rule forever: never to enter a pub or a single brothel!*" Before the day was over, another lapse obliged him that night to repeat in a postscript to this entry: "My foot will never, never enter a public place, except a concert or theatre."

Among Tolstoy's new friends in the Petersburg social world, perhaps the one who remained closest to him and influenced him most in later life was his "aunt" (actually, a first cousin once removed), Countess Alexandra Andreyevna Tolstoy, eleven years his senior. She was a Maid of Honour and governess in the family of Grand Duchess Marie, daughter of Nicholas I. A woman of remarkable tact and unusual gifts of heart and brain, she occupied a position of consequence in the political and literary world of the capital. Their affection for each other deepened over the years, and her strong intellect and love of truth inspired a trust and confidence in her judgment that Tolstoy rarely accorded to other people. In his old age, after reading over their extensive and notable correspondence, he remarked: "When I look back on my long dark life, my remembrances of Alexandra will always be a bright gleam, like a light that shines from under a door in a dark corridor."

She recalled his frequent and welcome visits: "I see him quite clearly as he returned from Sevastopol, a young artillery officer, and I remember what a fine impression he produced on all of us. At that time he was already a public figure. All were enraptured with his charming creations, and we were a bit proud of the talent of our kinsman, although we did not foresee his future renown."

<sup>1</sup> Some of the public bathhouses at the time were little better than houses of ill-fame.



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### V

A reviewer had lyrically advised Tolstoy in print not to write better but more. He improved upon the advice and wrote both more and better during this brief period. Direct contact with literary admirers gave him a sense of great things expected of him. With not a little pride he mentioned in the diary and repeated in a letter to his brother Sergei that the Emperor read *Childhood* to his wife and wept. He had no doubts about his future career now, and the praise of friends and rivals had banished uncertainty about his talents. Subjects for stories filled his mind, and living material on the Petersburg streets—a constable settling an altercation or the character of a Russian crowd listening to an orator—were jotted down for future reference.

In December 1855, Tolstoy finished *Sevastopol in August*, the first of his works to appear under his full name.<sup>1</sup> The inspired war correspondent of the two previous Sevastopol sketches had disappeared; in the third he is the story teller transposing the stuff of life into art. The didactic element and lyricism are absent. Living characters, especially the Kozeltsov brothers, lend a touch of unity to a loosely constructed story. In its leisurely, panoramic method of narration, in the manner in which plot is sacrificed to accumulating detail, and in the studied objectivity, one can detect the certain influence of Thackeray, whom Tolstoy had been eagerly reading and deeply admiring over this period. The three Sevastopol pieces are clearly efforts in the direction of *War and Peace*.

An entirely different matter is *The Storm*.<sup>2</sup> The theme was suggested by the fearful night Tolstoy spent on the steppes in a blizzard on his return from the Caucasus in 1854. Such an experience was a commonplace in Russia and not infrequently ended fatally. There is no plot; the theme is the storm, but it is realized so vividly that it takes on the human attributes of an intensely imagined character. With some justice early reviewers compared *The Storm* to a poem in tonal quality and structure. The effectively repeated motifs of the snow and wind amount almost to the incremental repetition of a folk ballad. So acute is the sensuous perception of bitter cold and driving snow that the reader imaginatively experiences the effect of the elements.

The following month in the *Contemporary* appeared Tolstoy's

<sup>1</sup> It was published in the January *Contemporary*, 1856.

<sup>2</sup> It appeared in the March number of the *Contemporary*, 1856.

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next piece, a novelette entitled *Two Hussars*. It is unlike anything he had done previously and he never returned to this type of subject. The story falls into two parts. In the first is portrayed Count Fyodor Turbin,<sup>1</sup> a typical officer in a hussar regiment at the beginning of the nineteenth century. He is a handsome, fire-eating young aristocrat, who appears for one night in a provincial town and throws its society into a turmoil by his drinking and wild escapades, and before leaving he seduces a pretty widow. Yet no one is shocked by his behaviour, for his daring, generosity, and noble nature win the admiration of all. In the second part—about twenty years later—his son is described (it is mentioned that the father had been killed in a duel). The contrast is pointed, for the son is a member of contemporary society, a calculating, materialistic prig. Chance brings him to the same provincial town. As an officer he is quartered in the house of the widow his father had seduced, and he tries unsuccessfully to seduce her pretty daughter. His petty, self-conscious nature has none of the natural, lovable quality of his scapegrace of a father, and he leaves behind him a definitely unpleasant impression.

In the diary Tolstoy noted a friend's remark that the second hussar was described without love. This is the key to the story. At this time Tolstoy entered a significant literary observation in his notebook: "The first condition of an author's popularity, i.e., the way to make himself loved, is the love with which he treats all his characters. That is why Dickens's characters are the friends of all mankind; they serve as a bond between humanity in America and in Petersburg; but Thackeray and Gogol, though faithful to life and artistic, are pitiless and not at all loving." In *Two Hussars* the father is in a sense a Dickensian character, and the son has the evil aspects common in the delineation of Thackeray's men. Thackeray's influence is evident in the introduction to the tale and in the manner in which the family relationship is used to join both parts, a method Tolstoy employed later in *War and Peace*.<sup>2</sup> The real theme of *Two Hussars* is the opposition of two generations; Tolstoy's preference for the older generation and his condemnation of the modern are patent. His attitude may have been a reflection

<sup>1</sup> The model was very likely a distant relative, Count F. I. Tolstoy, "The American" (so called because of some time spent in America), a famed duellist and adventurer whom Tolstoy had known from childhood.

<sup>2</sup> The influence of English novelists played a very important part in the development of Tolstoy's art. Russian critics have devoted some attention to the subject, but a comprehensive study has still to be made.

of his dislike for the *Contemporary* writers, and they appeared to recognize the fact by receiving the tale with marked reservations.

To fulfil his promises to editors, Tolstoy published in 1856 two short stories, "Meeting a Moscow Acquaintance in the Detachment,"<sup>1</sup> and *A Landlord's Morning*.<sup>2</sup> The material for the first is drawn from his Caucasian experiences and concerns the unfortunate history of a nobleman condemned to serve in the ranks as a common soldier; the second is the considerable fragment of the unfinished "Novel of a Russian Landowner."

*Youth*, the last work of this period<sup>3</sup> was the final part of *Childhood and Boyhood*.<sup>4</sup> The keen critic Druzhinin, who read the manuscript, wrote Tolstoy that no other author of the time could have so seized and sketched the agitated and turbulent period of youth, and that he ought "to spit in the face" of anyone who claimed that the work was inferior to the preceding parts.

Do not fear your reflections [he wrote], they are all clever and original. You have an inclination towards extremely fine-spun analysis that may become a great defect. You are sometimes on the point of saying that so-and-so's thigh indicated that he wished to travel in India! You must restrain this tendency, but do not squelch it for anything in the world. All your work over your own talent has to be of such a nature. Each of your defects has its share of strength and beauty, and almost each of your merits bears in it the seed of a defect.

Tolstoy's popularity suggested the feasibility of publishing his collected works in book form even at this early stage. In September 1856, his *Army Tales*<sup>5</sup> appeared, and the next month *Childhood and Boyhood*. They received little notice and sold poorly. This first literary disappointment was a new experience and disturbed him. The failure was perhaps partly owing to the fact that the stories had already appeared in the *Contemporary*. Something of the cool reception, however, must be attributed to the changing attitude of the liberal Petersburg critics whom he had offended. They were demanding works of political and social significance to

<sup>1</sup> This long and awkward title was forced on him by the censor who was suspicious of the original short *Razhalovanny*—"A Man Reduced to the Ranks."

<sup>2</sup> The first story was published in *The Library for Reading*, and the second in *National Notes*.

<sup>3</sup> Published in the January number of the *Contemporary*, 1857.

<sup>4</sup> During this brief period Tolstoy also worked on *The Cossacks*; and a number of fragmentary plays, stories, articles, and projects have come down to us. These may be found in Volumes V and VII of the Jubilee Edition.

<sup>5</sup> The book consisted of "The Raid," "The Woodfelling," and "Sevastopol Sketches."

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meet the progressive spirit of the age. But Tolstoy was not a writer to fall into an accepted groove; he had to carve his own. He wanted to try his hand at new forms and subjects. Over this period he worked on at least four separate plans for dramas. And in the diary he expressed his desire to strike out on new literary paths: "How I long to have done with magazines in order to write in the way I'm now beginning to think about art: awfully lofty and pure."

### VI

Turgenev pointed out in a letter to Druzhinin that *A Landlord's Morning*, which had just been published, conveyed the unpleasant impression that all efforts of landowners to enlighten or improve the conditions of the peasantry led to nothing. The real moral of the work, however, is that so long as serfdom exists the master will be unable to better the lot of his peasants, despite the most disinterested endeavour to do so. Tolstoy had not accepted such a position when at Yasnaya Polyana he had conducted the experiment with his serfs that provided material for this fragment of a novel. Since then his ideas on serfdom had changed. He had seen peasants undergo the horrors of war with endurance and courage; he had watched them die on the bastions with the calm resignation and simple humility of men who had a compact with God. Now he was prepared to put into practice some of the theories that serf-owning progressives of the *Contemporary* circle were still talking about.

On March of this year, the young Alexander II had made a historic address before the assembled nobles of Moscow. He warned them that the time would soon come when Russia's serfs must be freed, and he concluded with the famous statement that it would "therefore be much better for it to come from above than from below." While the government prepared its own programme for abolishing serfdom, the way was left open for individual owners to take action.

Tolstoy decided to take such action. Towards the end of April, while still in Petersburg, he wrote in the diary that his relations with his serfs were beginning to trouble him and that he felt the need of "learning, learning, learning." For advice he sought out his friend, K. D. Kavelin, a writer and authority on the question of emancipation. Kavelin's practical wisdom encouraged him. Tolstoy felt "bright, hopeful, and happy," and planned to go back to the country with a written project. For further information he

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canvassed the opinions of high liberal government officials. When at last the project was drafted, he took it for the necessary approval to A. I. Lyovshin, Assistant Minister of the Interior, who received him "dryly." Tolstoy acidly commented in the diary on the old men in government service who were unfitted for the work of change. Although his plan was not immediately accepted, he decided to go to Yasnaya Polyana and place it before his serfs.

Tolstoy stopped off at Moscow, and there ten days bright with love and excitement banished temporarily all thoughts of his serfs. Among his numerous visits was one to the parents of D. A. Dyakov, the close comrade of his student days at Kazan. There he met Alexandra Obolenski, Dyakov's married sister. He left the house "passionately in love" with her, as he mentioned in the diary. The feeling took complete possession of him, and he acted like a shy schoolboy with this married woman. He avidly followed her every movement and searched her face for the slightest sign that she recognized his secret passion. Now he could not make up his mind to stay or to leave Moscow. He contrived to be at evening gatherings where she was a guest and yet hardly dared converse with her. "No," he told himself in the diary, "I'm not being carried away in saying that she is the sweetest woman I've ever known. She has the most refined, artistic, and at the same time moral, nature." If he did not respect her husband so much, he decided, it would have been painful for him to imagine his intimate relations with his own wife. When she remarked in his presence that she had no lovers at the time of her betrothal, he hopefully took this as a hint that she had not been in love with her husband then. After a visit she gave him her hand at parting and it made him "terribly happy." Then, recalling his childhood love for Sonya Koloshin, he wrote: "Since Sonechka's days, I have positively not experienced such a pure, strong, and good feeling. I say 'good,' because though it is hopeless, I rejoice in arousing it."

It was difficult for Tolstoy to accept his sudden love as "hopeless." The day before he left Moscow, he paid a final visit to Alexandra Obolenski and came to the conclusion "that she knows my feelings and that she is pleased. I'm terribly happy." He almost decided to remain another day in order to see her once more, but he feared to tempt fate.<sup>1</sup> Just before he left Moscow, he went with

<sup>1</sup>There is a brief fragment, apparently the beginning of a short story, in which Tolstoy writes of his love for Alexandra Obolenski. It has recently been published in Volume V of the Jubilee Edition.

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Konstantin Islavin, the son of an old neighbour at Yasnaya Polyana, to visit the country house of Islavin's married sister, Lyubov Bers. There he met her happy family of children, and he noted in the diary: "What dear, merry little girls! We walked and played leap-frog."

### VII

A year of war had altered Tolstoy's opinions; the man who had scorned the organized liberalism of the *Contemporary* circle now observed in the diary: "In comparison with my former Yasnaya recollections of myself, I feel how much I've changed in the liberal sense. Even T.A. [Auntie Tatyana] displeases me. In a 100 years you couldn't knock into her head the injustice of serfdom." That very day of his arrival at Yasnaya Polyana he decided to call his peasants together to explain his startling plan to free them.

Tolstoy had prepared his project with care and a practical business sense rarely attributed to him. He spoke to a meeting of his 309 male serfs in simple, measured words: "The Lord God has put into my mind the thought to set all of you free. If it were possible to go to a court of justice now and free you by legal decree, I would do it. But I have taken counsel with wise and old men about this matter, and they have explained to me that it is impossible to do this at once and why it is impossible and how the matter must be arranged." Then he went on to explain his plan. He told them that his estate was mortgaged, and until the debt was paid he had no right to give them their freedom, and even if he could, liberty for them without land would be disastrous. Therefore, he offered to allow each household four and a half *desyatins* (about twelve acres) of land. Half a *desyatina* would be given outright, and for the remainder they would pay five rubles a *desyatina* for thirty years. Of this sum, one ruble would go to pay off the mortgage, and the other four would purchase for them the rest of the allotment of land. At the end of the thirty years they would be free of all obligations to him. He concluded his speech with the following advice: "Think about this matter, talk it over among yourselves, take counsel with your elders, and in three days come back and tell me what you have decided, whether or not you agree. If you find in it anything that seems unjust or not according to law, then show me and I will correct and change it."

Tolstoy was well pleased with this first meeting and he felt that the peasants believed in him. Once again, he had failed to take into

consideration the innate hostility for the master that centuries of serfdom had deeply rooted in the peasantry. He kept a record, *The Diary of a Landowner*,<sup>1</sup> of the meetings with his serfs and individual peasants. This account clearly reveals their traditional fear of change and their inborn suspicion of a master bearing "gifts" to them. In the end, they refused to agree to the plan, and they justified their refusal by seizing upon a wild rumour—widely believed by the peasants—that at the approaching coronation the young Tsar would free the serfs and give them all the land, and hence their master was scheming to forestall this blessing by obligating them to a prior contract.

The failure of his project was a keen disappointment. At their request Tolstoy tried to remedy the immediate condition of his serfs by releasing some of them from obligatory labour by substituting a fixed yearly payment, not an unusual arrangement. Rather bitterly he told himself that the peasants did not want their freedom, and in the diary he well summed up the relationship between him and his serfs: "Two powerful men are joined with a sharp chain; it hurts both of them, and when one of them moves, he involuntarily cuts the other, and neither has room to work."

The behaviour of the peasants in this whole matter alarmed Tolstoy, and he drafted an extraordinary letter of warning to his Petersburg friend Count D. N. Bludov, influential President of the Department of Laws.<sup>2</sup> He related the outcome of his project and then went on to add: "The despotism of the landowners has already engendered despotism in the peasants. When they told me at the meeting that I should give them all the land outright, and I said that I should be left without my shirt, they laughed, and it was impossible to blame them." For the landowner, he continued, it was now a question of land or life, and he confessed, contrary to the view he had expressed in his speech to the peasants, that he could not understand why all the serfs were not freed without the land. If it meant the growth of a huge proletariat, what then? Western Europe had its proletariat and had survived. Whatever historical phenomena the proletariat produced, while producing the revolution and Napoleon, it had not yet said its last word, and we could not judge of it as a completed historical phenomenon. (The Lord knows, might it not be the foundation for a renaissance of the world towards peace and freedom?) He

<sup>1</sup> Published for the first time in 1931 in the Jubilee Edition.

<sup>2</sup> This letter, it appears, was never sent.

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concluded: "If within 6 months the serfs are not freed, there will be a conflagration. Everything is ready for it. Treasonable hands are not lacking to light the fire of revolt, and then the conflagration will spread everywhere."

Tolstoy's prophecy of a revolution was right, but his chronology was off by some sixty years, and his conjecture of the future world mission of the proletariat is still one of the great question marks of history. The emancipation of the serfs took place five years after his letter and without any serious disturbances. But the letter reveals Tolstoy in a confused state of mind, pulled this way and that by both liberal and conservative tendencies. Essentially, his approach to the peasant question was a moral one: he felt a moral, not a political, duty to give them their freedom. And his lack of success at Yasnaya Polyana did not change his point of view in this respect. The letter to Bludov shows him attempting to serve two ends: to acquit himself of a moral duty by freeing the serfs, and, in a bourgeois fashion, to protect himself economically by keeping his land, without which the peasants would starve. Nor did he ever completely find his way out of this dilemma, despite the moral absolutism of his later years.

### VIII

After the collapse of his plan to free the serfs, Tolstoy remained at Yasnaya Polyana for the next five months. The leisurely existence of a country gentleman was occasionally interrupted by serious efforts at reading and writing.<sup>1</sup> The calm of village life was hardly ruffled by the drowning of a peasant in the Yasnaya Polyana pond, and the discovery of a young soldier hanging in the woods. A description of the suicide in the diary showed Tolstoy's uncanny gift for realistic details—"The soldier looked as though he were standing, his trousers tucked into his boots, a dirty shirt, cap turned inside out, overcoat thrown aside, legs strangely bent," and the corpse's clothing "was thickly covered with little yellow worms."

A severe illness was not allowed to interfere with Tolstoy's gymnastics or his passion for hunting, and he made several visits to his sister, to Sergeï, and to Turgenev's estate at Spasskoye

<sup>1</sup> He read with much admiration the poems and biography of Pushkin, Gogol's *Dead Souls*, Goethe's *Sorrows of Young Werther*, *The Newcomes*, *Little Dorrit*, and *Pickwick Papers*; and he finished writing *Youth* and began several stories and plays.



Lutovinovo.<sup>1</sup> Turgenev had gone abroad before Tolstoy left Petersburg and had written two letters which had helped to improve their relations.

On one of their walks together they stopped before an old broken-down horse and Tolstoy, stroking it, began to tell what he imagined the horse was thinking and feeling. So realistically did he project himself into the animal's consciousness that the astonished and delighted Turgenev declared that Tolstoy must at one time have been a horse.

These visits, however, did little to warm the two hypersensitive writers to each other. Tolstoy decided that Turgenev's whole life was a pretence of simplicity. Sharp discussions ensued and Tolstoy concluded that Turgenev was uncongenial. After one of their meetings, Turgenev wrote Tolstoy: "I can assure you I never thought that you were evil, never suspected literary envy in you. I (pardon the expression) surmised much in you that was fatuous, but never anything bad. But you are too penetrating not to know that if one of us comes to envy the other, then surely it is not for you to envy me." The strange magnet that attracted Turgenev to Tolstoy never lost its power.

Flagrant village immorality intensified Tolstoy's emotional instability at this time. His debauched surroundings suggested a play, "Free Love,"<sup>2</sup> that would involve—he noted in the diary—the perverted relations of a "propietress with her footman, a brother with his sister, and a father's natural son with the father's wife, etc." On his own part, the Petersburg grisettes who had tempted him were now displaced by willing village girls, nor did the wives and daughters of his neighbours escape his attention. "I'm insufferably abhorrent in my irresistible inclination towards vice," he complained. "Vice itself would be better."

Marriage as a remedy had already suggested itself to Tolstoy. His continual emotional excitement, he felt, was bad. After all, he was twenty-six, and it was time to settle down. He wanted to love and be loved. "Everything seemed to grow bright," he wrote in the diary, after receiving affectionate notes from two of his friends. "Yes, the best way to obtain true happiness in life is, without any rules, to throw out from oneself on all sides, like a spider, an adhesive web of love to catch in it all that come: an

<sup>1</sup> About seventy miles from Yasnaya Polyana and sixteen from Pokrovskoye, the estate of Tolstoy's sister.

<sup>2</sup> Only the beginning of this play exists.

old woman, a child, a girl, or a policeman." While in Petersburg he had written to Aunt Pelageya that he was thinking about marriage and would regard every eligible young lady he met from this point of view.

It is not surprising, then, that Tolstoy should meekly agree when his old friend Dyakov, who visited Yasnaya Polyana in June, advised him to marry Valerya Vladimirovna Arsenev. "After listening to him," he wrote in the diary, "it also seems to me the best thing I can do." The Arsenevs lived five miles away at Sudakovo. In the family were an aunt, three daughters, a son, and a French governess, Vergani. As an old friend, Tolstoy had been appointed the son's guardian and hence had easy access to the family.

Up to this point Tolstoy had paid little attention to Valerya, who was the oldest daughter, a pretty girl of twenty. Now, urged on by Dyakov, he rode over to Sudakovo to investigate. Valerya, if we may judge from the diary, did not stand his first inspection very well: "It is unfortunate that she is without backbone and fire—like vermicelli—but kind. And her smile is painfully submissive. Returned home and sent for the soldier's wife." The last cryptic sentence refers to a peasant soldier's wife with whom he had illicit relations. Not a very auspicious beginning for Valerya, but then his curiosity was aroused and he had plenty of time on his hands.

Over the next four months there were frequent exchanges of visits, and Valerya was submitted to the searching observation of a man who seemed more concerned with the idea of marriage than with marriage itself. The diary was the repository of Tolstoy's fluctuating impressions. Because Valerya chattered about clothes and the coronation, to which she was going, he decided that she was "frivolous" and his "passion" a fleeting thing. A few days later he saw her in a white dress and thought her "very charming." This same day at Sudakovo was one of the pleasantest in his life, and it prompted him to wonder whether he could love her seriously. On his next visit, however, he discovered that she was badly educated, "and ignorant if not stupid." Two days later the Arsenevs visited him, and he wrote: "Valerya is a splendid girl but she certainly does not please me. Yet, if we meet so often, I may suddenly marry her." Then he decided that her bare arms were unshapely and upset him, and he disliked her showy morning gown.

The Sudakovo household had smelled a suitor, a difficult one to snare they quickly perceived, but a highly desirable one in name,

ability, and in a large estate. Valerya deserved much of the criticism Tolstoy aimed at her, and she soon became painfully aware of his faultfinding. Although she obviously hoped to marry him, she was quite capable of showing her resentment of his parental attitude. She had capacities, but apparently not the kind to inspire lasting love where it did not first exist.

After a few weeks of this querulous courting, Tolstoy reached a point where Valerya's frivolity and absence of care seemed hopeless. He was afraid, he noted, that hers was a nature that could not love even a child. Finally, he wrote in the diary: "I fear marriage as well as baseness, i.e., of amusing myself with her. But to marry, much would have to be changed, and I have still a great deal of work to do on myself."

Suddenly, something happened to soften Tolstoy's attitude. It may have been Valerya's imminent departure for the coronation or simply a new effort on her part to please him. For he now noted that she wore her hair behind her ears because he liked it so, that she dressed less gaudily, and worked hard over his favourite piano pieces. He thought she had grown "ten times nicer" and "above all more natural." Valerya appealed to him for the first time as a woman, he wrote, and he could now look at her bare arms without disgust. He even talked to her about marriage and concluded that she was "not stupid and remarkably kind."

Valerya left to attend the coronation of Alexander II at Moscow in the middle of August. A few days later Tolstoy confided to himself: "I've been thinking more and more of little Valerya these days." He began to miss her and could not refrain from writing her. Valerya's failure to answer grieved him. At last a letter arrived from her to Auntie Tatyana. In this letter, which he read, she described in great detail the coronation ceremonies, the parties, festivities, and the clothes she wore to them, and the aides-de-camp who flattered her with their attention. Tolstoy was vastly irritated and promptly dispatched a scolding letter to the girl he was seriously thinking of making his bride. The letter was a cold piece of irony, fitfully garnished with morsels of playful sarcasm. He had written his first, he said, while trying to check his affection, in this one he must try to check the "calm hatred," the sadness and disappointment, that reading her letter to his aunt had aroused in him. He twitted her about her fondness for fine clothes and aides-de-camp. "To love high society," he wrote, "and not man is dishonest, and even dangerous, because in it trashy people

are to be met with more frequently than in any other society, and for you it is even not suitable, for you are not in high society yourself, and therefore your relations, based on a pretty little face and a red-currant dress, would not be at all pleasant or dignified. As for the aides-de-camp, I believe there are forty of them in all, and I know positively that only two are not scoundrels or fools—consequently there's also no joy in this."

It was the letter of an unreasonable and perhaps jealous man. Valerya did not deign to answer it. Anxiety banished his anger. He wrote again, begging her forgiveness and "two words" in reply to tell him she was not angry. Only after her return at the end of September was he restored to favour, and then her chatter about Moscow and high society raised his doubts again. Worse still, she admitted to having fallen in love with her Moscow music teacher, Mortier de Fontaine, a well-known French composer and pianist. Tolstoy was deeply offended, felt ashamed for himself and for her, yet he confessed on this occasion that for the first time he experienced something like feeling for her. Two days later he made a significant entry in his diary: "I'm not in love, but this bond will always play a great role in my life. If I have not yet known love, then, judging by the small beginning that I feel now, I shall experience it with terrible force, and God forbid that it should be for Valerya. She is completely empty, without principle, and cold as ice, so that she is continually being carried away."

For the next month Tolstoy tried to assure himself that he cared nothing for Valerya. But he kept on seeing her. And the realization that her family frankly considered him as good as engaged determined him to have an explanation. Like a man who fears his ultimate offer of love will be rejected, he had invented a humorous character for himself and one for Valerya whenever he wished to talk to her about marriage and family life. He became Mr. Khrapovitski (Mr. Snorer) and she, Miss Dembitski. As Khrapovitski he told the governess his true position and she relayed the story to Valerya. This secondhand apology made little impression on her, and he regretted it.

Tolstoy was acting like a man who was too proud to fall in love. In the absence of a spontaneous affection, he unconsciously strove to stifle his growing feeling for Valerya by an avid analysis of it. Feeling, however, would not be denied. After his "explanation," he attended a ball with Valerya at Tula and his feeling again eclipsed his reason: "Valerya was charming. I'm almost in love

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with her"; and when he showed her this page in his diary, she promptly tore it out for herself. Alarmed over the mounting tumult in him, he suddenly decided to go to Moscow in the hope that separation would give them both a clearer perspective on the possibilities of the future.

### IX

On the way to Moscow, Tolstoy thought only of Valerya, and upon his arrival he wrote her. In a parable of the silly man and the good man—his emotional, feeling self and his rational self—he explained to her that the silly man, whom she preferred, loved her for the sake of his own happiness, but the good man, his own favourite, loved her for the sake of her happiness. He argued for the good man, who had advised him to depart "for our mutual happiness." "I already love in you your beauty," he wrote, "but I'm only beginning to love in you that which is eternal and ever precious—your heart, your soul." They must not indulge themselves in a momentary passion; they must be sure their love would be lasting. Then he fell into his exasperatingly parental mood: "Please *go* for a walk every day whatever the weather may be. This is excellent, as any doctor will tell you, and wear a corset and put on your stockings yourself, and generally make various improvements of that kind in yourself. Do not despair of becoming perfect." And he concluded by holding up his own practice as a model, urging her to plan the occupations of the day and check them in the evening, and be able to go to bed at night with the conviction that she had done some good to someone.

In the correspondence that ensued between Tolstoy and Valerya<sup>1</sup> over the next three months, he hardly varied this attitude of the self-appointed preceptor. In one of his notebooks at this precise time, he observed: "Everything I've loved—a dog, a horse, a woman—I've always compared it with an ideal of perfection for that particular species. . . ." He sought for nothing less than perfection in a woman, without realizing that a man in love takes perfection for granted. Not really being in love with Valerya, he could afford to indulge in the pleasure and risk of trying to make her perfect—the ideal wife who would enable him to realize his ideal of family happiness.

Tolstoy remained but a short time in Moscow, staying with his sister Marya who was having difficulties with her husband. He

<sup>1</sup> Her letters, unfortunately, have not been preserved.

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dined with Botkin and the famous dramatist Ostrovski, whom he dispatched in the diary as "a dirty but kind man, though a cold egoist." The Sudakovo miss, however, was on his mind, and he made an ungracious notation on her: "I tried to think of Valerya and thought about brothels; this hurt me."

Tolstoy went on to Petersburg, where he arrived November 7. The next day he sent a scorching letter to Valerya. He had learned that her affair with the music teacher was common gossip in Moscow. Stung by this knowledge, he asserted that her nature was cold, incapable of love, and that her feeling for him would soon vanish. All this arose, he pointed out, from her light nature, and he begged her to reform, concluding with the advice that she should be utterly frank with him if they were going to remain friends and love each other.

Repenting his harshness, he hastened the following day to send another and kinder letter that strikingly revealed his own thought at this time. If he had erred in his last, he hopefully explained, it was because one must err boldly and resolutely in order to come nearer the truth. Her trouble was that she had not learned to suffer. "Ach, if you could only understand and feel through suffering, as I have, the conviction that the only possible, entirely true, enduring and highest happiness is obtained by three things: work, self-renunciation, and love." Two persons united in this conviction could be completely happy. To salve the sting of his previous letter, and perhaps because he really believed it at the moment, he told her that she had an extraordinarily lovely nature, and that in all his disappointments the fact that "there is a girl back there" was the most comforting thing he knew. He begged her to write him, and he ended with an unusually frank statement that very accurately summed up his whole relationship with Valerya. "You see," he wrote, "I so strongly wish to love you that I teach you how to make me love you. Indeed, my real feeling for you is not yet love, but a passionate desire to love you with all my might."

Love, however, is not teachable; its devotees learn by instinct, not by rote. Valerya's instincts were better than Tolstoy's. He insisted upon playing the pedagogue simply because he could not trust the instincts of his heart. Still not hearing from her, he wrote an amusing letter in which, after confessing that he loved her terribly, he pictured their life together as the Khrapovitskis, Mr. Khrapovitski despising society and adoring a peaceful family life in the country, his wife dreaming of social life in Petersburg.

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On their united income, he pointed out the impossibility of living the whole year or even part of it in the city in an expensive manner. They must compromise and reside seven months in the country and five in Petersburg in a sixth-floor flat, with books, music, pictures, concerts, and quartets at home. There would be no luxury, balls, and high society. He broke off at this point, and not receiving a letter from Valerya the next day, he added an angry note to tell her of his complete indifference.

In a few days two delayed letters from Valerya arrived. His immediate answer was filled with affection. He doubted the whole universe, he wrote, save that good was good, and it was this alone that kept him going. And he knew that she could be good if she would only try. Another letter from her sent him into an ecstasy of devotion. It was clear that she loved him; she even completed his unfinished sketch of the Khrapovitski's married life. In answer he poured out details on his writing, telling her that he valued his literary reputation almost as much as a certain young lady. In his ardour the Khrapovitskis got down to the fifth floor, then the fourth. The best society, that is the educated, cultured, and talented, would come to their modest home. "God help you, my darling," he exclaimed, "go ahead, love, love not me alone, but all God's world, nature, music, poetry, and all that is charming in it, and develop your mind so as to understand the things that are worthy of love on earth." Then he interrupted this frenzy to preach that the chief destiny of woman is motherhood, and he ended, aggravatingly enough, with a lecture on taste in clothes.

This letter marked the high point of Tolstoy's regard for Valerya. His expression of feeling for her in the remainder of the correspondence swiftly subsided; in the end, only rationalizations for his lack of feeling remained. Thus, in his next letter, he resurrected the music teacher in what seemed to be a deliberate attempt to pick a quarrel. He had learned that she still corresponded with him, and he wanted her to summon him to Sudakovo and tell him flatly that she was through with him. Her religious nature prompted from him an unusual statement that had a strangely prophetic ring in the light of his future difficulties with the woman he did marry. "Whatever our future relations are," he wrote, "*let us never speak about religion and all that refers to it.* You know that I am a believer, but it may very well be that my faith differs from yours, and this question must never be touched, especially by people who want to love each other."

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Tolstoy's growing coldness soon became apparent to Valerya. She took him to task for it and complained of his habit of lecturing her. His reply was an attempt to exaggerate his "nasty, suspicious, changeable nature" in an obvious effort to discourage her, and he finally fell into the last resort of a man trying to justify a love grown cold: the plea that love and marriage would bring unhappiness to them both and therefore they should try to remain friends. Her answer was a letter forbidding him to write to her. But he replied, offering the customary explanations in such a situation.

During the whole period of this correspondence, Tolstoy led his usual intense social existence in Petersburg. Much of his time was spent in the company of his literary friends,<sup>1</sup> who eventually began to bore him extremely; he heard a great deal of music; and often he had recourse to loose women. He seemed to feel no urge to keep himself pure and chaste for the girl who might have become his wife. At a masquerade, a "sweet mouth" approached him. "I solicited it for a long time," he wrote in the diary. "It came with me, and at home was very reluctant to unmask. As like A.D.<sup>2</sup> as two peas, only older and the features coarser. I took her home, and the whole night and the next day I recovered my happiness."

On November 28 he received his long-awaited discharge from the army, and he decided to gratify a wish that had been with him for some time: to go abroad. He left Petersburg on January 12, and after stops in Moscow and Warsaw, he arrived in Paris February 9.

Tolstoy had not entirely forgotten Valerya. Several letters to Auntie Tatyana, who had very much favoured the match, made a sincere effort to explain his conduct. "I never loved her," he wrote, "with a real love. I was carried away by the reprehensible desire to inspire love. This gave me a delight I had never before experienced. But the time spent away from her proved to me that I did not even have the desire to see her, still less to marry her. It was terrible for me to think of the obligations I should have to perform towards her without loving her; so I decided to come away sooner than I had intended. I have behaved very badly; I have asked God to pardon me, and I ask the same of all whom I have grieved, but to mend this matter is impossible, and nothing in the world can renew it now."

<sup>1</sup>With some of these friends, especially Druzhinin who originated the idea, he drew up a project to establish a Society for the Aid of Needy Authors and Learned Men. The money was raised and the Society functioned very satisfactorily. Dostoyevsky was one of its early beneficiaries.

<sup>2</sup> Possibly Alexandra Dyakov (Obolenski).



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The feeling persisted that he had played a shabby part in the affair. Just after he wrote what he thought was to be his last letter to Valerya, he had a strange dream in which he saw slaughter on the floor and a naked brown woman on his chest stooping down and whispering something to him. He felt a need to justify his behaviour and purge his mind of the whole episode. This he later attempted in his short novel *Family Happiness* (1858-1859). He re-created the situation and tried to prove that if he and Valerya had been married, their different views of what made for happiness in such a relationship would have led to unhappiness for both.

*Family Happiness* does not justify Tolstoy's actions, but it admirably explains the reasons and feelings behind them. Psychologically he was not yet ready for marriage, but he wanted to realize his ideal of family happiness. Just before he left Moscow for abroad, he met a thrice-married lady, Baroness E. I. Mengden. He was impressed by her culture and intellect, and could not resist drawing a comparison between her and the provincial little Valerya. In the diary he noted that Baroness Mengden was charming and that he might have very happy relations with her. Then he concludes: "Perhaps the whole delight consists in standing on the threshold of love." And this statement may also be accepted as the real explanation of his behaviour towards Valerya.

## Chapter X

### THE GRAND TOUR .

CULTURED Russians, like the English, regarded a grand tour through the countries of Western Europe as a fitting climax to a young man's education. Tolstoy was a bit old for such a finishing touch; he had come to Paris not so much with the desire to learn from foreign travel as to escape—to escape from Valerya, from the Petersburg literary circle, and from one of his periodic attacks of dissatisfaction with the lack of purpose in his life.

Paris was more than a haven for the fugitive; it was a veritable Isle of the Blessed—for a time at least. All the pleasures of the city were open to Tolstoy, without the foreigner's usual lonely introduction to them. For here solicitous "old nurse" Turgenev eagerly greeted his troglodyte and found a suitable *pension*, where French sociability and conversation, interspersed with jests and puns in a babel of languages, cheered him at once. At the typical *pension* table he found a philosopher, a Spanish countess spangled with romantic adventures, an opinionated American doctor, an Italian abbé who declaimed the *Divine Comedy*, a playwright with long hair, and a female pianist who had composed the best polka in the world. After dinner, chairs and tables were pushed back for dancing on the dusty carpet, and in the dark hallway furtive flirting went on.

Aristocratic Russian families settled in the city gladly opened their doors to Tolstoy, and touring cousins were happy to dine with him. At the *salon* of his distant relatives, the Trubetskoi's, he met a weird assortment of people, from Jesuits to unsuccessful revolutionists. Nor was he indifferent to the Trubetskoi's daughter, whose marriage soon took place and wrung from him a confession of sadness and envy. He was also welcome at the Lvovs', until the jealous husband began to suspect his attentions to his wife. Tolstoy was really interested in their niece, attractive Princess Ekaterina Lvov. Interest blossomed into affection. He noted in the diary that he was a fool not to try to marry her. Later, when away from

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Paris, he even wrote Turgenev for his frank opinion of whether or not a proposal to the princess would be acceptable. Nothing came of the matter; he was still unready to cross the threshold of love. There were numerous dinners and dances; and his rakish cousin, N. M. Gorchakov, took him to public balls and initiated him into the city's demi-monde. Here was God's plenty, and a society in which he felt completely at home.

Tolstoy was tireless in his activities. An Italian and an English teacher were engaged to give him lessons. Stock tourist places were visited—the museums, the bourse, Fontainebleau, and Versailles. He attended the theatre diligently and enjoyed nearly all of it. Of the French plays he saw, he had harsh words only for one type: "Racine's drama and the like are Europe's poetic wound. Thank God we've not got it and shall not have it." The opera, always a bastard art to Tolstoy, he enjoyed in Paris almost against his will, but the concerts threw him into ecstasies. After a performance of Beethoven's "Trio" (opus 70), he decided that the French played him like gods. Attending lectures of distinguished professors was more in fashion among tourists then than now, and Tolstoy went to the Sorbonne and the Collège de France to hear talks on dramatic poetry, the classics, political economy, and international law.

Quiet evenings with Russian literary friends visiting Paris varied this intensive fare, and of these Turgenev was the one most frequently visited. Turgenev could not seem to live with Tolstoy or without him. Tolstoy's opinion of his friend fluctuated. At one moment he found him "good but terribly weak," then he was "vain and shallow," and a few days later he decided that Turgenev "does not believe in anything" and "does not love, but wants to love." Upon saying farewell to him in Paris, however, Tolstoy confessed in the diary: ". . . I wept. I don't know why. I'm very fond of him. He has made and is making a different man of me."

The period was a low one in the fortunes of Turgenev. He was ill and was having difficulties with the great love of his life, the famous singer, Pauline Viardot-Garcia. Tolstoy thought that he exaggerated both complaints and was annoyed by his feminine querulousness and self-pity. After Tolstoy had been in Paris a short time, he agreed to go with Turgenev to Dijon to help him get over his "moral loneliness," his illness, and the feeling that his imaginative powers were failing. In a letter to Annenkov, Turgenev described the two of them at work in a little hotel room, almost

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sitting on the hot coals to keep warm. While Tolstoy industriously scribbled page after page, he looked on wistfully and lamented that he had long since sucked his own lemon dry. And with a sunset glow of artist's temperament, he ordered Annenkov either to print the last manuscript he had sent him or "consign it to a quiet end in the watercloset."

The two authors were getting along capitally together, and Tolstoy even admitted that he had misunderstood Turgenev in the past and generously granted his artistic superiority. Within five days this literary honeymoon ended. Tolstoy read the draft of the new tale to him, and Turgenev reacted coldly. He decided categorically that Turgenev had "never loved anyone." They quarrelled once again, and Tolstoy left for Paris. In all their relations his esteem for Turgenev as a great artist was patent. In fact, this feeling irritated him, and he wished to free himself of it.

Back in Paris, Tolstoy once more applied himself wide-eyed to monuments and cocottes. He felt his lack of knowledge amid the culture and art of the French capital. Sergei arrived, but Tolstoy's sincere delight over the presence of his brother quickly vanished. He discovered that they had little in common. Nikolai, with his artistic soul (his charming "Hunting in the Caucasus" had just appeared in the *Contemporary*), understood him thoroughly; Sergei loved without understanding him. He soon left Paris, somewhat to Tolstoy's relief.

After almost two months of dizzy, delightful playing, Tolstoy started a letter to Botkin, in which he enthusiastically declared that he could not foresee the time when this great city would lose interest for him. He described the artistic pleasures he had enjoyed and the striking differences in French and Russian life, "especially the social freedom of which I did not even have a comprehension in Russia." Two months more at least, he reported, must be spent in this delectable place.

The next day Tolstoy completed the letter, but Paris in the brief interval had taken on all the aspects of a Sodom. Early that morning he had gone, in the spirit of a tourist seeing the sights, to witness the execution of a certain Francis Richeux, who had killed and robbed two persons. The scene shocked Tolstoy's sensibilities.

This spectacle made such an impression on me [he wrote to Botkin] that I shall not recover from it for a long time. I saw many horrors of war in the Caucasus and elsewhere, but if a man were torn to pieces

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before my eyes, it would not be so repulsive as this dextrous and elegant machine with which in a flash a powerful, fresh, and healthy person is killed. In the first instance there would be no intelligent will, but the human feeling of passion; in the other, there is a refined quiet and convenience in killing and nothing at all majestic. The insolent audacious desire to fulfil justice, the law of God. . . . The repulsive crowd, the father who explains to his little daughter the clever, convenient mechanism that does this, etc. Human law—nonsense! . . . I understand the laws of custom, of morality and religion . . . and I feel the laws of art that give happiness always; but for me, political laws are such a horrible lie that I do not see in them anything either better or worse. . . . I will never again look at such a thing, and I will never anywhere serve *any* government.

The image of the guillotine haunted Tolstoy. "A stout, white robust neck and chest," he jotted down in the diary. "He kissed the Gospels, and then—death. How senseless!" He had nightmares. The glistening knife descended on him. He awoke trembling and felt his neck for a cut. The scene would not fade from his mind. Many years later, in both *Confession* and *What Then Must We do?*, he recalled this execution and condemned it. For the arbiter of good and evil, he decided, is not what people say or do, nor is it progress, but one's own heart.

Paris became hateful to Tolstoy. He did not stop to reason that Moscow or Petersburg could present scenes of equal horror. His intensely impressionable nature revolted at any display of human cruelty. His mind was keyed to the disharmony between absolute good and man-made laws, even to the extent that he was beginning to doubt the so-called benefits of civilization. Now, he could find no further charm in this city of refinement and culture, and the day after the execution, he noted in the diary: ". . . Suddenly a simple and sensible idea occurred to me—to leave Paris." The following day he set out for Geneva.

## II

The greater part of the trip to Geneva was by rail, and it bored Tolstoy. "For God's sake, travel wherever you like but only not by rail," he wrote to Turgenev, from whom he had taken a tearful farewell. "The railroad is to a journey what a brothel is to love: just as convenient, but also just as humanly mechanical and deadly monotonous." The last leg of the trip in a coach raised his spirits.

An open road and a moonlit night, in which everything stood out and was suffused with love, banished the spectre of the guillotine and his baleful thoughts of Sodom-Paris. "For the first time in a long period, I sincerely thanked God that I was alive."

Tolstoy's reason for selecting Geneva as a haven was the presence there of his relative, Countess Alexandra Tolstoy. She was traveling with the family of Grand Duchess Marie as the companion of her children. The day after his arrival Tolstoy called on the countess at the luxurious Villa Bocage and vehemently poured out his disgust for Paris. He had almost gone out of his mind with the things he had seen. Nineteen of the thirty-six couples in the apartment building where he had lived, he charged, were unmarried. It had revolted him. And then the execution had murdered his sleep. So he had rushed headlong to his dear relative, feeling sure that she would save him.

Happily, "Granny" (so Tolstoy humorously called the countess because he thought her too young for the usual Russian appellation of "aunt") thoroughly understood her eccentric "grandson." His impressions, she guessed, were nearly always extreme, but she was fond of him and liked his modesty, liveliness, and kindly, expressive eyes. With her sharp intellect she had already recognized in him a kindred characteristic: they were "both terrible enthusiasts and analysers, who loved goodness, but did not know how to follow it properly."

Soon they were on terms of intimate friendship and acted together like two youths off on a holiday frolic. His visits were always welcome, for both children and grown-ups unflinchingly responded to his intense, active personality. Cultured Russian travellers in the neighbourhood quickly became his friends. They made up a group for an excursion to Vevey, and after they arrived climbed to Glion. Good company, perfect weather, and lush fields of spring flowers gladdened all. They reached the hotel at the top of the mountain in a sweat and found the public room crowded with English and American tourists. Comfortable, self-centred, joyless English travellers annoyed Tolstoy. To him their inner world seemed asleep. "The English are morally naked people and go about like that without shame," he noted in the diary. Perhaps he thought their stuffiness needed a jolting, for after tea he unceremoniously sat down at the piano and called upon his friends to sing. The countess and Madame Pushchin, who had excellent voices, started with "God Save the Tsar," and soon the men chimed in. Russian

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and gypsy songs were rendered, anything that suggested itself to Tolstoy, who accompanied and acted the part of conductor. The open windows, the expansive view over the surrounding countryside, and the impromptu spirit of the performance enlivened the whole room, and the delighted audience called for more and more. This joyous excursion ended when the countess had to return to Geneva to the duchess. Tolstoy remained at Vevey and reproached his Granny for leaving him for the "Chimney," as he sarcastically called the Court and its royalty. Letters and telegrams reached her daily, and on one occasion even a bit of verse, to tell her of his eternal devotion or of some humorous adventure. In revenge for her desertion, he and some friends made occasional sorties across the lake to take the countess by surprise with some practical joke or other.

After two weeks of sight-seeing, during which Tolstoy visited Chillon, Villeneuve, and Savoy, and all the while kept up a flirtation with an English girl named Dora, he returned to Geneva and the countess. He went on another excursion with her and her sister, this time to Salève. Her woman's intuition, supported by a penetrating and deeply sympathetic mind, attracted him. He found in her what Valerya or any other woman he had met lacked—a clear understanding of his complex, often paradoxical, feelings and thoughts. They had long discussions, with lancet in hand but always with mutual affection and respect for each other's views. The subject was often religion, in which they had no common ground, for she was a serious and devoted believer and he was altogether uncertain of what he believed. Yet his sudden attendance at church and reading the Bible at this time may have been inspired by her influence. This woman, who had remained unmarried by choice, despite all her charm and high connections, came close to fulfilling his ideal of the wife whom he would love more than any woman had ever been loved. "I'm so ready to fall in love that it's terrible," he wrote in the diary. "If Alexandra were only ten years younger! A fine nature." She was young enough to be his Granny, but too old to be his wife.

### III

With his base at Clarens, Tolstoy pushed out into the surrounding Swiss countryside on short sightseeing trips. In the middle of May he took a ten-day hike into the mountains with Sasha Polivanov, the eleven-year-old son of an acquaintance at Clarens.

He mentioned in his notebook that he was interested in the reactions of an innocent boy. Sasha sometimes proved to be a trial, but Tolstoy loved children and could enter into their special world and win their trust and confidence. The itinerary took them through Montreux, Les Avants, Col de Jaman (to Château d'Œx) and back to Clarens by way of Interlaken, Grindelwald, and Fribourg.<sup>1</sup>

With knapsacks on their shoulders, man and boy trudged over the mountain roads, exchanging their impressions on the natives they met and on the natural scenery that unfolded before them. Tolstoy was unusually responsive to all manifestations of nature. He had a poet's eye, the microscopic eye of a Tennyson that lingered with rapt attention on the tiniest detail of flower and tree, on the slightest nuance of colour and fragrance. Shortly before starting out he had written to Auntie Tatyana from Clarens to tell her that he spent most of his time gazing at and admiring the wonders of nature in the neighbourhood of this village, where his beloved Rousseau's Julie had lived. And now, the account of his walking trip reveals a Rousseauistic quality in nature descriptions interpenetrated with feeling and sentiment.

In his *Travel Notes* Tolstoy wrote: "Surprisingly enough, I have been living at Clarens for two months, and each time in the morning, or especially just before evening after dinner, when I open the shutters on which the shadows of night are falling and look out over the lake and on the mountains, green in the foreground and blue in the distance, reflected in it, the beauty dazzles me and suddenly acts upon me with the power of the unexpected. At that moment I wish to love, and I even feel love for myself, and I regret the past, hope for the future, and there is joy in me at being alive. I want to live forever, and thoughts about death are filled with a childish poetic horror. Sometimes, while sitting alone in the shade of the little garden and gazing, always gazing on the shores of the lake, I experience a kind of physical impression, as though the beauty pours through my eyes into my soul."

Such expressions of feeling before the majesty of nature are not infrequent in the *Travel Notes*. Yet it is curious that these towering mountains and clear blue lakes filled him with a nostalgia for the rolling steppes and forests of his native Russia. He blamed his spirit of contradiction for the fact that the traditionally beautiful view of

<sup>1</sup> His *Travel Notes in Switzerland* has recently appeared in Volume V of the Jubilee Edition.



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the Jaman mountain left him unmoved. This was a sight for English tourists to gape at, he scornfully remarked. It was all bare and cold, foreign to his warm temperament. "I love nature," he wrote, "when it surrounds me on all sides and extends unendingly, and when I am a part of it. I love it when I am surrounded by warm air, and when that air rolls away into the measureless distance; and when those same sappy blades of grass that I crush as I sit on them form the green of the boundless meadows; when those same leaves that flutter in the wind run their shadows across my face and form the line of the distant forest; when the same air that you breathe makes the deep azure of the illimitable heavens; when you do not exult and rejoice alone in nature, but around you buzz and whirl myriads of insects; and beetles, clinging together, creep about, and all around you the birds pour forth song."

### IV

Shortly after returning from his walking trip, Tolstoy set out for Turin to join Botkin and Druzhinin, where they visited art galleries, monasteries, and Roman ruins. His friends accompanied him back to Clarens, walking part of the distance by way of St. Bernard. Although he worried about consumption, which ran in the family, Tolstoy's energy seemed inexhaustible.

A few days' rest in Clarens and Tolstoy was off again to Lausanne, Berne, and Lucerne. As he came into Berne the shouts of drunken soldiers did not destroy the beauty of an enchanting moonlight night. He heard the corncrakes and the croaking frogs, and his soul responded to the beauty of nature, but with a kind of sweet suffering. At a fête he attended, every seemingly insignificant detail was etched on his memory—officers flourishing their sticks, a man with a torn coat, the hot smell of trampled grass, a proud and irate dandy, a tall Swiss adjusting his braces, a poor Russian bear, and a pretty but fatty woman.

At Lucerne a curious incident occurred. Returning to the Schweizerhof Hotel at night, he noticed a tiny man who stood outside and sang Tyrolese songs to a guitar. The balconies of the hotel were crowded with well-to-do tourists who enjoyed the singularly fine performance. When the street singer begged for money, the guests turned away in silence. He went off muttering to himself and the crowd ridiculed him. Tolstoy overtook the man and invited him back to this exclusive hotel for a drink. The guests were shocked, and the waiter and hall porter grew offensive over

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this breach of decorum. Tolstoy became furiously angry and scolded them all.

A few days later Granny arrived at Lucerne. The last time she had seen him was at Vevey. At the hotel there the waiter had informed her in a mysterious voice that she was wanted downstairs. She descended and was greeted by Tolstoy and two of his friends wrapped in long cloaks, with feathers in their fantastic hats. In the fashion of strolling players, they had spread music on the floor, and with sticks for instruments had set up an indescribable cacophony or cat's concert. Granny nearly died with laughter and the Grand Duchess's children were inconsolable at having missed the performance.

The countess now found Tolstoy in anything but a playful mood. He was still excited and burning with indignation over the incident of the itinerant singer. In her *Reminiscences* she remarked that the affair made such a strong impression on him that it involuntarily communicated itself to others. After he had told her of how he had ordered supper and champagne for the man, she judiciously commented: "I scarcely think the guests or even the poor musician himself quite appreciated the irony of this action." Within a few days Tolstoy called on the "Chimney" to read them *From the Diary of Prince D. Nekhlyudov* or, as it is known in English, *Lucerne*. The story of the humiliated singer had received the form of enduring art.

Tolstoy remained a few more days in Lucerne, spending much of his time with the countess and amusing the Grand Duchess's children. The youngsters were diverted by his antics, and expressed wonder at the number of cherries he could eat at a sitting. He endeared himself so much to them that they begged for his company when the Grand Duchess's party moved on by boat to Küssnacht. Tolstoy was invited to go along, and he pushed on further to Zurich, Schaffhausen, and Friedrichshafen. Nothing of consequence happened on the journey; he continued to Stuttgart and Baden-Baden, where he arrived July 12.

## v

A letter to Auntie Tatyana from Lucerne had mentioned an extensive itinerary for the remainder of Tolstoy's stay abroad—Holland, London, then back to Paris, Rome, Naples, and possibly a return to Russia by way of Constantinople and Odessa. This plan

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was gambled away at the roulette wheels of Baden-Baden. He ventured a few francs and lost. The next morning he was back and played well into the night with indifferent success. The gambling fever gripped him. The following day he lost everything, borrowed two hundred francs, and lost again. He promised himself to play no more, having already run through three thousand francs.

Penniless, Tolstoy dispatched a telegram to Nekrasov for money, and wrote letters to Sergei, Botkin, Turgenev, and Granny, who at once sent him funds. The good Turgenev, who was staying at Sinzig on the Rhine at the time, worried over his troglodyte and set out for Baden-Baden. The money that Turgenev loaned him on his arrival, however, quickly went the way of the rest, and Tolstoy cursed himself as a "pig" and a "good-for-nothing."

This final loss convinced Tolstoy of the necessity of leaving the city and returning to Russia. A letter from Sergei strengthened his decision, for he learned that their sister had finally broken with her husband because of his infidelities. Marya declared that she did not care to be the chief sultana in his harem.

Tolstoy's first stop was at Frankfurt, where he visited Granny. Distinguished guests were present. She recalled the occasion: "I almost cried out in horror when the door opened and Leo stood there in a more than incredible costume. Neither before nor after have I seen anything like it. He was like a bandit, not a gambler who had lost all his money. Obviously displeased that he did not find me alone, he stayed a brief time and vanished." When the guests learned that this singular personage was Tolstoy, they were disappointed at not being introduced, and went into raptures over his literary talent.

Tolstoy pushed on to Dresden, visited the bookshops and the art gallery, where the Sistine Madonna moved him deeply. At Marienbad he met a group of Russians, among them the Lvovs, and his interest in the pretty princess flared up again. Later, he wrote Granny about his strangely mixed reactions on this occasion: "I was exactly in the proper mood for falling in love, for I had just lost heavily at cards, was dissatisfied with myself, and entirely idle. It is a theory of mine that love consists of the desire to forget oneself, and therefore, like sleep, it comes over a man most frequently when he is displeased with himself or unhappy. Princess Lvov is beautiful, clever, honest, and has a sweet nature. I wanted with all my strength to fall in love with her, saw her a great deal, and nothing came of it. For God's sake, what does this mean? Am

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I a freak of some kind? It is obvious that something is lacking in me. And this something, it seems to me, is a small dose of conceit."

Granny, wiser than he in these matters, reminded him that Providence especially reserves marriage to herself and arranges for the best, if only people do not spoil things by considerations of vanity, money, or ambition; and she good-naturedly promised that she would never let him remain a bachelor. Yet it was with some reluctance that he left the princess for Berlin. There he attended a concert, but the street debauchery disgusted him. The following day he took the boat at Stettin and arrived in Petersburg July 30.

### VI

In his letter to Botkin from Paris, Tolstoy had firmly declared that he was not a writer. By this he meant that he was not a writer in the sense that the Petersburg literary set understood the calling. For them, authorship was simply self-expression; Tolstoy regarded his art as a medium for moral self-perfection and ultimately for the perfection of mankind. He held truth to be the most valuable possession of an author, but, contrary to Mark Twain's advice, he did not always use truth economically.

During this first tour abroad Tolstoy worked intermittently on several tales.<sup>1</sup> At the end of 1856 social and political questions had been much on his mind; now he was concerned with the question of art. Art, he felt, must be based upon some moral truth that would go deeper than the "convictions" of the Petersburg *Contemporary* authors. And his story "Albert" was designed to convey this belief.

The life of a talented but hopelessly drunken violinist Kiese-wetter, whom Tolstoy had met in Moscow the previous winter, provided the material for "Albert." The story is a protest against society's inability to understand and protect real art, and it was his first literary failure. There is reason to believe that he thought this tale a step in the direction of the new art, "awfully high and pure," to which he had pledged himself shortly before coming abroad. Nekrasov returned the manuscript with a broad hint that Tolstoy refrain from publishing it. He pointed out the tendentiousness and banality, and suggested that the morally sick and drunken

<sup>1</sup> *The Cossacks*, "Far-Away Field" (a projected novel on which he made only a beginning), a short story, "Albert", and "From the Diary of Prince D. Nekhlyudov" or "Lucerne".

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Albert needed a doctor more than the appreciative understanding of society. Tolstoy was hurt and the criticism contributed to a growing coldness between him and Nekrasov that finally resulted in his breaking with the *Contemporary*. He reworked the story in an effort to eliminate the special pleading, but he did not entirely succeed. His lyrical description of the effects of music on a listener, inspired by his own powerful reactions, is superb, and is perhaps the only distinguished feature of the tale.

"Lucerne" actually appeared before "Albert," although written after,<sup>1</sup> and may be considered a variant of it. Tolstoy called it an "article," and packed into it all that the limitations of fiction prevented him from saying in "Albert." It is his first moralistic tract. Here he develops ideas of the beauty of primitive art and its blending with nature, and of the fixed opposition of nature, morality, and art to political laws, organized government, and civilization. The voice of Rousseau rings loud and clear. "Lucerne" is a slight thing in the totality of Tolstoy's vast literary creations, but it is a highly important signpost pointing the direction of much of his future thought.

## VII

These few months abroad coincided with an obvious step forward in the growth of Tolstoy's historic mission. His contact with the culture and civilization of Western Europe had not so much changed as accelerated a development in his thinking. Upon his arrival in Paris he had prophetically observed that this trip "must certainly mark an epoch" in his life. Doubts about the meaning of life had only timidly knocked at the door of his mind; now they boldly entered it. "Last night," he wrote in the diary, "I was suddenly tormented by doubts of *everything*, which arose in me. And now, though they do not torment me, they are still in me. Why? And what am I? It seemed to me more than once that I was solving these questions, but no, I have not fixed them in my life."

Rebellious thoughts and feelings prompted by Tolstoy's experiences in the Caucasus and at Sevastopol were now affirmed in an uncompromising and dogmatic manner. This was particularly true of his attitude towards war. He went to the Invalides to see the imposing sarcophagus of Napoleon. Angrily he commented: "This deification of a malefactor is terrible. Soldiers are animals

<sup>1</sup>"Lucerne" was published in the September number of the *Contemporary*, 1857, and "Albert" in the August number, 1858.

taught to bite everybody. They ought to die of hunger. Legs torn off—serves them right." An entry in his notebook was less bitter: "Is it worthwhile to dress a man in a uniform, separate him from his family, and give him a drum to beat in order to make an animal of him?"

Much of Tolstoy's reading during this first tour bore some relation to the questioning in his mind. Fiction and poetry occupied little of his time. He read Balzac's *Honorine* and *Cousine Bette* and credited the writer with an immense talent, but he thought the introduction to the *Comédie Humaine* shallow and self-satisfied. Freytag's novel *Soll und Haben* he set down as poor, and he read Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* and his poem *Wilkommen und Abschied*. He thought Dumas fils talented in *La dame aux perles* but filled with depravity.<sup>1</sup>

Tolstoy's interests were in sterner literature. He read the Gospels, Khomyakov's religious pamphlets, and political and historical works.<sup>2</sup> In his notebook he also mentioned that he read Proudhon, although he did not indicate which of the several works that the great French socialist and political writer had published by 1857. It was probably the well-known *Qu'est-ce que la propriété*. This introduction to the ideas of Proudhon was a matter of primary significance. When one remembers that Proudhon was already maintaining that private property was theft; that government of man by man in every form was oppression; and that the highest perfection of society was to be found in the union of order and anarchy, then much in the development of Tolstoy's future thought becomes clear.

It is of some importance to point out the results of this reading which are immediately apparent in Tolstoy's notebooks. For it is not generally recognized that even this early his mind began to grapple with the ideas that twenty years later were to change the whole course of his life.

Tolstoy's criticism of Proudhon, for example, was characteristic of his thought at this time. He wrote in the notebook: "While reading the logical, material Proudhon, his mistakes were as clear to me as were the mistakes of the idealists to him. How often

<sup>1</sup> He also read E. About's *Germain* ("a silly novel"); H. C. Andersen's *Improvisatore*; F. Bremer's *The Neighbours* ("a very bright, attractive talent, but as usual with women, too sugary"); and E. Gaskell's *Life of Charlotte Brontë*.

<sup>2</sup> He read G. M. Sarrut's *Biographie des hommes du jour*; E. Girardin's *De la liberté de la presse et du journalisme*; Napoleon III's *Idees Napoléoniennes*; E. de las Cases's *Le Mémorial de Sainte Hélène*; and A. de Tocqueville's *L'Ancien Régime et la Révolution*.

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does one see the powerlessness of one's mind—always expressing one side; but it is better to see this one side in past thinkers and workers, especially when they complement each other. From this comes love, uniting all these views into one, and this is the single, infallible law of humanity.”

Such a statement looked forward to Tolstoy's notion of universal love, and he was already beginning to think about its primary obstacle—modern civilization. He asserted that there was an equal compensation in the absence of civilization, a thought that led him to make random observations in the notebook about the political organization of society. “Nationality,” he declared, “is the one single bar to the growth of freedom”; and he went so far as to maintain that “the absence of laws was possible, but there must be security against violence.” Finally, he was led for the first time to a contemplation of that idea which in later years covered his name with both fame and infamy. “All governments,” he wrote, “are in equal measure good and evil. The best ideal is anarchy.”

There was much else in the notebooks over this brief period abroad that showed a surprising advance in Tolstoy's political, social, and moral views. He condemned British imperialism and the shedding of blood for any political gain; he hazarded the guess that socialism was impossible; and he asserted that the Russian people were capable of living under a republican form of government. The twenty-nine-year-old thinker had already found the road that would lead him straight to his epoch-making revolt against the whole organization of modern civilization. But he was never satisfied with abstract thought. Ideas must be translated into action. Only thus could he perfect himself and serve others. Just before he left Europe for Russia, a modest plan of action occurred to him that would soon occupy much of his time, and with unique results. “The idea came clearly and strongly into my head to start a school in my own village for the whole district, and of general *activity* of that kind. Above all, continuous activity.”

## Chapter XI

### LITERARY CRISIS

**A**GREY, dewy morning. The birch trees. Russia at last! Tolstoy's eyes filled at the sight of his native land. Nekrasov carried him off to his country place at Peterhof for a few days. He read "Lucerne" to the company and was pleased to note that it produced an effect. But he was anxious to get home. Affairs must be put in order and his future determined without any more nonsense. On the way he defined his new purpose in life: literary work first, then family duties, and finally estate management. As for his obligations to humanity, he decided that one good action a day would suffice.

"Delightful Yasnaya!" Tolstoy exclaimed on arriving. His feeling of pleasure, however, quickly gave way to one of loathing. What shocking sights in this fatherland of his—a gentlewoman beating her little daughter on the street with a cane, an official at the station thrashing a sickly seventy-year-old man, and his own bailiff punishing a tipsy gardener by sending him over the sharp stubble in his bare, wounded feet to watch the cattle. Were his countrymen all sadists? He could not rest until he had poured out his sentiments in a letter to Granny. "In Russia it is bad, bad, bad!" he protested. "In both Petersburg and Moscow all cry out over something, are indignant, expect something to happen, and in the village we have only patriarchal barbarism, thievery, and lawlessness. Do you believe it, upon arriving in Russia I long struggled with a feeling of repulsion for my native land, and only now do I grow accustomed to the horrors that make up the eternal conditions of our life." His only salvation, he told her, was the moral world and the world of art and poetry. He sat alone at Yasnaya Polyana. The wind howled and it was cold and dirty. With clumsy fingers he played an andante of Beethoven and wept tender tears; or he read that "wonderful *Iliad*," or invented men



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and women of his own and scribbled their doings on paper; or he found a refuge in thoughts about the real people he loved.

The culture and refinement of Europe had done their work. In retrospect Paris was no longer a Sodom to Tolstoy. What difference was there between the frightfulness of the modern guillotine and the horrors of Russia's primitive conditions of life? He soon regained his perspective, but this profound disillusion hovered in the background of his existence over the next two years and was periodically intensified by unhappy personal experiences.

August and September Tolstoy spent in the country. Literature—the first objective of his new purpose in life—received little attention, but he did make a serious effort to occupy himself with the family and the estate. The poverty of his serfs troubled him, and he began a regular policy of allowing peasants to buy their freedom. He tried to increase the value of his land; he planted a large number of trees in the park of Yasnaya Polyana, and soon he ordered the building of a house to replace the one he had sold several years before.

Tolstoy visited neighbours, among them the Arsenevs. Sudakovo seemed sad and gloomy. One might begin all over again, he mentioned in the diary, but Valerya he finally dismissed as a kind but empty girl. His chief enjoyment was hunting, and for this sport he went frequently to Pirogovo, an estate owned by Marya and Sergei. He felt a new responsibility for Marya and her children since she had separated from her husband. The relations of brother and sister at this time were not always pleasant, for she was beginning to evince a strong feeling for Turgenev, who obviously fostered it but had no serious intentions.<sup>1</sup> Tolstoy grew apprehensive, for he knew Turgenev's moral weaknesses.

Tolstoy could not throw off the feeling of boredom and sadness that had come over him upon his return to Russia. He wished to lead an active and self-denying life, by which he meant to labour, to think, and to give himself to others. Yet a sense of futility continually gnawed at him. "The ideal is unattainable," he jotted down in the diary. "I've already destroyed myself. Work, a small reputation, money. What for? Material enjoyment—also what for? Soon eternal night. It always seems to me that I shall soon die." At twenty-nine the gloomy spiritual condition that tormented him in later life had already begun to manifest itself.

<sup>1</sup> It is very likely that Turgenev's *Faust* was inspired by his affection for Marya, and he dedicated this work to her.

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A scheme for encouraging tree-planting in the Tula province took Tolstoy's mind off his morbid thoughts. He wrote up the project,<sup>1</sup> and in the middle of October he went to Petersburg to submit his plan to the proper government authorities.

### II

Cautious officials deftly shelved Tolstoy's project. A further disappointment was the discovery that his literary fame had virtually vanished among the Petersburg cognoscenti. "My reputation has fallen or hardly squeaks," he noted in the diary. "And inwardly I felt terribly grieved; but now I'm calmer. I know that I have something to say and the strength to say it powerfully; then let the public speak what it will." One solid consolation was the company of Granny, who had returned from abroad. He declared enthusiastically that he had never met a woman who even reached to her knees.

Tolstoy spent the remaining two months of 1857 in Moscow. His sister, brother, and Auntie Tatyana also arrived for the gay winter social season. Marya was a fine pianist, and frequent musical evenings at home were arranged. Nor did he miss an opportunity to take her three children to the theatre, where they fell asleep, or to the zoo at which they remained wide-awake. One of these outings inspired a tale that he wrote for the amusement of his adored and adoring nephew and nieces.<sup>2</sup>

He saw a great deal of Nikolai, whose droll humour, brilliant conversation, and simple, lovable nature made him a general favourite. Although they had the deepest admiration and affection for each other, Nikolai, who distinguished so clearly between the real essence of life and its ephemeral aspects, often treated his brother to a gentle "riding" because of his snobbish lapses and fondness for modish clothes. Indeed, Tolstoy might be seen any day strutting along the boulevard, dressed in a short winter overcoat with a stylish grey beaver collar, his well-groomed dark curly hair showing under a glossy hat cocked fashionably to one side, and jauntily swinging a cane like any lord of creation. In the homes of Moscow's best families his proud bearing, lively personality, and flashing eyes instantly commanded attention. In conversation his face became animated, and he talked loudly and clearly. There

<sup>1</sup> It has been published in Vol. V of the Jubilee Edition.

<sup>2</sup> *A Tale of How Varinka Quickly Grew Up* (Jubilee Edition, Vol. V.)

was an aggravating positiveness in his exposition, and it was obvious that he feared to be wrong in either words or deeds. Ideas and projects sprouted in his head like mushrooms, and to all who listened he gave the impression of originality and immense driving force.

Whenever Tolstoy was in the city, he insisted on regular physical exercise. At two o'clock in the afternoon, his friends knew they could locate him at Moscow's fashionable gymnasium. While a group of baldheaded businessmen and government officials with pendulous stomachs looked on with bored dissatisfaction, Tolstoy, clad in tights, dexterously leaped over the vaulting horse, without touching a cone placed on the back of the apparatus.

Nor was the science of the tender passion neglected during his stay in Moscow. Many years later a feminine admirer recalled that at this time Tolstoy "still flirted and was a swell whom all of Moscow zealously courted, for he was very much interested in women." The urge to marry was stronger than ever, but Granny's Providence gave him no aid, and he was loath now to let reason dictate where the heart had not spoken. The Valerya incident had taught him a lesson. He was thrown again with Alexandra Obolenski, and perhaps because the issue was bound to be hopeless, he felt himself "passionately in love with her." And he renewed his acquaintance with the Lvovs, who were also staying in Moscow that winter. Now he shifted his attention to the younger sister, Alexandra, but he showed even less zeal for her than he had for Ekaterina.

Two plain-appearing but intellectual girls, Olga Kireyev and Alexandra, the sister of his close friend B. N. Chicherin, obviously set their caps for him. But he did not like intellectual women, and the seventeen-year-old Olga's enthusiastic disbelief in Christ pained him extremely. There were others, prettier and less intellectual, who caught his eye. Ekaterina, a daughter of the poet Tyutchev, whose verse he greatly admired, he confessed himself "ready to marry, quietly, without love, but she would have accepted me with studious coldness." Meanwhile, Providence was arranging things to suit herself. He had taken to visiting the Bers family again. In this merry household the girls with whom he had played leapfrog the preceding year were fast growing up. The two oldest, Elizaveta and Sonya, delighted in the lively amusement he provided. He remarked to a friend: "If Sonya were sixteen and not fourteen, I would propose to her at once."

## III

Tolstoy remained in Moscow until April of 1858.<sup>1</sup> During this time he saw much of Fet, who had become one of his closest and most valued friends, and Chicherin, a brilliant philosopher and jurist, who stimulated him intellectually and influenced him to take an interest in science. He began to read up on the subject of geology and also the curious works in natural science of Michelet—*L'Oiseau* and *L'Insecte*.<sup>2</sup> On the theme of religion, however, he differed emphatically with Chicherin, as he did with everyone. After a warm discussion of Christianity, he set down the following thought that he found no reason to alter during the remainder of his life: "Christ did not impose but revealed a moral law that will always remain as a standard of good and evil."

With the first breath of spring, the season that always filled Tolstoy with a joyous feeling of renewal, he was off to Yasnaya Polyana (April 9). "It's spring, Granny!" he proclaimed in a letter to Countess Alexandra Tolstoy shortly after his arrival, and continued:

For good people it is splendid to live in the world, and it is fine even for me. In nature, in the air, in everything is hope, the future, and a charming future. . . . I well know, when one reasons it out sanely, that I'm a frozen, old, rotten potato stewed in sauce, but spring acts on me so powerfully that I often catch myself in the full blaze of dreaming I'm a plant that is just about to put forth its leaves with other plants, and will go on growing simply, calmly, and happily in God's own world.

Yasnaya Polyana was Tolstoy's "fatherland." Without it, he admitted, it would be difficult for him to comprehend his relation to Russia. His housekeeper, Agafya Mikhailovna,<sup>3</sup> was the first on hand with a warm welcome and a list of complaints, and Vasili

<sup>1</sup> With other enthusiasts, Tolstoy helped organize during this winter a Musical Society that later developed into the Moscow Conservatory, of which Nikolai Rubenstein became director.

<sup>2</sup> From 1857 to 1859 Tolstoy's reading was varied. Among other things, he read the Gospels, *Don Quixote*, Rabelais' works, Goethe's *Faust*, Macaulay's *History of England*, the tales of H. C. Andersen, George Eliot's *Scenes from Clerical Life* and *Adam Bede*, Gogol's *Letters* and the second part of *Dead Souls*, Goncharov's *Oblomov*, Kozlov's *Poems*, Saltykov-Shchedrin's *Death of Pazukhin*, and the *Correspondence* of P. V. Annenkov and N. V. Stankevich.

<sup>3</sup> This house serf spent all her life at Yasnaya Polyana, serving in various capacities. She had a unique personality and was a talented narrator of folk tales. Tolstoy portrayed her in *Childhood*, *Boyhood*, and in *Anna Karenina*.

the bailiff waited patiently to present an account of his stewardship. For twelve years Tolstoy had been dabbling at estate management, but this spring he had decided to tackle the job in all seriousness, and to begin by doing away with the intermediaries who stood between him and direct contact with his peasants.<sup>1</sup>

With that curious compensatory desire of the intellectual for hard physical labour, Tolstoy plunged into farming. Writing and reading were almost entirely forgotten. He tried to become a practical squire and drove himself as hard as his peasants. Nor did he spare blows, and on one occasion he even ordered a stubborn serf to be flogged, although he at once grew conscience-stricken, asked the victim's pardon, and gave him three rubles. He tried his hand at ploughing and discovered the poetry of work in guiding the colter through loamy spring earth. The blood raced through his veins, hours passed, and he went home with an appetite and a satisfying fatigue he had never before experienced.

Nikolai amusingly observed to Fet that his brother was trying to become acquainted with peasant life. He described how Tolstoy regarded his serf Ufan as an emblem of village strength and admired the way he stuck his arms out when ploughing. In imitation, Tolstoy "ufanized," that is, stuck his own elbows out wide as he drove the plough. His insistence on taking a hand in all manner of work on the estate, without omitting anything, not even his gymnastics, also drew Nikolai's raillery. The bailiff, he remarked, saw things differently. When he came to the master for orders and found him head downward, swinging by one knee from a horizontal bar, he did not know whether to listen to his orders or be astonished at him.

There were few visitors that summer at Yasnaya Polyana. Turgenev came for several days and they got along pleasantly enough in that curious state of armed neutrality that always existed between them. On a return visit to Spasskoye, however, Tolstoy found his friend unendurably ponderous. A more welcome visitor at Yasnaya Polyana was the aged mother of Countess Alexandra Tolstoy. He wrote Granny of the joy this visit had given him, and in the same letter he also described his simple country pleasures. Two nightingales sang below his window, and he noticed that they answered the sixths in a Haydn sonata that he strummed on the piano. He stopped and so did the birds, and they began their

<sup>1</sup> He announces this determination in an unfinished sketch, "Summer in the Country" (Jubilee Edition, Vol. V).

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warbling again when he played. "I spent about three hours at this game," he wrote. "The balcony was open, the night warm, the frogs were about their business, and the watchman about his—splendid! Pardon me if this letter seems to come from the forest primeval. I must confess that I have gone a little off my head with the spring and the solitude. I wish you the same with all my heart. There are moments of happiness stronger, but none more harmonious than these."

Granny did understand his groping, his wonderment that Truth and Beauty, as he pointed out in another letter, can live in the same corner with Christian sentiments, like a dog and cat. She replied:

. . . I am never worried, whatever you say. The seed is germinating, and God placed it in too good a soil for it to be stifled. Everything standing in the way of Truth shall be cast aside one day. On my part, I see (as it were) only the mechanical working of your soul. That is the ship that is being built and has not yet left the dock. When I see it majestically sail past from the level at which I flounder, I shall cry out: "Saint Leo, pray for us!"

"Saint Leo," however, doffed his canonical robes when he left the sanctum of his study where he penned these lofty sentiments on Truth and Beauty. In the fields, woods, and bathhouse he was Squire Tolstoy, and over his serfs he claimed all the ancient prerogatives appertaining to that title. His victim at this time—apparently a very willing one—was a pretty young married peasant girl by the name of Aksinya Bazykin. In May he noted in the diary: "Today, in the big old wood. I'm a fool, a brute. Her bronze flush and her eyes . . . I'm in love as never before in my life. Have no other thought." Something of his unusual contentment with village life this summer must be attributed to the pleasures Aksinya afforded him. The customary transient liaison of master and serf developed into a firm attachment. A son, Timofei, was born.<sup>1</sup> The veiled references to Aksinya in the diary suggest—as he actually admitted—that his feeling for her had become that of a husband for a wife. His conscience troubled him. A sense of guilt at times amounted literally to physical suffering, but so completely was his desire concentrated on Aksinya that at times even the voice of conscience was stilled. Three months before his death, Tolstoy

<sup>1</sup> In later years Timofei served as coachman to one of Tolstoy's sons, a situation ironically reminiscent of the illegitimate coachman-son of Tolstoy's father.

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told his official biographer, P. I. Biryukov, that his affair with Aksinya was one of two moral lapses in his youth that most tormented him throughout his life. This illicit union served to intensify his desire for marriage as the only hope of escape.<sup>1</sup>

At night, seated in his comfortable armchair in the quiet living room of Yasnaya Polyana, Tolstoy's conscience found peace in the serene companionship of Auntie Tatyana. If she had known of his affair with Aksinya, she would have suffered for him but not censured him. For she never told these children, who had been left to her care, how to arrange their lives. All her moral influence rested on the sweet, tranquil existence of unobtrusive love that she led. Although deeply religious, she did not discuss religion, and Tolstoy, after some unhappy attempts, avoided this subject with her. She seemed to have a trusting faith in everything, except the doctrine of eternal punishment, for she could not imagine how God, who was goodness itself, could ever desire man to suffer. Her charming Old World affability put all at their ease, yet she did not live in the past and tried to keep up with all the interests of her nephews and niece. The new telegraph wires along the road puzzled her. When driving with Tolstoy one day, she asked him to tell her how words were sent by telegraph. He explained the process as simply as possible and she indicated that she understood. After keeping her eyes on the wire for some time, she asked in a puzzled tone why she had not yet seen a single letter go along it. Years after her death, he suffered pangs of remorse at the remembrance that he had sometimes denied her money for sweets that she kept in her room, more to treat others with than to indulge herself. She often called him "Nikolai," which pleased him immensely, for he thought it showed that her conception of him and his father was mingled in her love of both.

## IV

Early in September Tolstoy attended an election of the Tula nobility. He appears not to have been very friendly with his fellow landowners at the meeting, but he was one of the signers, along with Turgenev and Khomyakov, of a resolution that favoured emancipation of the serfs, with a just allotment of land. This

<sup>1</sup> So strong was this attachment that Tolstoy felt impelled to make use of it several times in his fiction. It appears in *Polikushka*, "Idilliya," and in "Tikhon and Malanya"; and it is most fully described in *The Devil* in the love of Eugene for Stepanida.

document reflected the growing feeling throughout the whole country that the time for freeing the serfs had arrived.

Tolstoy returned to Yasnaya Polyana (September 20) and remained until December, when he went to Moscow again. A friend, S. S. Gromeka, who was as enthusiastic as Tolstoy about hunting, invited him and Nikolai to take part in a bear hunt at Volochok, a village on the road to Petersburg. The affair was arranged in elaborate fashion, with a host of peasant beaters and a professional huntsman to direct all details.

It was known that a particularly large she-bear had so far escaped the hunters, and the next day the party set out to track it down. The bear was raised and surrounded in a patch of forest by beaters. Hunters took their positions at the approaches and the beaters set up an infernal racket to drive the bear out. Although the huntsmen had been advised to stamp down the snow at their stations in order to have complete freedom of movement, Tolstoy obstinately remained standing up to his waist in it, declaring that he was there to shoot, not box, the bear. Running from the beaters, the animal turned into an approach, saw the hunters, and quickly swerved towards Tolstoy's post. So surprised was he that the bear got to within six paces of him before he remembered to fire. The shot missed, and he fired a second time with the bear on top of him. But the bullet failed to stop the beast and Tolstoy was bowled over. The next thing he knew he felt something heavy weighing him down and his face being forced into the bear's mouth. He instinctively tried to draw his head into his shoulders in an effort to free his nose and eyes from the enormous teeth that were gnawing at him. His face felt as though it were being cut by knives. The end had come, he thought. Then suddenly the weight lifted from him, and the bear vanished. The professional hunter had immediately perceived Tolstoy's plight, and, dashing up with only a stick in his hand, had frightened the animal off. The flesh above and below Tolstoy's eye had been badly torn. He was taken to a near-by town, and after the wound was sewn up, he suffered no ill-effects. The huge bear was eventually killed and Tolstoy claimed the skin, which may still be seen at Yasnaya Polyana. He returned to Moscow, immediately wrote Auntie Tatyana about his adventure, and thanked God for his unusual escape.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Tolstoy described this incident in one of his tales for children, "The Bear-Hunt."



Tolstoy began 1859 with a firm declaration that "I must get married this year or never." He had passed the thirty mark, an inevitability that worried him excessively. Aksinya worried him more, and soon he confessed to himself: "I've even become terrified at the thought of how close she is to me." Matrimony would solve everything, but it was a solution that still evaded him.

For consolation Tolstoy went to Petersburg in March to visit Granny, that unfortunately passé embodiment of his ideal woman. He spent "ten of the happiest days," and the countess noted in her diary: "Met with dear Leo. As formerly, he is a queer fellow, but also a remarkable mind and heart."

Tolstoy justified her description of "queer fellow" by suddenly departing for Moscow without troubling to take his leave of the countess. She was deeply hurt. A letter of explanation promptly arrived: everything was so good with her, he wrote, and got still better day by day that if he had not left, there would never have been any reason to go. What he did not explain was that her charming company constantly reminded him of a happiness he was searching for and could not find. His peace of mind was better sustained by keeping up their friendship at a distance, and he promised to write her every week.

The gentle resentment in the countess's reply had an undercurrent of feeling that ran deeper than mere affection. Tolstoy could not fail to understand her comparison between the small dissonances of friendship and those of married life, or the reference to herself as an old woman whom he would never again find so receptive and inclined to be so infinitely sincere. She too was reminded of a happiness that she had almost ceased to search for. A difference of eleven years in their ages kept her innuendo within the bounds of infinite delicacy and refinement. And at the end of her letter, she firmly slammed the door: "Get married, my dear Leo, and without delay, while egoism has not yet had time to dry all over you. Having dispensed little of self-denial, you have much to give away—if that does not happen to be the same as almsgiving—; whosoever gives shall be enriched. Thanks for your visit. When I succeed in detaching it from your abrupt departure, I am heartily and sincerely thankful."

Tolstoy kept his promise for a time and wrote her about every week. The Easter holidays had arrived and, knowing it would please

her, he announced his intentions of going to church. In another letter, however, he told her that the experiment had failed. He could pray at home and read the Gospels, but to stand in church, surrounded by a motley crowd, and listen to the unintelligible mumbling of the priest—all this was utterly impossible. To make matters worse, he twitted her on her own sincere faith, asking her to make over to him some of her holy radiance.

His levity drew a withering arraignment from the countess, all the more devastating in that she wrote out of love for him. His letter, she said, had caused her sharp pain, tears, and confused thoughts. "What pride, ignorance, and sloth in a sentiment that you probably believe to be respectable or reverent," she wrote of his attitude towards the Easter services. "It seems to me that you sometimes combine within yourself every idolatry of heathendom—while adoring God in a sunbeam, in an aspect of nature, or in one of the innumerable aspects of His glory—, but you never understand that you must rise to the source of life to be enlightened and purified." She blamed his spirit of pride for the fact that he disdained the simple worshippers and priest. Did her dear "grandson" require a service performed in a solemn or poetical manner before he could pour out his heart to God? If he did not understand the prayers in church, why not work at them? "It would be worth your while to work at them," she wrote, "even at the expense perhaps of husbandry and literature. Ignorance by design is no justification. But you must have gratuitous ecstasies, ravishments, and sudden transports leading you into a blissful state, without disturbing your idleness and with no effort of volition on your side." She concluded on a note of love for him and with a prayer that he might one day find true humility that teaches more than all our so-called sublime thoughts and craving for God.

Tolstoy was deeply moved by this deserved rebuke from a religious and wise woman. His faith was in an amorphous state, yet he felt it essential to defend his position to the countess. The result was a rather remarkable letter. He had been bad, he admitted, but was it necessary to punish him like that? A man who had won his convictions from life did not speak about them, and he assured her that she did not know his. But he would try to make his convictions on religion clear. He told her of the meaningless traditional faith of his childhood, and how even as a boy he had brushed this all aside. Then he gave an account of his spiritual struggle in the Caucasus. "I found that immortality exists, that there is love, and

that you have to live for others in order to be eternally happy. These discoveries surprised me by their conformity with the Christian religion, and from this time onward I began to search for them in the Gospels instead of in myself, but I found little there. I did not find God there, or the Redeemer, or the Sacraments—nothing; and I searched with all the vigour of my soul, and I wept and tormented myself and craved for only one thing—truth.”<sup>1</sup>

At this point in his letter the effort to explain seemed futile to Tolstoy, and he generalized by saying that he loved and esteemed religion, and that man could never be good or happy without it. At moments, he wrote, he had a gleam of faith; but he had neither religion nor dogma. “Further,” he continued, “with me religion is the outcome of life and not the reverse. Whenever I lead a good life, I feel religion near at hand and am quite ready to step into this blissful world; but when I lead a bad life, there seems to be no need for religion.” This is a fair statement of Tolstoy’s attitude towards religion at this time and for a number of years to come. The need of religion was great, but he could win his way to spiritual faith only through intellectual conviction.

## VI

Towards the end of April Tolstoy went to Yasnaya Polyana for the summer. His abysmal frame of mind was in marked contrast to the high spirits of the preceding spring. There was a worm that wanted to turn and wriggle somewhere deep down inside him, he complained to Granny. Work alone was left him. But what was work, he asked? A pitiable trifling: you shovel, make haste, and your heart keeps narrowing, shrivels, and dies. He had in mind not only his labour on the estate, but also his writing, for he had reached a severe crisis in his literary career.

Upon his return from abroad in 1857, Tolstoy’s disillusion with Russia did not except the contemporary state of literature and his own contribution to it. He wrote Botkin that he could not believe, with Turgenev, that literature existed only for the man of letters, and was an end in itself. Literature should be a means towards an end, and man’s chief occupation should be outside literature.

In 1858 Tolstoy conscientiously directed his activities away from literature. Turgenev wrote to Annenkov:

<sup>1</sup> He means that he did not find in the Gospels his own conception of God.

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You have astonished me with your news of Tolstoy's reforestation projects. What a man! With perfect feet, he is determined to walk on his head. Not long ago he wrote Botkin a letter in which he said: "I'm very glad that I did not heed Turgenev and become a mere man of letters." In answer to this I asked: What does he want to be—an officer, a farmer, etc.? Now he tries to prove to himself that he's a timber expert. With these capers I fear only that he will throw the spine of his talent out of joint. In his Swiss tales a very pronounced curvature is already noticeable.

In truth, when "Lucerne" had appeared both critics and public were mystified, and with the publication of "Albert" in 1858, the worst fears of Nekrasov were fulfilled—it was whispered about that Tolstoy had lost his grip, that the great literary promise of his earlier fiction had come to nought. The discovery that his reputation had fallen supported Tolstoy's belief that contemporary authors, in their insistence upon themes of social and political significance, were undermining the reading public's taste for pure literature. His reaction was characteristic: Russia needed a new periodical whose writers would endeavour to correct prevailing literary tendencies. Eagerly he wrote of the project to Botkin.

The aim of the periodical [he declared] is just this: artistic pleasure, —to weep and to laugh. The magazine will prove nothing, and know nothing. Its one criterion will be cultured taste. The magazine will not desire to know either this or that line, and still more emphatically, it will not care to know the needs of the public. . . . It will not stoop to public taste but will boldly become the public's teacher in the matter of taste, but *only in the matter of taste*.

Botkin was not snared by this idealistic bait. A good novel from Tolstoy, he cannily answered, would improve public taste more than ten such magazines. Other prospective editors among his literary friends were equally discouraging. Stubbornly he tried his hand at a purely artistic piece that might have been designed as a contribution to just such a magazine as he had in mind. He called it "The Dream," and it amounts to a lyrical variant of an episode in "Albert" in which the poor musician dreams of the beautiful woman who is his ideal.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In 1863 Tolstoy sent "The Dream," under a pseudonym, to I. S. Aksakov for publication in his magazine. Aksakov rejected it, and wrote, not knowing Tolstoy's authorship, that the piece was "too baffling for the public, its contents too indefinite, and perhaps entirely understood only by the author."

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At about the same time (January 1858), Tolstoy began "Three Deaths," another brief piece that was intended to exemplify the moral truth of pure art. He described the death of a noble lady, a peasant, and a tree. The lady's death is ugly and pitiable, for she fears to leave this earth and can obtain no consolation from the Christianity she has believed in. On the other hand, the peasant dies calmly, because his religion is Nature which has taught him that all things must pass away. The tree also dies quietly, honestly, in beauty. There is no dissonance in this death, as in that of the lady, only harmony with creation.

In published form "Three Deaths"<sup>1</sup> simply fortified the growing feeling among critics that Tolstoy's powers were failing. Throughout the remainder of 1858 and the first half of the next year he worked, in a discouraged frame of mind, on *The Cossacks* and *Family Happiness*. The first had gone through a bewildering evolution in form and subject matter since he began it in the Caucasus, and now, as though conscious of its superior merit, he hesitated to hurry the completion of the story. *Family Happiness*, however, he began and swiftly carried through. His love affair with Valerya—the inspiration of this short novel—was still fresh in his memory, and his occasional meetings with her at this time no doubt fed his desire to justify in fiction the treatment he had accorded her in real life.

Before *Family Happiness* was finished, he was so uncertain of its success that he contemplated publishing the novel under a pseudonym. When he read the proof sheets of the second part, he was horrified. "A shameful abomination," he jotted down in the diary, and he hastened off a letter to Botkin, directing him to hold up the printing and burn the manuscript. But it was too late. Botkin, in whose criticism he had most faith, tried to reassure him, but Tolstoy considered himself finished as a writer. Although his attitude was extreme, he had good reason to doubt the merits of his novel. Fine descriptive passages and the sensitive handling of the heroine's feeling of love in the early parts are offset by the clouded design of the whole and by a puzzling, inconclusive ending. As Botkin pointed out, a persistent puritanism in the point of view vitiated the total effectiveness of *Family Happiness*; and the absence of any tangible social significance once again disappointed the public.

On February 4, 1859, Tolstoy was inducted into the Moscow

<sup>1</sup> It appeared in *Library for Reading*, No. 1, 1859.

## LEO TOLSTOY

Society of Lovers of Russian Literature, and he used the occasion to vent his wrath against contemporary literature. The tendentiousness that had entered Russian literature at the time of Gogol had by now swept all before it, and the trend continued for many years. Art was expected to indict political and social abuses or offer a progressive programme of reform. Unfortunately the literary atmosphere became almost as muddled and disputatious as the political atmosphere in the nineteenth century, but such a result was inevitable in a country still struggling with political feudalism and a nascent economic capitalism.

In his brief speech before the assembled men of letters of the Moscow Society, Tolstoy declared: "The majority of the public has begun to think that the problem of all literature consists only in the denunciation of evil, in the debate and correction of it, in short, in the growth of a civic feeling in society." He did not condemn this utterly, but he pleaded for moderation and for a greater emphasis on the rich variety of approach in the world of art. "A literature of the people is its full, many-sided consciousness, in which must be equally reflected popular love for goodness and truth, as well as the popular contemplation of beauty in a given epoch of development. . . ." And he concluded: "There is another literature, reflecting eternal and universally human interests, the most precious, sincere consciousness of the people, a literature accessible to every people and to all times, a literature without which no single people, gifted with strength and richness, has ever developed."

This is the substance of what Tolstoy had been saying to Botkin, Druzhinin, and Fet over the past two years, and it describes the artistic purpose behind the last few works he had written. But the stern president of the Moscow Society, A. S. Khomyakov, coldly answered Tolstoy's speech by reminding him that, however eternal truth and beauty may be in art, the artist is a man of his own times, and that the present historical moment was one in which self-indictment acquired a special significance and an indefeasible right, and hence must manifest itself in literature.

The time would come when Tolstoy's own views on literature for the people would radically change, but at the moment he had reached a point of despair and thought of giving up writing entirely.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Apart from the works mentioned in this chapter, Tolstoy also wrote between 1857 and 1859 the following fragmentary pieces: "Notes of a Husband," "Easter Sunday," "How Russian Soldiers Die," and "Notes on the Nobility." These pieces are published in the Jubilee Edition (Vol. V).

## LITERARY CRISIS

To scribble stories was stupid and shameful, he told Fet in a burst of enthusiastic confidence, when he learned that this poet was thinking of settling on an estate near him and making literature secondary to husbandry. Turgenev railed at Tolstoy's new resolution and Druzhinin wrote him a pathetic plea not to deprive Russia of his literary leadership. Tolstoy, however, could not give up literature any more than he could cease his search for truth; one was the essential medium for the expression of the other. But in his present frame of mind, he required a new outlet for his energies.

The idea of starting a village school now took hold of Tolstoy with peculiar force, for he saw in it a direct connection with his retreat from literature. For whom did Russian authors write? For themselves and the cultured few. For masses of illiterate Russian peasants, literature was useless. If they could not read his writings, then he would teach them. This was the first and essential step towards the creation of a "literature for the people." Here was a purpose that would satisfy his thirst for activity and moral influence.

## Chapter XII

### EUROPE ONCE MORE

ON A fine morning in early autumn, 1859, some twenty peasant children waited expectantly at the manor-house door of Yasnaya Polyana. The master had announced that a school would be opened and lessons given free. All the youngsters were dressed for the occasion—clean white shirts, new bast shoes, hair glistening and plastered down with oil. Suspicious parents stood around and talked in nervous, subdued tones among themselves. What was their strange, unpredictable master up to now? Did he wish to teach their children and then hand them over to the Tsar to be soldiers? One mother kept insisting that the lessons were free. Why, Ivan Fokánov had been going to the sexton for lessons for three winters at two rubles a month, and he had still not learned a thing! It was said that the master would also take grown-ups free, and several parents signified their intentions of attending the school.

Suddenly a loud voice sounded from behind the door. Parents hurriedly admonished their children again to bow low and say: "I wish you health, your excellency!" Tolstoy appeared. All bared their heads and bowed to the ground.

"Good morning! Have you brought your children?" Tolstoy asked, turning to the parents.

"Just so, your excellency," they chorused with bows.

"Well, I'm very glad," he said, smiling and looking them all over. His appearance did not accord with their notions of a teacher. He was so plainly dressed, his hair as long as theirs, and his common face with its broad peasant nose was covered with a thick black beard, like that of a gypsy. With assurance he walked into the crowd of children and singled one out.

"Do you wish to learn?"

"Yes."



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“What’s your name?”

“Danilka.”

Swiftly he questioned the others in similar fashion, a smile on his lips and merriment in his eyes. Then he led them into the house, up the stairway, and through the huge living room. Scared, wide-eyed children noticed the lofty ceiling and the floor cleaner than the tables in their wretched little thatched huts. Numerous portraits on the walls at once caught their attention. These figures looked so magnificent, holy, like the icons they saw in church. Several of the youngsters involuntarily started to cross themselves.

“Those are not gods, but people, my relatives and friends,” the teacher explained.

Tolstoy shepherded them into a neighbouring room that had been fitted up with benches and blackboards. This was the schoolroom, he announced. Regular lessons would begin on the morrow. Today, he would just write a few letters of the alphabet on the board and they would try to learn them. But first he questioned them a bit further about their work in the fields and their reasons for wanting to go to school. With humour, kindness, and simplicity he tried to banish timidity and win confidence. Soon they were repeating the letters of the alphabet after him, their young voices rising to a fearless crescendo as he prompted “Louder! Louder!” In no time they were a happy, excited group working together and following the teacher with rapt attention until the lesson ended.

“Now go home and God bless you!” Tolstoy said. “Come early tomorrow. We’ll have another lesson. Come. I’ll be waiting.”

“We left the school and said good-bye to our dear teacher, promising to come early on the morrow,” recalled V. S. Morozov, one of the young pupils at the first meeting. “Our rapture was boundless. Each told the other over and over again, as though he had been the only one to notice it, how our teacher had appeared, how he questioned us, how he talked, and how he had smiled.”

## II

Work at the new school filled Tolstoy with an enthusiasm and energy that delighted some of his friends and annoyed others, particularly Turgenev. Everything was sacrificed to the project. Estate affairs became a bore; “pretty stories” were scorned (at most he pecked away halfheartedly at *The Cossacks*); and even his precious diary was allowed to lapse in the excitement of proving in

practice that all existing methods of pedagogy were necessarily wrong.

Tolstoy kept his friends well posted on the progress of his experiment. After a couple of months of teaching, he wrote to Druzhinin and gleefully drove home the significance of his new enterprise by ordering this self-appointed gadfly of his literary ambitions to remove his name from the list of members of the Literary Fund, since he was through with writing. And to Fet, after blasting away at modern authors, he pompously declared: "We don't need to learn, we need to teach at least a little of what we know to Marfutka and Taraska."

The philosophical Chicherin required a more thoughtful letter. He had written to Tolstoy from abroad to urge him, with some condescension (he did not have a high opinion of Tolstoy's intellectual sanity), to give up his idle country existence, get married, and devote all his attention to literature. In reply, Tolstoy vigorously defended his activities and condemned Chicherin's inability to comprehend their value. "The self-delusion of so-called artists," he wrote, "which you—I flatter myself with the hope—charged me with only out of friendly consideration (while not understanding me), this delusion is only for him who submits to it; it is the most rascally meanness and falsity." Chicherin never could appreciate the moral satisfaction Tolstoy derived from "teaching the alphabet to dirty little boys," and soon their interesting correspondence lapsed, as well as the friendship that had begun with so much zeal on both sides.

With a half year of successful teaching behind him, it was almost inevitable that Tolstoy should find himself bedevilled in a maze of speculation on pedagogy and obsessed with schemes for improving national education. When he opened his school, free education for peasant children did not exist in Russia. Occasionally, a village would boast of a priest or an old ex-soldier who taught a few children at so much per head. The subjects were elementary, the method a mixture of blows and learning by heart, and the results negligible. This situation Tolstoy wished to remedy by substituting public education based on entirely original pedagogical methods.

In March 1860, Tolstoy wrote a long letter to E. P. Kovalevski, an old friend of his Sevastopol days. More important, he was the brother of the Minister of National Education, and Tolstoy hoped to persuade him to intercede on his behalf. In the letter he described

the unusual success of his school, and mentioned that he already had fifty students and that the number was growing constantly. "Wisdom in all worldly affairs, it seems to me," he continued, "consists not in recognizing what must be done but in knowing what to do first and then what comes after." He boldly questioned the value to progress in Russia of roads, the telegraph, literature, and the arts as long as only about one per cent of some seventy millions of people were literate. Such widespread ignorance represented an acute danger to the healthy functioning of a state. It was clear, he asserted, that the greatest daily need for the Russian people was public education. But if one waited for the government to remedy the lack, he maintained, the situation would never be improved. At this point he fell into his familiar paradoxical vein: "Over the dispute as to whether or not literacy is useful, one must not laugh. This is a very serious and melancholy argument, and I deliberately take the negative side. *Literacy*, the process of reading and writing, is harmful." And he justified his position by citing the unvarying practice of teachers, trained in government schools, of setting their pupils to read only religious works that produced a devastating effect on the intellectual faculties. What Tolstoy had been leading up to in all this was the utter incapacity of the government to understand the educational needs of the public and the best methods of satisfying them. As a remedy, he proposed the establishment of a Society for National Education. Among its duties would be the setting up of public schools where they were most needed; the designing of courses of instruction; the training of teachers in suitable educational methods; and the publishing of a journal devoted to the dissemination of its own pedagogical ideals.

If the government would only permit the formation of such a society, Tolstoy pledged all his time and effort to it. Since he was in the bad graces of the authorities,<sup>1</sup> he asked Kovalevski's aid in pushing this programme. If the project were not permitted, he jokingly signified his intention of starting a secret Society for National Education. At any rate, he declared that he would publish a pedagogical journal and that he was engaged in writing an article on education. Rather whimsically he concluded his letter: "Whatever you may think, it is almost certain that you will answer me with: 'It is clear that you, Leo Nikolayevich, are stuck in the country and fussing again with these projects.'"

<sup>1</sup> Tolstoy was convinced of this after he learned that the government had discovered the part he played in composing the unpatriotic Sevastopol soldier's song.

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Unfortunately, Kovalevski's answer has not been preserved, but it is fairly certain that neither he nor his brother gave Tolstoy any support. Fragments of pedagogical essays have survived from this time (about March 1860), and it is clear that he was trying to handle the larger abstract concepts of educational theory without a sufficient knowledge of their history. He began one of the fragments with the assertion that "For every living condition of development, there is a pedagogical expediency, and to search this out is the problem of pedagogy." His search, however, led him nowhere, and the article abruptly broke off.

Educational theory in Russia was entirely dominated by foreign influence, particularly German. Tolstoy considered going abroad again to make a first-hand study of foreign pedagogical methods. He decided to start sooner than he had expected. His brother Nikolai had already gone abroad in an effort to remedy a dangerous tuberculous condition, and Tolstoy was worried because he had not heard from him for some time. Having placed his school in charge of a teacher who had been working under his direction, he sailed from Petersburg with his sister and her three children July 2.

### III

Tolstoy landed at Stettin on July 5 and proceeded without delay to Berlin. Marya and her children went to Soden, a Prussian health resort, where the sick Nikolai was staying. Having received some reassuring news from his brother, Tolstoy decided to remain in Berlin for a few days to begin his quest for knowledge in matters educational. For a time, aching teeth rendered the search heroic. He had even less faith in dentists (somewhat justified at that time) than in physicians. At any rate, he preferred to endure periodic misery from decayed molars and actually appeared to derive a certain moral satisfaction from such suffering.

Tolstoy visited the Moabit Prison, museums, and the university, and he heard lectures on history and physiology by distinguished professors. A friendly young German student took him to a meeting at a workers' club. Here he heard another lecture, and he was so much interested in the "question box" device used to stimulate discussion by the audience that he returned the following evening.

After ten very agreeable and useful days in Berlin, he left for Leipzig. He set out busily to visit schools in that city, but severe headaches and hæmorrhoids put an end to all activity. Apparently his

suffering was intense enough to drive him to a physician, and upon his advice he went to Kissingen for a cure. Here he quickly recovered and remained a full month, for the news from Nikolai was still encouraging. Except for a walking trip in the Hartz Mountains, Tolstoy devoted all of his stay in Kissingen to pedagogical researches. He visited the schools, and remarks in the diary reflect his disappointment: "Have been to a school. It is terrible! Prayers for the king; blows; everything by rote; terrified, beaten children." And there are similar entries after other inspections. His thoughts constantly returned to his own experiment, and he wrote anxiously to Auntie Tatyana: "Tell the teacher to send me news about the school: How many students come and whether they learn well? I shall certainly return in the autumn and intend to occupy myself more than ever with the school, so I do not wish its reputation to be lost while I am away, and I want as many students as possible from different parts." And in the diary he noted: "The idea of experimental pedagogy has agitated me. I can scarcely contain myself. . . ."

When he was not observing educational practice at first hand, Tolstoy applied himself to reading pedagogical theory. He also dipped into Montaigne, "the first to express clearly the idea of freedom in education," he wrote in the diary. "In education, once more," he concluded, "the chief things are equality and freedom." There were likewise entries at this time on his reading of Francis Bacon, "the founder of materialism," on Luther, whom he called great, and on Herzen—"a scattered intelligence, morbid pride, but breadth, cleverness and kindness; Russian refinement." One author whom Tolstoy read at this time with very emphatic but mixed reactions was Wilhelm Riehl, the remarkable German ethnographer and professor of the history of culture at the University of Munich.<sup>1</sup> With his growing interest in popular education and in the inherent artistic possibilities among the masses, Tolstoy found much pertinent material in Riehl's historical treatment of Germanic folk art and traditions.

In Kissingen, Tolstoy very likely discussed Riehl's works with Julius Froebel, a nephew of Friedrich Froebel, the celebrated educational reformer and founder of the kindergarten system. Tolstoy no doubt learned a great deal from him about his famous uncle's pedagogical experiments. Julius Froebel left a curious

<sup>1</sup> The works of Riehl that Tolstoy read were *Naturgeschichte des Volkes als Grundlage einer deutschen Social-politik* and *Culturstudien aus drei Jahrhunderten*.

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account of Tolstoy: "Progress in Russia, he told me, must come out of public education, which among us will give better results than in Germany, because the Russian masses are not yet spoiled by false education. Something better will come out of a child who has been educated correctly from the first year than from one who has been subjected to a spurious education for several years." Tolstoy went on to inform him of his own school in which learning was in no sense obligatory. "If education is good," he said, "then the need for it will manifest itself like hunger." Froebel also relates that Tolstoy spoke of the Russian masses as a "mysterious and irrational force," from which would one day spring an entirely new organization of the world, and that from the Russian artel there would develop in the future a communistic structure.

This interesting report of Froebel reflects the proud, dogmatic, almost arrogant attitude that Tolstoy adopted towards most of the European personalities he met on this second trip abroad. While sincerely seeking knowledge, he invariably made it clear that he belonged to no school of thought, had his own point of view on most questions, and that Europeans did not understand the real failings of their civilization. On the other hand, Froebel's account of Tolstoy's views on the Russian masses was no doubt coloured by his own radical leanings and his knowledge of Russian radical thought (he was acquainted with Bakunin and Herzen).

While Tolstoy was still at Kissengen, Nikolai felt improved enough to pay him a visit. Nikolai's condition shocked Tolstoy. His brother seemed so intelligent and lucid in his illness, filled with the desire to live, yet without a spark of vital energy. After a few days, a sudden relapse obliged him to return to Soden. Extremely worried over Nikolai, Tolstoy finally decided to join him and he arrived at Soden on August 14.

## IV

Tolstoy remained only three days at Soden, long enough to inspect a school. He and his brother left for Hyères on the southern coast of France; doctors had strongly advised a warmer climate for the fast-failing Nikolai. On the way they stopped at Geneva, where Tolstoy visited the college and an orphanage; a "drunken professor" and "deformed children" were his only comments in the diary.

Tolstoy's experiences at Marseille inspired one of the most

striking passages in an article that he published two years later—"On Public Education." He visited the primary schools of the city and several institutions for older children. The futility of the subjects taught and the lifeless, unimaginative methods of teaching them provoked his criticism. None of the pupils appeared to be able to think or to apply the facts that they had learned. He questioned one boy on the history of France, and the boy answered well what he had got by heart, but to a question slightly off the beaten path, Tolstoy received the answer that Henry IV had been killed by Julius Caesar. Quizzing on other subjects brought similar results. Tolstoy concluded that the school system of Marseille was extremely bad and that its pupils must grow up in utter ignorance. His opinion of the people, if not of the schools, changed after he had spent some time roaming about the streets and talking to workers and children. They seemed intelligent, free thinking, and surprisingly well-informed, but with no thanks to their schooling. He discovered that they absorbed history from such thrillers as *The Three Musketeers* and *The Count of Monte Cristo*, of which novels scores of cheap editions were obtainable; and that they learned politics and much other useful knowledge from newspapers, magazines, and endless discussions in their cafés. "Here is an unconscious school undermining a compulsory school and making its contents almost of no worth [he said in an article] . . . What I saw at Marseille and in all other countries amounts to this: everywhere the principal part in educating a people is played not by schools, but by life." Here we have the kind of characteristic half-truth that Tolstoy was fond of deducing from incomplete experience, and later this conclusion became an important factor in his educational theorizing. But even half-truths that blasted away the hard shell of traditional and erroneous thinking on vital social problems had their value for him.

The brothers reached Hyères on August 25 and took comfortable quarters in a *pension*. Marya and her children also arrived and rented a place nearby. Nikolai seemed to improve in the mild climate. Tolstoy sent Auntie Tatyana a letter of hope; and to Dyakov, Nikolai wrote in a similar strain, beguiled by one of those deceptive periods of improvement so common in tuberculosis. The ravages of the disease had gone too far, however, and in less than a month (September 20) after his arrival at Hyères, Nikolai died.

Nikolai's death profoundly affected Tolstoy. His admiration and respect for him had never wavered since those golden childhood days of the Ant Brotherhood, when young Nikolai seemed to possess the secret of universal happiness written on the green stick buried in the Zakaz woods. With some rancour but not without justice, Turgenev had remarked that Nikolai practised in life the humility that his brother Leo preached. Druzhinin, commenting on his brilliant literary talents, thought his command of language superior to that of Leo. Despite all the urgings of admiring friends, however, Nikolai could not overcome a rooted dislike for regular composition. He was one of those men whose innate nobility of soul was always shyly concealed beneath a self-effacing modesty.

"Nikolai is dead!" sounded like a dirge in Tolstoy's letters for weeks. All his values were thrown into confusion and his natural doubts intensified. With the morbidity of grief, he dwelt with loving care on all the trifling details connected with his brother's death. It was not like Dmitri's death, he told Sergei. With Dmitri were joined only memories of childhood, but Nikolai was a positive personality whom he loved more than anyone in the world. To Fet, he wrote that Nikolai had died in his arms, and that nothing in life had ever made such an impression on him.

It is true, as he said [continued Tolstoy], that nothing is worse than death. But when one reflects well that that is the end of all, then there is nothing worse than life. Why strive or try, since nothing remains of what was Nikolai Nikolayevich Tolstoy? He did not say that he felt the approach of death, but I realized that he watched every step of its approach and knew with certainty how much of life remained. Some moments before his death he drowsed off, but suddenly he awoke and whispered with horror: "What is that?" That was when he saw it—the absorption of himself into nothingness. And if he found nothing to cling to, what then will I find? Still less! . . . A thousand times I say to myself: "Let the dead bury the dead." One must use somehow the strength that remains to one. . . . But as soon as man reaches the highest degree of development, then he sees clearly that it is all nonsense and deceit, and that the truth—which he still loves better than all else—is terrible. And when you look at it well, and clearly, you awake with a start and say with terror, as my brother did: "What is that?" Of course, so long as the desire to know and speak the truth exists, one tries to know and speak. That



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alone remains to me of the moral world; higher than that I cannot place myself. That alone I will do, only not in the form of your art. Art is a lie, and I can no longer love a beautiful lie.

Nikolai's death had shattered Tolstoy's former complacent acceptance of immortality. For several weeks he lost interest in everything, even in his diary, and when he resumed it the first entry reads: "Nearly a month has passed since Nikolai died. This event has torn me terribly from life. Again the question: Why? Already the departure draws near. Whither? Nowhere! I try to write, I force myself, but it does not get on—because I cannot attach enough significance to the work, which it must have if I am to possess the strength and patience to work. At the very time of the funeral the idea occurred to me of writing a materialist Gospel, a Life of Christ as a materialist." Perhaps he thought that there was also a materialistic immortality, like that suggested by the peasant in "Three Deaths": he had serenely accepted his passing as a unification with deathless Nature. Nikolai too had loved nature, and in the letter to Fet, Tolstoy had expressed the dim hope that there, in nature, of which we become part in the earth, something will remain and be found.

In the course of a few weeks, however, Tolstoy began to recover some of his former faith in immortality. A boy in the neighbourhood died of tuberculosis, and in the diary Tolstoy queried: "What for? The only explanation is furnished by a belief in a future life. If that does not exist, there is no justice, and justice is unnecessary, and the need for justice is a superstition."

## VI

Depression and a sense of futility clung to Tolstoy for some time. His only escape was in work. From the cave of grief he could tell Fet that art was a beautiful lie that he could no longer love, but what solace had he left save art? And soon he wrote Auntie Tatyana to send him his manuscript of *The Cossacks*.

Art came hard, for Tolstoy's thoughts reverted to the real purpose of his trip abroad. From Hyères he wrote Granny of his absorption in educational experiments. "I can sincerely say that this is now the sole interest that binds me to life. Unfortunately, this winter I cannot occupy myself with this matter here; I work only for the future." He had begun an article on public education,

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and his interest in teaching found some outlet in Marya's three children. In his sister's *pension* there also lived a Russian lady with her nine-year-old son, Sergei Plaksin, who joined the class, although he was in delicate health. Tolstoy loved walking and took the children on excursions into the country. On the way he would hold them spellbound with tales of wonders, of a golden horse and a giant tree from the top of which all the world was visible. Tender of little Sergei's weak lungs, Tolstoy would hoist him to his broad, muscular shoulders and continue his tale as they walked along.

After dinner at the *pension*, Tolstoy would organize an opera or a ballet, with himself at the piano and the children as the assisting artists. Before the bedlam reached its height, the audience, consisting of Marya and Plaksin's mother and his nurse, was more than ready to call a halt to the performance. Then came gymnastics. Lying at full length on the floor Tolstoy would get up without using his hands, a feat the youngsters found difficult to imitate. Or he would delight them by turning somersaults on a home-made apparatus. The study hour followed. He placed the children around a table and set them to writing a theme on some such subject as the difference between Russia and other countries. This was hard and not always congenial work, but they did it eagerly in anticipation of his exuberant and amusing comments on the results. If their exercises were good, he would reward them—on one occasion with water-colour paints which he taught them to use. Whether on excursions, at lessons, or in settling their disputes, these children hung upon his every word and would have laid down their lives for him.

After Nikolai's death, Tolstoy had little taste for Hyères society, but eventually he took to visiting a few socially prominent Russian families at this health resort. His sister recalled how on one occasion he was to be the lion of the evening. He failed to appear at the appointed time, and as the evening wore on the guests grew more and more glum, despite the frantic efforts of host and hostess. Very late the lion arrived, garbed in a hiking costume and wearing wooden sabots. He had come directly to the party from a long walk, and because of his tardiness he had not bothered to go home and change. The party brightened and took on a new life as Tolstoy at once launched into a convincing argument on why wooden sabots were the most comfortable of footgear. The guests were charmed by his bizarre appearance and natural gaiety, and in no time he had them all singing the songs he played on the piano.

December and January (1861) were spent in a sightseeing tour of Italy, but the Italy that had charmed and inspired so many foreign writers left no solid impression on Tolstoy and is nowhere reflected in his works.

It was largely an educational mission that took Tolstoy to London in the middle of February; he was determined, he wrote his brother Sergei, to learn everything of significance in foreign pedagogy so that nobody in Russia would dare question his authority in this respect. He found it difficult to admire the individual Englishman, whose native temperament was so utterly unlike his own, although he shared to some degree the general continental enthusiasm for the English nation as a whole, for its just laws, its liberal thought and democratic government. Turgenev mildly reproved him for a letter containing snap judgments on England, and the scholarly Chicherin advised him of the necessity of a thorough study of the history and social background of this country before venturing to condemn it. Tolstoy could not help contrasting the tender solicitude of Russians for convoys of prisoners on their way to Siberia with a scene he witnessed in the London streets of a crowd that threatened to tear a criminal to pieces before the police intervened.

Tolstoy did find some things to his liking in London. He daily visited the Kensington Museum and pronounced it the best institution of higher learning that he had seen in his travels. He also heard Dickens—"a genius born once in a hundred years," he declared—deliver a lecture on education. Tolstoy could hardly have got much out of this performance, for though he could read English well at the time, he had had little practice in hearing or speaking it. This difficulty must also have hindered his appreciation of a three-hour speech delivered by Palmerston in the House of Commons. Whether he understood or not, he condemned the great Prime Minister's effort as "boring and meaningless."

Tolstoy lost no time in fulfilling his real purpose in coming to London—a study of the city's educational system. Free lectures by experts at the Kensington Museum won his unstinted praise. These talks were suggested by practical questions of visitors, and hence they conformed to the criterion of utility, always a primary principle in Tolstoy's pedagogical ideals. He applied to the Council Office of the Department of Education for permission to visit

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schools. An official, R. R. Whings, provided him with a letter of recommendation; and it is very likely that he also used the influence of Matthew Arnold, a prominent inspector of schools at that time, whose acquaintance he seems to have made.<sup>1</sup>

About a year later Tolstoy wrote an account of one of his visits to a London school in an article, "Social Work in the Field of Public Education." For his benefit the English teacher endeavoured to show his students' ability in an object-lesson test. The object selected was cotton, and the students answered well a series of set questions on where cotton grew, how it was manufactured, and so on. Tolstoy, guessing that they knew these answers by heart, requested permission to ask some questions of his own. He completely stumped the students with such questions as: To what class of plants does cotton belong? What kind of soil is necessary for its growth? He concluded that the object-lesson method was wrong, because its radius was seriously limited by the knowledge preferences of the teacher, and because its ideal application would involve the teaching of an impractical number of subdivisions of the sciences.

Nor did English textbooks escape the sharp pedagogical eye of Tolstoy; he made a collection of them, as he did in several of the countries he visited. A list of over fifty English textbooks and educational journals compiled at this time exists among his papers, and apparently he read most of them, for his incisive critical notes appear beside many of the titles.

The man Tolstoy saw most frequently in London was the distinguished Russian revolutionary exile, Alexander Herzen. He had long been eager to meet Tolstoy whose *Childhood* he had praised highly in his famous contraband periodical, the *Bell*. Herzen had written Turgenev, on the occasion of Tolstoy's first visit abroad, that he would be "very, very glad" to make his acquaintance, and that he was a "sincere worshipper of his talent." Tolstoy was not too well disposed to like this man, the fount of inspiration for the Petersburg radical intelligentsia whom he distrusted, nor had his works impressed him. But their meetings in London were cordial. They had many vigorous but friendly disputes. Herzen wrote Turgenev that Tolstoy was a fine and warmhearted man, but why, he asked, did he feel it necessary in argument to take everything

<sup>1</sup> Whings's letter of recommendation has turned up among Tolstoy's papers, and in it his acquaintance with Matthew Arnold is cited as a reason for according Tolstoy the special privilege of visiting schools. (See the Jubilee Edition, VIII, 609.) It may be recalled that years later Arnold wrote a critical essay on Tolstoy.

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by a brave assault as at Sevastopol? He found him stubborn and felt that his head had not yet been picked over and swept clean. On one occasion Herzen's young daughter, Natalya, received permission to sit quietly in the corner of the room during Tolstoy's visit. She had already read his stories and had formed her own childish idealized impression of one of her favourite authors. Her ideal vanished when Tolstoy entered, foppishly garbed in the latest English fashion and impetuously pouring forth a description of a cockfight and a boxing match that he had attended. Many years later Tolstoy gave his own recollections of these meetings with Herzen. He pronounced him an unceremonious, sympathetic, brilliant, and interesting man. And he expressed the conviction that Herzen was immeasurably higher than any of the political thinkers whom he had known in his lifetime.

Tolstoy availed himself of Herzen's wide acquaintance with prominent European revolutionary figures by requesting letters of introduction to some of them. One he eagerly sought was to the great French socialist Proudhon, who at that time was living in exile in Brussels. Armed with the letter, he left London for Brussels on March 4.

### VIII

At their meeting Proudhon impressed Tolstoy as a man who had the courage of his convictions. In turn, the Frenchman wrote Herzen that the faces of Russians who visited him fused in his mind, "But a Mr. Tolstoy has been calling on me over the last few days, and he is a savant who has presented to me quite a different side." Another letter to a friend is slightly more revealing:

A well-informed man, Mr. Tolstoy, with whom I have been talking these last few days, told me: "There you have a real emancipation. [Alexander II's decree of emancipation had appeared March 5, 1861.] We do not free our serfs with empty hands, we give them property along with their liberty!" He also said to me: "You are much read in Russia, but they do not understand the importance you attach to your Catholicism. Only after I had visited England and France did I understand how right you were. In Russia the Church amounts to zero!"

These two men, who intellectually had so much in common, talked about Proudhon's book, *La Guerre et la Paix*, which was just then going through the press. This book was translated into Russian

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in 1864 with the title *War and Peace*. Although Proudhon's book is a work on the principles of international law, Tolstoy was indebted to it for much more than the title. A study of *La Guerre et la Paix* reveals a good deal about the whole theory of war that Tolstoy incorporated in his novel.

Some time after this meeting, Tolstoy began an article as follows:

Last year I chanced to speak with Mr. Proudhon about Russia. He was then writing his work *On the Law of War*.<sup>1</sup> I told him about Russia, about the freeing of serfs, and of the fact that in the upper classes a strong interest in the education of the masses was noticeable, and that this interest sometimes expressed itself comically and had become a fashion. "Is it possible that this is really true?" he said. I answered that as much as one can judge from a distance, Russian society now showed itself conscious of the fact that without education of the masses no governmental organization can be durable. Proudhon jumped up and walked about the room. "If this is true," he said to me, as though with envy, "the future belongs to you Russians." I relate this conversation with Proudhon [concluded Tolstoy] because in my experience he was the only man who understood in our time the significance of public education and of the printing press.

Tolstoy presented a letter from Herzen to another exiled revolutionary writer in Brussels, the old and poverty-stricken Polish patriot, J. Lelewel, who had taken part in the rebellion of 1830. This sudden fondness for radicals, however, was not allowed to interfere with Tolstoy's pedagogical interests. He inspected schools in the Belgian capital; and in a letter to Sergei he wrote that upon his return to Russia he intended to publish a pedagogical periodical on the results achieved in his school at Yasnaya Polyana. And in his notebook at this time (March 16), he jotted down: "My one aim is education of the masses. My one faith, which I dimly feel, binds me to the career of education."

## IX

Germany next became the centre of Tolstoy's pedagogical studies. He continued his travels through Eisenach to Weimar, where he stopped for a few days. Visits to Goethe's house and the court of Grand Duke Karl Alexander left him unimpressed. "The

<sup>1</sup> Tolstoy, of course, means *La Guerre et la Paix*. Although the book was already finished, Proudhon was actually writing an introduction to it at the time of Tolstoy's visits.

stupid ladies of the court!" he fulminated in the diary. "The beautiful German woman of the people, who must be regarded as a fool, is wiser than them all." His thoughts were on educational problems. He engaged a young German mathematics teacher, G. F. Keller, to instruct at Yasnaya Polyana, and he was already drafting a programme for his proposed pedagogical magazine and writing two articles for it, one on rules for elementary schools and the other on foreign educational methods.<sup>1</sup>

In Weimar and near-by Gotha, kindergarten schools had been developed along the lines laid down by Friedrich Froebel. Tolstoy visited them and talked with the teachers, a few of whom had been students of the great Froebel. Tolstoy appeared in one class, announced his purpose without any formalities in quite perfect German, and then abruptly asked the instructor what plan he observed in teaching history. The astonished teacher was able to outline his method and Tolstoy busily took notes while he talked. He then sat through a lesson on history and scribbled more notes. The next lesson was in German composition. Tolstoy expressed great interest and requested to be allowed to remain. The teacher set a subject and asked the children to write a letter on it in their copybooks. The visitor roamed among the benches and looked at the efforts of many of the young pupils. At the conclusion of the exercise, he boldly asked permission to take the copybooks home with him, as he wished to study the results of the lesson. But the teacher, justifiably exasperated by this time, refused because the students were poor and could not afford the loss of their notebooks. Tolstoy agreed, went out and bought a package of writing paper, and returned with the request that the youngsters copy what they had written on the paper he distributed. In the meantime, the harassed instructor had consulted his director and was told to show the visitor every courtesy. Accordingly, the copies were made and Tolstoy left with them in triumph.<sup>2</sup>

Tolstoy realized that French, English, and even Americans merely imitated German educational theory, but he was fast growing weary of theories. With the Germans, theory had come first and the children were its victims. In the kindergartens he saw nothing but

<sup>1</sup> These articles—"Project for Rules of Elementary Schools" and "A Letter to an Unknown on the German Schools"—were never finished. The fragments have been published in Vol. VIII of the Jubilee Edition.

<sup>2</sup> As confirmation of this story, published by W. Bode ("Tolstoi in Weimar," *Der Sämman*, Leipzig, September 1905), these exercises with the teacher's notes have turned up in Tolstoy's papers.

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“geometrical drawings and basket-work-trifling! It is impossible to determine the laws of a child’s development,” he continued. “These children learn by heart what is of no use to them; as for what touches them directly, they have no means of grasping it.”

Tolstoy wrote Auntie Tatyana that he would return by way of Petersburg, for he wished to obtain permission to publish his pedagogical magazine. Three days at Dresden were crowded with inspections of schools, buying textbooks, visits to Russian friends, and attendance at the theatre and opera, which left him with the impression that Germans were men of talent but tortuous. On April 9 he was in Berlin.

There Tolstoy saw in the flesh the one man in all Germany he was perhaps most eager to meet—the novelist Berthold Auerbach. Four years before he had read and admired his *Schwarzwälder Dorfgeschichten*, tales of peasant life in the Black Forest. Shortly before this second trip abroad, he had also read Auerbach’s *Ein Neues Leben*, a sentimental novel of rural life, with a schoolteacher for a hero, and filled with the romanticism and philosophical reflection typical of the author. Tolstoy was under no illusions about the literary value of this novel, but he declared it to be a most remarkable book, and he asserted that it influenced him to open his school and to take an interest in public education.

The hero of *Ein Neues Leben* is Count Eugene Falkenberg. Sent to prison for his part in the 1848 revolution, he eventually escapes and plans to go to America. At this juncture he meets a village schoolteacher, Eugene Baumann, who dreams only of emigrating. They agree to exchange names and documents: the count becomes Eugene Baumann, a village teacher, and the real teacher goes to America. The remainder of the book concerns the pseudo-Baumann’s experiences in conducting a rural school. It turns out that he loves this work, considers it the highest of vocations, and many pages are given over to describing his pedagogical experiments and his moral and social views on public education and peasant life. With most of the ideas that Auerbach expresses through the medium of his hero, Tolstoy found himself in complete and enthusiastic agreement. Baumann declares against all theories and systems. The teacher must devise his own methods, and his success will depend upon his natural pedagogical talents and the force of his own personality. Tolstoy must have exulted when he read of the hero’s belief that this world will become a better place only when the people in it become better. The purpose of education, the hero



continues, is to make prisons and coercive laws unnecessary; every man will find a law in himself, and he will live in conformity with this law just as naturally as he breathes. In the schoolroom he allows his children complete freedom to come and go as they wish, to behave as they like. Everything must be done to encourage in the student a feeling of his own worth. In this novel Tolstoy found exactly what he sought—a moral formulation of the whole problem of public education, a formulation obviously based on the moral precepts of his beloved Rousseau.

The very day of his arrival in Berlin, Tolstoy sought out his "biographer." And as though to give point to the unconscious prescience of Auerbach, Tolstoy introduced himself ecstatically as Eugene Baumann. For a moment the novelist was taken aback and actually feared that he was to be charged with blackmail or defamation of character. Tolstoy hastened to assure him that he was Eugene Baumann not in name, but in character. He then told Auerbach of his school and how much he was indebted to his inspiration. In their long conversation, Auerbach lived up to the exalted impression Tolstoy had formed of him from his books. That night he wrote in his diary with special emphasis: "Auerbach!!!!!! A most delightful man! He has given me light." Then he related that Auerbach talked of "Christianity as the spirit of humanity than which there is nothing higher. He recites verse admirably. . . . He is forty-nine, straightforward, youthful, believing, and not troubled by negation." The next day he visited him again and decided that he was a true Christian. (Auerbach had abandoned his Jewish faith.) Apparently, Auerbach was equally pleased with his strange and impetuous disciple. He wrote to a friend: "Count Leo Tolstoy visited me two days ago. I experienced spiritual joy upon beholding such an exalted nature as this man's."

Tolstoy spent only three days in Berlin. In this short time, however, he did not fail to talk with several figures in the educational world, among them F. Diesterweg, the prominent director of the Teacher's Seminary. Tolstoy set him down as intelligent but cold. On April 12 he departed for Russia, which he never left again during the remaining fifty years of his life.

## Chapter XIII

### YASNO-POLYANA SCHOOL

**T**HE LITTLE peasant children of the school shouted an affectionate welcome to Tolstoy upon his arrival. His absence had dragged heavily for them; they had not got along too well with the other teachers who on rare occasions had even punished them. The youngsters gathered around Tolstoy on the porch, plied him with eager questions, and familiarly felt of his new blouse and trousers. Some told him that he had grown old, and he jokingly agreed. Then he presented Keller, the youthful teacher he had brought from Germany. As Tolstoy gazed fondly upon these glowing, fresh young faces, he was filled with a spirit of re-dedication to the whole difficult problem of public education in Russia.

To be on the safe side, he now obtained formal authorization from the Tula authorities to conduct his school (previously it had been a purely private enterprise). While a new schoolhouse with three rooms was being prepared, classes were held in the garden under an apple tree. The children sat in a half-circle around the master and listened to the lesson while they nibbled grass and made lime and ash leaves pop. Soon he received permission to publish his magazine and at once plunged into the business of writing educational articles as well as teaching.

For the next year and a half Tolstoy worked with self-sacrificing zeal<sup>1</sup> on theoretical and practical problems of education. Few questioned his sincerity, and his contributions to the field were original, though often weakened by perverse and exasperatingly dogmatic reasoning. Truth was his sole aim. He occasionally forgot, however, that his sweeping generalizations were based on a limited experience with his own little school and on the efforts of unique students and a unique teacher.

<sup>1</sup> The school cost him about two thousand roubles a year, and the twelve issues of his magazine some three thousand roubles.

Some professional educators criticized his ignorance of theory. But a thorough knowledge of his efforts abroad and a careful study of his own contributions reveal that there was little of consequence on the subject that he had not read. On the other hand, he often seemed to have read merely to confirm his own preconceived ideas. A persistent scepticism was the trade secret of his educational thinking, as well as of his thinking in nearly every other field.

Tolstoy's ideas on teaching and educational theory appeared in a series of articles and notes in *Yasnaya Polyana*,<sup>1</sup> to which teachers and students also contributed. After extensive reading and observation, Tolstoy reached the conviction that all education should be free and voluntary. He supported the desire of the masses for education, but he denied that the government or any other authority had the right to force it upon them. The logic of things and his study of the operation of compulsory education abroad convinced him that it was an evil. The German father, he pointed out, often objected to sending his children to school, for he needed their assistance at home, and the children reflected their parents' hostility in their active dislike of studies. Pupils should come to learn of their own accord, for if education were a good, it would be found as necessary as the air they breathed. If people were antagonistic, then the will of the people should become the guiding factor. This faith in the "will of the people," even though the people opposed the commonly accepted notions of progress, contained the seeds of Tolstoy's later anarchism, and was a direct slap at the radical reformers who would uplift the masses even against their will. Had he not observed that many of these progressive liberals, worshippers of culture and civilization, in the depths of their souls scorned the masses and their dirty children whom he proposed to educate? But the people could get along without the progress of the intelligentsia. In generations of workers, he maintained, there existed more strength and a greater consciousness of truth and goodness than in all the generations of barons, bankers, and professors. He made an exception of America in his condemnation of compulsory education, for he admitted that in America it had

<sup>1</sup> Twelve numbers of this monthly magazine (the issues were often late) appeared between February 1862 and March 1863. Tolstoy's contributions consist of twelve extensive articles and a series of notes. All this material, including variants of published articles, fragments of several hitherto unpublished ones, and the "Diary of the Yasno-Polyana School," has been brought together for the first time in Vol. VIII of the Jubilee Edition. This volume is an impressive monument to Tolstoy's total accomplishment in the whole field of educational theory and practice.

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the sanction of a democratic electorate and was therefore in a sense not forced upon the people.

Tolstoy believed that education should answer the needs of the masses, but his own conception of the people's needs had nothing in common with that of contemporary progressive thinkers. Nor did he have any patience with the widespread pedagogical conviction that education should mould the character and improve the morals of people. These were matters for family influence, he declared, and the teacher had no right to introduce his personal moral standards or social convictions into the sanctity of the home. In public education he was concerned with the peasants, the vast majority of Russia's population. But he was not concerned with elevating the peasant above his class by the power of education (a definite evil in his eyes); he was concerned with making him a better, more successful, and happier peasant.

In this position the individualistic direction of Tolstoy's thought was apparent. The assumption of civilization's progress in Macaulay, Buckle, and especially in Hegel, he firmly rejected. For some time now the opposition between the good of the individual and the good of society had been troubling him. He was already developing a philosophy hostile to the pragmatic ideal that progress could be achieved only by social education of the people through the medium of democracy. Progress was personal, he felt, and not social. Education must serve the individual and not society, for the individual's capacity to serve humanity was what gave meaning to life. Yet he did not appear to see the contradiction in his rejection of the whole modern concept of progress. He would teach the peasant child what he needed, but what he needed was often conditioned by the social system in which he lived.

Tolstoy defined education as "a human activity, having for its basis a desire for equality, and a constant tendency or urge to advance in knowledge." Education, he declared, was history, and therefore had no final aim. Its only method was experience; its only criterion, freedom.

## II

Tolstoy attempted to realize in practice even the extreme aspects of his educational philosophy. He regarded his own school as a pedagogical laboratory, and the teaching in it he based on experimentation that was constantly informed by a search for the fundamental laws of life. But he never believed that Yasno-Polyana School

## YASNO-POLYANA SCHOOL

was necessarily a good model. He frankly stated that the best school for a Russian village might well be the worst possible model for a school elsewhere. This fact followed from his conviction that a school and its methods must adapt themselves to the peculiar conditions of the pupils.

Yasno-Polyana School was non-compulsory and free to all. One of the three large rooms in the renovated building boasted a museum that was open to the public on Sundays.<sup>1</sup> The number of pupils varied, but the average was about forty. Most of them were peasant boys of Yasnaya Polyana, but some came from villages as far as thirty miles away. Several girls were also enrolled. With the exception of three or four adults who attended irregularly, the ages of the pupils varied from seven to thirteen, and they were roughly divided into three groups. Classes ordinarily ran from eight to noon, and then from three to six, but, as Tolstoy proudly wrote Granny, they often continued an hour or more beyond closing time, "because it is impossible to send the children away from school—they beg for more." Many even lingered on till late in the evening and then passed the night in a hut in the garden.

During the morning mechanical and graded reading<sup>2</sup> were taught, composition, penmanship, grammar, sacred history, Russian history, drawing, music, mathematics, natural sciences, and religion; in the afternoon there were experiments in physical sciences and lessons in singing, graded reading, and composition. No consistent order was followed, however, and lessons were lengthened or omitted according to the degree of interest manifested by the students. There were three teachers besides Tolstoy. On Sundays they met to talk over the work and to lay out plans for the following week. But there was no obligation to adhere to any plan, and each teacher was placed entirely upon his own. For a time they kept a common diary in which were set down with merciless frankness all their failures as well as their successes.

Originality was the guiding spirit. Freedom ruled, but not to the extent of anarchy, as some critics have supposed. In his inspection of schools abroad, especially in Germany, Tolstoy had seen everywhere rigid discipline, a constant demand for silence and obedience,

<sup>1</sup> The school was in a two-story brick wing of the Tolstoy manor house and exists today.

<sup>2</sup> "Mechanical reading" was intended simply to acquaint beginners with the process of reading freely; "graded reading" meant to read with skill and understanding.

the refusal to allow pupils to criticize, and an utter lack of initiative. All this, he asserted, had a stupefying effect on children; teacher and pupil regarded each other as mutual enemies. A certain amount of disorder on the surface, he felt, was even useful and necessary. When the German teacher left his classroom hard at work, all remained quiet for a short time. But if he listened at the door, he would soon hear the class in an uproar, with the pupils indulging in the usual pranks performed in the absence of authority. Tolstoy often tried the same experiment in his own school. When he left the room in the middle of the lesson, however, his pupils were enjoying complete freedom. They behaved as though he were still in the room; they corrected or praised each other's work, and sometimes they grew entirely quiet. Such results were natural in a school where the pupils were not obliged to attend, to remain, or to pay attention. Tolstoy insisted that only in the absence of force and compulsion could natural relations be maintained between teacher and pupils. The limit of freedom in the classroom was defined by the teacher, by his knowledge, and by his capacity to manage. And the pupils, Tolstoy asserted, should be treated as reasoning and reasonable beings; only then would they find out that order was necessary and that self-government was the best way to preserve it. If pupils were really interested in what was being taught, he declared, disorder would rarely occur, and when it did, the interested students would oblige the disorderly ones to pay attention.

The successful functioning of such a school demanded unusual ability on the part of the teacher. Tolstoy admitted this, and just claimed for himself a certain pedagogic tact. Always in his mind was the pupil's convenience in learning and not the teacher's in teaching. He insisted that there was no best method in teaching a subject. The best method would always be that which the teacher happened to know best. A method was good which when introduced did not necessitate any increase of discipline, but that which required greater severity was bad. The method should develop out of the exigencies of a given problem in teaching, and it should fit and please the pupils instead of the teacher. In short, teaching, according to Tolstoy, could not be described as a method; it was a talent, an art. Hence, finality and perfection were never achieved in it; development and perfecting continued endlessly.

Tolstoy's own practice did not fall behind his original notions of how students should be taught. He tried to understand the inner

needs of each child and to conform to them. In teaching the alphabet, he began by printing—not writing—the letters on the blackboard and by asking the children to copy them. At the same time he showed his pupils how to form words with the printed letters. The transition to writing he purposely delayed, for he was convinced that hastening this process resulted in illegible handwriting.

The common practice of quizzing an individual pupil before the whole class was discouraged at Tolstoy's school. He believed that such a procedure was most inimical to the building up of friendly relations between teacher and students. It seemed to him like a condescending and humiliating exercise of unlawful authority. His own method was to ask a question and allow all to answer at once. When nothing could be made out of the chorus of voices, he hushed the pupils and then called on one. When this one reached the end of his information, the teacher called on others until the question was fully answered. This method developed of itself, and when controlled was very successful and kept the children in a happy and highly competitive spirit.

Since experimentation was the basis of classroom instruction, Tolstoy never hesitated to change a method when it seemed inadequate. The teacher considered himself wrong and not the pupils when interest flagged. Under the spur of competition, the children themselves sometimes hit upon highly successful methods of learning. For example, despite all his efforts, progress in reading lagged until a pupil voluntarily announced that within a week he would learn how to read as well as the best student in the class, a boy who had had previous instruction. Others took up the challenge, and soon were furiously at work. The rivalry grew so intense that many of the slower students insisted upon taking their books home at night and doing extra work. Within three weeks extraordinary progress was made.

Somewhat the same experience occurred in penmanship. The pupils grew bored with their attempts to write well, and they resisted the teacher's efforts to have them recopy exercises. Some members of the older class, however, wrote Bible stories in their copybooks. Then they desired to take them home, perhaps to read to their parents. But the originals were so crumpled and illegible that one of the boys asked for paper to rewrite his stories. This idea took hold of the others. Soon they were all demanding paper to copy out their tales, and they boasted to each other of the excellence of their handwriting.

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In reading and writing, pupils found the stories of the Old Testament most acceptable. So enthusiastically did they read and retell these tales that Tolstoy concluded that the Old Testament should serve as a model for all children's primers. When he read the Bible to them, it seemed to him that a corner of the veil of knowledge was lifted and they yielded themselves to him completely. The children fell in love with the book, he declared, and with learning, and with him. The only kind of reading matter that could compare with it in popularity were folk tales, popular legends, proverbs, and verses. In teaching the Bible so successfully, Tolstoy learned a deeper appreciation of its literary and moral values.

Tolstoy had his own method of teaching drawing. He thought it useless to oblige beginners to copy complete figures or pictures, for they had no understanding of their evolution. His method was to evolve a figure on the blackboard before their eyes by drawing horizontal and vertical lines, dividing them into segments by dots, and then connecting the parts. Pupils were called upon to criticize the lines and the relation of one to the other as he drew them. Often he asked a boy to add the next line or even to invent the shape of the figure. In this way a more lively interest was aroused and the inevitable question, *Why?* was constantly anticipated.

Music, one of his favourite subjects, presented peculiar difficulties, and Tolstoy's efforts to devise an effective method found him drifting into the technique of Chevet, which he had seen employed among classes of Paris workmen. He used numerals instead of notes to indicate sounds, and he taught rhythm separately from pitch. On this basis his best pupils, after a few lessons, were able to write down the melodies of songs that they knew and were almost able to read music at sight. Tolstoy avoided what he called the false taste of the community and concentrated on the laws of music. Nothing so harmed musical instruction, he declared, as a superficial knowledge of the subject.

In this free atmosphere of student-dominated learning, certain subjects were resisted in a manner that led Tolstoy to doubt their ultimate usefulness or to question the desirability of teaching them to youngsters. Grammar was such a subject. Although his instruction favoured analysis, the kind involved in grammar put the pupils to sleep, or they openly avoided that class. To write correctly and to correct mistakes made by others gave his pupils pleasure, but this was only true when the process was unrelated to grammar. After much experimentation with teaching this subject, he reached





Leo Tolstoy, about 1855



Sofya Andreyevna Bers in 1860,  
before her marriage to Tolstoy

the conclusion that "grammar comes of itself as a mental and not unprofitable gymnastic exercise, and language—to write with skill and to read and understand—also comes of itself."

History and geography likewise provided difficulties. Tolstoy early discovered in his teaching experience that it was difficult for children to comprehend general notions; they had to begin with something tangible, something related to their own common experiences. Formal instruction in history, for example, got nowhere; pupils stubbornly refused to be interested in ancient history. Even Russian history fell flat until he hit upon the happy idea of giving his own artistic version of Napoleon's invasion of Russia, which delighted his pupils. He decided that in teaching history, it was necessary to start from the end rather than from the beginning, and that the more legendary and artistic the narrative the more interesting it was to children. With geography he had no success whatever until he aroused his pupils' curiosity about the relative geographical position of their village, but their interest scarcely went beyond this elementary knowledge. The fact that the earth revolved on its axis and passed around the sun bored them. He was ready to believe that nothing more to the point had ever been said on the subject than the remark of the hero's mother in Fonvizin's comedy, *The Minor*. She was urged to have geography taught to her booby of a son: "Why teach him all the countries?" she demanded. "The coachman will drive him wherever he may wish to go." Both history and geography, Tolstoy finally decided, ought not to be taught until the university, and even then he was altogether unconvinced of their utility to students.

## III

Over the door of Yasno-Polyana School was the inscription "Enter and Leave Freely." Perhaps he was thinking, by way of contrast, of Dante's inscription over hell, "Abandon All Hope, Ye Who Enter Here," which Tolstoy would hardly have hesitated to place above the entrances to most of the European schools he had visited. Certainly the atmosphere of his own school convinced the children that education was a precious and joyous heritage.

On a cold winter morning the bell would ring for the start of school. Children ran out into the village street. There was no lagging on the way, no urge to play the truant. Each child was eager to get there first. The pupils carried nothing in their hands, no

homework books or exercises. They had not been obliged to remember for today any lesson done the day before. They brought only themselves, their receptive natures and the certainty that it would be as jolly in school today as yesterday.

Before the teacher arrived the pupils gathered near the porch, pushing each other off the steps or sliding on the frozen crust of the road. A few would go into the classroom and read, write, or play. When the teacher came he might find on the schoolroom floor a heap of squealing children shouting:

"The pile is too small! You're squashing me, kids! Enough; cut out pulling my hair!"

As the teacher entered the voice from the bottom of the heap would cry out: "Peter Mikhailovich! Tell them to stop!"

"Good morning, Peter Mikhailovich!" shouted the others, continuing their game.

The teacher would take the books and give them to those who had followed him to the bookcase. The boys who were sprawled on the top of the heap would ask for books without getting up. The heap would become smaller by degrees. The moment the majority had books, the rest would run to the case and shout:

"Me too, me too! Give me yesterday's book; give me the Koltsovian book!"<sup>1</sup>

If there were two left who, excited from the struggle, still rolled on the floor, those who had books would cry out to them:

"You there, don't bother us. We can't hear a thing. Cut it out!"

The excited boys would cease their wrestling. Quite out of breath, they would seize books, and, while applying themselves, they would still keep swinging their legs for a time from unalloyed excitement. Soon the martial spirit would take flight, and the reading spirit would reign in the room.

These youngsters, sitting wherever they pleased—on benches, tables, window sills, or floor—would now attend to their reading with the same eagerness with which a moment before they had been struggling with each other. They did not whisper, giggle, or show any lack of attention once the lesson was under way.

Though in the course of a lesson the pupils preserved quiet, they did not hesitate to walk around and look at each other's copybook or show their exercises to the teacher. Often a particularly stimulating

<sup>1</sup> The poems of the Russian writer A. V. Koltsov, whose simple verse tales of country life were much liked by both Tolstoy and the students.

one-hour lesson would run into three hours, and still the children would call for more of the same. If some one of the older boys expressed weariness, the others scornfully ordered him to "go to the babies." On the other hand, they were free to leave whenever they wished, and often they took advantage of this if they were tired, or if the lesson was boring, or especially if there was a holiday on the morrow.

Two or three boys might suddenly rush into the room during the second or third afternoon class and hurriedly pick out their caps.

"What are you up to?" one of their comrades would ask.

"Going home."

"But studies; there's to be singing."

"The boys say they're going home," added another, slipping away with his cap.

"Who says so?" And several more youngsters would vanish.

"What is this?" the perplexed teacher, who had prepared the lesson, would ask. "Wait!" But the room would quickly empty, and the mortified teacher would have to submit, his hurt feelings perhaps assuaged by the fact that such scenes gave deeper meaning to the six or seven classes that these children voluntarily attended each day.

Tolstoy, like Rousseau, was opposed to both punishments and rewards in his school, features that he condemned most vigorously in schools abroad. Since the object of education was to bring happiness, the use of violence served only to frustrate it. The principle was deeply rooted in his own childhood experiences. Yet the habit of punishment was so ingrained in the teachers that they indulged in it on several occasions, but the results only fortified his conviction that it was a grave error. He sorrowfully admitted to losing his temper once and pulling a pupil's hair because he could not solve a simple problem in arithmetic. When two boys were discovered to have pilfered books, pencils, and a Leyden jar, Tolstoy in his embarrassment submitted the case to the pupils. They suggested placing a placard with the word "Thief" on the culprits. The guilty pupils were extremely mortified by this punishment. One of them, however, was not deterred from stealing again, and the same punishment was repeated. Tolstoy could not bear to witness the boy's sufferings under the jibing and mockery of his fellow students, and he tore off the "stupid label." "I convinced myself," he wrote, "that there were secrets of the soul, hidden from us, upon which only life can act, and not moral precepts

and punishment. . . . Our world of children—of simple, independent people—must remain pure from self-deception and from the criminal belief in the legality of punishment, free from that belief and self-deception that the feeling of revenge becomes a just thing the moment you call it punishment.”

## IV

The spirit of freedom and equality that reigned in Yasno-Polyana School placed the teachers on a level with their pupils without any sacrifice of respect or authority. Tolstoy had an unusual gift for this difficult kind of familiarity which is so easily abused by youngsters. He insisted upon being addressed simply as Leo Nikolayevich instead of “your excellency,” and in turn he learned to call them all by their nick-names. Pupils did the ordinary chores connected with the school, and to a few of the older boys Tolstoy gave bits of land to cultivate, for he strongly believed that manual labour should be an essential part of education. In the gymnasium that he provided for the children, he behaved as one of them. With strength and agility he led them in stunts on the apparatus and urged them to engage in gymnastic competitions. Alarmed village mothers were not slow to ascribe digestive troubles of their children, especially the bellyaches that followed the customary gorging after a Lenten fast, to this new passion for violent exercise in the gymnasium.

At the end of a lesson Tolstoy would announce that it was time to eat and play, and challenging them to race him outdoors, he would leap downstairs, three or four steps at a time, followed by the pack of screaming, laughing children. Outside in the snow he would face them.

“Now, all of you at me! Bet you can’t down me!”

The students would cling to him in front and behind, try to trip him, throw snowballs at him, leap on him, clamber over his back, desperately striving to pull him down. But he was too strong for them, and like a powerful ox he would cart them around on top of him. After a time, from weariness, but more often for fun, he would fall in the snow. Then their delight was indescribable! They at once began to cover him with snow and pile themselves on top of him, crying: “The heap is too small, the heap is too small!”

On one occasion Tolstoy bundled his class up and took them off to Tula to visit the circus. The gaping wonder of these little

peasant lads, who had never seen such a spectacle, repaid him for his struggle with the crowds, a dispute with a policeman, and quarrels with adults who obstructed the vision of his young charges. At Shrovetide he treated the whole school to a monster feast of the usual pancakes and sour cream. And at Easter he gathered all the pupils in a classroom where tables were loaded down with presents—cloth for shirts, concertinas, pencils, and jack-knives. Each child was allowed to go to the tables and select the present he desired. Then nuts and candies were distributed. At Christmas he again entertained them with a tree and gifts.

It is little wonder that the children came to love their school and the teachers, especially Tolstoy. He was like an older brother to them, and they responded to his efforts with devotion and tireless interest. Yet he was careful not to thwart their independent natures and to preserve relations that were at once free in thought and action. Their special treat was to gather around him on the terrace of his house at night after school was over. They pressed him for stories, and he told them tales of the Caucasus or of his narrow escape from the bear, and showed them the mark of the beast's teeth above his eye. In return, they related village tales of wizards and wood devils. When they asked if he believed in wizards and ghosts, he said with some firmness that he would give a hundred rubles to anyone who would show him a wizard. Sometimes these conversations became serious and he would tell of his war experiences and paint all the horror of men killing men. Once he said to the children: "I've been thinking that I'd like to throw over my estate, my life as master, and become a peasant, build a hut on the edge of the village, marry a country girl, and work as you at mowing, ploughing, at every kind of labour." The youngsters solemnly debated this proposition. Tolstoy attentively listened to their thoughtful reasoning and occasionally jotted down a note in his little book.

The close, even tender, relations that existed between Tolstoy and some of the older boys of the school are beautifully reflected in one of his articles in the pedagogical journal. It was a moonless winter night. School had just let out and the younger pupils noisily coasted downhill on sleds into the village. Fedka,<sup>1</sup> a lad of ten, with a sensitive, poetic, yet daring nature, suggested to Tolstoy that he accompany him and two of the older boys home on a roundabout

<sup>1</sup> Fedka, a favourite pupil, was V. S. Morozov, who lived to an old age and left highly interesting memoirs of his school days.

way through the woods. The danger of wolves fascinated the youngsters. The four set out together and skirted the forest, the boys hopefully on the lookout for wild animals. They chatted about Caucasian robbers, of Hadji Murad, and of the brave Cossacks that Tolstoy had often told them about. Although Russian peasant children very early learned to scorn affection and were even offended by the most commonplace caresses, in the darkness of the night, at the most fearful part of a tale Tolstoy was narrating, Fedka furtively clasped two of his teacher's fingers in his little hand and held on. When the story ended the agitated Fedka and the other boys demanded more. The wind sounded through the aspens and the snow crunched under their feet. Tolstoy concluded his tale by telling how a Chechenian brave, surrounded by enemies, sang his death song and threw himself on his dagger. The children were silent for a moment, and then ensued a discussion about the import of the warrior's death song. Fedka, his appetite for horror aroused, asked Tolstoy for the story of his aunt whose throat had been cut.<sup>1</sup>

No sooner had this tale been finished than Fedka, with one of those mysteriously swift and unconnected transitions of children, suddenly asked why they had to learn singing in school. "What is drawing for?" Tolstoy rhetorically asked, puzzled for the moment about how to explain the usefulness of art. "Yes, why draw figures?" Fedka questioned. The other boys joined in the discussion. "What is a lime tree for?" asked Syomka. Each began to speculate on these questions, and the facts emerged that not everything exists for use, but that there is also beauty, and that art is beauty, and in the end Fedka understood why the lime tree grows and what singing is for.

"It feels strange to repeat what we then said," Tolstoy remarked, "but it seems to me that we said all that can be said about utility, and plastic and moral beauty." They continued on their way to the village and the boys reluctantly left Tolstoy for their miserable thatched huts and poverty-stricken parents. Fedka was the last to go. He still clung to Tolstoy's hand out of gratitude it seemed, and as he entered his hut, in which his father and the drunken village tailor were gambling, he said pathetically: "Good-bye! Let us always have walks like this!"<sup>2</sup>

Such experiences led Tolstoy to meditate on the age-old question

<sup>1</sup> A distant relative of Tolstoy had recently been murdered in this fashion by her cook.

<sup>2</sup> Tolstoy reprinted the account of this incident at the beginning of his famous treatise, *What Is Art?*



of the moral and practical utility of educating the masses. The cultured, he said, would remonstrate: Why give these poor peasant children the knowledge that will make them dissatisfied with their class and their lot in life? We cannot all be thinkers and artists, for someone must labour. But moral questions and doubts troubled Fedka, countered Tolstoy, and you could not put him off with three rubles, a catechism, and the necessity of hard labour. "He needs," concluded Tolstoy, addressing the cultured upper class, "what your life of ten generations unoppressed by labour has brought to you. You had the leisure to search, to think, to suffer—then give him that for which you suffered; this is what he needs. You, like the Egyptian priest, conceal yourselves from him by a mysterious cloak, you bury in the earth the talent given to you by history. Do not fear: nothing human is harmful to man. Do you doubt yourselves? Surrender to the feeling and it will not deceive you. Trust in his [the peasant boy's] nature, and you will be convinced that he will take only that which history commanded you to give him, that which you have earned by suffering."

## V

The question of art and its relation to his young peasant pupils interested Tolstoy. He discussed the subject in one of his most remarkable articles,<sup>1</sup> inspired by an unusual experience in composition in his school. Themes on the customary subjects, such as descriptions of a forest, a pig, or a table, drove the children to tears. He then suggested that they write a story on peasant life to illustrate a proverb. The pupils found this difficult too, but one boy proposed that Tolstoy write the story himself in competition with them. He composed several pages and was interrupted by Fedka, who climbed on the back of his chair and read over his shoulder. Tolstoy explained the plot of the story and the boys became immediately interested. They criticized what he had done and suggested different ways of continuing. Fedka took the leading part in this discussion and surprised Tolstoy by his imagination and sense of proportion, the chief quality in every art. Tolstoy set to work to write to the dictation of his pupils. Syomka and Fedka, who angrily rejected superfluous details by the others, eventually took command of the situation, and the rest of the boys went home.

<sup>1</sup> "Who Should Teach Whom to Write, We the Peasant Children or the Peasant Children Us?"

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Tolstoy described how he and his two pupils worked feverishly from seven in the evening till eleven. Neither hunger nor weariness bothered them. In his account of their collective efforts, he gave a number of convincing examples of the artistic rightness and fitness of details, descriptions, and selection that the boys argued and insisted upon. They drew from their experience with village life and characters, and they were nearly always right. Tolstoy was tremendously excited and admitted that he had felt such a strong emotion only two or three times in his life. He was amazed over his discovery of such artistic and creative powers in two peasant lads who could scarcely read or write, and it seemed almost offensive that he, a nationally known author, was virtually unable to instruct these eleven-year-old pupils in his art. Not even the great Goethe, he ecstatically exclaimed, achieved such artistic heights.

The next and still a third day they continued the story with equal enthusiasm. Then the work was interrupted because Tolstoy had to go away for a few days. During his absence a craze for making popguns out of paper swept the school, and the unfinished manuscript of the story was unwittingly sacrificed to this childish diversion. When Tolstoy discovered the loss upon his return, he was deeply chagrined. Fedka and Syomka, aware of his keen disappointment, offered to reproduce the tale themselves. They came after school one evening at nine o'clock and locked themselves in his study. Tolstoy listened at the door and heard them laughing. Then all grew quiet, except for subdued voices discussing the story and the scratching of a pen. At midnight he knocked and was admitted. Fedka still had a few more sentences to dictate to Syomka, who stood at the large table busily writing, his lines running crookedly across the paper and his pen constantly stabbing at the inkpot. At last Tolstoy took the copybook. After a merry supper of potatoes and kvas, the boys lay down on their sheepskin coats under the writing table, and until sleep overtook them, their charming, healthy, childish laughter rang through the room.

Tolstoy read the story over and found it very similar to the original draft. Some new details had been added, but the tale contained the same feeling for beauty, truth, and measure of the first version. And he printed it with very few changes in his magazine.<sup>1</sup> From this unique experiment in composition he drew

<sup>1</sup> The title is the Russian proverb, "The Spoon Feeds, but the Handle Sticks in the Eye." Other tales written by his pupils were printed in the magazine, and he declared them to be equal to anything in Russian literature.

some interesting conclusions. He declared that nearly all contemporary art was intended for people of leisure and artificial training and was therefore useless to the masses, whose demand for art was more legitimate. He dismissed with some vexation the stale notion that in order to understand and appreciate the beautiful a certain amount of preparation was necessary. "Who said this?" he asked. "Why? What proves it? It is only a shift, a loophole to escape from the hopeless position to which the false direction of our art, produced for one class alone, has led us. Why are the beauty of the sun, of the human face, the beauty of the sounds of a folk song, and of deeds of love and self-sacrifice accessible to every one, and why do they demand no preparation?" He questioned whether Pushkin's poems or Beethoven's symphonies were as art so absolutely and universally good as popular folk songs.

Tolstoy's position was no doubt extreme, and there was also considerable exaggeration in his unqualified praise of the literary ability of his pupils, who were no doubt inspired to an extraordinary degree by his own artistic interests. Ten years later, when he reprinted one of Fedka's stories,<sup>1</sup> he found it necessary to rework the whole, and he cut out many of the features that he had originally found so beautiful. Yet the schoolboy efforts of his peasant pupils taught him the fundamental truth that the need to enjoy and serve art was inherent in every human being, and that this need had its right and should be satisfied.

## VI

Although the Society for National Education that Tolstoy fondly projected found no support among government officials, his Yasno-Polyana School was not without its influence. After the emancipation of the serfs, the government encouraged them to open their own schools. Peasants in the Tula district appealed to Tolstoy for teachers and he willingly suggested a number. In 1862 there were no less than thirteen village schools in the neighbourhood of Yasnaya Polyana, and their teachers were all zealous disciples of Tolstoy's pedagogical methods. They were mostly youths who had been dismissed from the universities for their part in the radical student movement of 1862. "Each one of them arrived," he wrote to Granny, "with a manuscript of Herzen in his suitcase and revolutionary thoughts in his head, and in the course of a week

<sup>1</sup> "A Soldier's Life," reprinted in Tolstoy's *ABC*.

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each without exception burned his manuscript, discarded his revolutionary thoughts, and taught peasant children sacred history, prayers, and passed out copies of the New Testament to be read at home.”

These would-be young radicals, turned rural schoolteachers, worshipped Tolstoy and caught from him the devotion and enthusiasm that transformed their difficult task into a pioneering venture. They lived like peasants, taught from seven in the morning until late at night in dirty, stuffy huts, using tables for blackboards, and they received in return for their services scarcely enough money to keep them alive. At first, like Tolstoy, they had to overcome the ignorant suspicions of peasant fathers and mothers who distrusted these newfangled methods of teaching and were alarmed because their sons were not regularly beaten by the masters. The fact that they were entirely free to send their children to school or take them out broke down resistance, and then the happiness of the youngsters and the obvious progress they made in so short a time eventually won the parents' complete confidence.

A religious prophet and his disciples could hardly have been more devoted to each other than Tolstoy and these young teachers. He inspired them with a love for their peasant children and set them a compelling example of self-sacrificing service. When Tolstoy was obliged to be away for some time, A. P. Serdobolski, a teacher in one of the village schools, wrote him of their progress, and concluded his letter:

We await you with impatience; without you things are not as they should be. I confess that our common effort can proceed only under your personal direction, that it can be fired only by your warm love for it. I am not convinced that all the teachers here love this undertaking, but I am convinced that they will love it as I love it, and as Tomashevski<sup>1</sup> loves it, if they will only find in it that poetry, that rapture which shines forth from your own being.

## VII

In a brief note “To the Public” that introduced his pedagogical magazine, Tolstoy eagerly invited criticism. He even wrote a letter to Chernyshevski, now one of the most popular progressive thinkers, in which he requested a sincere review of the magazine in

<sup>1</sup> A. K. Tomashevski, one of the most successful of the village teachers recommended by Tolstoy.

the pages of the *Contemporary*. The desire to publicize his educational ideas as widely as possible was part of Tolstoy's larger plan, but this appeal to a radical critic was singularly misplaced in view of Tolstoy's hostility towards the *Contemporary* circle. Chernyshevski did not miss this handsome opportunity to flay the aristocrat of Yasnaya Polyana. The review was painstakingly insulting. Tolstoy was held up as an ignoramus in the field of education and advised to return to his lessons in the university. The problems of what and how to teach children that he had laboured so hard over were declared by Chernyshevski to be long since solved, and he bluntly told Tolstoy that if he did not know these simple matters, then nature had deprived him of the capacity to acquire the most elementary knowledge in education.

Tolstoy was deeply offended and did not deign to reply to such contemptuous and unconstructive criticism. He might have anticipated Chernyshevski's opposition if not his severity, for in the first and succeeding numbers of his pedagogical magazine, he had lightly disposed of all the Western European and Russian educational thinkers who were most esteemed by the *Contemporary* radicals. Nor was hostile criticism lacking in formal Russian educational circles. Tolstoy was called a "pedagogical nihilist," his experiment set down as a complete overthrow of educational order and discipline, and his school was described as one in name only: a "Jewish synagogue or a gypsy encampment."

A smattering of praise for some of the less extreme aspects of Tolstoy's experiment appeared in a few Russian literary periodicals, and several teachers, weary of the slavish devotion to everything German in pedagogy, bravely encouraged him. In general, however, his efforts were received in silence, and in no instance did he inspire among educators an enthusiastic acceptance of his experiment. His essential principle of freedom for both teachers and pupils was too radical a demand for even the most progressive theorist.

Of course, Tolstoy's educational ideas had no chance of a favourable hearing in his own day. He revolted against established opinion in the name of healthy common sense. Still worse for his case, he scorned scientific exposition in his articles and used the simple and forceful prose of which he was a master. If he had elected to write treatises on experimental pedagogy in the accepted trade jargon, buttressed with elaborate footnotes and well-chosen citations from authorities, he would doubtless have gained a hearing, even if an unfavourable one. His extremely radical position—really

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to the left of Rousseau—represented a danger not only to the whole foundation of educational practice, but to the authority of the State. The freedom that he advocated seemed to verge on anarchy, and children educated in this spirit would hardly grow up with the proper reverence for those institutions of the tsarist government that had been hallowed by a tradition of corruption and oppression. His educational philosophy would place the human worth and well-being of the individual above the well-being of the State.

Despite this hostility during his lifetime, Tolstoy's educational ideas and practice did not fall on barren ground. In recent years there has been a marked tendency to acclaim him a brilliant innovator and one of the most significant of educational reformers. Experimental schools in America and abroad have profited from the full accounts he left of his own experiences. His method of teaching the alphabet and of reading, his insistence on self-reliance by obliging pupils to do manual labour, and his belief that the child should be allowed as much freedom as possible in the classroom—all these features of his system have had their influence in later progressive education. And one of his principal theses, that the school should always remain a kind of pedagogical laboratory in order that it might not fall behind universal progress, has found wide acceptance as an educational premise.

### VIII

By September of 1862 there were plenty of indications that Tolstoy's zeal for his school was waning. His absorbing experiment had fulfilled its purpose: the school contributed as much to the historical development of Tolstoy as it had to the education of peasant children—it brought him back to his career of fiction writing. It was as though a kind of catharsis had been effected that once again left his mind and spirit free for artistic work.

Although Tolstoy in later years commented slightly on his educational efforts, he never really regretted them. In 1904 he wrote of his teaching experience: "The brightest period of my life gave me not female love, but love for people, for children. This was a wonderful time, especially in contrast to the preceding gloom." And as an old man, he noted in his diary that the happiest periods of his life had been those in which he surrendered his whole existence to the service of people, and among these he listed as first the time he had spent in educational work. And to Granny

he wrote: "You know what the school meant to me from the very moment that I opened it. It was all my life, it was my monastery, my church, in which I redeemed myself while being saved from all the anxieties, doubts, and temptations of life."

Tolstoy's satisfaction was shared by the teachers who worked under him, and some of the pupils seem to have enjoyed a lasting and beneficial experience from their close contact with his powerful personality. His favourite pupil Fedka, looking back over a span of fifty years, recalled his schoolboy days: "There I am a ten-year-old schoolboy, there is young, jolly Leo Nikolayevich; there I am sliding down the steep hill, romping with Leo Nikolayevich, covering him with snow, playing ball, walking in the woods and fields, and having conversations on the terrace, telling our tales about the wizards. . . . The remembrances of those happy, bright days of my life I have never lost and never will. The love for Leo Nikolayevich that burned within me then still burns brightly in my soul and illumines my life."

## Chapter XIV

### A CHALLENGE TO A DUEL

**F**REEING the serfs intensified the radical movement in the 1860's. All over Russia demands for further reforms outstripped the intentions of a government which was the most liberal in the country's long history of despotism. Tolstoy remained outside this social ferment, for he involuntarily opposed external, epidemic pressures. Comment in his diary and letters was conspicuously absent at the time of the emancipation of the serfs, but he must have rejoiced inwardly, as he no doubt did over other governmental reforms.

According to the terms of the emancipation, peasants were allowed to buy small plots of land, paying their former masters in money or labour. It was anticipated that endless controversies would arise over the size and value of these parcels of land, as well as many other vexing problems connected with the new social status of the peasants. To settle such difficulties, the government created in the various districts the new post of Arbiter of the Peace.

Upon his return from abroad in May 1861, Tolstoy learned that he had been nominated for the position of Arbiter in his district. The friendly governor of the Province of Tula apparently considered him an ideal man for the task, but the noble landlords were of another mind. Tolstoy's liberal experiments with his own peasants, his generous treatment of them before and after the emancipation, and his proud, opinionative, and slightly contemptuous attitude had won him the reputation in the region of being a crank, even a dangerous person. The landlords wanted an Arbiter who would respect their traditional rights and not strain the quality of justice on behalf of the peasantry. Opposition took shape at once. The Marshal of Nobility protested that the nomination was thoroughly distasteful, but the governor refused to be persuaded. Tolstoy was fully aware of the hostility. He wrote to



Granny of his candidacy: "I did not dare to refuse before my conscience in view of this terrible, uncivil, and cruel nobility that promised to devour me if I accepted the post of Arbiter."

Tolstoy took up the challenge, determined that the peasants should have fair play, and he went about it with all the buffalo-like obstinacy that Turgenev had observed in him. He demanded that landlords recompense their peasants for beatings and for detaining them in service months after the emancipation; he protested the removal of peasants from their legal homesteads on an estate to land of less value; and he uncovered swindles on the part of landlords to deprive their former serfs of land to which they were entitled under the terms of the emancipation act.

For his efforts the peasants worshipped Tolstoy and the landlords hated him. He received threatening letters from landlords. They wrote denunciations of him, planned to thrash him, and conspired to involve him in a duel. The emancipation itself had caused them grief enough, and they did not propose to make any further concessions. Tolstoy's intention was to deal fairly with both sides, but he lacked a conciliatory spirit and was incapable of softening his notion of justice with administrative tact. While displaying a militant attitude towards his equals, he was ready to wait on his inferiors upon his knees. There were stories of his endless patience with peasants, even when they vainly persisted in trying to persuade him to do what he considered unjust. On the other hand, at the Magistrates' Session, where landlords registered complaints against his decisions, he stubbornly refused to alter them, despite the fact that all the judges opposed him. On one occasion he demonstratively walked out of a meeting because those present would not agree with his opinion.

The situation went from bad to worse. A petition of complaint was circulated among the landlords and sent to high government authorities in an effort to have Tolstoy removed. His judgments were reversed by the Magistrates' Session, but often when he appealed to the Government Session, which was uninfluenced by the nobles of his district, his original decisions were upheld. Finally, in February 1862, he wrote an indignant letter to the Tula Board of Peasant Affairs. He objected that many of his rulings had been reversed without legal justification, a situation that destroyed confidence in his office and rendered useless all his efforts. A list of such reversals was enclosed, and he refused to continue the duties of Arbiter until all these cases had been investigated by the Board.

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Shortly before this he wrote to Botkin: "I fell into the job of Arbiter of the Peace quite unexpectedly, and despite the fact that I conduct the business most coolly, and in a scrupulous manner, I have earned the terrible indignation of the nobility. They even want to beat me and to take legal action against me, but neither one nor the other will succeed. I wait only until they have calmed down, and then I shall resign." There was no possibility that the enraged landlords would calm down, and at the end of April he sent in his resignation on the score of illness.

A sincere desire to serve his fellow men had no doubt prompted Tolstoy to accept the post of Arbiter of the Peace. He regarded it, as he did his educational work, as a kind of moral activity. But the task had nothing to do with moral absolutes or abstract justice. The accommodation of means to an end required for the satisfactory handling of any social problem was nearly always beyond him. The problem must be solved in his own way, and that had little relation to the opinions or wishes of others. His experiences as Arbiter of the Peace merely added to his growing conviction of the stupidity of civil institutions. In all of them justice and the public welfare were sacrificed to an apparent order that sanctioned the oppression of the weak and the iniquity of the strong.

## II

Two of Tolstoy's friends, Fet and Turgenev, regarded his efforts to serve society as schoolmaster and Arbiter of the Peace with distrust, but for different reasons. Since he had become a gentleman farmer on an estate not far away, Fet had grown very close to Tolstoy. They exchanged visits and carried on a lively correspondence filled with their agricultural experiences, but also rich in thoughts on questions of religion, philosophy, and art. Tolstoy highly esteemed his friend's common sense and his literary talent. Indeed, Fet was quite capable of writing some of the best lyric poetry in Russia while managing a large estate with unusual success. He did not worry so much about Tolstoy's desertion of his art in order to be of service to peasants, but the impracticality of his efforts and the absence of any possibility of material gain gave him concern. Turgenev, on the other hand, imagining himself the literary midwife who had brought Tolstoy's brain children into the world, had no patience with these madcap activities that interfered with the further artistic productions of his prize pupil. Not

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long after Tolstoy's return to Russia, these three friends were thrown together in a meeting that ended in an epoch-making quarrel.

Turgenev returned from abroad in May and eagerly sought out Tolstoy, whom he had not seen for some time. Turgenev had just finished the manuscript of *Fathers and Sons* and perversely longed to submit it to his dangerous friend's critical eye. Tolstoy arrived at Turgenev's estate, Spasskoye, on May 26. The meeting went off cordially enough. After a fine dinner, Tolstoy was manœuvred to a large sofa in the drawing-room. The precious manuscript was placed in his hands, and he was discreetly left to devour this new feast in majestic solitude. Tolstoy soon fell sound asleep, either from the effects of the large dinner and his comfortable position on the sofa, or because the novel bored him (he did decide that it was artificially constructed and the contents unimportant). He awoke, he said, with a strange sensation and with the conviction that just as he opened his eyes he saw Turgenev's broad back disappearing through the doorway.

In spite of the frayed feelings engendered by this unpleasant occurrence, the two friends set off gaily the next day to visit Fet at his new estate, Stepanovka, where they were accorded a joyous welcome by Fet. Knowing Turgenev's love for good eating, Fet had his cook prepare a magnificent dinner, topped off with champagne. After dinner they walked in the fields, lay down in the tall grass, and continued their discussion with verve and freedom. Harmony reigned. Upon retiring that evening Turgenev playfully remarked that his host and hostess would spend the night on a cloud, between heaven and earth. In a sense, this was a just observation, retorted Fet, but a position not a little inconvenient.

The next morning around the samovar, Turgenev sat on one side of his hostess and Tolstoy on the other. Madame Fet, aware of the importance Turgenev attached to the education of his natural daughter, asked him if he were satisfied with her English governess. He praised the governess and added that with English exactitude she had requested him to fix the sum his daughter might give for charitable purposes. "And now," continued Turgenev, "she requires my daughter to take in hand and mend the tattered garments of the poor."

"And you consider that good?" asked Tolstoy.

"Of course: it places the doer of charity in touch with everyday needs."

"But I consider that a well-dressed girl with dirty, ill-smelling rags on her lap is acting an insincere theatrical farce."

"I beg you not to say that!" exclaimed Turgenev, his face flushing.

"Why shouldn't I speak about what I'm convinced of?" Tolstoy replied.

"Then you consider that I educate my daughter badly?"

Tolstoy answered that he thought just that, but that what he had said did not refer to Turgenev personally but simply expressed his own notion.

Turgenev in anger cried: "If you speak in that way I'll punch you in the face."

Upon that, Turgenev jumped from the table, clapped his hands to his head, and rushed out of the room. A moment later he returned and declared to Fet's wife: "For God's sake, excuse my improper conduct which I deeply regret!" and again left the room.<sup>1</sup>

The worried and unhappy Fet, knowing the fiery tempers of both his guests, endeavoured at once to put distance between them. Tolstoy with difficulty was hurried off to near-by Novosyolki, the estate of Fet's brother-in-law. Pride and self-esteem, however, had received a deadly blow, and Tolstoy's first act upon arriving at Novosyolki was to write a note to Turgenev, in which his fury was barely concealed by the icy tone: "I hope your conscience has already told you that you have not behaved properly to me, especially in the eyes of Fet and his wife. Therefore, write me the kind of a letter that I could send to Fet. If, however, you find that my demand is unjust, then inform me. I shall wait at Bogoslovo."

At Bogoslovo, the post station nearest to Novosyolki, Tolstoy waited impatiently for an answer. It did not come. He sent for pistols, and wrote a second note to Turgenev, this time a challenge. Nor did he wish to fight, he hotly asserted, in the trivial manner of literary men who end their ridiculous duels with champagne toasts; he wanted to shoot it out in real earnest, and he hoped Turgenev would meet him in the woods on the edge of Bogoslovo.

Tolstoy waited all night without any thought of sleep. But no Turgenev. Finally, a letter arrived in answer of Tolstoy's first note. It had been delayed because Turgenev had mistakenly sent it to Novosyolki. With excessive politeness he wrote:

<sup>1</sup> Subsequent events indicate that on this occasion Turgenev also asked Tolstoy's pardon, but not with sufficient definiteness to satisfy him.

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Dear sir, Leo Nikolayevich! In answer to your letter, I can only repeat what I considered it my duty to announce to you at Fet's: carried away by a feeling of involuntary enmity, the reasons for which need not be considered here, I insulted you without any definite provocation on your part and I asked your pardon. . . . What happened this morning proved clearly that attempts at intimacy between such opposite natures as yours and mine can lead to nothing good: and I the more readily fulfill my duty to you because the present letter probably terminates our relations with each other. From my soul I hope that it is satisfactory to you, and I consent in advance to your making what use you please of it. With complete esteem, I have the honour to remain, dear Sir, your most humble servant,

IV. TURGENEV.

About the contents of this letter Tolstoy wrote to Fet: "I wish you well of your relations with that man, but I scorn him. I have written to him and broken off all relations, except that I hold myself ready to give him any satisfaction that he may desire. Despite all my apparent tranquillity, I was disturbed in spirit and felt I must demand a more explicit apology from Mr. Turgenev, which I did in my letter from Novosyolki. Here is his answer, which I accept as satisfactory, merely informing him that my reason for pardoning him is not the opposition of our natures but one which he may surmise."

Meanwhile, the much harassed Turgenev had received Tolstoy's note containing the challenge, and he hastened to write another letter that was a curious mixture of abjectness and fussy justification. He admitted Tolstoy's right to demand satisfaction, weapon in hand, and then added:

I will say without phrases that I would willingly stand your fire in order to efface my truly insane words. That I should have uttered them is so unlike the habits of my whole life that I can only attribute my action to the irritation aroused by the extreme and continued antagonism of our views. This is not an apology, I wish to say not a justification, but an explanation. And therefore at parting from you forever—for such occurrences are ineffaceable and irrevocable—I consider it my duty to repeat once again that in this affair you were in the right and I in the wrong. I add that here is no question of courage which I wish or do not wish to show, but an acknowledgment of your right to call me out to fight, in the accepted manner of course (with seconds) as well as your right to pardon me. You have chosen as you pleased, and there remains for me simply to submit to your decision.

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Tolstoy could not resist a reply to this letter, in which he bluntly wrote Turgenev: "You are afraid of me, but I scorn you and do not wish to have anything to do with you." Two months passed, and an echo of the quarrel is heard in Tolstoy's diary: "Have had a remarkable wrangle with Turgenev, a final one. He is an utter villain, but I think with the passing of time I shall not be able to refrain from pardoning him." The prophecy was correct. Tolstoy's pride and sharp temper made enemies easily, but he could not treasure up grudges for long. Periodically he felt it necessary to cleanse his soul of ill-feeling towards his fellow men; at such moments it became insupportable for him to know that he had an enemy. In another two months he wrote in the diary: "Be fair about Turgenev. I was going to, but for some reason or other haven't written him a letter, in which I wished to ask his pardon."

The next day Tolstoy did write a letter which contained the frank sentence: "If I offended you, pardon me; it makes me unbearably sad to think that I have an enemy." This letter had been sent to Turgenev's Petersburg bookseller to be forwarded to him. Since Turgenev went abroad, the letter did not actually reach him until some three months later.

In the meantime, fate once again played the estranged friends a shabby trick. Tolstoy received the following letter from Turgenev who was in Paris:

Before my departure from Petersburg, I learned that you disseminated in Moscow a copy of your last letter to me, in which you call me a coward, a man not willing to fight with you, etc. It was impossible for me to return to the Province of Tula at that time, and I continued my journey. But, as I consider your *behaviour after all that I have done to efface the words that slipped from me* to be offensive and dishonourable, then I warn you that I will not let this instance pass without attention; I will return to Russia in the spring and demand satisfaction from you. I consider it necessary to inform you that I have made known my intentions to my friends in Moscow in order that they may counteract your loose rumours.

Tolstoy's answer was prompt: "In your letter you call my behaviour dishonourable; apart from this you personally told me that you would punch me in the face. But I ask your pardon, confess my fault, and decline the challenge." Apparently he accompanied this with another letter, for Turgenev wrote to Fet that Tolstoy had satisfactorily explained the ugly rumours as pure invention.

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Actually, Turgenev's challenge to fight a duel eight months hence had struck Tolstoy as a little silly.

When Tolstoy's letter of reconciliation that had been sent through the bookseller finally reached him, Turgenev felt that his own actions had been hasty. Having in mind the baffling imponderables that had complicated the whole quarrel, he wrote Fet:

From all this one must conclude that our [Tolstoy's and Turgenev's] constellations move through space in resolutely hostile conjunction, and that therefore we had better, as he himself proposes, avoid meeting. But you may write or tell him (if you see him) that I (without phrase or joke) love him very much *from afar*, esteem him, and watch his fate with sympathetic interest, but that in proximity all takes a different turn. What's to be done! We must live as though we inhabited different planets or different centuries.

Fet had the temerity to convey these friendly sentiments to Tolstoy. For his pains he received the following brusque note in reply: "Turgenev is a villain who ought to be beaten, which I ask you to transmit to him as accurately as you transmit to me his precious maxims, despite my repeated requests not to speak of him. I ask you not to write to me any more, for, as with Turgenev's letters, I will not open yours." Thus Fet was also placed beyond the pale for a time.

Trivial as the cause may seem, this quarrel interrupted the friendly relations of two of Russia's greatest novelists for seventeen years. Turgenev could not easily become reconciled to the fact that his troglodyte had grown up and no longer required the care of his "old nurse." Tolstoy's own capacity for friendship was considerable, but his occasional irritability, his spasms of intolerance, and especially his excessive demands resulted in his having relatively few close friends in the course of his long life. Commenting on the quarrel, Botkin justly said of Tolstoy that he had an ardently loving soul and that he wanted to love Turgenev, but his impulsive feeling encountered merely mild, good-natured indifference. This would never do with Tolstoy.

### III

Tolstoy's educational activities and the demands made upon him as Arbiter of the Peace affected his health. He also felt spiritually ill, for it seemed that all his efforts towards human betterment were

leading him nowhere. A cough developed and he was haunted by the spectre of tuberculosis. The doctor advised a rest. In May, Tolstoy decided to go to the Bashkirs on the steppes, breathe the fresh air, drink *kumys* (soured and fermented mares' milk), and lead an animal existence.

For company on the road, Tolstoy offered to take along two of his favourite pupils, Vasya Morozov<sup>1</sup> and Ignat Chernov. The wide-eyed wonderment of the boys at their first sight of Moscow amused Tolstoy. They stayed in the city for a few days. Tolstoy visited the Bers family, who were on the point of leaving for their country home. So intimate had he grown with this family, and so highly did they prize his company, that they willingly put off their departure. They worried about his thinness and racking cough. In the general conversation at dinner, Tolstoy complained of his onerous duties as Arbiter of the Peace. The daughters were more interested in their visitor than in what he was saying. Spirited fifteen-year-old Tanya, the youngest, observed in a whisper to Sonya that their oldest sister Liza "sentimentalized" for Tolstoy's benefit. The smile never left her face, and she spoke in a quiet unnatural voice. For some time now Liza had been cherishing hopes. After dinner Tolstoy presented his two little peasant pupils, and he was proud of their grown-up behaviour in the presence of fashionable people.

That night in their bedroom, the observant Tanya noticed that Sonya was unusually sad and prayed for a long time. At the conclusion of her prayers, Tanya asked:

"Sonya, *tu aimes le comte?*"

"*Je ne sais pas,*" she softly answered, obviously not surprised at the question. "Ach, Tanya, his two brothers have died of consumption!"

It was long before Sonya went to sleep. Tanya heard her indistinct murmuring and saw how she wiped away her tears. The wise little Tanya understood that Sonya also had hopes, and that night she lay awake for a long time while wondering about the eventual outcome of this sisterly duel for the heart of Tolstoy.

The next day Tolstoy and his young companions resumed their journey, proceeding to Tver by rail. At the station the baggage-master must have taken him for a country bumpkin with two sons clinging to his coat-tails, for he repeatedly ignored Tolstoy's request for his luggage.

<sup>1</sup> Vasya (V. S.) Morozov is Fedka, the pupil who distinguished himself in Tolstoy's literary experiments in his school.



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"The devil! What a bothersome fellow, what an uproar!" growled the bumptious official to Tolstoy's insistent demand for service.

"Do you know to whom you speak and whom you insult?" shouted Tolstoy in a sudden burst of temper. "I'm Count Leo Tolstoy!" He stormed at the official, told him that he was an author, and threatened to write to the newspapers about him. In a moment the baggagemaster was all deference. With endless apologies he quickly produced the luggage. Tolstoy soon regained his composure and laughingly remarked to young Morozov: "How I scolded him! He kept saying all the time: 'Pardon, it's my fault,' but I ought to have asked his pardon because of my lack of restraint and my pride."

From Tver the travellers took a steamer down the Volga to Samara, and then rode horseback some ninety miles to Karalyk, where they found the nomadic encampment of the Bashkirs. Not a tree or bush could be seen on the vast, rolling steppes. In a native tent Tolstoy and his young companions lived the simple life of these Asiatic nomads for more than two months. The Bashkirs grew very fond of him. They were Mohammedans and he talked seriously with their old men about religion and God. With the youths he was a general favourite. They liked his jolly disposition and called him "Prince Tul"—that is, Prince of Tula. He participated in their athletic competitions, and none of these husky young Bashkirs could throw him in wrestling.

This life in the open steppes and the salutary properties of the large quantities of *kumys* that he drank soon improved Tolstoy's health. He wrote to Auntie Tatyana that he was growing fat, that his cough had almost disappeared, and that he had discovered and visited an old Sevastopol friend who had become Ataman of Uralsk.

One morning at tea a disturbing note was interjected into Tolstoy's peaceful, healthy existence: a letter from Auntie Tatyana was handed to him. He read it and grew pale and agitated.

"Aleksai Stepanovich!" he shouted to his servant.

"What do you wish, your excellency?"

"Such a bundle of news from Yasnaya Polyana!"

"What is it, your excellency?"

"The Lord knows what it is. The gendarmes, the police, have come to our house, conducted a search, turned everything upside down, flung around all my books and papers, and have made a regular pogrom. It is frightful, frightful! And what have they been

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searching for there? They have terrified Auntie, driven her from her room, and upset the whole bed. It is terrible! It's an insult! I shall not let it stand thus. I'll write to His Majesty. It is impossible to put up with this!"

After such bewildering news, Tolstoy could no longer remain away from home and he soon took his farewell of the kindly Bashkirs. They surrounded him and begged him to return soon. In their broken Russian they said: "Fine prince, jolly, love our joke; never was such a prince." He and his young pupils waved them good-bye and promised to return the following year.

Tolstoy arrived in Moscow about July 20. He stayed long enough to visit the Bers family and to pour out to these sympathetic friends the shocking story of how his house had been ransacked by the police. Then he hurried on to Yasnaya Polyana, anxious to learn all the details. In the meantime he turned over in his mind various schemes for demanding redress for this offence against the sanctity of his home and his personal honour.

### IV

For some months the police had had their eye on Tolstoy, nor did they lose sight of him for the remainder of his long life. Revolutionary manifestoes had begun to appear furtively in various parts of Russia. The secret police of the Third Section of the government grew worried. Large-scale conspiracies were imagined and many harmless "enemies of the state" were relentlessly tracked down. One of Tolstoy's young teachers, a university student, was suspected of having a part in the printing and distribution of anti-religious works. As a consequence the Moscow police in February (1862) sent M. I. Shipov to Tula to investigate Tolstoy and his teachers. The sleuth could hardly have expended much effort on his commission, for it appears that he spent most of his time and the government's money in the pothouses of Tulla.

In May, hearing that Tolstoy had left for Petersburg,<sup>1</sup> Shipov also set out for that city, and upon arrival he reported to the Chief of the Third Section, General A. L. Potapov. Meanwhile, the sleuth himself had been spied upon, for the Tula police had sent in a report of his debauchery to his superiors. Shipov slipped away to Moscow when he learned of this denunciation. There he was arrested for

<sup>1</sup> This undoubtedly was a false lead on the occasion of Tolstoy's departure for Samara by way of Moscow.

drunkenness, and in the hope of obtaining his freedom he manufactured an extraordinary cock-and-bull story that bore all the evidence of alcoholic inspiration. He declared that Count Tolstoy was surrounded by twenty young radical university students who lacked proper resident passports, and that they possessed an illegal Press on which they intended to print forbidden works.

Since this startling information did not soften the police, Shipov had another try at it, and this time his imagination soared to dizzy heights. He asserted that Count Tolstoy employed a special courier on mysterious trips to Kharkov and Moscow; that various people came to sell the count strange merchandise; that he planned to print illegal manifestoes to be sent abroad; and that his house was honeycombed with secret doors and stairways, and was guarded at night by a large force.

For some reason this last parcel of humbug impressed the Moscow police. Illegal manifestoes were always sure bait. The drunken sleuth was sent to Petersburg to Prince V. A. Dolgorukov, head of the police of the Third Section, with a report containing all his testimony. Although Shipov's unreliability was mentioned, an investigation was advised on the basis of his evidence. Accordingly, on July 6, a certain Colonel Durnovo of the Secret Police descended with his myrmidons on Yasnaya Polyana. His orders were to conduct a thorough search and to arrest the responsible persons if incriminating evidence were discovered.

The police deployed through the village like an attacking force bent upon capturing it. Auntie Tatyana and Tolstoy's sister were in charge at Yasnaya Polyana. The terrified ladies were reduced to a fainting condition by the appearance and actions of the police. Everyone was placed under guard; rooms, chests, desk drawers, and all corners of the house were ransacked for hidden documents. Even the floor of the barn was torn up, and the pond in the park, which was dragged, yielded only a few innocent fish instead of the illusive secret printing press and illegal manifestoes. The school-house and Tolstoy's Kursk estate were also searched, and all persons on the property were minutely questioned.

After this formidable effort, Colonel Durnovo's full report to his superior was a disappointing confession of misdirected endeavour. Nothing incriminating was found. In some cases the resident passports of the young teachers did not seem to be in order; three of the teachers had taken part in student disturbances; one was the son of an exiled father; and another had in his

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possession a copy of Herzen's contraband periodical, the *Bell*.<sup>1</sup> The examination of various people connected with the estate or in the neighbourhood elicited the information that Tolstoy was a proud man, and that in his function of Arbiter of the Peace he had made enemies among the landowners and had treated the peasants with special consideration. The report also charged that towards his own peasants he had been unduly generous, and with the pupils in his school "even friendly."

When Tolstoy received the news at Samara of this police invasion, his first impulse was to write to Granny. Flaming indignation distorted his judgment and allowed him to attribute to this friend, because of her high connections with the Court, an unconscious share in the injury inflicted on him.

Fine friends you have! [he stormed] True, all the Potapovs, Dolgorukis, Arakcheyevs, and dungeons—all these are your friends! . . . Some one of your friends, a filthy colonel, read all my letters and diaries which I thought to entrust to the person closest to me only before my death; he read over two sets of my correspondence<sup>2</sup> that I wished to keep hidden from all the world at any price, and he left, admitting that he found nothing *suspicious*. It is my good fortune and that of your friend that I was not there—I would have killed him. Fine! Glorious! That is how your government makes friends for itself. If you will recall my political attitude, then you know that always, and especially since my love for the school, I have been entirely indifferent to the government, and even more indifferent to the present liberals, whom I scorn with all my soul. Now I can no longer say this. I possess bitterness and revulsion, almost hatred, for that dear government. . . .

Tolstoy concluded his angry letter with insolent disparagement of Granny's good sense: "Some days ago I wrote you that it was impossible to seek out a quiet retreat in life, but that one must strive, work, and suffer. All this is possible only if one can escape somewhere from these bandits with their preciously washed and scented hands and cheeks and their affable smirking. In truth, I shall retire, if I live long enough, to a monastery, not to pray to God—this is unnecessary in my opinion—but in order not to see all the nastiness of worldly debauchery, of pompous self-complacency in epaulets and crinolines. The devil! How do you, an excellent person, live in Petersburg! I shall never understand

<sup>1</sup> It appears that Tolstoy's housekeeper, upon the arrival of the police, concealed in the garden his portfolio which contained letters of Herzen, his portrait, and some copies of the *Bell*.

<sup>2</sup> One of these was undoubtedly his correspondence with Valerya Arsenev.

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this, or have you already cataracts on your eyes so that you can see nothing."

When Tolstoy finally arrived at Yasnaya Polyana and learned from Auntie Tatyana and his sister every last detail of the police's offensive behaviour in his home, his initial rage gave way to black despair. It is difficult to appreciate the intensity of his feelings over this whole incident, certainly not an unusual one in Russia at this time. Injured pride and honour, the fright that those near and dear to him had suffered, the knowledge of his innocence, a belief that he had been irremediably compromised in the eyes of everybody, and a feeling of the hopelessness of redress—all contributed to the solemn conviction that his life was ruined. He wrote Granny again, a long letter this time, in which he pleaded for her advice and her intercession with people of authority in the hope that some explanation or apology would be offered him. With wearisome iteration he went over the details of the search and added some new ones; patiently he rehearsed his activities of the past two years and insisted upon their innocent and purely humanitarian character. Now all the happiness he had gained from such work was ended, he lugubriously declared, never to return again. His dear Auntie Tatyana was still weeping, had fallen ill, and was growing thin daily from the shock she had received; his sister was also terribly disturbed; his enemies, the landowners, were in ecstasies; his peasants had lost confidence in him, and all regarded him as a criminal. Now, he added, he kept a pair of loaded pistols in readiness to shoot the police should they dare return. Ought he to write the Emperor about the matter, he asked Granny? "There is no other outlet for me," he asserted, "than to receive some such satisfaction for the offence (to correct it is now impossible) or to expatriate myself, which I have firmly resolved to do."

Granny's answer to these two letters was full proof of her sincere devotion to Tolstoy and at the same time reflected the discreet part she was obliged to play as a member of the Court circle. She condemned utterly the treatment he had received and offered every expression of sympathy, but she attempted to explain, though not justify, the search of his house on the score of the widespread treason in the land. Then she advised him to write to the Emperor and also promised to use whatever influence she had to obtain redress.

Tolstoy accepted this advice. His letter was presented by one of his friends, an imperial aide-de-camp, to the Emperor. Who had

ordered the search, he asked in the letter, and he requested that the guilty ones, if not punished, be informed of the abuses they had perpetrated in the Emperor's name. The head of the secret police, General Dolgorukov, sent his own report of the affair to the Emperor. He took care, however, to omit all references to an illegal printing press, manifestoes, and secret doors and stairways. The only evidence he had acted upon, he explained, was the information that the resident passports of some of the young people about Tolstoy were not in order, and this was found to be correct. The Emperor was entirely satisfied with this doctored explanation, and Dolgorukov was merely ordered to write to the Governor of Tula that the search at Yasnaya Polyana, apart from revealing that a few of the young teachers did not possess satisfactory passports, was not to be considered as having any consequence for Count Tolstoy. Here was small comfort for the proud and offended Tolstoy.

Nor was the unhappy incident of the search the full measure of the government's officious prying into Tolstoy's personal affairs at this time. In October (1862), the Minister of the Interior wrote to the Minister of National Education about the harmful aspects of Tolstoy's pedagogical magazine. He complained that its general direction and spirit perverted the fundamental values of religion and morality, and he suggested that the censor's attention should be specifically directed towards correcting this situation. Fortunately, the Minister of Education was enlightened and fair-minded. He disagreed with his colleague, insisted that there was nothing irreligious in the magazine, and maintained that Tolstoy's extreme educational ideas might be better corrected by criticism in pedagogical periodicals than by the prohibition of the censor.

In part, the fears of the Minister of the Interior were correct: Tolstoy's educational articles did call into question the whole contemporary concept of morality. The spirit of Christian anarchy that he was later to preach so openly and eloquently had already crept into his thinking. For in his educational articles he condemned the false morality of government and society, their despotism, use of force, and belief in the legality of punishment. And he frankly stated his conviction that the masses could exist without the educated classes, and hence without government, but that the educated classes could not exist without the masses.

The government had dimly begun to recognize in Tolstoy a mortal enemy. He himself was not entirely aware of the full implications of the fact, and his first encounter with hostile author-

ities pained him deeply and intensified his mounting dislike for organized government.

## V

Tolstoy's turning to his school and pedagogical magazine was in some respects an escape from the literary art in which he thought he had failed. This decision was not taken without a struggle, nor did the struggle cease during the whole period of his educational activities. To be sure, he had little time for creative writing or even for reading belles-lettres.<sup>1</sup> Yet the urge to create fitfully contended with his other time-consuming efforts.

While he was abroad, engaged in inspecting schools and reading quantities of pedagogical treatises, Tolstoy began three separate works of fiction that he continued after his return to Russia. Two of these were short tales that he never finished.<sup>2</sup> The third work was *Polikushka*, a novelette that he completed in 1862 and published the following year. Without being tendentious, the story exposed the hard features of peasant life. The tone of refined humour that aimed to ridicule the false and insincere in art appeared for the first time in his fiction. Here he upheld the canons of truth and simplicity that dominated his future tales and novels. The amazing concentration of effects and the complete revelation of character in so brief a scope marked a distinct advance over the best of his earlier efforts and stamped *Polikushka* as a little masterpiece.

These writings do not represent the sole artistic activity of Tolstoy during these lean years. An unhappy occurrence set him to work, however begrudgingly, on a major production that he had had on the stocks for a long time. On the occasion of a visit to Moscow in January, 1862, his old gambling mania seized him. He could not resist the temptation of a game of Chinese billiards (a game something like bagatelle) and in short order he lost a thousand rubles. Not having so much money on hand he approached the publisher Katkov, who agreed to give him the required sum as an advance on *The Cossacks*. During the ensuing months Tolstoy struggled to complete the first part of this work on which he had laboured intermittently ever since his Caucasian days. But the writing dragged on until the next year.

<sup>1</sup> Between 1860 and 1862 there is evidence that Tolstoy read works of Homer, Plato, Goethe, Hugo, Koltsov, Tyutchev, Fet, Turgenev, and Dostoyevsky.

<sup>2</sup> These fragments, "Tikhon and Malanya" and "An Idyll," may be found in Vol. VII of the Jubilee Edition.

So far as the reading public was concerned, Tolstoy's name had vanished from the literary arena. Over the years 1858 to 1860 not a single mention of him occurred in reviews or critical articles. In 1862, however, the brilliant critic, Apollon Grigoryev, devoted a whole article to Tolstoy in Dostoyevsky's magazine, *Time*. The critic remarked on the contemporary indifference to Tolstoy, then went on to show how much this was undeserved, and concluded that he possessed talents hardly equalled by any living writer in Russia or abroad.

His literary stagnation troubled Tolstoy, for he was first of all an artist. In the full tide of enthusiasm for educational work he had complained of an acute dissatisfaction with himself. His thoughts were in a chaos and he seemed to be getting nowhere. The fundamental demand of his nature was the need to search—to search for truth, for the meaning of life, for the ultimate aims of art, for family happiness, for God. Only when the search had ended—however temporary this period of certainty might be—could all his intellectual and spiritual powers combine to produce art. In a letter to Fet that has already been mentioned in connection with the Turgenev quarrel, Botkin keenly perceived this fixed relation between Tolstoy's art and his philosophical uncertainty.

His [Tolstoy's] mind is unfortunately in a chaos [Botkin wrote], by which I mean that it has not yet reached any definite point of view on life and the business of the world. That is why his convictions change so often, and also why he is so inclined to go to extremes. . . . Without some firm ground under one's feet, it is impossible to write. And that is the reason why he *cannot* write, and this will continue to be the case until his soul finds something on which it can rest.

Tolstoy's soul very shortly found that something on which it could rest—the ideal of family happiness that had been the object of his search for years. Once this search was ended, he entered upon the greatest creative period of his life.



## Chapter XV

### MARRIAGE

FROM HIS early youth Tolstoy had been searching for family happiness, not yet recognizing it as one aspect in his endless struggle between good and evil. In his old age he looked back with frank disgust on this period as one in which the selfish pursuit after personal pleasure had predominated. And with a sense of horror he severely castigated himself for his sins of the flesh. If his capacity for sensual pleasure was great, it was not abnormal. The most intimate pages of his diary reveal simply a strong, healthy, animal nature, and at the same time they record a manly struggle against excesses. Neither in his life nor in his art is there a suggestion of joyless profligacy or sniggering indecency. His moral dualism was the conflict of all mankind: a struggle between conscience and the appetites, reason and the vital impulses, order and life. Both sides were strong within him. His appetites and his capacity for enjoying them were above the average, and his craving to bring order into the chaos of life was unquenchable. He could not eliminate either, nor could he be satisfied with anything less than absolute victory. In this lies his greatness.

At this point in his career, however, Tolstoy dreamt about that still unexplored realm—family happiness—as a positive good, an ideal, the anticipation of which comforted him in penitent moments or during those periods when his search for truth and goodness led him into a blind alley of despair. Like Levin in *Anna Karenina*, marriage for Tolstoy was synonymous with the joys of family life. A wife seemed merely the indispensable instrument for achieving the ideal. On several occasions in the past he had played with the idea of marriage, but only now did there exist for him that favourable conjunction of forces that appears to determine the ascendancy of marriage in a man's life.

For some time now Tolstoy had been weighing in the scales every eligible girl who crossed his path, but all had been found wanting. About the latest of these, Ekaterina Tyutchev, he wrote to Granny immediately after his return from abroad in May, 1861: "The excellent girl E. is too much of a hothouse plant, too trained in 'fool-proof enjoyment' to be able to share my work or even to sympathize with it. She is occupied with the preparation of moral sweetmeats, and I have to do with soil and manure." Here, as in all other cases, he unconsciously demanded perfection to compensate for an absence of love. The passionate experience with his peasant Aksinya Bazykin, who seemed so much like a wife to him, had failed to teach him that there was no substitute for love.

Tolstoy was almost thirty-four. He envied the family happiness of his friend Fet, and it pained him to think that he might long since have had children of his own. Was he not now too old? At times this thought enabled him to dismiss the compelling urge to marry with a sense of relief. He realized that it must be soon or never. At this crucial time his attention centred on the Bers family.

The mother, Lyubov A. Bers, only two years older than Tolstoy, had been his childhood playmate. She had grown up at Krasnoye, an estate some twenty-five miles from Yasnaya Polyana. A. M. Islenev, her father, who had been a close friend of Tolstoy's father, was an unusual character. A striking example of the energetic hard-living old Russian provincial nobility, he was a passionate hunter, a lover of gypsies and of their haunting songs, and a desperate gambler. At a single sitting he was reputed to have gambled away all his money, serfs, dogs, horses, his wife's jewels, and even the home over her head.<sup>1</sup>

When only sixteen Lyubov married the thirty-six-year-old Dr. A. E. Bers. He first met his future wife when he was summoned from the Turgenev estate near by (he had had an affair with Turgenev's mother) to attend her in an illness. They settled in Moscow, where both the doctor's practice and his family flourished. His engaging manner with the ladies, and perhaps his medical skill, gained him many patients among wealthy aristocrats, and he was eventually appointed Court Physician with quarters in the Kremlin.

<sup>1</sup> Tolstoy drew heavily upon Islenev and his family for characters in *Childhood*, *Boyhood*, and *Youth*. Islenev is the model for Nikolai Irtenev's father, and his second wife appears as "La belle Flamande." Mimi, the French governess in the family, and her daughter Katenka, likewise serve as models.



The Countess Tolstoy during her earlier married life



Here his five sons and three daughters grew up. Fet, whom Tolstoy introduced into the family at this time (1862), described them as follows: "I found the doctor an amiable old gentleman of courteous manner and his wife a handsome, majestic brunette, who obviously ruled the household. I refrain from describing the three young ladies, the youngest of whom possessed an admirable contralto voice. All of them, notwithstanding the watchful supervision of their mother and their irreproachable modesty, had that attractive quality which the French call *du chien* [spirited]."

There was nothing very spirited about Liza, the oldest of the three sisters, a beautiful girl of nineteen, tall, with fine features and serious, expressive eyes, but with a cold, unsociable nature. She held herself aloof in the household. Eternally with a book in her hand, she scorned the customary games and amusements of a large family and gave herself up to things of the mind.<sup>1</sup> Tanya, four years younger than Liza, was a striking contrast to her sister. Affectionately nicknamed "Tatyanchik the Imp," she was her father's favourite and the spoiled tyrant of the household. Her passionate, artistic nature bubbled over with enthusiasm and excitement on the slightest provocation, and although she was something of an egotistical little show-off, her warm heart was always filled with irrepressible love for everyone and everything around her.<sup>2</sup>

The nature of eighteen-year-old Sonya (Sofya Andreyevna), a healthy, rosy girl with great brown eyes and dark braids, was in a sense a mean between the two extremes of her older and younger sisters. Despite her lively disposition, she affected a sentimentality that easily slipped into melancholy. Sonya's father remarked that she could never be completely happy. In her happiness something always seemed to be lacking, and she once admitted to Tanya that she could always find sorrow in her joy. A fondness for children and domestic tasks appeared in Sonya even as a young girl, and she early exhibited a curious miserly trait.

Liza and Sonya were educated by expensive tutors at home, and both girls passed the university examinations that qualified them for teaching. Sonya loved literature, painting, and music, but in none of them did she possess any exceptional talents. Tanya, with her fine voice and artistic ability, was destined for a musical career by her parents.

Expansive hospitality reigned in the Bers household. Guests were

<sup>1</sup> Many of Liza's traits appear in the characterization of Vera Rostov in *War and Peace*.

<sup>2</sup> Tanya was the principal model for the unforgettable heroine of *War and Peace*—Natasha Rostov.

endless, and on holidays favourite "Anke pie"<sup>1</sup> was always served, a dish that later symbolized for Tolstoy the material well-being of the privileged classes. The children were constantly entertaining crowds of young people with games and music, and often they put on plays. The gelid Liza maintained a decorous deportment amid these carefree gatherings, and her stern mother always held her up to her sisters as a model of correct behaviour. But Sonya and Tatyanchik the Imp secretly yearned to turn the heads of the uniformed students whom their oldest brother, a member of the cadet corps, brought home on vacations. One of them, Mitrofan Polivanov, had already turned Sonya's head. They whispered eternal devotion to each other, but Mitrofan, with the magnanimity of a boyish lover, graciously granted her complete freedom to break her plighted word should she fall in love with another. The little firebrand Tanya, who still played with her favourite doll, Mimi, shared Sonya's secrets of the heart, and in turn confessed her own romantic passion for her cousin Kuzminski.<sup>2</sup> Here was a merry society of Moscow girls with their ribbons, calicoes, shy coquetry, and all the poetry and stupidities of youth.

The awkward girls of a few years back had been transformed by 1862 into attractive young ladies. Liza and Sonya had finished their schooling, wore long dresses, and did up their hair in the latest coiffures. Tolstoy now grew more interested. With the bookish Liza he discussed literature, and urged her to write articles for his pedagogical magazine. Duets on the piano or a quiet game of chess delighted the sentimental Sonya. With Tatyanchik the Imp, he played the schoolmaster, set problems in arithmetic, obliged her to recite verses, and when success crowned her efforts, he triumphantly carried her around the room on his back.

The sisters eagerly looked forward to Tolstoy's visits. Even the numerous servants, whom he regaled with jokes and stories, loved him. The merry household grew still merrier when he was present. He would gather them all about the piano to sing gypsy songs, or he would accompany Tanya in a solo. When her performance particularly pleased him, he would laughingly call her "Madame Viardot" after the great concert singer. Sometimes he improvised subjects for brief operas and obliged the young people to make up the words (the more incomprehensible the better), which they sang to familiar motifs.

<sup>1</sup> A rich pastry garnished with almond chips and named after a frequent guest of the family, Dr. N. B. Anke, who was responsible for the recipe.

<sup>2</sup> Traits of both Polivanov and Kuzminski appear in the characterization of Prince Boris Drubetskoi in *War and Peace*.

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These frequent visits to a family with at least two marriageable girls soon set tongues to wagging. Gossip represented Tolstoy as the suitor of the oldest sister. His own sister, a lifelong friend of mother Bers, favoured Liza. Such a solid, serious, and well-educated girl, Marya told him, would make an excellent wife. The solid Liza was indifferent at first, but the persistent gossip began to arouse her from her books. All noticed that she paid more attention to her appearance, and soon she was madly in love.

From the very first, however, the serious Liza left Tolstoy quite cold. "Liza Bers tries to tempt me," he had written in his diary in September 1861, "but nothing will come of it. Calculation alone is not enough, and there is no feeling." The spirited Imp was more to his liking, but she was still a child. On the other hand, he began to observe that Sonya grew more attractive with every passing day. Her Polivanov was away in Petersburg. She wept over him and eagerly read to her younger sister the letters this delicate lover sent. Somehow "*le comte*" as a lover had not at first dawned upon her consciousness. She had known him as a little girl when she had gone into raptures over his *Childhood* and *Boyhood*, copied pages of them into her diary, and memorized whole passages. Sonya regarded the author through a prism of poetic ecstasy. He became her shining hero. She tied ribbons to the chair on which he sat, and even wrote out from *Youth* several lines that she wore next to her heart as a precious jewel. Sonya was then a child of eleven. Now she was eighteen, and a furtive mouse of an idea crept into her mind that she was not unattractive to this man almost twice her age. His face was common, almost ugly, but there were a strange charm and spiritual power in his piercing glance. He was also a count, a famous author, and the possessor of a large estate. It was a challenge to win the love of such a man. The more her thoughts dwelt upon him, the paler grew the image of her young cadet at his military studies in Petersburg. And suddenly Sonya was almost ready to confess to herself that she was in love not with Polivanov, but with Tolstoy.

### III

A few weeks after Tolstoy's return in July 1862 from Samara, a series of events threw his emotions into a turmoil. Mother Bers decided to take her three daughters on a visit to Ivitsy, the estate of their grandfather. On the way she planned to stop over at Yasnaya Polyana, some thirty-five miles from Ivitsy, in order to see her childhood friend, Marya Tolstoy. No doubt this ambitious mother

also had in mind the fact that her friend's brother was being much talked of as a suitable match for her eldest daughter.

The party arrived at Yasnaya Polyana in the early evening. Tolstoy tried to conceal his agitation over all this charming feminine company by indulging in gestures of fussy hospitality. It was discovered that one bed was lacking. He suggested a huge armchair, and Sonya at once elected it for herself. With awkward, unaccustomed movements he began to spread the sheets, and these preparations filled her with a pleasant sense of intimacy. While the table was being set for supper, Sonya wandered into a small reception hall off the dining-room. Venetian doors in the centre wall opened onto a balcony from which one had a clear view of the countryside. She took a chair out on the balcony and sat there to admire the landscape. Forbidden thoughts, happy and serious, ran through her maiden mind. Tolstoy called her to supper, but she declined. Bits of the merry conversation floated out to her. Without finishing his meal Tolstoy finally joined Sonya. She did not remember their conversation, only that he said: "How clear and simple you are," and this pleased her. That night she fell happily asleep in the armchair, her young heart gladdened by the thought that *he* had prepared this bed for her with his own hands.

The following day Tolstoy, rid of his initial feeling of constraint with his guests, became the soul of easy hospitality. Neighbours called and a picnic was planned. He invited Sonya to accompany him on horseback while the rest of the party went in a carriage. As she cantered beside him Sonya thought she could never be happier. They all halted by a stack of fresh hay in a meadow in the Zasek woods. The meal was enlivened by his banter and merry-making, and at its conclusion nothing would do but that they must all climb on the haystack and sing songs.

The guests continued their journey to Ivitsy the next day, promising to call again on their way home. Lively grandfather Islenev received them joyfully, pinching the fresh cheeks of his granddaughters and ordering up all manner of old-fashioned entertainment for these "Moscow ladies" as he called them. Shoals of neighbours were invited, and there were rides, picnics, and at night dances for the young people and whist for their parents.

The day after the arrival of the girls Tolstoy suddenly appeared on his big white horse. Liza blushed, accepting it as a compliment, and so did Sonya who immediately became unnaturally lively. But it was Sonya that he singled out for his special attention, and the observant



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Tatyanchik read in her sister's eyes: "I want to love you but I'm afraid." Polivanov and Liza, like ghosts, stood always before her.

At the dancing the following evening Tolstoy preferred to play cards or talk with the mothers and fathers. He was too old, he told Tanya and Sonya, when they teased him to dance. After supper the capricious Tanya was asked to sing. She refused, and to escape her petitioners ran into the drawing-room and hid under the piano. Suddenly Tolstoy and Sonya entered. They seemed agitated. Tanya did not dare to move. Sonya wished to leave, for her stern mother had already ordered her to bed.

"Sofya Andreyevna, wait a moment," pleaded Tolstoy.

"What for?"

"Read what I'm going to write for you."

"All right," she agreed.

"But I shall write only the initial letters and you must guess what the words are."

"How so? But that's impossible! Well, write."

Tolstoy wrote with a piece of chalk on the surface of a card table the letters "Y.y.a.n.o.h.r.m.t.s.o.m.a.a.t.i.o.h."<sup>1</sup>

Sonya read with some prompting from Tolstoy: "Your youth and need of happiness remind me too strongly of my age and the impossibility of happiness."

Her heart beat loudly, her face burned. She felt that something she had hoped for and dreamed of was about to happen, and she was both eager and afraid. All her senses were sharpened to a point of miraculous comprehension.

Then Tolstoy wrote further: "I.y.f.e.a.f.o.a.m.a.y.s.L.D.m.w.y.s.T."

Again Sonya read with a bit of help: "In your family exists a false opinion about me and your sister Liza. Defend me with your sister Tatyanchik."

At the conclusion of the second sentence, Sonya, hearing her mother calling her to bed, ran out of the room. Before she fell asleep that night, she wrote the sentences in her diary. She fully realized that something serious and significant had taken place between her and Tolstoy, something that would not cease there. Only to Tanya, a witness to the whole scene, did Sonya confide her hopes and misgivings.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The initial letters of the Russian words, of course, are different, but the following translation is an exact rendering of the Russian sentence.

<sup>2</sup> This scene was utilized by Tolstoy in describing Levin's proposal to Kitty in *Anna Karenina*.

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Tolstoy departed the next day. Once again he saw the Bers family at Yasnaya Polyana on their return journey to Moscow. When they were saying their farewells, to the surprise of all he announced that he would drive to the city with them. His simple excuse was that it would now be boring and empty at Yasnaya Polyana. The sisters were delighted, and Sonya must have imagined that her battle was nearly won. For most of the journey he contrived to sit with her alone, somewhat to the indignation of the now jealous Liza. During the long hours of the trip he told Sonya the story of his life, of the beauties of the Caucasus, and of his adventures there. Perhaps like Othello he hoped to win this credulous girl by an account of the dangers he had been through. Unlike Desdemona, however, she fell asleep before his story ended. But until the fatigue of the journey had taken its toll, she had been a most enraptured listener to this real tale of her favourite author.

### IV

It was the middle of August. The affairs of his school and periodical weighed upon Tolstoy, but he could not tear himself away from Moscow. Passion gambled with reason and his future destiny was the stake. The Bers family moved to their summer house at Pokrovskoye only eight miles from the city. Here Tolstoy was almost a daily caller, often walking the distance. His frequent visits began to embarrass him as well as the members of the household, yet he could not stay away. The parents were confused as to his intentions and began to treat him with some restraint. Sonya, tortured by his uncertainty, received him with conflicting emotions, one day gay and bright, the next sad and gloomy. Why did he not declare himself?

At Pokrovskoye there were long walks together on beautiful moonlight nights, but no romantic scenes took place. Once Sonya sat in her father's carriage, from which the horses had just been unharnessed. She called out to Tolstoy in a merry mood: "When I'm an empress, I'll be driven about in such a carriage." He impetuously seized the shafts, and with an unusual show of strength wheeled her around the yard, shouting: "This is the way my empress will ride!"

Throughout all this period of indecision, Tolstoy kept his diary, and it is a sorry record of confusion and struggle. His first entry referring to Sonya occurred on August 23, after having spent the

night at the Bers home. "She's a child!" he wrote. "Just like one! Oh, if I could only place myself in a clear and honourable position. . . . I'm afraid of myself: what if this be only a desire for love and not real love? I try to see only her insufficiencies. . . ."

Several days later Tolstoy recorded some interesting observations on the manuscript of a story he had begged from Sonya. She had written it when she first sensed her attraction for him, and now she willingly let him have it, perhaps in the hope that it would allay his doubts and sting him to action. For the tale was a frank narrative of their relations, thinly disguised as fiction. Tolstoy was described as Dublitski, a middle-aged man of unattractive appearance, energetic and wise, but with unsuitable views on life. Sonya, as Elena, fell in love with him, but worried about her young suitor Smirnov (Polivanov) and her older sister, who was in love with Dublitski. In her perplexity she thought of entering a convent, but in the end arranged a marriage between her sister and Dublitski. Then Smirnov finally returned and married Elena.

Sonya gained little by this transparent hint, although Tolstoy did finally admit to her that the tale had agitated him and kept him awake all night. The reactions he concealed from her, however, appeared in his diary: "She gave me her story to read. What energy of truth and simplicity! Vagueness tortured her. I read all without anxiety, without a show of jealousy or envy, but the 'unusually unattractive appearance' and 'instability of conviction' hurt me much. I calmed myself. All this is not about me. Work, and just the satisfaction of one's needs."

His imagined calm was murdered the moment Sonya entered his thoughts, and he could not keep her out of them. Two days after this entry (his thirty-fourth birthday), he busied himself with work and visits, and refused to be disturbed. But a "bouquet of letters and flowers" from the Bers family arrived. Sonya's brief contribution to the family's collective congratulatory epistle—her first letter to him—set him off once again on the treadmill of his emotions. "If I were an empress," she wrote, recalling their recent pleasantry at Pokrovskoye, "I would send you on your birthday a most gracious mandate, but now, as a simple mortal, I *simply* congratulate you with having come into God's world, and I wish that you may look on it for a long time and if possible, forever, and with the same eyes as now." Was there some hidden meaning in this ordinary note, he wondered. He tried to draft a reply, but the words would not come. Then he sought to regain

tranquillity once more by reminding himself in the diary: "Ugly mug that you are! Think no more of marriage; your calling is something other, and for that much has been given you."

Such indecision was no comfort to Sonya's titillated emotions. It appears that at this point she treated him to a wholesome dose of jealousy. A history professor of thirty-five, N. A. Popov, had evinced an interest in her charms, and to do them more homage he had hired a summer house quite near Pokrovskoye. She liked the professor with his expressive grey eyes and slow, deliberate movements, and perhaps with design she would often engage him in serious conversation in Tolstoy's presence. The diary registered his immediate alarm: "To the Bers'. Sonya with Popov. I'm not jealous," he protested. "We walked, the arbour, a melon for supper—her eyes, and the night! . . . Fool! She's not meant for you; yet I'm in love, just as with S. K. and with A.<sup>1</sup> No more. I spent the night with them, did not sleep, and always she. Have you not loved? she asks, and I feel so funny and happy."

This slip of a girl was swiftly and utterly taking possession of his heart. He awoke in the morning with a sweet sense of the fullness of a life of love. He visited friends and thought he heard Sonya's voice when some other girl spoke. By comparison, all other girls seemed to him "vile, dried-up things in crinoline." In vain he told himself that he was "an old devil" who ought to stick to his pedagogical articles.

September arrived and the family returned to Moscow. Tolstoy diligently continued his vigil at their house. In a moment of misplaced confidence, Sonya confessed to her mother that she expected a proposal from him. She was testily ordered to forget such nonsense and to cease imagining that everybody was in love with her. Meanwhile, father Bers began to grow angry with the ubiquitous Tolstoy for not making an offer to Liza.

On his next visit Tolstoy noticed that father Bers sat angrily in his study. The whole family was grave and stern. He knew what they were waiting for. As he looked at the cold Liza, all he could think of was what a dreadful misfortune it would be if she should become his wife. He took refuge in Sonya's blushes and obvious agitation in his presence. "Oh, Dublitski, don't dream!" he cautioned himself in the diary. "I began to work but I could not go on. Instead of work I wrote her a letter. . . . I *cannot, cannot* leave Moscow." Sleep deserted him and he felt that he was acting like a boy of sixteen.

<sup>1</sup> Sonya Koloshin and A. A. Obolenski.

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In the letter he explained that he had never loved Liza, and, as that "unusually unattractive devil" Dublitski, he could have no pretension to Sonya, whom he regarded as he would a child he loved. Then he pathetically and perhaps hopefully concluded: "I am Dublitski, but I can never marry a woman merely because a wife is necessary. I demand the fearful, the impossible from marriage. I demand to be loved as I can love. But this is impossible." And he added a postscript that in the future he would cease to visit them.

On second thought, Tolstoy decided not to send the letter; he knew that he could not break off his visits. As the tide of his emotions rose, his capacity for positive action seemed to diminish. He wrote in his diary that he waited for the evenings to see Sonya like a schoolboy waiting for the coming of Sunday. Often now she greeted him sternly. After one such meeting on September 10, he entered in the diary: "I left discouraged again, but still more in love than before. *Au fond* sits hope. One must—it is necessary to cut this knot. . . . Lord help me, God, teach me! Again, a sleepless, torturing night; I really feel, I who used to laugh over the sufferings of lovers. I deserve this punishment because of my ridiculing. How many plans I have formed to tell her or Tanichka, but all in vain. . . . Lord, help me, teach me! Mother of God, help me!"

Tolstoy did not trust himself to make another visit the next day. But this brief separation only added flame to his passion. "I'm in love as I never believed it possible to be in love," he wrote in the diary on September 12. "I'm a madman. . . . A Dublitski, it may be, but I'm made beautiful by my love. Yes. I will go to them tomorrow morning. There have been minutes, but I have not made use of them. I've been timid; one must simply speak. I want to return at once and say all, and before everybody. Lord, help me!"

This brave resolution deserted him on the following day. His entry reads: "Each day I think it is impossible to suffer more and at the same time remain so happy, and each day I grow more frenzied. Again I departed anguished, remorseful, but happy at heart. Tomorrow I shall go as soon as I arise and tell all or" . . . he added: "shall shoot myself," but crossed this out. "Four o'clock in the morning. I've written a letter; I'll give it to her tomorrow, i.e. today, the 14th. My God, how I fear to die. Happiness, and such a happiness, seems to me impossible. My God, help me!"

Although Tolstoy visited Sonya on each of the next two days, he did not dare to present the letter. Such lack of resolve from a man

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of his age and experience with women may seem puzzling, yet it was in accord with his nature and with the special circumstances of the situation. He had always been shy with women, and particularly with women of his own social standing. Then Sonya's description of Dublitski had intensified his poignant feeling about the disadvantages of his unattractive appearance and of the considerable disparity in their ages. Finally, with his pride and egoism, he no doubt feared the consequences to him of a refusal.

### V

On the evening of September 16 Tolstoy called on the Bers family again. He seemed agitated. The letter he had written for Sonya three days before still nestled in his pocket.

Ill at ease, Tolstoy asked Sonya to play a duet with him and then decided not to. They sat quietly at the piano. She gently fingered the accompaniment to the "Il Baccio" waltz that she was learning for her sister. His agitation quickly infected Sonya. Nervously she called to Tanya to sing the piece.

Tanya agreed, but she noticed that the request seemed to displease him. She was in voice that night. Standing in the centre of the room, she soon forgot them both in her rapt concentration on the song. Sonya stumbled on the accompaniment and Tolstoy slipped into her place and took it up, at once giving new life to Tanya's voice and the words of the song. He promised himself that if Tanya took the final high note well, he would give Sonya the letter.<sup>1</sup> The little singer ended, soaring to the final high note with perfect ease.

"How you sing tonight!" he exclaimed in an excited voice.

At this moment Tanya was called from the room to help with the tea. They were alone.

"I wanted to speak with you," Tolstoy began, but he could not continue. "Here is a letter that I've been carrying around in my pocket for several days. Read it. I'll wait for your answer."

Sonya seized the letter and ran downstairs to her room and locked the door. She opened the letter with trembling hands and read:

"This is becoming unendurable. Every day for three weeks I have been saying: today I shall tell all, and I have been going away with the same anguish, remorse, fear, and happiness in my soul. And

<sup>1</sup> Tolstoy often decided to act positively or negatively on the basis of such wagers with himself, a habit he also attributed to Pierre in *War and Peace*.

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every night, as even now, I examine the past, torment myself, and say: why have I not spoken, and I tell myself how and what I should have said. I have taken this letter with me in order to give it to you if I again find it impossible or lack the spirit to tell you all.

"*The false opinion in your family* about me, it seems, arises from the belief that I am in love with your sister Liza. *This is unfair. Your story is constantly in my mind*, and after reading it I became convinced that I am Dublitski, and therefore to dream about happiness ill suits me; that your conception of love is too romantic . . . that I have not envied and will not envy the man you may love. It seems to me that I can rejoice over you as over a child.

"At Ivitsy I wrote: *Your presence too strongly reminds me of my age and the impossibility of happiness, and just you.* . . .

"But even then and afterwards I lied to myself. Then even more so I could have given over everything and again gone into my monastery of lonely work and become absorbed with affairs. Now I can do nothing of the kind, and I feel that I have made a mess of things in your family, that having grown cold, my dear relations with you, as with another honest person, are ended. But I cannot take my leave, and I do not dare remain. You, an honest person, and with hand on heart—*without haste, for God's sake, without haste*—tell me what to do. He who laughs may in the end suffer. I would have died with laughter if a month ago I had been told—that I could suffer as I now suffer, and happily suffer. Tell me, as an *honest person*—do you wish to be my wife? Only if you can boldly say yes with all your soul, then you had better say no, if there is a shadow of doubt in you.

"For God's sake, examine your heart carefully.

"It will be dreadful for me to hear 'no,' but I foresee it, and I will find in myself the strength to bear it; but if as a husband I shall never be loved as I love, it will be terrible."

The ecstatic Sonya did not pause to read through this tortured analysis of a heart enthralled. Her eager eyes quickly discovered the question: "Do you wish to be my wife?" That was enough. On the other side of the locked bedroom door she heard Liza's frightened voice:

"Sonya, what has the count written to you? Speak!"

Sonya remained silent, tightly gripping the precious letter.

"Speak at once! What has the count written you?" cried Liza again, a hysterical note in her voice.

"He has proposed to me," Sonya, with an effort, calmly answered.

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"Refuse!" screamed Liza. "Refuse at once!" and she burst into sobs.

Tanya called her mother to quiet Liza. Sonya told her mother what had happened, and she was ordered to give Tolstoy her answer. She flew up the stairway, shot by the dining-room, the drawing-room, and ran into her mother's apartment. Tolstoy stood there, leaning against the wall in the corner of the room, waiting for her. He took both her hands.

"Well, what?" he asked.

"Of course, yes."

In a few minutes the whole house knew what had happened.

## VI

Congratulations in the household were not unanimous. The news threw father Bers into a rage. He refused at first to give his consent, for he had expected Tolstoy to propose to his eldest daughter. But the mother's tactful diplomacy, Sonya's tears, and even Liza's generous pleading won a begrudging blessing from him.

Tolstoy's choice of Sonya, however, caused some embarrassment. The day after the proposal, the name-day of Sonya and her mother, was turned into an occasion for announcing the engagement to many visiting relatives and friends. Sonya and Liza, as usual, were dressed alike—lilac gowns with white *barège* trimmings, open collars, and lilac bows at the waist and on the shoulders. Both girls were pale and received the guests with tired eyes. To the customary name-day felicitations, the mother at first made the mistake of announcing to the guests that her daughter must also be congratulated on her engagement to Tolstoy. Many promptly turned to the crimson and suffering Liza with the customary exclamations. One of her old professors, even when apprized of the mistake, naïvely remarked: "It is a shame that it was not Liza; she was such a good student." Horror chilled Sonya when she saw in the throng the happy face of young Polivanov, resplendent in his new Guards uniform. Her brother perhaps prevented a scene by taking him aside and telling him the fatal news. Later, Sonya sought him out in an effort to explain. Her letter to Petersburg had not reached him.

"I knew," the unhappy Polivanov declared with tears in his eyes, "that you would forsake me; I felt it."

The only solace Sonya could offer her childhood sweetheart was that she could forsake him only for one man—Tolstoy.



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"Bridegroom, gifts, champagne," was Tolstoy's sole comment in his diary on this day of celebration. In his bliss he did not forget to write to Granny, that faithful friend whom he might have married, if she had only been "ten years younger." He informed her of his approaching marriage, and then with the pardonable exaggeration of the insensate lover, he added: "I would have to write volumes to give you any understanding of what she is like; I have never been so happy since I was born."

Whatever sense of personal loss Granny may have felt over this announcement, she rose nobly to the occasion, expressing her delight at the thought of acquiring "a charming granddaughter," and concluding: "There, now, our prodigal son is bound forever. I rejoice, rejoice, rejoice!"

Over the strenuous objections of mother Bers, Tolstoy demanded that the marriage take place as soon as possible. The trousseau and various other preparations he impatiently brushed aside as needless delays. Finally, a date just one week after his proposal was decided upon. Every day he visited Sonya. With the conviction that there should be no secrets between them, he turned over his diaries to her, and with the unwisdom of a girl of eighteen she allowed herself to peer into this history of his past excesses and moral lapses. "I remember," she wrote later, "how terribly shocked I was by the reading of these diaries that he gave to me before my marriage out of a sense of personal duty. I wept much upon glancing into his past, but to no purpose." Sonya forgave all, though she now feared to lose the love of this man.

Tolstoy had his own fears and doubts, the doubts that had tormented him from the moment he fell in love with Sonya. On the morning of his marriage day, September 23, he violated all proprieties by suddenly appearing at her home. He at once overwhelmed her with questions and doubts about her love for him. It seemed to her as though he were afraid of marriage. Sonya began to weep. Her mother scolded him for his behaviour and he immediately left.<sup>1</sup> Later he wrote in his diary: "On the day of the marriage, fear, disbelief, and dislike of the ceremony."

The marriage was to take place in the evening in the Court church of the Kremlin. Sonya's attendants dressed her in her wedding gown and veil. Then they awaited the arrival of Tolstoy's best man to tell them that the bridegroom was at the church. The

<sup>1</sup> This whole incident, as well as others connected with his marriage, are faithfully retold in the marriage scene of Levin and Kitty in *Anna Karenina*.

minutes passed and still no news. A terrifying thought flashed into Sonya's mind, prompted by her painful session with Tolstoy that morning, that he had actually run off. Finally, instead of the best man, Tolstoy's faithful valet arrived with the agitated explanation that his master had no clean dress shirt. Everything had been packed and sent to the Bers house. A clean shirt was finally procured and after another long wait, the news came that Tolstoy was at the church.

The bridal party set out. Many people crowded the church which was brightly illuminated for the wedding. The priest in his sacerdotal headgear and vestments of heavy silver cloth met Tolstoy and his bride at the door and led them to the altar. Sonya's thin arms and shoulders emphasized her extreme youthfulness. Spectators whispered comments on it and on her weeping. Perhaps some said, as they did of Kitty in *Anna Karenina*: "What a darling the bride is, like a lamb decked for the slaughter." The beautiful Russian Orthodox ceremony, enhanced by the lovely music of the invisible choir that harmoniously filled the church from the windows to the vaulted roof, lasted a long time. After the marriage the party drove back to the bride's house where guests were provided with a bountiful repast and much champagne.

The new *dormeuse* (sleeping carriage) that Tolstoy had bought for the occasion waited outside. He was impatient to be off for Yasnaya Polyana. The tearful farewells between Sonya and her family were painfully prolonged. Finally tearing herself away with difficulty from her sobbing mother, Sonya entered the carriage and they began their journey. Burying herself in a corner, the bride, worn out from weariness and grief, did not cease to weep. Tolstoy was a bit hurt. An orphan for most of his life, he found it difficult to understand Sonya's copious tears on parting from her parents. He wrote cryptically of that night in the diary: "She is weepy. In the carriage. She knows everything and it is simple . . . . But she's afraid."

On the evening of the next day they arrived at Yasnaya Polyana. Tolstoy's brother Sergei welcomed them with the traditional hospitality of bread and salt, and Auntie Tatyana with an icon of the Virgin. Bride and groom bowed, kissed the image and then Auntie Tatyana. Their long and eventful life together at Yasnaya Polyana had begun, and under the most auspicious circumstances. The next day Tolstoy jotted down in his diary: "Incredible happiness! . . . It cannot be that all this will end only with life!"

*Part III*

“There is the Third Period . . . in  
Which I Lived a Correct,  
Honourable Family  
Life . . .”



## Chapter XVI

### THE PORCELAIN DOLL

**A**T TIMES such bliss seemed unreal to the newly-made husband. Less than a week after the event, Tolstoy hurried off a letter to Granny: "As I write I hear from upstairs the voice of my wife, whom I love more than anything in the world; she is talking with my brother. I have lived to the age of thirty-four and did not realize that one may love so and be so happy." And two days later, as though amazed that such happiness could last a whole week, he jotted down in the diary: "I don't recognize myself. All my mistakes are clear to me. I love her just as much, if not more."

Back in Moscow Tatyanchik the Imp impatiently awaited news from her married sister, and when the letter arrived it was filled with the self-satisfaction of a happy bride. There were exclamations over the gracious reception accorded her by all and praise for the charming appointments of her new home. Sonya no doubt exaggerated for effect, for no special bridal furnishings had displaced the Spartan simplicity of the large bare rooms of Yasnaya Polyana. As for her husband, she only discreetly hinted at the immensity of his love for her, as though it had already become a hallowed subject. But she added a sophisticated touch for the benefit of her younger sister: "I'm afraid to think about the future, for now one does not dream as a virgin, but directly knows one's fate, only it is terrible to think of spoiling it. Being still a little girl, you do not understand this; when you are married, you will understand." Then putting aside the mystery and the burden of marriage for a moment, she asked Tanya to send her the warm boots and face powder that she had forgotten. Tolstoy tacked on a humorous postscript. "You see," he wrote to Tanya, "how all this is fine and touching, especially the thoughts about the future and the powder. . . . Farewell darling, and may God give you such happiness as I now enjoy. More does not exist."

A lyric ecstasy filled the letters and diaries of the happy couple during their honeymoon days. In his rosy frame of mind, Tolstoy could not resist a note to Fet, to whom he had not written since his quarrel with Turgenev. With that curious conviction of the lover that all humanity must be absorbed in his personal good fortune, he abruptly announced to his friend: "I've been married for two weeks and am happy, and a new, entirely new, man!" The new feelings that he was experiencing defied his passion for analysis. He tried to take an inventory of the reasons for his sensations and reactions, but he succeeded only in reducing them to trifles that in turn added up to something beyond his immediate powers of comprehension. In the diary he wrote: "I love her at night, or in the morning when I awake and see: she looks at me and loves. And no one, especially not I, prevents her from loving me in her manner, as she understands it. I love her when she sits close to me and we know that we love each other, as only we are able to, and she says: 'Lyovochka,' and then adds: 'Why are chimneys built so straight?' Or: 'Why do horses live so long?' etc. I love when we are alone, and I say: 'What are we to do? Sonya, what are we to do?' She laughs. I love when she gets angry with me, and in the twinkling of an eye, her thoughts and words sometimes sharp, she says: 'Let me be, you bore me.' In a moment she smiles timidly at me. I love when she does not see me and does not know that I love her in my fashion. I love her when she is a little girl in a yellow dress and sticks out her lower jaw and tongue at me. I love when I see her head tilted backwards, her serious, frightened, childish, and passionate face. I love when . . ."

## II

If a full measure of felicity is taken for granted in a newly married couple, so also is the disintegrating effect annihilating time may have on it. The honeymoon ardour ran its course rather soon, and the disillusioning period of adjustment set in. Hardly a week had passed after their arrival at Yasnaya Polyana when the first tiff took place. Others followed in alarming succession, for both husband and wife were extremely sensitive, and each seemed bent on creating more than the usual number of difficulties that complicate early married life.

Sonya was immensely flattered with her new title of Countess and with being mistress of a large house. But even in these attractive circumstances, existence in the country soon became a trying

matter. She was a city girl, only eighteen, accustomed to the theatre, music, balls, and to merry parties of young folk. There was none of this at Yasnaya Polyana. Almost the only people she saw, besides the members of the household, were provincial neighbours and the uncouth wayfarers that her husband liked to bring home or the peasants he often took delight in talking to. Tolstoy tried to amuse her in the long autumn and early winter evenings. They read *Les Misérables* together, and he taught her English. She made clear copies of his manuscripts, and even attempted to help with his school, which still dragged on for a brief period.

Although Sonya was eager to take an active part in her husband's work in the country, she found it extremely difficult to adapt herself to this new way of life. Frequently she was left alone with no resources of her own to fall back on. Tolstoy would shut himself up in his study, or go hunting, or more often busy himself with the affairs of his estate. For at this time, perhaps because of the feeling that he would soon be a family man, he experienced anew a desire to expand and improve his property. He began the cultivation of bees, bought a herd of sheep, planted numerous fruit trees, and planned to set up a distillery to which Sonya and even her father objected as immoral. He plunged into these new enterprises with zeal, and Sonya tried to share his enthusiasm. She bravely declared her desire to work in the dairy, but the smell of the cowshed nauseated her. Tolstoy was annoyed by her city-bred squeamishness.

Over these first months of marriage after the honeymoon, the diaries of both husband and wife were turned into frank confessions of their quarrels, reconciliations, and painful efforts to build their love on a foundation of mutual understanding and self-sacrifice. This fact is all the more surprising since, by agreement, each had free access to the other's diary. There is a marked difference, however, in the uses to which they put their respective records. Tolstoy, as formerly, made his an impartial history of events and an inventory of his thoughts and feelings; Sonya, by her own admission, took to her diary when things went wrong, when she felt the need of seeking relief by pouring out her dissatisfactions and sorrow in its pages. The result is that her diary more frequently presents a dark, one-sided picture of her existence.

About two weeks after her marriage, Sonya expressed the gloomy conviction in her diary that Tolstoy did not believe in her love, and that she could not forget, as she ought to, her stupid, childish dreams of an ideal husband. Intellectually and emotionally

jealous of Tolstoy's capacity for self-sufficiency, she was too young and inexperienced to accept him as she found him. It was hard to surrender her story-book notion of married love for the commonplace reality of daily life on a country estate. Then, too, her penchant for seeking misery in her happiness, her fondness for sitting, like Stephen, melancholy upon a stool, complicated the simple adjustments that any young bride has to make. "I'm terribly, terribly sad," began her entry on October 11. "I retire into myself more and more. My husband is ill, out of spirits, does not love me. I expected this but did not think it would be so awful. . . . No one knows that I'm unable to create happiness either for myself or for him."

Complaints about her inability to fill up the hours of the day ran like a litany through the early pages of Sonya's diary. Rather bitterly she wrote: "It is not difficult to discover an occupation; there are many of them. But one must first develop a liking for these trifling matters—winding up the clock, banging on the piano, reading many stupid things and very few fine ones, and pickling cucumbers. All this will come about, I know, when I manage to forget my idle girlhood life and get accustomed to the country."

Such a reformation came very hard. When Tolstoy was away, the house was like a tomb to her. "I live for him, by him," she protested, "and I wish him to be the same. It is oppressive for me here, and today I ran off, because everything and everybody had become disgusting to me. . . . I could hardly keep from laughing for joy when I ran softly out of the house. . . . If I do not absorb him, if I'm a doll, if I'm only a wife and not a human being, then I cannot live so and do not wish to. Of course I'm an idler, yes, but I'm not such by nature, and yet I do not know; chiefly I'm not convinced in what and where I'm to busy myself."

Tolstoy was fully aware of the trying period his young wife was going through, but he was not disposed to make many concessions. In his long bachelor existence he had fallen into ruts that were now not easy to climb out of. He had grown accustomed to being alone with his thoughts and work and could not, like a love-sick young swain, attach himself everlastingly to the skirts of his girl wife. Perhaps he expected her—the fate of so many wives of great husbands—to make herself over in his image and merge her individuality into his. At best, however, Sonya could never do much more than compromise with such a demand.

The disturbing doubts that tortured Tolstoy before his proposal returned more than once. "Today there was a *scene*," he wrote in his



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diary only a week after marriage. "I was sad at the thought that we behave just like others. I told her that she had offended me in my feeling for her; I wept. She's charming. I love her even more. But is there not something false?" A few days later he listed two more disputes, but his love, he insisted, was stronger, although now different.

Yes, there was a palpable difference in Tolstoy's love and he had already begun to assay it. His state of mind at this juncture is faithfully reflected by the autobiographical Levin in *Anna Karenina*.<sup>1</sup> Shortly after his marriage Levin was happy, but not in the manner he had expected. At every turn he grew disillusioned with his former dreams only to discover unexpected new charms. During his bachelorhood he had regarded with some scorn the trifling cares, disputes, and jealousies of married couples, and he had convinced himself that nothing like this would exist in his own married life. He found, however, that insignificant trifles took on an unusual and indisputable importance. In a similar fashion, Tolstoy's search for family happiness forced him into endless compromises with trifles. He understood their significance, but he submitted with reluctance. His bachelor ideal of family happiness, like Levin's, vanished forever. If the compensations brought him much real joy, they also fettered the wings of his genius.

### III

The ubiquitous ghosts and even the living images of women in her husband's past haunted Sonya and were the cause of much of their quarrelling. She struck a note of protest on the very first page of her diary after marriage, and she continued to strike it with morbid persistence. "All his past is so awful for me," she wrote, "that it seems I will never become reconciled to it." A precious part of him—his golden youth with its eager passion—has been forever lost to her. Her reactions were natural enough for a girl of eighteen: her own purity had been polluted by the many women who had preceded her. And her imagination insistently conjured up these predecessors: "He kisses me, and I think: I'm not the first to attract him. . . . I also have been captivated, but only in my imagination, whereas he has been fascinated by women, real, pretty, with characters, faces, and souls of their own, which he loved and by which he was captivated, just as he is captivated by me, at least for the present."

<sup>1</sup> See Part V, Chapter XIV.

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No doubt Sonya had in mind a particular woman—Tolstoy's recent peasant love, Aksinya. By chance less than three months after the marriage Aksinya was ordered to wash the floors of the manor house, and she was pointed out to Sonya as "that woman." The ardent lines devoted to Aksinya in Tolstoy's diary had stuck in Sonya's memory. That day she jotted down a few venomous ones of her own. "Sometimes I think I'll put an end to myself from jealousy," her diary reads. "I'm in love as never before!<sup>1</sup> A simple wench, fat, fair; it is horrible! With what satisfaction I just now looked at a dagger, a gun. One blow—easy. While there's yet no child.<sup>2</sup> And she is right here, several steps away. I'm simply like an insane woman. I'm going for a drive. I can see her at this moment. How he loved her! If one could only burn his diary and all his past."

Here was the stuff of tragedy and a theme worthy of the creative powers of her husband.<sup>3</sup> One can sympathize with the young wife's fury, although she knew that her husband had severed all relations with Aksinya shortly before his marriage. If she could only kill him and create him anew, Sonya reflected, she would do it with pleasure. Years later, after his death, she told his former secretary, and perhaps with Aksinya in mind, that in her first year of marriage she used to dress as a peasant girl and roam about the secluded forest paths near the house in the hope that Tolstoy would mistake her for his lover and hail her by the name she wished to ascertain. Aksinya continued to stalk her thoughts. She saw her in a terrible dream that she described in her diary. The peasant women of the village appeared in the garden, all dressed up as ladies of fashion. "The last to enter was Aksinya in a black silk dress," wrote Sonya. "I talked with her, and such a vicious feeling came over me, that I at once seized her child from somewhere and began to tear it into bits. In my fearful rage I ripped off feet, head—all. Lyovochka came; I told him they would send me to Siberia. But he gathered up the legs, arms, all the parts, and said that it was nothing, only a doll. I looked, and in fact instead of a real body, there was only cotton-wool and leather. And this vexed me."

One need be neither a medieval necromancer nor a modern Freudian to read the proper interpretation into this horrific farrago from the world of dreams. However excusable was Sonya's jealousy of Aksinya, there was little sense to her childish fears about

<sup>1</sup> A line in Tolstoy's diary about his love for Akisnya.

<sup>2</sup> Apparently Aksinya was pregnant by Tolstoy at this time.

<sup>3</sup> The manuscript of *The Devil*, the tale inspired by his relations with Aksinya, Tolstoy concealed from his wife.

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other women at this time. She complained bitterly because her husband liked to play duets with Olga Islenev, her cousin, who visited them at Yasnaya Polyana, and there were moments when even her younger sister Tanya fell under suspicion. And after reading the letters of Granny and Valerya to Tolstoy, she could not suppress a jealous pang over the part these two women had played in her husband's life. Perhaps just because of her intense love, she was jealous of everyone and everything that surrounded him. Her diary clearly shows that she tended to be hostile to any interest of her husband that did not immediately serve their mutual affection. Even the inner world of creative fancy that he liked to retire to often caused her qualms, for she feared he would find there support and sustenance independent of her love.

### IV

For the first three months at Yasnaya Polyana the Tolstoys rarely visited and had few callers. Late in December the couple packed themselves off to Moscow for the Christmas holidays. To her delighted sister Tanya, Sonya seemed pale and thin. She was already pregnant.

After the solitude of the country, the resumption of her former gay Moscow existence was not an unmixed blessing for Sonya. She now had to visit and be visited by Tolstoy's friends, often people she had never met before and of some of whom she stood in awe. It was a trial for the young bride. There were fashionable clothes and hats to buy, and a fastidious husband to please in the matter, for Tolstoy had very definite opinions about female attire, as he had about nearly everything. He came into the room suddenly when she was trying on a new hat, a modish creation, very high in front, covering the ears, and adorned with a chin strap.

"What!" he exclaimed in horror. "Is Sonya going to visit in this Babylonian tower!" She stuck to her choice. The visit was made. Sonya felt ill at ease, timid, and got cross with him for not paying sufficient attention to her. The sisters of his old friend Dyakov were present. Sonya imagined that they behaved in a patronizing and condescending manner to her. She was jealous of them, especially of his former love Alexandra Obolenski. Tolstoy, on the other hand, was immensely pleased that all seemed to like his young wife.

In the end Sonya preferred to let Tolstoy visit without her. She had become self-conscious about her pregnant condition. One

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evening he went off to call on the Sushkovs, and promised to return at twelve as usual. The irritated Sonya remained with her mother and Tanya and whiled away the evening with an account of her life at Yasnaya Polyana. With the natural instinct of the happy bride, she garnished her narrative with glamour and gladness. But here and there a peevishness peeped through. "You know, Tanya," she complained, "I sometimes get bored with being 'grown-up'; the silence in the house vexes me, and I feel an irresistible need for jollity and action. I leap about, run, and remember you when we used to cut up, and you used to say that I was 'off my head.' And then Auntie Tatyana laughs good-naturedly, and, looking at me, says: 'Be careful, softly, my dear Sonya; think of your baby.'"

The hours wore on with this chatter until midnight. But no Tolstoy. Sonya grew quiet, then angry, and somewhat hysterical by the time one o'clock struck. She imagined all manner of accidents that might have happened, and was sure that Alexandra Obolenski was at the Sushkovs'. With difficulty her mother restrained her from returning to her hotel alone. Shortly after one, Tolstoy entered. Sonya, her nerves at the breaking point, burst into tears. In consternation he tried to comfort her, begged her pardon, and fell to kissing her hand.

"Darling, sweet," he pleaded, "calm yourself. I was at the Aksakovs', where I met the Decembrist Zavalishin;<sup>1</sup> he interested me so much that I did not notice how the time passed."

Scenes, tears, and reconciliations were a regular diet during the six weeks of their Moscow sojourn. "Every such quarrel, however insignificant, marks a diminution of love," Tolstoy noted in his diary. What he did not always perceive was that in this purging fire of doubts and uncertainties their love was gradually assuming a new aspect of greater calm and strength. Their diaries clearly reveal this slow transformation. He observed her morbid fear and jealousy, and compared her to other women to her disadvantage. "Since morning, dresses. She dared me to object and I did: tears, nonsense, explanations. . . . We made it up somehow. On these occasions I'm always dissatisfied with myself, especially with the kisses—this is a kind of sham cement. . . . At dinner the cement fell away; tears, hysterics. The best indication that I love

<sup>1</sup> D. I. Zavalishin, one of the rebels exiled by Nicholas I for his part in the Decembrist Revolt of 1825. The records indicate that Zavalishin was not in Moscow at this time. He corresponded with Aksakov, however, and no doubt Tolstoy talked about him with Aksakov. Such a statement was perhaps incorrectly remembered by Tanya Bers, the authority for this incident.

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her is that I did not get angry. It all grieved me, terribly grieved and saddened me. I went out to forget and distract myself. . . . To remain at home with her is painful. Without doubt much has begun insensibly to weigh on my heart. I feel that she suffers, but I suffer still more, and I can say nothing to her—for there is nothing to say. I'm simply cold, yet it is with warmth that I must comprehend everything. She will cease to love me; I'm almost convinced of this. The only thing that can save me is for her not to love anybody else. . . . 'You are good,' she says. I don't like to hear that; it makes me think that she does not love me." Two weeks later, however, he wrote: "On the very best of terms with my wife. The ebb and flow now do not surprise and frighten me. Although it is not so at present, I rarely have any fear now; she is young, and there is much she does not understand and does not love in me, and there is much in herself that she strangles for my sake, and all these sacrifices must instinctively be chalked up against me." By the time he returned to Yasnaya Polyana, he was able to reflect the happy feeling of complete reconciliation: "I feel fine, fine, and I love her so!"

### v

If we may accept the evidence of her diary, Sonya was heartily glad to leave Moscow and return to Yasnaya Polyana. By now the purging fire had badly singed, if not utterly destroyed, some of her fine-feathered notions of married life. There was nothing in the world dearer to her than Lyovochka, she told herself. Only to be alone with him in the country, away from his exacting Moscow friends—that would be heaven. She now saw no reason why she could not create happiness for herself at Yasnaya Polyana. Thoughts of the coming child banished her former restlessness.

If quarrels were less frequent and love less strained, a worm of discontent did not cease to gnaw at Tolstoy over most of the period of his wife's pregnancy. He was an active, passionate man, and the passivity, even frigidity, of Sonya, now accentuated by her condition, preyed upon his mind. Not unlike many young brides, she evinced a fear and disgust for physical relations. About two weeks after marriage, she wrote in her diary: "All physical manifestations are so repugnant." And this common difficulty, requiring sympathetic understanding and delicate adjustments, was apparently magnified by his inordinate demands. The tension increased with the months of pregnancy, evoking a desperate protest from Sonya.

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"Lyova deserts me more and more," she noted in her diary. "The role of the physical side of love plays a great part with him. And that is awful. For me, on the contrary, it means nothing." At times she grew frantic at the thought that she would lose him. "I feel that I have become unendurable to him; now I have only one purpose—to leave him in peace, to take myself out of his life as much as possible. I can bring him no pleasure now because I'm pregnant."

Tolstoy curiously connected this sexual coldness with Sonya's pronounced inactivity and general lack of interest in everything that went on around her. He called her a doll, and in a letter to her sister Tanya he betrayed in a psychic manner his intense emotional dissatisfaction. The letter was a joint effort, indicating his intention that Sonya should read what he wrote. His part amounted to a short story, to which has actually been given the title, "The Tale of the Porcelain Doll." Although on the surface it claimed to be nothing more than a joking performance, composed to amuse Tanya and her parents, it was executed with all his literary skill and concealed a profound meaning. Sonya began it and then Tolstoy took hold. In a seriocomic vein he told how he fell asleep, and suddenly his wife entered the room. "I opened my eyes and I saw Sonya, not the Sonya whom we know, but a porcelain Sonya!" He then vividly described her appearance and his own consternation over this weird transformation. "She did not look at me," he continued, "but past me at her own bed; it was obvious that she wanted to lie down, and she swayed back and forth. I did not know whether I was standing on my head or my feet; I seized her and wanted to carry her to bed. My fingers did not press into her cold porcelain body, and what struck me even more was that she had become as light as an empty glass phial. And suddenly she seemed to shrink, as it were, and became tiny, smaller than the palm of my hand, although she still looked just the same." He placed her on a pillow, put out the light, and lay down beside her. Then he heard her voice: "Lyova, why have I become porcelain?" I did not know what to answer. Again she spoke: 'Does it make any difference that I am porcelain?' I did not wish to grieve her and said that it did not matter. I felt her in the darkness—she was so cold and porcelain. But her belly was the same as when she was alive, protruding upwards in a cone shape, a little unnatural for a porcelain doll." After he had fondled the doll for a while, they both went to sleep. Tolstoy ended the story by relating that the next day Sonya became her own live self, but that every time they were alone, she

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turned into porcelain. "She is not dismayed by this," he concluded, "nor am I. To put it frankly, however strange it may be, I'm glad of this, and despite the fact that she is porcelain, we are very happy." It is difficult to believe that Sonya missed the point of the story, but she naïvely added to this letter to Tanya: "He has invented this that I am porcelain; such a rascal! But what does it mean—God knows."

Whatever amusement was intended—and the Bers family regarded the story only as a pleasantry—the letter unquestionably reflected a serious difficulty in the intimate relations between husband and wife. Yet it would be a mistake to construe his tale of the porcelain doll as evidence of a permanent lesion in their physical life together. Uneven as this was at the time, their life together was essentially a happy one. Only the day after his letter to Tanya, he noted in the diary: "I love her always more and more. Today is the fifth month, and I experience what I have not experienced for a long time—a feeling of frustration before her. She is so impossibly pure and fine and substantial for me. At these moments, I feel that I do not possess her; despite the fact that she gives herself entirely to me. I do not possess her, because I do not dare to; I do not feel myself worthy. I'm nervously irritated and therefore not *completely* happy. Something torments me. Jealousy of that person who would be completely worthy of her. I'm not worthy."

## VI

As Sonya's time approached, the couple were drawn still closer together in that mysterious community of feeling evoked by the unknowable future that they both awaited. "I, happy man, still live," Tolstoy wrote his sister. "I listen to my child's kicking in Sonya's belly." He planned the education of his unborn child, read medical books, and, as Sonya put it, "continually examines my abdomen" in an effort to determine exactly the eventful day. He would suddenly enter the room after reading an authority on obstetrics and abruptly announce to his wife: "He *already* has toe nails," to which Sonya would be on the point of replying: "Who?" before she recollected herself.

The uneventful country existence that had formerly seemed so dull to Sonya now cheerfully absorbed her with its numerous details. She no longer played with dolls, as Tolstoy jokingly wrote Fet, but had become his serious helpmate in the affairs of the

estate. He had dismissed his steward and clerks on the theory that they were simply a hindrance to efficient management, and, single-handed, directed the work while Sonya took charge of the office and accounts. Fet, paying a visit to Yasnaya Polyana at this time, found Tolstoy in working clothes busily directing the dragging of his pond and taking all possible care that the carp should not escape. Sonya came running down the path with a huge bunch of keys hanging at her waist. After gaily greeting Fet, she leaped over a low railing between the path and the pond, despite her "exceedingly interesting condition." At dinner that night, Fet remarked, some of the captured carp made their appearance at the table. All seemed merry and filled with hope, and kind old Auntie Tatyana beamed over the happiness of her *cher Léon*.

The eagerly expected first-born arrived on June 28, 1863, and was christened Sergei. One of the greatest scenes that Tolstoy ever wrote, the birth of Kitty's first child in *Anna Karenina*, was directly inspired by his emotional reaction to the birth of Sergei. How close his art could be to reality may be observed by comparing this scene in the novel with the rather full record of his experience in his diary. "At the crucial time," he wrote in this detailed account, "I was both agitated and quiet, occupied with trifles as before a battle or during a moment close to death. I was annoyed with myself that I felt so little." He held Sonya during her labour pains, "and I felt how her body trembled, stiffened, and she grimaced; and I never before experienced the feeling that her body conveyed to me, not even before marriage." He prepared for her the huge divan on which he himself had been born. "But in me," he continued, "there was always the same feeling of indifference and of self-reproach for it, and of irritation."

The birth of Sergei ended Tolstoy's preparatory period for the enjoyment of family life. There were some immediately stormy scenes, for his mother-in-law had descended on Yasnaya Polyana to be on hand for the arrival of her first grandchild. There were the usual sharp differences of opinion that sometimes developed into three-cornered battles on the care of infants. Sonya's mother and father took her side in the controversy that raged on the nursing of little Sergei. Because of Sonya's illness, the physician ordered her not to nurse the child herself. Tolstoy had obstinate and unreasonable ideas on this score, perhaps long ago suggested to him by his reading of Rousseau, and he demanded that the young mother should take complete charge of her infant. Although his



son-in-law might be a master of language and literature, Dr. Bers angrily declared, he had no understanding of practical matters, and accordingly a wet nurse was engaged. Tolstoy believed Sonya capricious and wrote in his diary that she did not love him. But a little more thought on the matter and he realized his gross unfairness. In a penitent mood he wrote a confession of regret in her diary: "Sonya, forgive me; I know now that I have been at fault and how I've been at fault. There are days when you live, as it were, not by your own will, but subject to some external, irresistible law. Such I've been towards you these past days. I always thought I had many failings, but there is also a tenth part of feeling and magnanimity. I was rude and cruel, and to whom? To the one being who has given me the most happiness in life and who alone loves me. Sonya, I realize that this will not be forgotten or forgiven; but I know more than you and I understand all my own meanness, Sonya darling; I am at fault, and I am wicked. In me, however, there is an excellent man who sometimes sleeps. Love and do not blame him." Shortly after, in a fit of anger over some other offence, he crossed out all these fine sentiments. But soon one could see him trying to quiet the crying child by sticking a funnel in the infant's mouth and pouring milk into it with his large, trembling hand.

These tempests in the teapot, however, quickly passed. Despite his firm intention to share equally in all the cares connected with the bringing up of little Sergei, he soon manifested a father's indifference to his child in the infant stage. The baby interested him only as an essential part of the world that he dwelt in with his beloved wife.

And that world at last began to pay its premiums in family happiness. Soon after his marriage he had written to Granny: "I was getting weary of keeping accounts with myself, of continually turning over a new leaf (remember); I was growing accustomed to my vileness, and had begun to think of myself, if not absolutely, then as relatively good. Now I have renounced my past as I have never renounced it before. I feel my wickedness every moment; I compare myself to her, to Sonya, but 'I cannot wash out the mournful lines.'" <sup>1</sup> If he could not wash out the lines of his past, he discreetly drew a curtain between them and his present happiness. "Whoever is happy is right," he observed, and if thinking could make it so, he was happy now with his wife, his child, and with that golden vision of an ideal family life illuminating the path before him.

<sup>1</sup> A *versé* from Pushkin's "Recollections," one of Tolstoy's favourite poems.

## Chapter XVII

### AN EPIC IS BORN

**T**OLSTOY'S spiritual quest was not compatible with any earthly ideal of happiness, for perfectibility did not exist this side of paradise for him. This kind of search the pleasures of marriage could interrupt but not terminate. Yet his spiritual existence was a part of him that his young wife imperfectly understood and always resented. Tolstoy realized that marriage had transformed the whole order of his life. He soon gave up his school and abandoned his pedagogical magazine, a release that once again turned his thoughts in the direction of creative writing. But a feeling of apathy in the midst of his happiness both saddened and irritated him. Less than a month after marriage he wrote in the diary: "Now I'm always occupied with matters that are dubbed practical. But this idleness is becoming burdensome to me. I cannot esteem myself. And therefore my relations with others are unsatisfactory and unclear. . . . All this annoys me, both my life and even hers. *I must work.*"

Tolstoy imagined that his spiritual and creative forces were being frustrated by the demands of his new existence, and this belief no doubt contributed somewhat to the periods of incompatibility of husband and wife. He wrote in the diary in a moment of distress over his inability to resume artistic work: "For the third time I've tried to write. It is frightful, terrible, insane to say that one's happiness is made up entirely of material circumstances: a wife, children, health, riches! Perhaps the poor idiot who runs the streets is right. One can have a wife, children, health, and the rest, but happiness is not in that. Lord, give me grace and aid me!"

Tolstoy's moody behaviour in the early months of marriage often mystified Sonya, who complained that he was growing old, did not eat or sleep well, and spent most of his time wandering

about the estate. In reality, however, marriage had little to do with his discontent and inability to write. This state of mind was a phase of his everlasting dualism that was subject to no order of life and was beyond the control of his own will. Even before his marriage, he had grown disillusioned with the educational work that he had undertaken more or less as an escape from what he thought was his failure as a literary artist. A similar confusion seems to have existed in Prince Andrei's mind in *War and Peace* when he blurted out to Pierre his bitter, misanthropic advice never to marry, at least, not until his life's work was done and he was an old man. No, the discontent was rooted in Tolstoy's own nature, and he confessed the fact in his diary: "I'm happy with her, but I am terribly dissatisfied with myself. I swing, swing under the mountain of death and scarcely feel strong enough to check myself. I don't wish to die, but I want and love immortality. There is no need to choose. The choice has long since been made. Literature, art, pedagogy, and the family. Inconsistency, timidity, laziness, weakness—these are my enemies."

Here Tolstoy realistically plumbed his state of mind. Not family concerns or the failings of Sonya stood in his way. On the contrary, the happiness that he at last found in marriage led him out of the impasse that had reached a crucial stage at about the time he became a frequent visitor at the Bers home. His emotional impulses had been localized, and the family ideal that he eventually realized temporarily resolved the inner struggle of his nature. His thoughts and energies once again had been freed for creative work.

## II

Tolstoy was fond of saying that writing was just like childbirth; until the fruit had ripened it did not emerge, and when it did, it came with pain and labour. Yet he was as happy in producing novels as Sonya was in bringing forth children. In a creative ferment now, six months after his marriage, he was impatient to rid his mind of all other concerns. The school and pedagogical magazine had irritated him by their lingering death. Even the manuscript of *The Cossacks* that he owed to Katkov seemed like an obstacle, for his thoughts were spawning vaster designs. He had written the publisher to suggest that the agreement be cancelled and he would refund the advance, for he saw no hope of finishing the novel. When he finally sent off the first part, he accompanied it

with a note in which he gloomily wrote to Katkov: "Now, as always, I'm extremely dissatisfied with this tale, and I have corrected it again and again up to this very moment, but I do not feel it possible to work any more on it." And in the diary he tersely judged his performance: ". . . terribly weak. I suppose, therefore, that it will please the public." *The Cossacks* and *Polikushka*, which he had finished earlier, appeared in print at the beginning of 1863.<sup>1</sup>

Tolstoy's literary friends hailed his return to print after an absence of almost three years. Fet positively raved over *The Cossacks*, and Turgenev, still sulking like Achilles in his tent, emerged long enough to lavish generous praise. Dr. Bers, who had begun to take a keen parental interest in his son-in-law's literary work, wrote of his delight, amplifying it by a baffling professional observation that the nervous systems of the characters entirely corresponded to their muscular control. Tatyanchik the Imp, always a rabid partisan of Tolstoy, reported that everyone was in raptures over *The Cossacks*, but she quoted a letter from her fiancé, who informed her that readers in Petersburg "found the novel indecent and impossible to give to young girls. . . ."

Professional critics were not so uniformly enthusiastic. *Polikushka* went entirely unnoticed by them; *The Cossacks* they praised highly for its artistic worth, but all condemned the author's passionate protest against civilization. Tolstoy's intention had been to write a large work in three parts. However, the design of the novel had changed several times over the years that he had laboured away at it, and perhaps because of his frequently interrupted efforts, a certain inconsistency is apparent in the characterization of the hero. Olenin changes from a world-weary youth who turns his back on civilization in the early sections to a philosophical reasoner who, at the end, searches for the personal happiness that was Tolstoy's own aim in 1862. Running through the story is a frank condemnation of society, and one may see in this a continuation of Tolstoy's hostility towards those critics who three years before had censored him for disregarding contemporary social factors in his writing. And once again a radical reviewer of the *Contemporary* flatly condemned Tolstoy's work because it lacked social content. The hero was brusquely dismissed as a "petty Hamlet," the contents as having no relation to the burning questions of the day, and the author as a wilful exponent of the literature of escape.

<sup>1</sup> They were published in Nos. 1 and 2 of the *Russian Messenger*.

Before his energies became entirely absorbed with the greatest creative effort of his life, Tolstoy, in the early months of 1863, tried his hand at a unique little tale, "Kholstomer," the story of a horse. The idea had long been in his mind. It will be remembered that once in the course of a walk with Turgenev, they had stopped before an old, broken-down jade, and the convincingness of Tolstoy's imaginary account of the sad-looking animal's thoughts and feelings had astonished and delighted his companion. With this inspiration, he now wrote his story based on the life of a real horse, Kholstomer, famous for his enormous stride and incredible speed.<sup>1</sup> He seemed to project himself into the consciousness of the poor, old piebald gelding of the tale as a great novelist might enter into the minds of the human beings he imagines. One is tempted to explain such artistic wizardry only in the words of Turgenev—that Tolstoy must at one time have been a horse himself. When Fet wrote to Tolstoy about his recent publications, he replied: "I live in a world so far removed from literature and its critics that upon receiving your letter my first feeling was one of surprise. Really who was it that wrote *The Cossacks* and *Polikushka*? And what is there to discuss about them? Paper endures anything and editors pay for and print anything. But this was only a first impression; afterwards I looked into the meaning of what you said, rummaged about in my head and found there in a corner, among old, forgotten rubbish, something obscure under the heading *Art*."

In fact, brief notes in the diary not long after his marriage hint at this renascence of the artistic urge to create something truly magnificent. A typical one reads: "Someone told me that I'm foolish not to use my time in writing. It is long since I remember having such a powerful desire, and a quiet, self-assured desire, to write." "The epic type would be a natural one for me," runs another entry. And shortly before the birth of his son, he jotted down: "I'm reading Goethe, and thoughts fairly swarm." Tolstoy's creative spirit was already prepared to grapple with the tremendous design of *War and Peace*.

<sup>1</sup> Dissatisfied with the results, Tolstoy put the manuscript aside. It was fished out twenty-two years later by his wife, who was then editing the first collected edition of his works and desired a new piece. After some urging, he agreed to print it, but not until he had thoroughly reworked the whole tale. It then appeared in 1886.

In his letters and diary at the end of 1862 and the beginning of the next year, Tolstoy threw off various hints that he was contemplating a new novel. And in a letter to Granny in the autumn of 1863, his intention for the first time was declared in more definite language. She had gently reproved him in a letter for his long silence since his marriage. He was exactly like those novels, she had joked, that usually came to an end with the chapter about the marriage, that is to say, at the very moment life began to be most interesting. In his reply he described his happiness as a husband and father. "I do not burrow any more into my state of mind," he continued ". . . or into my feelings; I only feel and do not think in my family relations. This condition affords me tremendous mental scope. I have never felt my mental and even all my moral faculties so free and so ready for work. And this work now exists. It is a novel covering the years from 1810 to 1820, which has entirely occupied me since autumn. . . . Now I am an author with all my soul. I write and meditate as never before." He had at last embarked on the arduous creative path that led to *War and Peace*.

The gestation period of Tolstoy's great masterpiece was long and severe, and its birth was attended by much pain and labour. As early as 1856 he had contemplated a story, the hero of which was to be an exiled Decembrist.<sup>1</sup> And in a letter to Herzen, dated March 26, 1861, he informed him that he had actually begun this tale when abroad in the late autumn of 1860, but there is no further reference to any progress on the work. Now, in 1863, when he was casting about for a subject, he returned to this theme of the Decembrists. He selected 1856 as the time of the action of the novel, and for his hero a man who had returned home after having spent many years of exile in Siberia for his part in the abortive Decembrist Revolt of 1825.

After writing three chapters that contain an extraordinarily vivid picture of peasant life,<sup>2</sup> Tolstoy found himself involuntarily returning to the year 1825, when his hero's misfortunes began. Even at this time, however, the hero was a married man of mature

<sup>1</sup> All the prefatory material, drafts and variants of *War and Peace* may be found in the Jubilee Edition (Vols. XIII-XIV).

<sup>2</sup> These chapters have been published in the Jubilee Edition (Vol. XV); they have also been published in an English translation in René Fülöp-Miller's *Tolstoy* (N.Y., 1931).

age, and Tolstoy felt strongly that in order to understand him thoroughly he must study the period of his youth. Thus, putting aside all that he had written up to this point, he plunged into an investigation of the notable 1812 year. In this fresh beginning his hero receded more and more into the background and other figures, partly historical and partly of his own invention, took hold of his imagination. The logic of his expanding design drove him further down into the pages of Russian history until he reached the year 1805, at which point he made still a third beginning. By now the original hero and action had all but vanished. He could not seem to decide at what year to open the novel, but he finally settled on the period between 1805 and 1814.

It is clear that Tolstoy's final design comprehended an extensive trilogy, of which *War and Peace*, centred in the year 1812, was to be the first novel; the other two, connected but complete works in themselves, were to deal with the events of 1825 and 1856. Although the introductory chapters of the novel on 1856 exist, no manuscript drafts have come down to us concerning the theme of the Decembrist Revolt of 1825. Yet over the course of the next fifty years he never lost sight of his original desire to write a novel about the Decembrists.

Once Tolstoy had settled upon the external limits of *War and Peace*, the second and most difficult stage began—working out the plan and composition of the novel. When he started to write, he by no means had clearly in mind the succeeding course of events that would fill his vast canvas. Nor did the finished product six years later embody the artistic purpose with which he began. For the earliest outlines place the emphasis upon "peace." Historical events were intended to serve merely as a scaffolding or background for the development of a tale of family life among the gentry. The principal characters were to be subjected to a series of adversities that would undermine them spiritually, but in the end they would be regenerated and begin a quiet and happy life. The whole theme of "war" with its historical events and persons did not enter into the design of the novel until much later. Although this initial plan called for a kind of family novel in the spirit of Dickens, Tolstoy intended to charge it with an intense, contemporary appeal. This work was to serve as an answer to those critics who had so harshly condemned him for failing to treat in his fiction the burning problems of the day.

By September of 1863 Tolstoy was deep in *War and Peace*. The family circle and intimate friends buzzed with the news. Father Bers in Moscow enthusiastically acclaimed the project and sent his son-in-law batches of references to source material on Napoleon's invasion. Even the studious Liza, who by now had forgiven if not entirely forgotten her unrequited love, loyally answered an urgent request for aid: "I have fulfilled your commission, dear friend Lyovochka; I have looked up the materials for your novel, and I'm sending you a list of books in which mention is made of the year 1812." There follows a long list carefully drawn up and meticulously annotated. At this point, the learned girl appears to have read much more on the subject than her brother-in-law. And from her detailed answers to his questions concerning these books, it is clear that at this stage Tolstoy was interested primarily in memoirs, letters, and human-interest stories. That is, he intended to place the emphasis upon the private lives of people rather than upon historical events.

At first this sudden, all-absorbing literary activity worried Tolstoy's wife. Besides, at the moment she was foolishly annoyed with him for an impulsive desire he had manifested to go off to war (Russian troops were being sent to put down a Polish rebellion). "What do you think of the Polish business?" he interpolated in a letter to Fet on other matters. "It looks bad! Shall we . . . not be obliged to take down our swords from their rusty nails? . . ." Sonya took this passing fancy seriously. Angrily she scribbled in her diary: "Now he's married, is pleased with himself, has a child, but he wants to throw it all over and go to war. . . . I don't believe in this love for the fatherland, in this *enthusiasm* at the age of thirty-five."

But her Lyovochka was really interested in another war, that of 1812, and he waged it on reams of paper, shut up in his study hours on end. "Where is he?" Sonya gloomily asked herself in the diary, and she answered, "The History of 1812. He used to tell me everything—now I'm unworthy. Formerly all his thoughts were mine. The minutes were happy, marvellous, now they are not."

As soon as Tolstoy had finished a small section of the novel, written in his nearly illegible handwriting, Sonya was promptly drafted to make a clear copy, and there began the long years of



close association in his literary work. She developed into an invaluable assistant. With some justice she might have complained of the use that he made of her in this work. The poet takes the best out of his life and puts it into his writings, Tolstoy once declared, which is the reason his writing is beautiful and his life bad. However conscious Sonya may have been of the truth of this observation, and although she grew jealous at times of his complete absorption, she never ceased to take a passionate interest in his literary endeavours. She loved to copy *War and Peace*, she declared, and she copied a great deal of it as many as seven times. The consciousness of serving a genius and a great man gave her strength for anything, she wrote in her diary. As she copied the barely decipherable pages she felt uplifted, morally and spiritually. She was carried away into a world of poetry, and it seemed to her that it was not his novel that was so good but she who was so clever.

Not all of Tolstoy's material came out of books. His own life and the lives of many who made up his intimate world were drawn upon for *War and Peace*, as in the case of so many of his other works. Of particular importance at the moment was Tatyanchik the Imp. In the summer of 1863 she, her brother Alexander, her childhood sweetheart Kuzminski, and a certain Anatole, with whom she was carrying on a violent flirtation, were all invited to Yasnaya Polyana. The slim, supple, and graceful sixteen-year-old Tanya was original and attractive in appearance with her dark, slightly wavy hair, refined face, large mouth, and delicately tinted complexion. In her spontaneous nature that expressed itself in irresistible mirth, quick sensibility, and passionateness, Tolstoy found the model for his heroine Natasha Rostov, and he now observed Tanya's every movement.

The young people made Yasnaya Polyana ring from morn till night with their merrymaking. Tolstoy and his wife soon grew displeased with the sly, designing, handsome Anatole, and finally, offended by the impropriety of his conduct, they sent him packing. He reappeared again as the brilliant but calculating Anatole Kuragin in *War and Peace*.

Tanya, sad at losing Anatole, prolonged her stay several months after the others had left. A born coquette, however, she soon comforted herself by carrying on a flirtation with Tolstoy's brother Sergei, more than twice her age. He frequently visited Yasnaya Polyana. As the flirtation gave promise of becoming something

more serious, despite Sergei's gypsy mistress and brood of illegitimate children, Tolstoy and Sonya grew disturbed. In vain Tolstoy warned her that a heart once given away cannot be taken back, and a tormented heart always bears a scar.

Tanya was devoted to Tolstoy; he seemed like a father to her and the one man, she said, who thoroughly understood her. When he looked at her with his penetrating eyes, she knew that she could keep no secrets from him. They were much together that autumn, often strolling through the paths of the ancient Zaseka woods that seemed to Tanya more majestic and beautiful than ever at sunset. She rode with him on the hunt, and in the evening sang for hours to his accompaniment on the piano.

In October the nobility of Tula gave a ball in honour of the young Tsarevitch, later Alexander III, who was visiting the city. The Tolstoys were invited. Sonya wept because illness would not permit her to attend; Tanya was in ecstasies, for Tolstoy promised to take her. All the fears, joys, triumphs, and breathless experiences of Tanya on that memorable night reappear in the unforgettable description of Natasha's first ball in *War and Peace*.

The next day Sonya pensively listened to her sister's rapturous account of the dance.

"Do you know, Tanya," she broke in, "I could not have gone even if I had been well."

"Why?"

"Surely you know Lyovochka's views. Could I dress in a ball gown with an open neck? This is entirely unthinkable. How often has he condemned married women who 'go naked,' as he expresses it."

There was truth in this—Tolstoy was extremely severe in such matters. He was even capable of grotesque fits of jealousy over the harmless attention that young men paid to his wife. There was also a twinge of jealousy, however, in Sonya's reaction to Tanya's gala evening with her husband. Tolstoy continued to study Tanya's volatile nature, and he frequently engaged her in conversations about herself, while there gradually took shape in his imagination the charming image of Natasha Rostov.

In December, the Tolstoys, worried over the swift progress of Tanya's attachment for Sergei, took her back to Moscow. Sonya

also required medical treatment in the city. During their stay of only a few days, Tolstoy visited literary friends, and with a nose keen for the scent of any material for the novel, he consulted the famous historian M. P. Pogodin. Katkov was also looked up in connection with the plans for the serial publication of *War and Peace*.

Upon his return to Yasnaya Polyana, Tolstoy sought relief from his labours on the novel by writing a comedy. The idea of doing a play had been in his mind since 1856, and several abortive attempts had been made. Perhaps the smouldering desire once again to pay off his critics among the radicals was behind this new and completed effort in five acts, *A Contaminated Family*,<sup>1</sup> for in it he depicted a typically vulgar group of representatives of the progressive movement of the 1860's. Among the principal characters was a landowner's daughter, with short hair, abbreviated skirt, spectacles, and a cigarette continually drooping from her mouth. In the jargon of the type, she regarded herself as an "emancipated woman," scorned the significance of the female provincial aristocratic rabble and the social web of prejudices, and while living off the substance of her wealthy uncle, she scorned him also. Then there was an ignorant, conceited radical student who imagined himself the most advanced of intellectuals. The characters were well individualized, and for all his own sympathies Tolstoy portrayed with commendable impartiality members of both the old and the new orders.

Father Bers in Moscow, delighted with this new literary venture of his son-in-law, busied himself with theatrical people in an effort to arrange for the production of the comedy. By the beginning of February, Tolstoy had finished the play, and he and Sonya hurried up to Moscow, filled with the exciting prospect of seeing his first dramatic work on the stage. As an initial precaution, Tolstoy invited his friend, the celebrated dramatist A. N. Ostrovski, to hear him read *A Contaminated Family*. The growling, bearlike Ostrovski let Tolstoy off lightly with the terse remark that the play had too little action and ought to be reworked, but to Nekrasov he wrote a very unflattering comment: "It was so hideous that I positively had to stop my ears at his reading."

Tolstoy went blithely ahead and submitted the play for production. He was disappointed, for he was informed that it was too

<sup>1</sup> This play is little known in English. It has been translated, under the title of *The Progressives*, in Fülöp-Miller's *Tolstoy*.

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near the end of the season for the theatre to attempt a new piece. He and Sonya returned to Yasnaya Polyana, and from a statement in a letter to his sister shortly after, it appears that he began to have doubts about his play, for he wrote: "Among other things I've done a comedy that I wanted staged at Moscow, but I had no success before Shrovetide, and the comedy, it seems, is poor; it was all written to ridicule the emancipation of women and the so-called nihilists." *A Contaminated Family* was never produced or printed in his lifetime,<sup>1</sup> but his interest in drama and the stage eventually bore rich fruit.

### VI

Tolstoy returned to his novel, but over the next six months there were periods when he wrote little. Much of his time was spent in hunting, or on business trips to the estates of his brother and sister. Sonya disliked his being away from home. She grew melancholy, and the fear that he would suddenly die haunted her. Her letters were cheerless accounts of daily tasks and of worries over her son. His answers were chatty, amusing, and comforting. To the charge that he had forgotten her, he wrote: "Not for a moment, especially when I'm with people. On the hunt, however, I do forget; I remember only about a particular woodchuck. . . ." In another, announcing his return home, he wrote: "Tomorrow morning I will be leaving, and by evening I will be feeling your watermelon and seeing your dear face." (Sonya was again far gone in pregnancy and gave birth to a daughter, Tatyana, on October 4, 1864.)

Auntie Tatyana used to say: "Our dear Tanya will come with the grasshoppers." And with the spring the Imp was back at Yasnaya Polyana. No doubt she hoped to see Sergei, to whom she was now engaged, but she had promised to wait a year before marriage because of her extreme youth. Sergei, however, was waging a losing battle with his conscience, for he could not get himself to abandon his gypsy mistress of sixteen years' standing. Tolstoy, fully aware of all the joy and grief in this affair, tried sympathetically to prevent a catastrophe. At the same time his creative imagination was transforming the love of Tanya and Sergei into that of Natasha and Prince Andrei in *War and Peace*.

In his diary on September 16, 1864, Tolstoy jotted down: "It's almost a year since I wrote in this book and it has been a good year. Relations between Sonya and me have been strengthened,

<sup>1</sup> It was not published in Russian until 1928.

consolidated. We love, that is to say, we are dearer to each other than all other people in the world, and we see each other clearly. We have no secrets, nothing on our conscience. Meanwhile, I've begun a novel; I've written about 120 printed pages, but now I find myself in a period of correction and alterations. This is painful. Pedagogical interests are far removed. My son is not very close to me."

About ten days later Tolstoy set off on horseback to visit a neighbour. Two of his hunting dogs trailed after him. Suddenly a hare was sprung and the dogs were after it in a flash. He could not restrain himself. "Sick 'em!" he yelled, and galloped after the dogs. The horse, unused to the hunt, stumbled and fell, and Tolstoy also went down, breaking his right arm. He lay there in agony for some time before he could attract the attention of a passing peasant, and he had himself carried to a hut in the village rather than home, for he feared to frighten his pregnant wife. The arm was soon set by a Tula physician, but for weeks after he continued to suffer severe pain. Finally, deciding that it had been badly set and that an operation might be necessary, he went to Moscow towards the end of November.

Tolstoy remained at his mother-in-law's home for a little more than three weeks. A painful operation was performed, and he eventually recovered full use of his arm. Before and after the operation, he crowded his days with activity, most of it in connection with work on *War and Peace*. He shopped in the bookstores for material, consulted authorities on history, and spent hours reading in the libraries. The amount of historical research that he did for the novel, however, has often been exaggerated. He made no attempt to exhaust such material, for he read only up to the point where it became clear to him what use he wished to make of his sources.

Liza and Tanya Bers served as eager amanuenses when Tolstoy was unable to write because of his injured arm. With a concentrated expression on his face, and supporting his bad arm with his hand, he dictated to Tanya while walking back and forth across the room. "No, it's trite, won't do," he would talk to himself, forgetting her presence. In dictating, his tone was imperious, there was impatience in his voice, and often he changed his phrasing three or four times. Occasionally he dictated quietly, smoothly, as though he had it all by heart, and then the expression on his face became calm. The awed Tanya felt that she was doing something immodest, that she had become the involuntary witness of his inner

world, a world concealed from all. The periods of quiet cold dictation he distrusted. Without agitation, he told his wife, the business of writing just did not get on.

Nor at this time could Tolstoy resist the desire to test a few of the initial chapters of his novel by reading them to friends. An evening was arranged by papa Bers at the Perfilyevs'. Guests gathered in the large, murky drawing-room, illuminated by two oil lamps. To the observant Tatyanchik the Imp, the preparations took on all the solemnity of a christening. The plump hostess in her tall cap spangled with ribbons, seated in the middle of a high-backed divan, looked like a stuffed museum piece expecting a miracle to bring her to life. Tolstoy began with some confusion, weakly, hesitantly. Tanya suffered for him. But he quickly gathered confidence, firmness, and soon his brilliant reading carried all with him. These guests, intimates of the Bers family, began to look furtively at each other as they recognized the living models of many of the characters he described. When Natasha was introduced, Varya Perfilyev broadly winked at the blushing Tanya. And Tanya was delighted to hear the description of her own doll Mimi, and the true story of how she had asked Boris to kiss the doll and made him kiss her instead. This was not life transposed by art; it was life itself. And as all the guests crowded around to congratulate him at the conclusion of the performance, Varya Perfilyev excitedly cried out to her mother:

"Why, Mama, Marya Dmitrevna Akhrosimov is you; she resembles you exactly!"

"I don't know, I don't know, Varya," replied the charmed hostess, "I'm not worth describing."

Tolstoy smiled and said nothing, but papa Bers was in a seventh heaven over the success of his son-in-law.

Tanya regretted that Sonya was not present at this triumph. Hardly a day passed during Tolstoy's brief absence, however, that letters or telegrams were not exchanged between husband and wife. As always, Sonya's correspondence was largely a record of domestic trivia—her daily tasks, the diarrhoea and smallpox of the children, and the various illnesses of cows, pigs, and sheep. She worried over his seeming lack of concern for little Sergei and Tanya, and she overwhelmed him with well-intentioned advice on how to take care of himself in Moscow. The temptations of the city troubled her imagination, and she confessed to being jealous of the women he might meet. But throughout these letters her

love and infinite concern for everything that made up his life shone forth brightly. She missed him terribly. "With you I feel myself an empress, without you I'm superfluous." She pleaded for every last detail about the operation on his arm and about his work in Moscow. "Lord, how I should like to see you, talk and sit with you," she wrote after he had been gone only five days. "You know me, you know how I love you and that I'm wretched without you."

Sonya envied and perhaps was a little jealous of the privilege enjoyed by her sisters in Moscow of taking dictation on the novel. Tolstoy had left her some sections to copy, and she eagerly applied herself to this task at night, after the children were asleep and the house quiet. "How I like everything about Princess Marya!" she excitedly wrote him. "You see her so clearly. Such a splendid, sympathetic character. I will always criticize you. Prince Andrei, in my opinion, is not yet entirely clear." He had written her of his bargaining with Katkov, from whom he had demanded, and finally obtained, twenty-five rubles a printed page for serial publication of *War and Peace*. With a suggestion of that business astuteness that she later displayed in the publication of her husband's works, his young wife warned him not to print serially. All who took the *Russian Messenger*, she observed, would not buy the book when it appeared in this form, and these were the very people who could afford to purchase the book.

Tolstoy wrote Sonya how proud he was of her praise of the novel. Love, deep and tender, ran through nearly all of his letters to her during these few weeks in Moscow; and for her frequent moods of depression and anger over household worries or his absence, he had only words of understanding and sympathy. He flattered her intellectual powers. She belonged, he wrote, to the "Black Bers," with her mother and Tanya. Their minds slumbered, but they could do things if they wished to, and they loved passionately. That he did not inquire always about the children, he explained, was no reason for her to suppose that he was not interested. But he did not love them, he admitted, as much as he loved her. "Yesterday I explained to Tanya," he wrote in another letter, "why it is easier for me to bear a separation from you than it would be if I were not writing. Along with you and the children (I feel, however, that as yet I do not love them enough), I have a continual love or care for my writing. If this were not so, I really feel that I could not spend a day without you; this you will surely understand, for what writing is for me the children must be for you."

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At the first opportunity he returned home, but only after he had handed over to his publisher the first thirty-eight chapters of *War and Peace*, a surrender that saddened him, he wrote Sonya, because he could no longer correct and improve them.

### VII

Was this full, contented existence Tolstoy's youthful ideal of family happiness? He seemed to think so now. In January 1865, he wrote to Granny:

Do you remember I wrote you once that people are mistaken in expecting some happiness or other in which there is no work, no deceit, no grief, and all goes smoothly and pleasantly? I made a mistake then. Such happiness exists, and I have been living it for the third year now, and with every day it becomes smoother and deeper. And the material of which this happiness is made is most unlovely—children who (pardon me) befool themselves and squall, and my wife, who nurses one and leads the other around and reproaches me because I do not see that both are on the brink of the grave, and the paper and ink by means of which I describe the events and feelings of people who never existed.

Life at Yasnaya Polyana now flowed smoothly along those well-grooved ruts prescribed by the petty obligations and pleasant amenities of a happy family existence. The Tolstoys lived modestly, and the contented inertia that often takes possession of congenial married people made them loath to leave their isolated estate. They visited and were visited by few friends, but these were close and dear—the Fets, the Dyakovs, and members of the family, such as his brother and sister, grandfather Islenev, and above all Tanya. Her engagement to Sergei was finally broken off, for in the end his conscience had obliged him to marry his gypsy mistress and legitimize their children. Two years later the restless Tanya married, much against Tolstoy's advice, her cousin and childhood sweetheart, A. M. Kuzminski. Tolstoy's sister, who was much abroad,<sup>1</sup> left her two daughters, aged fourteen and fifteen, at Yasnaya Polyana for long periods of time, and they contributed to the jollity of the household.

Sonya was rapidly and completely identifying herself with the sphere Kaiser Wilhelm allotted to women: *Kirche, Küche, Kinder*,

<sup>1</sup> Her husband, from whom she was separated, died in 1865, but before this she had married abroad a Swedish viscount.



a division of interest that once prompted her husband to wonder what could possibly be left for the men. At first she had been somewhat fearful of him and regarded everything through his eyes. Even the litter that he had allowed to accumulate around the outside of the house in his bachelor days she feared to complain of. But two years of intimacy brought courage and determination. The model housewife Sonya bravely ordered the surroundings cleaned up, the paths fixed, and flowers planted.

Upon surveying the results, her husband remarked with a trace of annoyance: "I don't understand why all this. We lived very well without it."

But gentle Auntie Tatyana came to Sonya's rescue. "My dear Léon," she observed, "Sonya has done well in tidying up around the house; it is so much pleasanter now to promenade." In fact, although he had a masculine weakness for old clothes and for preserving things as they always had been, he quickly took his wife's hint, and all were surprised one day to discover him painting the benches in the garden and cleaning and trimming the paths. This was not merely part of the business of learning to be a husband; it was also devotion to Sonya.

In the management of the estate the more practical wife again set the pace. The new enterprises that Tolstoy had initiated shortly after his marriage required careful attention. There was no place here for the altruism of his youth in agricultural improvements and in the rehabilitation of his peasants. Changed circumstances curiously brought out in him at this time that latent aspect of the aristocratic landowner who forgot his social ideals in the face of the present necessity of providing for a growing family. Bitterly he wrote to the governor of the province to demand protection against peasants who stole his livestock and produce. And in a letter to his wife, while visiting one of his properties, he remarked with obvious irony that he had spent the night "in the hut of a dear Russian peasant," and he concluded: "What swine and sluts they are!"

The happy family life that could so easily divorce Tolstoy from his youthful ideals had also created that disposition of soul so vital to the free functioning of his art. For the present the struggle between spiritual perfection and material well-being had ceased. When he was shut up in his study, no one dared to disturb him. He wrote with irritation, often with tears and pain, but always with the conviction, as his wife expressed it, that this greatest

creation of his genius must be superb. The road ahead was long and hard, but he took fresh courage at the thought that the first section of *War and Peace* would soon be published. With a feeling of elation he wrote to Fet in January 1865: "Do you know what surprise I have in store for you? After a horse threw me to the ground and broke my arm, and just as I regained my senses, I said to myself that I am an author. And I really am an author, but an isolated, furtive author. In a few days the first half of Part I or 1805<sup>1</sup> will appear. Please, write me your opinion of it in detail. Your opinion is dear to me, even more so than the opinion of a man whom I love less the more I grow up—Turgenev. He *will understand*. What I have printed formerly, I now regard only as a trial of the pen and a kind of draft of an *opus*. What I now print, although I like it more than my former work, seems weak, as introductions must be. But what comes after—tremendous!"

<sup>1</sup> This first part was published under the title "Eighteen Hundred and Five," in the February and March numbers, 1865, of the *Russian Messenger*.

## Chapter XVIII

### WAR AND PEACE

NO READER could have guessed from the first part of *War and Peace* the massive superstructure that would be raised on this rather slight foundation. Least of all could Tolstoy have guessed it at the beginning of 1865. Drafts of early plans called for a family novel with a historical background. There were no indications of the vast sweep, the concentration on war, and the elaborate philosophy of history in the final scheme.

Tolstoy's desire to transform his novel into a mighty epic of war was first suggested in a passage in his diary in March 1865. After going through the memoirs of one of Napoleon's marshals,<sup>1</sup> he jotted down: "I read with delight the history of Napoleon and Alexander. At once I was enveloped in a cloud of joy; and the consciousness of the possibility of doing a great thing took hold of my thoughts—to write a psychological novel of Alexander and Napoleon, and of all the baseness, phrases, madness, all the contradictions of these men and of the people surrounding them." There then followed a brief but vivid sketch of the two rulers. And succeeding entries in the diary reaffirmed his delight with this changed purpose and his determination to carry it out.

Now new plans ran through all the cracks and zigzags of Tolstoy's creative mind, but they still failed to crystallize into the intricate pattern of *War and Peace*. Four days after he had conceived the idea of a psychological novel on Napoleon and Alexander, he entered in the diary: "Wrote little this evening; but pretty well. I can. Yet all this time my new thoughts become more important and I'm dissatisfied with the old." During the autumn and winter of 1865 he worked hard and the design of the novel gradually expanded. Art was long and life short, he dolefully told Fet in a letter in December, and he complained of his inability to fulfil more than

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires du maréchal Marmont, duc de Raguse.*

a fraction of what he had planned. By the end of the year he had the third part ready for printing.

The growing conviction that he was engaged in a major effort soon led Tolstoy to follow Sonya's advice to publish the novel in book form instead of serially in a magazine. While in Moscow in January 1866, he contracted with M. S. Bashilov, an artist and relative of his wife's family, to do a set of illustrations for a separate edition. He returned to Yasnaya Polyana much elated and "very pregnant" with new material. Throughout all of 1866, not even excepting the summer, when he usually rested from writing, he kept at the novel. Although the design had become more complicated, the genre changed, and the historical aspects had assumed an entirely new significance, it was clear that he had not yet fully grasped the final conception of the work. For in a letter to Fet, dated May 1866, he wrote that he hoped to finish the novel by the autumn of 1867 and to publish it in a separate edition with illustrations, and under the title *All's Well That Ends Well*. Tolstoy had miscalculated by two years the time of completion, and he had not yet hit upon the actual title, which fact suggests that the final historical and philosophical purpose still evaded him.

Several compelling factors, however, were inevitably directing Tolstoy's mind towards the ultimate design and execution of *War and Peace*. During the 1860's in Russia the subject of philosophy of history was much discussed in intellectual circles. The two problems most frequently posed were the relation of individual freedom to historical necessity, and the factor of causality in history. Nowhere was the subject more debated than in the homes of Tolstoy's Moscow Slavophile friends. Chief among them were the historian M. P. Pogodin, Yu. F. Samarin, well-known author of social, religious, and philosophical works, and S. S. Urusov, a brilliant but cross-grained theorist on mathematics and military strategy, whose acquaintance Tolstoy had made in his Sevastopol days. Between 1866 and 1868 Tolstoy often went to Moscow, usually in connection with his novel, and on his visits he rarely failed to meet and discuss with these friends who were so deeply interested in historical problems. No doubt Proudhon's work, *La guerre et la paix*, then much talked about in Russia, was also a frequent subject for discussion. Pogodin suggested that Tolstoy look into his book, *Historical Aphorisms*, and he also read at this time works of Joseph de Maistre.<sup>1</sup> All these discussions and studies helped to turn his

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance diplomatique and Soirées de St. Pétersbourg.*

mind towards that ultimate and vaster conception of his masterpiece as a medium for the full expression of a philosophy of history.

In an early unpublished foreword, apparently intended for the novel as Tolstoy first designed it, he wrote: "The life of officials, merchants, students, and peasants does not interest me, and I only half comprehend it; the life of the aristocrats of that time, thanks to the monuments of the age, and for other reasons, I do understand, and it is interesting and dear to me." Now his new historical design obliged him to study also the profound influence of the peasantry on the events of 1812. The immediate result was the creation of one of the finest characters in the novel, Platon Karatayev, that symbolic personification of the simplicity and truth living in the great grey masses of Russia.

In March 1867 Tolstoy at last hit upon the title *War and Peace*, and by then the future course of the novel was finally decided. Three months later, having given up his notion of an illustrated edition, he signed a contract with a printer to issue the volumes separately just as soon as he completed them, and he employed P. I. Bartenev, editor of the *Russian Archive*, to serve as proof-reader.<sup>1</sup> For this was an independent publishing venture, and Tolstoy, while accepting the risks, stood to make a large profit if the novel sold well.<sup>2</sup>

In September Tolstoy visited the battlefield of Borodino before he undertook to write his famous description of that engagement. He took for company Stepan Bers, the twelve-year-old brother of his wife. To his great regret he discovered that the caretaker of the monument on the field, an old veteran, from whom he hoped to obtain a first-hand account of the battle, had very recently died. Tolstoy carefully surveyed the terrain and drew up a plan of the battle which he published in his novel. On his way home he wrote to Sonya: "I'm very, very satisfied with my trip. If God gives me health and peace of mind, I'll write such a description of the Battle of Borodino as was never written before. Always boasting!"

Tolstoy now worked so hard at the novel that he endangered his health. He continued to write later sections while correcting proof

<sup>1</sup> Later, this task was assumed by Tolstoy's friend, S. S. Urusov, who read proof on the sixth volume.

<sup>2</sup> Tolstoy contracted for 4,800 copies. The novel eventually ran to six volumes in this first edition and sold for 10 rubles a set. He agreed to advance 4,500 rubles for the printing and promised 30 per cent of the gross profits to the printer and proofreader. If the edition sold out, he would realize a profit for himself of 29,100 rubles. The silver ruble was worth about 50 cents, and its purchasing power was several times greater than its equivalent today.

of the earlier parts which he then sent to Bartenev in Moscow for final inspection. Bartenev fell into despair over the author's numerous corrections. "God knows what you are doing!" he complained to Tolstoy in one of his letters. "At this rate we'll never finish with the corrections and printing. . . . More than half of your besmearing is unnecessary, and meanwhile the printing bill soars terribly." And the next day came another wail from him: "For God's sake, stop picking away at it!" Tolstoy replied: "I can't help messing it up. But I'm firmly convinced that this messing serves a great use. Therefore I'm not afraid of the printers who, I hope, will not be very captious. But no matter what you say, that which you like would be much worse if it were not scribbled over at least five times." The work did not give him a moment's rest, he declared to a friend, and he had spells of dizziness from writing constantly. By the end of 1867 he had the satisfaction of seeing three volumes of *War and Peace* published.

The new direction he had given the novel caused Tolstoy infinite trouble. He worried over what the critics, and particularly his Moscow Slavophile friends, would think of the anti-historical point of view he was developing. In a letter to Pogodin in March 1868, he earnestly defended his original approach.

My thoughts about the limits of freedom and independence [he wrote], and my views on history are not a mere paradox that has occupied me in passing. These thoughts are the fruits of all the intellectual efforts of my life, and they are an inseparable part of that philosophy which I have achieved, God alone knows with what striving and suffering, and it has given me complete calm and happiness. Yet along with this I know and knew that in my book they will praise the sentimental scenes with my young ladies, the laughter over Speranski, and such rubbish. . . .

Despite fears, doubts, illness, and periods of deep despair, *War and Peace* moved irresistibly on. If he had many low moments in the course of its composition, there were also joyous compensations after a day well spent in the successful handling of a difficult scene. Then he would jauntily emerge from his study, happy, smiling, and declaring that he had just left a piece of his life in the inkwell. In March 1868, the fourth volume appeared, the fifth in March 1869, and the sixth and last in December of that year. It had taken him more than six years to write *War and Peace*.

## II

Tolstoy was staying with the Bers family in Moscow at the time the first part of *War and Peace* appeared. On the morning of publication, before he got out of bed, he sent his young brother-in-law, a military student, for a copy of a newspaper in which he expected a review. The youth lagged, and Tolstoy impatiently shouted: "You wish to be a general of infantry? Yes? Well, I wish to be a general of literature! Run at once and bring me the paper!" Tolstoy was serious; he wanted to be a literary general, and *War and Peace* was intended to advance him to that rank. Further, the financial stake was considerable and now an important item in his mounting expenses.

Literary friends like Fet and Botkin lavished praise. With the first volume Turgenev showed himself a conscientious objector. "Positively bad, boring, and unsuccessful," he curtly declared. But as successive volumes appeared he gradually, and it seems almost unwillingly, surrendered to the charm of *War and Peace*. Soon he lost all reserve in acclaiming those features of the work "that will not die as long as the Russian language lives." "For in this novel," he concluded in a letter to Fet's brother-in-law, "there are so many first-class beauties, such life and truth and freshness, that with the appearance of *War and Peace* Tolstoy has taken first place among all our contemporary writers." He became not a general, but a generalissimo of literature, and at the hands of the recognized leader—Turgenev.

There were detractors, of course, particularly among those adherents of the two extreme social and political parties—the patriotic conservatives and the cosmopolitan radicals. Both were indignant over the novel. The first group condemned Tolstoy's failure to perpetuate the notion of widespread patriotism in the Russian armies of 1812; the second group bitterly censured him for idealizing the nobility of that time and for manifesting sympathy with conservative tendencies.

On the whole, *War and Peace* caused a sensation; it quickly went into a second edition and was extolled in numerous reviews. The most thorough and discriminating criticism was contributed in a series of four articles by N. N. Strakhov, later a distinguished philosophical thinker and a close friend of Tolstoy. His final judgment of the novel was: "A complete picture of human life. A complete picture of the Russia of that day. A complete picture

of what may be called the history and struggle of peoples. A complete picture of everything in which people find their happiness and greatness, their grief and humiliation. That is *War and Peace*." After reading this appraisal, Tolstoy, with the self-assurance of the genius who knows that he has scored, calmly remarked to his wife: "N. N. Strakhov has placed *War and Peace* on the pinnacle where it will remain in the opinion of society."

Tolstoy's philosophy of history was the feature of the novel most persistently objected to, as it is among modern readers. He had anticipated both objections and misunderstanding on this score, for in 1868, a year before the novel was actually finished, he had taken the precaution to publish an article explaining his views—"Some Words about *War and Peace*."<sup>1</sup> There he defended the artist's treatment of history as contrasted with that of the historian. The actions and speech of historical persons, he asserted, had been scrupulously reproduced without change. But he stoutly defended his contention that the great events of history in no sense depend upon the will of any individual such as Napoleon, rather they are predetermined. History, he explained, is not the slave of kings but kings are the slaves of history. Behind a historical event is never one reason but a whole series of reasons, and all of them are beyond the control of a single individual. Tolstoy's position naturally led him to distrust the historical approach of nearly everyone who had written about the period of Napoleon.

However much Tolstoy's views on historical necessity and causality may have been influenced by his Slavophile friends and by what he read at this time, their roots can be clearly discerned in his previous thought and writings. Opposition to traditional historical methodology and his intellectual anarchy date from the period of his youth. And these tendencies were intensified by the evidence he found in the "whole library" of books that he read in preparation for *War and Peace*. For now his detailed knowledge of the facts behind the invasion of the French and of the consequences of the war began to convince him that governments and rulers do not work for the good of the people but for their harm. This growing conviction was reflected in a strange project that he formulated in 1868 for the formation of a society that would dedicate itself to work for the independence of all Russians. Any member, wrote Tolstoy, "who received a rank, decoration, or money from the government would be excluded from the society."

<sup>1</sup> This article appeared in *Russian Archive*, No. 3.



They were to eschew luxury, live simple and moral lives, help their fellow members in all things, and try to increase the membership of the society.

In *War and Peace*, however, Tolstoy was too great an artist to allow his historical hobbyhorse to run away with the novel. Each of the more than five hundred active characters he placed on this vast stage of life has his own distinct personality and speaks his own language. Even the dogs, as Strakhov pointed out, are individualized. If many of these men and women were suggested by people he knew, and if he drew upon himself for those two central figures, Prince Andrei and Pierre, all were passed through the alembic of his art and transformed into creatures of his imagination. With some justice the radical critics could point out that he did not see the faults of the privileged classes and failed to portray the dark misery of the peasantry at that time, although he significantly recognized in the novel the historical mission of the people. In an interesting letter addressed but not sent to the author P. D. Boborykin, Tolstoy defended his avoidance of social problems. "The aims of art," he wrote, "are incommensurable (as they say in mathematics) with social aims. The aim of an artist is not to resolve a question irrefutably, but to compel one to love life in all its manifestations, and these are inexhaustible. If I were told that I could write a novel in which I could indisputably establish as true my point of view on all social questions, I would not dedicate two hours to such a work; but if I were told that what I wrote would be read twenty years from now by those who are children today, and that they would weep and laugh over it and fall in love with the life in it, then I would dedicate all my existence and all my powers to it."

However justifiable this conviction may be as an aesthetic aim, it is not a full explanation of Tolstoy's deliberate avoidance of the real social problems that played so large a part in the historical period he attempted to re-create. The fact is that he wrote *War and Peace* in an atmosphere of love and family happiness. The prevailing spirit of the book is an ecstatic love of life in all its manifestations. Lulled to contentment by his own happiness, he evaded the suffering and grief of people in the historical past and tried to see in life, as his character Karatayev did, only "a resplendent comeliness."

## III

Daily grubbing in the garden of life was for Tolstoy a necessary and salutary escape from intense creative activity. While he was writing *War and Peace*, he also led the full existence of a family man; he busied himself with the cares of his estate, with hunting, visiting, and entertaining friends. The Tolstoy and Fet families exchanged visits over this period. He now felt closer than ever to Fet with whom he could share his inmost thoughts, and whose judgment of his novel was almost the only criticism he cared to solicit. "Without speaking of any others," he wrote him, "you are a man whose mind I value above that of all my acquaintances, and who alone in personal relations gives me that very bread without which a man will not be satisfied." On the other hand, Fet was incapable of returning his own full measure of devotion. He was a man of mind, not of heart, Tanya Bers keenly observed, a man who thought of himself first, and in speaking produced the impression always of listening to himself.

Joined more closely to him by those ties of feeling that Tolstoy valued most was the constant friend of his university days, D. A. Dyakov. His model estate was only a few miles from Nikolskoye, a property that Tolstoy had acquired after the death of his brother Nikolai. When Tolstoy visited Nikolskoye, he rarely failed to extend his trip to Dyakov's where he always received a warm welcome. Sometimes Tanya accompanied him and remained with the Dyakovs for long periods, for she was also the darling of this household. Indeed, after the early death of Dyakov's charming wife, Tanya seriously considered marrying the widower, a match which Tolstoy much preferred to that with her childhood sweetheart Kuzminski. Dyakov's kindness, unfailing good nature, and sense of humour endeared him to Tolstoy. There were a few other close friends at this time, such as the mathematically-minded Urusov who wished to reduce everything, even the death of kings, to exact laws.

When visitors arrived, Tolstoy became the demon contriver of household amusements, such as domestic balls and masquerades. Dressed in some outlandish costume, he held the centre of the stage, entertaining all by singing tender gypsy songs to his own accompaniment on the guitar. Once on Sonya's name day he prepared a surprise. When the guests were seated at the festive table on the terrace, suddenly from the garden came the sounds of music.

One of Sonya's favourite pieces was being played. Tolstoy had secretly obtained the services of a regimental band in the neighbourhood. The beaming expression of the surprised and delighted Sonya in her white dress and flowing ribbons was answered across the table by her Lyovochka's equally delighted grin. And the holiday spirits of the guests, especially of the young ladies, soared, for they knew that the presence of the band meant dancing after dinner.

Nor did Tolstoy hesitate to employ his literary talent on such occasions. In August 1866, when the Dyakovs were visiting Yasnaya Polyana, Tolstoy proposed to the young people that they do a little play instead of the customary charades. They at once importuned him to write something, and several days later he brought them the manuscript of a comedy in three acts called *The Nihilist*. The plot concerned a conventional married couple who were visited by a group of young people, one of whom was an attractive student filled with the new nihilist ideas. The husband imagined that the student had designs on his wife, but in the end all was satisfactorily explained. Sonya played the husband and Tanya his wife, and the other parts were acted by young guests. The role of a religious pilgrim was improvised for Tolstoy's sister, who acted it brilliantly. After much rehearsing and coaching by Tolstoy, the play was put on in the large dining-room, to the huge enjoyment of an audience composed of older members of the household and neighbours.<sup>1</sup>

The little world of Yasnaya Polyana was complete and satisfying. It had the further advantage of being a private world of Tolstoy's own creating. The instinct for exclusiveness was strong within him; he suffered only occasionally from a lack of those advantages to which his cultural background had accustomed him. The theatre, music, libraries, he wrote to father Bers, and conversations with intellectuals, were the only pleasures he missed in the country. Such deprivations were plentifully compensated during his trips to Moscow over this period. Two of these visits, in January 1866 and February 1868, on which occasions he was accompanied by his family, extended for more than a month each. On the first he studied sculpturing and modelled a horse and then a bust of Sonya, but he soon wrote to Fet that, although the work was agreeable, he was convinced that he would never be a sculptor. Many hours were spent in libraries reading books that provided material for his novel. The whole question of the Masons, for example, had

<sup>1</sup> A version of this comedy has been published in the Jubilee Edition (Vol. VII), and it has been translated in Fülöp-Miller's *Tolstoy*.

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to be thoroughly investigated, and at the end of his studies he came to the conclusion that it was too bad that all these Masons were such fools. And quite apart from the considerable amount of research for his novel, he managed to read much literature at this time.<sup>1</sup>

Tolstoy's visits to Moscow only made clearer to him how firm was his attachment to Yasnaya Polyana. The dust, crowds, and noises of the city disgusted him. When the business of the novel took him away from home, Sonya peevishly charged him with a fondness for city life. Patiently and sincerely he wrote her: "It is insupportable for me in the city, yet you say that I like to gad about. I only wish that you loved the country one tenth as much as I hate the idle vanity of the city."

### IV

In the summer of 1866, Tolstoy underwent an experience that he always remembered with chagrin and self-condemnation. Not far from Yasnaya Polyana an infantry regiment was stationed. One of its most insignificant members was Vasili Shibunin, who had been reduced to the ranks for some offence and now did clerical work. In his unhappiness he took to drink, which aggravated a naturally irritable and moody disposition. His company commander, a cold, cruel, and meticulous Pole, took a sadistic delight in oppressing his men by means of calculated humiliations. Shibunin became the victim of his petty persecution. On one occasion the courage of vodka led Shibunin to protest his commander's unreasonable criticism of a battalion report that he had just copied. When he was ordered to the guardhouse for his effrontery, he lost control of himself and violently struck his commander. Shibunin was arrested and held for court-martial.

Two officers of the regiment, who were acquainted with Tolstoy, asked him to take upon himself Shibunin's defence, for the poor clerk was in imminent danger of being condemned to death. Tolstoy agreed. He visited Shibunin in his cell, but he found the gloomy, taciturn prisoner of little assistance. Shibunin accepted the situation as something ordained. He simply explained that he had hit the commander because he could no longer tolerate his unjust persecution.

<sup>1</sup> Between 1865 and 1870, Tolstoy mentions that he read works of Cervantes, Montaigne, Goethe, Mérimée, Hugo, Sand, Dickens, Schopenhauer, Trollope, and Turgenev.

Tolstoy decided to base his defence on the military law governing the crime. This law allowed a mitigation of sentence if it could be proved that the defendant exhibited positive insane tendencies. Tolstoy wrote out an elaborate plea<sup>1</sup> and delivered it before the military tribunal. He convinced only one of the officers that the punishment should be softened; the majority opinion condemned Shibunin to be shot.

Tolstoy at once wrote Granny to use her influence with the Minister of War to obtain a pardon from the Tsar. She hurried off a reply that the minister needed the name of Shibunin's regiment, which Tolstoy had neglected to indicate. This was a patent subterfuge. From the facts Tolstoy had supplied in his letter, it would have been very easy to look up the name of the regiment stationed near Yasnaya Polyana. Tolstoy complied at once, however, but vital time had been lost. The truth of the matter was that the minister had no intention of requesting a pardon.

Shortly after the trial Shibunin was marched out to an open field. All the troops were drawn up, and a number of peasants looked on anxiously. A priest gave the condemned man the last rites of the Church. Soldiers presented arms, the drums rolled, and the sentence was read aloud. Shibunin listened quietly with lowered eyes. At the conclusion of the reading the priest pressed a cross to the prisoner's lips. The troops shouldered arms, the drums rolled again, and Shibunin was led to a stake placed before a freshly dug grave. His eyes were covered, a shroud thrown over him, and he was tied to the stake. Twelve riflemen took up positions fifteen paces away. Amid the beating of the drums, the officer in charge waved a handkerchief and twelve shots rang out. The warm body was dropped into the hole and quickly covered over; the troops marched off past the grave to the strains of a regimental band. Some peasant women among the spectators fainted, others quietly sobbed.

Ever since Tolstoy had witnessed the execution of a criminal in Paris on his first trip abroad in 1857, he had entertained a horror of capital punishment. Yet, when he read through his speech defending Shibunin some forty years after the event, he felt only extreme disgust for himself and contempt for his reasoning at that time. He had based his plea for a human life on a man-made law instead of on the moral law and the law of God. On the other hand, he insisted that he had felt then, although in a very confused

<sup>1</sup> It was later published.

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way, that this terrible deed ought not to have taken place, and that it was somehow connected with all the other errors and miseries of mankind.

### v

Tolstoy jokingly wrote Fet that he loved his wife less than his novel—a kind of humour Sonya found it difficult to appreciate since she bore him four children before *War and Peace* was finished.<sup>1</sup> If the growth of his family kept pace with that of his novel, he had no cause for discouragement, for he too was growing artistically and morally and spiritually. It was a growth according to rule, he wrote Granny, like an apple tree, constantly trimmed and trained so that its roots would sink more deeply into the life-giving earth. "Never have I felt myself so entirely, so vividly all soul as I do now, when the impulses and passions are limited."

Sonya cared nothing for this internal illumination in her husband, but his dawning love for their oldest child, which she now began to observe, delighted her beyond measure. Not until little Sergei was approaching his second birthday did Tolstoy evince any affection. "I'm beginning to love him very much," he noted in the diary. "An entirely new feeling." A quiet and proud love for the baby took possession of him. Sonya wrote to her younger sister that her husband had grown very tender toward little Sergei and continually played with him, but that she was much hurt and offended because he paid not the slightest attention to his second child, Tanya. Before another year had passed, however, she could announce to her sister that Lyovochka had "simply gone out of his mind" over tiny Tanya.

Although the children were still too young for any formal education, the pedagogue in Tolstoy could not resist some speculation on this favourite theme. He attempted to prescribe certain clothes for the children and was opposed to giving them toys. In these matters he nearly always found himself a minority of one, defending his theories against the objections of Sonya, Auntie Tatyana, an old Russian nurse, and a recently employed young English governess.

Despite his belief that women were not the equal of men and acted and lived primarily by feeling, Tolstoy at this time willingly left the practical affairs of the household and the supervision of the children entirely in the hands of his wife. The children, she

<sup>1</sup> After Sergei and Tatyana, Ilya was born May 22, 1866, and Leo on May 20, 1869.

said, were her greatest happiness. Now, in contrast to the experience with her first child, when illness obliged her to employ a wet nurse, she grew furiously jealous and demanded that the substitute be sent away.

Entries in her diary over this period seem to indicate that Sonya's almost morbid love for her children was an unconscious attempt to compensate for what she believed to be Tolstoy's loss of affection for her. The intellectual differences that separated them she magnified into an unbridgeable chasm, and it made her feel lonely and deserted. Lyovochka, she noted, had such a powerful will, and was so occupied and independent. "I feel that he is life, power," she wrote in March 1865. "But I'm only a worm that crawls and gnaws at him. I'm afraid to be weak." This curious self-abasement alternated with a possessiveness that sprang from her consuming love for him as a husband, a love that came first in her world before his talent, moral worth, or literary activity. Any defection on his part, real or imagined, worried her excessively.

Sonya's feeling of insufficiency fed her jealousy. She noticed that he went out frequently for walks. "I began to think," she noted in the diary almost three years after marriage, "does he not go to Aksinya? This tortured me the whole day." She grew angry with her sister Tanya for occupying so much of Tolstoy's time. Their excursions together aroused her suspicions. "They've gone shooting in the woods alone," she jotted down. "God knows what comes into my head."

A good wife may contemplate everything through her husband's eyes save women, and there were few women in Tolstoy's past or present life who still failed to provoke Sonya's jealousy. While he was on a trip in 1869, a letter to him from Granny came to Yasnaya Polyana. Sonya did not hesitate to open it and summarize the contents in a letter to her husband. "She writes you many tender things and it annoys me," Sonya reported. "I think that it would have been better if you had married her. . . ." Sonya could never become quite reconciled to Granny, although this kind friend had recently written to both of them, but particularly for Sonya's benefit, that whatever may be an old woman's charm, she will forever be a spent candle, no longer harmful to anyone. Tolstoy had made the mistake of praising Granny too highly to Sonya.

Instead of the whole masculine arsenal, women have but one single moral weapon—love, and Sonya lived to record Tolstoy's every response to her love. "Today Lyovochka became more

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affectionate," she entered in her diary. "He kissed me, which has not happened for a long time. I've been poisoned by the thought that it has been a long time since he lived with me." If she protested too much her insignificance, she also proudly itemized her contributions to his literary labours. When the well-known writer V. A. Sollogub, who visited Yasnaya Polyana in August 1866, told her that she was the ideal wife of an author, because she was the nurse of her husband's talent, she readily agreed and carefully wrote down this observation in her diary. Sometimes he discussed his literary plans with her and acted upon her criticism, and this made Sonya "terribly happy."

In Tolstoy's own diary<sup>1</sup> over this period, both the debits and the credits of married life were faithfully listed. Entries or quarrels were balanced with loving reconciliations, or with such declarations as: "We are so happy together, as happy as only one couple out of a million can be." Although his trips were rather brief, they missed each other very much and absence often forced passionate expression of the love and tenderness that were buried during their daily existence together. "Today it seemed so terrible for me to sleep alone," wrote Sonya, "that I put our little girl in your place. . . ." Joyfully she described how she had shown his picture to little Sergei who exclaimed "Papa!" "I love you terribly!" she concluded another letter. "I want to kiss your hand and you, and tell you how dear and charming you are."

Tolstoy's letters to Sonya might be the letters of any husband to any wife. Conjugal epistolary commonplaces were now rarely brightened by the humour and verbal playfulness of his letters to her shortly after their marriage. Only his deep and ever-fresh feeling of love lends significance to these letters. "Farewell, my soul, my darling," he ended one. "Know and remember that I've thought of you no less than you of me; and I think of you now and will think." He kissed her eyes, he wrote, and her neck and hand. While staying at her parents' house in Moscow, he hurried off a letter to tell her: "I always love you more when I'm parted from you. . . . How dear you are to me; for me you are better, purer, more precious and desirable than anything in the world. I gaze on your childhood portraits and rejoice." He anxiously awaited her answers and read them at once. "I cannot describe," he declared, "the tenderness even to tears that I feel for you and

<sup>1</sup> Beginning with 1865, Tolstoy ceased to keep his diary, with the exception of a few random jottings, for the next thirteen years.



not only now, but every minute of the day. My soul, my darling, the best in the world! For God's sake, do not fail to write me every day. . . ."

Tolstoy had been married almost five years when he wrote this. For some husbands the springs of love dry up with the passing of time and are displaced by habit sanctified by duty. For Tolstoy, time brought a deeper, more spiritual meaning to his love for Sonya. She and his children had become the centre of his being, and apart from fulfilling his consuming need to love, they gave added purpose to his life and broadened the whole frame of his existence.

## VI

In his state of complete happiness, it is not surprising that Tolstoy lost contact with the world outside of Yasnaya Polyana. Throughout this whole period there are few indications of the sensitiveness to human misery and injustice that had inspired his search for spiritual truth in the past. Exceptions to this indifference were rare. In the summer of 1865, when he was on the way to his property at Nikolskoye, the fearful effects of a prevailing drought over the surrounding countryside and its forewarning of famine for the peasantry drew from him an anxious letter to Fet, in which he expressed his pain and puzzlement over the contrast of the well-to-do and the poor victims of calamity. "Lately I've been satisfied with my private affairs," he wrote, "but the general course, that is the impending misery of famine, torments me more and more every day. It is so strange, and even good and terrible. We have rosy radishes on our table, yellow butter, and well-baked soft bread on a clean tablecloth; the garden is green and our young ladies in muslin dresses are happy that it is both hot and shady; while out there that evil devil hunger is already at work covering the fields with gooseweed, cracking the withered earth, chafing the hard heels of the peasants and of their women, and splitting the hoofs of the cattle; and all of them scold and murmur, I dare say, against us who, under our shady lime trees and in muslin dresses, have creamy yellow butter on a painted dish."

It is curious that this faint awareness of peasant discontent should suddenly take the form, two months later, of a remarkable statement, entirely unconnected with the famine, on the future social revolution. For in his notebook on August 13, 1865, Tolstoy wrote down what he claimed was a dream, and it stands as an uncanny

anticipation of his later position on private property. "The universally national task of Russia," he declared, "is to endow the world with the idea of a social structure without landed property. '*La propriété c'est le vol*' will remain a greater truth than the English constitution as long as the human family exists. This is an absolute truth, but out of it emerge relative truths—application. The first of these relative truths is the view of the Russian people on property. The Russian people refuse to believe that land is the most stable form of property, because it is least dependent upon labour and hampers the acquisition of property by others. This truth is not a dream—it is a fact expressed in general among peasants and *Cossacks*. The learned Russian understands this truth, and equally so the peasant who says: Let them inscribe us as *Cossacks*, and the land will be free. This idea has a future. The Russian revolution can be based on this only. The Russian revolution will not be against the Tsar and despotism, but against landed property. It will say: Take from me, from man, what you wish, but leave all the land to us. The autocracy will not prevent but will facilitate this order of things."<sup>1</sup>

These political and social observations, however, did not reflect any practical interest in such matters. During the writing of *War and Peace* Tolstoy remained severely aloof from the important events that were taking place in the nation. After the Polish rebellion had been put down, he wrote Granny in November 1865 that he felt neither sympathy nor anger over the edict that prohibited the Poles from speaking their own language. And he coldly declared that he would not condemn the brutality with which the rebels were crushed. "It is all the same to me," he wrote, "who strangles the Poles, takes Slesvig-Holstein, or speaks in the assembly of the *Zemstvos*. Butchers fell the oxen we eat, but I'm not obliged to accuse them or sympathize with them." The rising clamour for reform, and the intense political and social activity that made these years among the most significant in the country's history were simply ignored by him. If he bothered to notice events outside his estate, it was only to ridicule them, as his scornful charge to Fet that the national hero worship of the peasant who had saved

<sup>1</sup> The only thing revolution does not change, it would seem from this statement, is the government. Forty-three years later Tolstoy came upon this forgotten note among his papers, read it, and exclaimed with wonder and delight over this signal proof that he had anticipated by many years his theory in private property. His consistency, he felt, showed that the life of the spirit in a man was not temporal but existed in him always.

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Alexander II from an assassin's bullet in 1866 was stupid in the extreme.

### VII

Had the search then ended? Was Tolstoy finally at peace with himself? For during the last few years in which he had worked on *War and Peace* Tolstoy, the seeker after material success, had found it in his literary labours and in family happiness. But had that incessant voice of spiritual discontent also been stilled? On the contrary, various facts suggest that the great spiritual crisis of his later life had its roots in this period of the 1860's. In a nature divided against itself, material success simply intensified the struggle between good and evil. He wanted to believe that flesh and blood alone could build up the happiness and morality of life, but in his heart he knew that they could not save the spirit.

A man who can love can do all things, Tolstoy wrote Granny, but was he not thinking of a selfish, fleshly love? The thought troubled him. At times, throughout this whole period, he heard the small voice of conscience telling him that there existed a good higher and more worthy than family happiness. In one of these self-lacerating moods, recalling so clearly the anxieties of his youth, he wrote to his sister-in-law Tanya on February 20, 1865: "Here is what I've been deliberating upon now for the second day that it is very sad that the world is made up entirely of egoists, of whom I'm the first. I'm not blaming anyone, but I think that it is very disgusting, and that between husband and wife there is no egoism only when they love each other."

In this rarefied atmosphere of spiritual needs, Tolstoy had to walk alone. Sonya had her own world of thoughts, feelings, and desires, and at bottom it was entirely different from his. With little success he turned to Fet for spiritual communion. And in an unusual letter to his friend Samarin in January 1867, Tolstoy's spiritual loneliness and despairing hunger for a kindred spirit who would understand are pathetically evident. He began by declaring that he urgently needed the moral and intellectual companionship of a man like Samarin who loved truth more than anything else. "I also am such a man," he continued. "I have my weaknesses, habits of vanity, and warm ties, but up to now—I shall soon be forty—I have loved truth more than anything; I do not despair of finding it, and I am still searching and searching. At times, and precisely this year more than ever before, I have failed to raise a

corner of the curtain to take a peep there—but I'm alone, and it is hard and terrible, and it seems that I have lost my way."

Tolstoy was right; he had lost his way, and brief periods of deep depression and mental groping testify to his struggle to find the road once again to spiritual perfection. Rare and unexplained fits of anger threw the household into consternation and were outward manifestations of his inner ferment. On one occasion and for no apparent reason he roared at Sonya to get out of his room, and in an uncontrollable rage he smashed a tray of dishes on the floor.

Behind his disturbed state of mind was the phantom of death that seemed to mock his happiness. Perhaps his thoughts were more often turned to the subject because over this period there died the wife of his close friend Dyakov, the critic Botkin, his father-in-law, Granny's beloved sister, and his own sister's former husband. He wrote of the latter to Granny: "He died quite lonely at Lipetsk. That is the worst of death—it is impossible to atone for the wrong one has done a man who is dead now or to do him some good still. It is said: Live in a way that makes you always fit for death. I myself should have said: Live in a way that anyone may die and you have nothing to repent of."

If death were but the end of his happiness, Tolstoy wondered, then of what use was this happiness? At one point in his notebook at this time he even imagined that death was a desirable end, a release and comfort. "I have desired and desire something now. What is it?" he asked himself. "I desire something that is not here in this world. But it is somewhere, because I desire it. Where, then? I must be reborn in order to be content, and to be content with the best that is in me. To be reborn is to die. That is the only contentment that I desire and what we all desire."

Such a thought was a passing fancy, and death as the end of everything he loved terrified Tolstoy; yet its image haunted him, and on one occasion appeared before him with fearful reality. At the end of August 1869, he set out on a journey to Penza Province to look over an estate that he contemplated buying. On the road he wrote to Sonya that he had had a terrible experience one night, the details of which he would tell her later. What happened that night he probably described accurately in his autobiographical *Notes of a Madman* some twelve years afterwards.

On his trip he reached the town of Arzamas and spent the night in a little house. He lay down on the divan and dozed. In a short time he awoke and the room was dark. He tried in vain to go to

sleep again. "Why have I come here?" he asked himself. "Where am I going? From what and whither am I fleeing? I am running from something terrible, and I cannot run. I am always with myself and I torment myself. I am he, I am always there. Neither Penza Province nor any estate will add or take away anything from me. I am bored with myself, insupportable, and torment myself. I wish to sleep, to forget—and I cannot. I cannot get away from myself."

He went out into the corridor, hoping to escape from what tormented him. But it pursued him and obscured everything.

"What is this stupidity?" he said to himself. "What am I distressed over? What do I fear?"

"Me," answered the voice of death. "I am here!"

Tolstoy in horror struggled with the phantom. But death, like some physical presence, murdered his sleep and filled his mind with thoughts of dissolution and of the end of all he held dear. He prayed and closed his eyes, but the phantom remained to torment him until he finally was obliged to wake his servant and leave.

In time, Tolstoy forgot this harrowing experience at Arzamas. But in the depths of his thoughts there still lurked the terrible spectre of death that he had seen, and in a few years it reappeared to demand an answer to its incessant question.

## Chapter XIX

### CREATIVE INTERLUDE

TOLSTOY told Fet that the hours seemed dead after his prolonged effort on *War and Peace*. He read and wrote nothing and simply felt himself agreeable and stupid. Nerves had been stretched to the breaking point, and his physician warned him of the danger of a collapse. His creative imagination and intellect, however, could never lie fallow for long. Whole poems, novels, and philosophical theories, he wrote Granny, marched through his brain continually. Turgenev once remarked that the hounds of thought hunted Tolstoy's head to exhaustion. Even while working on *War and Peace*, he requested historical material from his friend Bartenev for a new novel on the reign of Paul I, a design that never materialized. And he had already plunged into a special study of philosophy before his masterpiece was fairly out of the way. Hegel's works struck him as an "empty collection of phrases," but in August 1869 he wrote Fet: "Do you know what this summer has been for me? An endless ecstasy over Schopenhauer, and a series of mental pleasures such as I've never experienced before. I have bought all his works and have read and am reading them (as well as Kant's). And assuredly no student in his course has learned and discovered so much as I have during this summer. I do not know whether I shall ever change my opinion, but at present I'm confident that Schopenhauer is the greatest genius among men." And he concluded with an offer to collaborate with Fet on a translation of Schopenhauer.

Philosophy was an intellectual brew that Tolstoy always stirred the wrong way. He was hostile to systems of thought or to systems of any sort. He now pondered much and painfully over philosophical problems, and he talked endlessly, but the net result was always a headache. His speculations filled him with gloom and thoughts of death, whereas a faith was what he really hoped to find. "They reproach me with fatalism," he declared to Sonya,

“but no one could be more believing than I. Fatalism is a subterfuge for those who do ill; but I believe in God, in the expression of the Gospel that not one hair falls unless willed by the Lord. Therefore, I say that all is predestined.”

Drama quickly displaced Tolstoy's zeal for philosophy. Over the winter of 1870 he read plays of Shakespeare, Molière, Goethe, Pushkin, and Gogol, and he contemplated writing a comedy. “During this whole winter,” he told Fet, “I've been, in general, busy only with drama. . . . I lie in bed (sick), and characters for tragedy or comedy begin to act. And they present themselves very well.”

Sonya saw that he was not really serious about this new endeavour, and he actually confessed to her that after having wrestled with a subject of epic proportions, it was difficult and hardly worth while to concern himself with a drama. In fact, with another epic subject in mind, he now turned to explore the age of Peter the Great. The period excited him with its rich, thrilling activity and colourful figures. Jottings on this reading in his notebook for April 1870, plainly indicate the preliminary massing of material for a historical novel on the time of Peter. An opening chapter was drafted, and in November he wrote Fet: “You cannot imagine how difficult is this preliminary labour of ploughing deeply the field that I intend to sow. I ponder and change my mind continually over what may happen in the lives of all the future people of this huge projected work, and I think of the million possible combinations which make the selection of one so hard.”

Less than a month later, however, Fet was bewildered to receive the following information from Tolstoy: “I got your letter a week ago but have not answered because from morn to night I'm learning Greek. I'm writing nothing, only learning; and to judge by information reaching me from Borisov, your skin—to be used as parchment for my Greek diploma—is in danger.” He then went on to relate that he could already read Xenophon at sight and Homer with a dictionary. “But how glad I am that God sent this folly upon me! In the first place I enjoy it, and secondly, I have become convinced that of all that human language has produced truly and simply beautiful, I knew nothing—like all the others who know but do not understand; and thirdly, because I have ceased to write, and never more will write wordy rubbish. I'm guilty of having done so, but by God I won't do so any more!” And he

finally expressed the conviction that "without a knowledge of Greek there is no education."

The proposed novel on Peter the Great was quite submerged under this new enthusiasm. He applied himself to Greek with all that ardour and concentration that he gave to any subject or cause that excited his admiration and interest. He says that he learned to read the language with some ease in three months. His claim astonished a Moscow professor of Greek whom he visited the following winter. To test him, the professor proposed that they read something at sight. They differed on the meaning of several difficult passages, but after some discussion the professor agreed that Tolstoy's interpretations were correct. Like an arrogant school-boy, he boasted to friends that he read Plato and Homer in the original, and to Fet he wrote that he was living in Athens and at night spoke Greek in his sleep. Sonya listened to all the wearying details of his progress. Her principal worry was that his intense application would undermine his health.

In the early months of 1871 Tolstoy's health did break down. Although his Greek studies were no doubt one cause, other factors contributed. There were organic disturbances—fever and rheumatic pains, but these were accompanied by insomnia, nervous exhaustion, and depressed spirits. He wrote to Urusov: "Never have I experienced such misery; I do not wish to live." And to Fet he complained of failing powers, an expectation of death, and an absence of spiritual peace.

The feverish and fruitless activities of Tolstoy after the completion of *War and Peace* were not so much a cause as a symptom of his physical and spiritual breakdown. For to pause meant always to examine himself, to concentrate upon his own fate and historical mission. Now, as in periods of inactivity in the past, he sought to escape from himself. These swift thrusts into philosophy, drama, and Greek studies were unconscious attempts to arrest his mind with some all-absorbing task. But his studies did not distract him from the intense self-analysis that nearly always brought him to the point of spiritual despair.

Tolstoy's low state at this time was aggravated by a serious quarrel with his wife. On May 20, 1869, another son, Leo, had been born. After this fourth child in less than seven years of married life, Sonya, with perhaps justifiable querulousness, noted in her diary: "With every child I deny myself more of life and grow reconciled under the burden of cares, illness, and years."



## CREATIVE INTERLUDE

Nevertheless, on February 12, 1871, a fifth child, Marya, arrived, and after this birth Sonya suffered an illness that almost proved fatal. The prospects of another pregnancy frightened her, and she made known her fears to her husband. With his strict views on marriage, such an attitude deeply offended him and brought about a temporary coldness in their relations that intensified his spiritual loneliness. His poor health became so alarming that he was advised to go to Samara for a *kumys* cure.

### II

Tolstoy went first to Moscow where he decided that he would set out for that part of Samara which he had visited in 1862. His young brother-in-law, Stepan, who had grown to worship him ever since their excursion together to the battlefield of Borodino, joyfully agreed to accompany him on this trip. On June 10 they took the train to Nizhni Novgorod. Travel by rail, which had only recently been introduced into Russia, seemed to Tolstoy one of the more dubious benefits of civilization. When he had to use this form of locomotion, he preferred to go third class, for he liked to chat with the peasants.

At Nizhni Novgorod they boarded a Volga steamer and proceeded to the town of Samara. Tolstoy had received a tender, solicitous letter from Sonya. She implored him to think more of himself and of his health and less of the family he had left behind at Yasnaya Polyana. "I feel that I have a solace in the children," she wrote, "you have your inner, spiritual life. For God's sake, do not give way to fear, grief, and disquietude." He replied that his health was unusually good. Indeed, the river trip boosted his spirits. With his unflinching interest in people, he was soon on the friendliest terms with all on the boat, especially with the sailors with whom he slept in the fore part of the vessel.

From Samara Tolstoy made a journey of some eighty miles on horseback to the village of Karalyk. There his old friends the Bashkirs gave him a warm welcome. Soon he settled in a tent in the open steppe and applied himself to his cure—a diet restricted to *kumys* and meat. Living conditions were extremely primitive. A few days after his arrival, he wrote Sonya that he would be happy if he were only well. He looked upon everything as though he were a corpse, the sort of attitude he hated in other people, he remarked. "As formerly, I do not see through things with love.

If I happen to be in a poetical mood, then it is most bitter, tearful—I want to weep.”

Tolstoy's low spirits did not last long in these picturesque surroundings, although the state of his health fluctuated considerably. In the neighbourhood were several other Russians who had come to regain their health. Tolstoy's genial disposition banished dull care among these melancholy invalids. The group grew gay and lively. An ancient teacher vied with him in skipping rope; an attorney's clerk insisted on showing his ignorance in futile debates on literature and philosophy; a young farmer quickly fell into wide-eyed idolatry. In a near-by village Tolstoy came upon the religious sect of Molokans or Milk-Drinkers, who based their faith on the Bible, rejecting all the traditions of the Russian Orthodox Church. He admired their honesty and industry, and frequently discussed with them in an effort to discover their points of difference with the Orthodox faith.

There were hunts on the steppes and a visit to a fair held at Buzuluk, sixty miles away. Tolstoy circulated among the motley crowd, chatting and laughing with them, but he became indignant over a drunken peasant who, in an excess of affection, sought to embrace him. He saw real poetry in the simple easy life of the Bashkirs, readily adapted himself to their ways, and even took an interest in their Mohammedan faith (on his way home he bought a copy of the Koran to read). To Fet, he wrote: “As is proper when one is taking a *kumys* cure, I'm drunk and sweat from morn to night, and I find pleasure in it. It is very good here, and were it not for homesickness, I should be quite happy. Were I to begin describing, I should fill a hundred pages with this country and my own occupations. I'm reading Herodotus, who describes in detail and with great accuracy these same milk-consuming Scythians among whom I'm living.” In truth, he had reverted to his Greek again, reading it with the ancient teacher among the *kumys*-drinking invalids. But this passion was running low, and after they had been there some time, young Bers had no difficulty in getting Tolstoy's permission to press leaves between the pages of his huge Greek lexicon.

In letter after letter Sonya implored him to abandon these hateful Greeks. “Not to no purpose is this language dead,” she warned, “for it brings a man to a dead state of mind.” But her chief plaint was his absence. Despite all the visitors and amusements at Yasnaya Polyana, “without you it is without its soul,” she wrote. “You

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alone are able to inject poetry and charm in all and over all . . . for me all is dead without you."

Her letters, Tolstoy good-naturedly parried in one reply, were probably more harmful to him than Greek, "because of the agitation they throw me into. More so when I receive them unexpectedly; I cannot read them without tears, and I tremble all over and my heart thumps. Though you write anything that comes into your head, to me every word is significant, and I read them all over and over again. . . . At this moment I love you so that I wish to weep." Indeed, he was impatient to return home, so much did he miss his family, and at the end of six weeks he was back again at Yasnaya Polyana, although not much improved in health. His stay on the steppes, however, suggested the purchase of land in Samara, for he saw a possibility of realizing a handsome profit on horse raising.

### III

N. N. Strakhov's brilliant review of *War and Peace* had originally attracted Tolstoy to him. Soon after that, he felt impelled to write him an unusual letter, inspired by Strakhov's magazine article, "The Feminine Question," which had been prompted by a recent Russian translation of John Stuart Mill's treatise, *The Subjection of Women*. In his article Strakhov opposed the feminist movement and held up woman as God's most perfect creation. But she should cling to her natural calling of wife and mother, he declared, for in competing with men in their activities and careers, she forfeited that which she should value most—her femininity.

Tolstoy, in his letter, enthusiastically supported Strakhov's position. He went further and maintained that not even unmarried women should enter the professions. Then he introduced a strange line of reasoning. "You will perhaps be astonished," he wrote, "when I say that in the list of honourable callings I include that of the 'Magdalen.' For when I consider the present state of society, I am bound to do so. These unfortunates have always existed, and will always exist. In my opinion it would be monstrous to suppose that God made a mistake, as it were, when He created this order of being; and was our Saviour in error when He pardoned the woman who was a sinner?" Tolstoy justified his argument by pointing to the crowded conditions of modern cities which made prostitution necessary if the family was to survive. Prostitutes were indispensable, he insisted, and their number should be in

proportion to the population. "Should we permit promiscuous sexual intercourse, as many 'liberals' wish to do?" he asked. "Impossible! It would be the ruin of family life. To meet the difficulty, the law of development has evolved a 'golden bridge' in the form of the prostitute. Just think of London without its 70,000 prostitutes! What would become of decency and morality, how would family life survive without them? How many women and girls would remain chaste? No, I believe the prostitute is necessary for the maintenance of the family."

Perhaps a lurking sense of the unwisdom of his argument prevented Tolstoy from sending this letter to Strakhov. The stand he took, one commonly held by certain cultivated people in Russia at that time, was obviously determined by his conviction that the family and family life must be protected at any cost. In later years a clearer understanding of the problem of prostitution made him see the error of his position, and he eventually repudiated it.

Several months after this surprising letter (that he never sent) Tolstoy replied to a request from Strakhov to contribute to his magazine, *Zarya*. He politely declined, but he concluded with the warmest expressions of friendship and a pressing invitation to Strakhov to pay a visit to Yasnaya Polyana. At their first meeting the following summer, shortly after Tolstoy's return from Samara, these two men discovered at once how much they had in common spiritually, and Strakhov's boundless esteem for Tolstoy was very flattering to him.

After Strakhov's departure, Tolstoy replied kindly to his letter of thanks, but he could not refrain from injecting a paternal note. In touching upon Strakhov's future career, he strongly advised him to drop journalism. At this time the whole subject of journalism was much on Tolstoy's mind. He was childishly proud of the fact that for over a year he had not looked at a newspaper or magazine. "The newspaper and magazine business," he wrote one editor who had solicited an article, "is an intellectual brothel from which there is no escape."

Strakhov, far from being offended by this well-intentioned advice, was rather pleased by Tolstoy's expressed interest in his career. Until his death in 1896, Strakhov rarely failed to visit Yasnaya Polyana in the summer, and Tolstoy looked forward to his coming with impatience. His favourite path in the garden where he often paced up and down in philosophical meditation was dubbed "Strakhov's Walk" by the children. Tolstoy had almost

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a blind faith in his critical judgment, but he could not always accept his philosophical views. Perhaps the secret of their close friendship was Strakhov's ability to return in kind the devotion that Tolstoy gave so readily to the few people he sincerely loved. Yasnaya Polyana was his Mecca, Strakhov declared. He did not flatter—Tolstoy scorned this in a friend—but he criticized without offence and appreciated with insight. With sincerity and truthfulness, he could express their mutual feeling in these words: "Well, how soon and where will you find a man who would love and understand you as I do?"

In his search for a programme of work after his return from Samara, Tolstoy finally reverted to an old interest—pedagogy. The subject had never ceased to concern him, as occasional observations in his diary and statements in his letters indicate. And the future prospect of the education of his growing family naturally directed his thoughts along these lines. He wrote to Granny as early as 1865: "I'm always thinking a great deal about education, and I impatiently await the time when I can begin to teach my own children. I intend then to open a new school and to write a résumé of all that I know about education and about what no one knows or with which no one agrees." And buried among a spate of material on *War and Peace* in one of the notebooks, dated 1868, there is the following announcement: "First book for reading and a primer for families and schools, with directions to teachers, by Count L. N. Tolstoy." Accompanying this is a detailed plan for what later became his well-known *ABC Book*.

In the autumn of 1871, Tolstoy turned to this plan in real earnest. His new effort filled him with joy. All his energies were concentrated on the task, and every letter carried an excited reference to the work. Sonya was pressed into service again as an amanuensis. The visit of Eugene Schuyler, an American consular official at Moscow, was turned into an inquisition on methods of education in the United States, and he was importuned to furnish data on the teaching of reading in American schools. Tolstoy pored over endless collections of Russian proverbs, medieval legends, and the folk tales of a dozen different countries. He worked out problems in arithmetic and physics, and for the section on astronomy he stayed up all night to observe the stars. There were hurried trips to Moscow to arrange for the printing, and long hours over proofs that never satisfied him. He grew disgusted with his Moscow printer and transferred the publishing to a

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Petersburg firm, securing the valuable services of Strakhov there as a proofreader.

In the summer of 1872 Tolstoy went for a rest to a recently acquired estate in Samara,<sup>1</sup> but his anxiety over the *ABC Book*, which was then going through the press, was so intense that he returned home sooner than he had intended. Finally the *ABC Book* appeared. Shortly after publication, he wrote in all seriousness to Granny that he had put into it more work and love than on anything else he had done, and that he knew that this was the one important matter of his life.

The *ABC Book* comprised a complete curriculum for beginning pupils. There were sections on reading and writing with drawings, exercises, and various typographical devices to aid in spelling and pronunciation; there were also sections on natural sciences and arithmetic. Detailed directions for teachers were included. Tolstoy realized the importance of effective examples and exercises, and his selections are original and often reveal profound artistic judgment. The frame of reference was restricted by the limitations of the students and their daily lives. "From the natural sciences," he wrote Strakhov, "I did not choose what may be found in books or anything that I by chance knew or what appeared to me necessary to know, but only that which was clear and beautiful; and when it seemed to me insufficiently clear and beautiful, I tried to express it in my own way."

In the reading selections of the book Tolstoy the artist is everywhere in evidence. He laboured over the style of many of the folk tales, legends, and historical narratives that he translated from various foreign languages. No doubt the models that he had discovered in his studies of Greek literature influenced his stylistic purpose. He strove for clarity and simplicity and achieved them to a remarkable degree. Already he was beginning to believe that the language of sophisticated literature was less effective than the language of the people, and the tales and poetry of the folk he ranked, artistically, above the works of educated writers. At this time he became one of the co-founders of the Society of Lovers of Russian Folksongs. A number of the stories in the *ABC Book* are Tolstoy's own, and they are told with much of the fetching artlessness of folk tales. He composed charming adventures of his favourite dogs, Milka and Bulka, admirable in their simplicity and

<sup>1</sup> In August 1871, Tolstoy had purchased 6,750 acres in Samara, in the Buzuluk district, for 20,000 rubles.

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in the sincerity of the feelings conveyed. Two of his stories, "A Prisoner of the Caucasus" and "God Sees the Truth but Waits" which he also published separately, he later regarded as the best of all his works.

The *ABC Book*, based upon the pedagogical theories that Tolstoy had developed and put into practice in his own village school, was designed, as he said, for the teacher who loved both his calling and his pupils. The work firmly eschews useless or erudite knowledge or facts beyond the comprehension or experience of beginners. A pupil who imagines that the earth stands in water with fish in it, declared Tolstoy, judges much more healthily than one who believes that the earth spins and is not able to understand and explain this fact. For the chief significance of teaching, he maintained, was not in the assimilation of a known quantity of information, but in awakening in students an interest in knowledge.

Tolstoy hardly dared to hope for an agreeable reception of the *ABC Book*, although he was confident of its worth and convinced that it had few if any faults. Letters to Granny and Strakhov at the time of publication were filled with foreboding, yet he anxiously wished for success which would have signalized acceptance of his precious educational theories. He was not left long in doubt, for the storm broke swiftly. The innovations infuriated pedagogues, and a deluge of sharp, even vicious, reviews resulted. In the first few months only four hundred copies were sold.

Tolstoy was bitterly disappointed. He had deliberately tried to avoid extremes in his theorizing in the *ABC Book*, for he had learned a lesson from his past educational controversies, but the reviewers decided that the work was really an attack on the accepted methods. Tolstoy had opposed to a pedagogical system of reason one of faith, to a system of science one of instinct and imagination, and to a system of conviction and ideas one of moral principles. In particular, the critics dealt severely with his theory for overcoming illiteracy and his notions of teaching arithmetic, all of which, they charged, were backward.

Tolstoy's first impulse was to turn fiercely upon his critics, but he contented himself in the end with a rather mild letter to the editor of a periodical, in which he answered the frequent charge that he was ignorant of the popular oral method of teaching reading. Inwardly he scorned the official type of city education, and he had an equal contempt for the new frills introduced from Western Europe by the intelligentsia. He was an aristocratic

agrarian, opposed to city civilization, and more than ever he now felt the need of harmony with the peasants.

With a feeling of relief Tolstoy turned once again to teaching the peasant children of the district. The school served as a proving ground for the methods he had advocated in his *ABC Book*. Classes began in January 1872. Sonya helped, and so did eight-year-old Sergei and his sister Tanya, one year younger. They made up a merry company, with some thirty-five peasant youngsters attending class daily. Lessons were gay and lively, the children did pretty much as they pleased, and answered questions all together. What Tolstoy liked most was the picturesqueness and originality of the language of these peasant boys and girls. He once stopped a boy who was running into the next room.

"Where are *you* off to?" he asked.

"To uncle, to bite off a piece of chalk."

"Cut along, cut along! It's not for us to teach them, but for them to teach us," he said to someone when the boy was gone. "Which of us would have expressed himself like that? You see, he didn't say to 'get' or to 'break off' but to 'bite off,' which is right, because they do literally 'bite' off the chalk from the lump with their teeth, and don't 'break' it off."

## IV

With the *ABC Book* out of the way, Tolstoy returned to the subject of a historical novel on the time of Peter the Great. Throughout 1872 his letters reflect mounting interest and finally complete absorption in this theme. He envisaged a novel of the epic dimensions of *War and Peace*. Fet and Granny were informed of the big new work and of the joy, timidity, and doubt with which he approached the subject. Friendly historians were importuned for aid; a whole library of books was assembled and studied, and an acquaintance living in a district near the Sea of Azov was asked to obtain topographical details concerning Peter's campaign there. He even planned a trip to the distant Solovetski island in the White Sea in order to secure material on that infamous ancestor of Peter's day, P. A. Tolstoy, who had been banished to a monastery there, but in the end he was unable to make the journey. Scribbled notes from his reading grew more and more bulky. Customs, habits, clothes, weapons, maps, and popular sayings of this past age were investigated—all was grist for his mill. So zealous was he in this research that he once dashed home early from a hunt because he suddenly



remembered a minor detail of seventeenth-century costume that he wished to check. "What an epoch for an artist!" he wrote Strakhov.

The instinct of the scholar was strong in Tolstoy. He enjoyed historical research, but he never forgot that it was only a means towards an artistic end. Yet, after months of intensive study of the period of Peter the Great, he found it extremely difficult to start writing. He strained at one beginning after another but all were cast aside. At night, after the children had gone to bed, he talked enthusiastically to Sonya over his vast plans for the novel and then grew gloomy because nothing had been done.

The months wore on into the next year and still the novel remained a mass of unrealized plans. His failure literally made him ill, and so frayed were his nerves that he became unbearable to all around him. In all he made some twenty beginnings. By March of that year, his letters clearly indicated that at last he had grown reconciled to the fact that he would never write a novel on the period of Peter the Great. Once he had admitted this to himself, he was able to put the project, on which he had expended so much effort, entirely out of his mind.

Years later, in recalling his attempt, Tolstoy decided that he had failed because he could not re-create this historical past in his imagination. It was too remote, he said, and hence he was unable to enter fully into the spirit of the people and of the times. Further, his study of the period had altered his initial enthusiasm for Peter. Intimate historical facts and documents drove him to the conclusion that the Tsar possessed no qualities of real greatness and was "simply a drunken fool."<sup>1</sup>

## v

When Tolstoy returned home from Samara in the summer of 1872, he found that a bull had fatally injured his herdsman. With officious zeal, the local examining magistrate, a young man, placed Tolstoy under technical arrest. That is, he obtained a promise that Tolstoy would not leave his estate until the whole matter could be brought up at court.

These proceedings infuriated Tolstoy, and worry over the impending examination deprived him of any judicious perspective in this occurrence. With a feeling of outraged dignity, he wrote to

<sup>1</sup> This fragmentary material has been published completely for the first time in the Jubilee Edition (Vol. XVII). A fragment of the novel has been translated into English in Fulöp-Miller's *Tolstoy*.

Granny for sympathy and perhaps because he deliberately wished to wound the sensibilities of this aristocratic woman who always remained in his eyes a symbol of the governmental proprieties that he scorned. The wrong done him was infamous, he protested. "It is intolerable to live in Russia—intolerable for a man like me, a man with a grey beard, six children, with the consciousness of a useful, industrious life, with my firm conviction that the fault cannot be with me, with the contempt I cannot help feeling for these new-fangled tribunals as I know them, and with my sole wish to be left alone, just as I let the entire universe alone; it is intolerable, I say, to live in dread of some silly youngster, displeased with my nose, who is able to make me sit down in the prisoner's dock and send me to jail afterwards." He had decided, he told Granny, to go to England, where everybody's freedom and dignity were assured. Sonya agreed and the children would benefit. He would sell off all his property and find a good healthy place on the English coast. At this point in his letter that exclusive pride of family, never far beneath the surface, emerged. "To live pleasantly in England," he declared, "one must be acquainted with fine, aristocratic families. In this you can help me, and I ask you to do it. . . . Two or three letters of introduction will open to us the doors of some good English circle. It is indispensable because of the children who are to be brought up there." Then he concluded: "It is a current argument that the law affords security. It is just the reverse with us. I have adapted my life to the utmost security. I am contented with very little; I seek and wish for nothing but peace. I am loved and honoured by the peasantry. Thieves even respect me; I enjoy perfect security, but not on the part of the law."

Tolstoy's frequently expressed dislike for Europe and his contempt for the kind of educational value that children obtained from association with aristocratic families were momentarily forgotten in the rage that prompted this letter. On the other hand, whenever his life, as now, had come in contact with the arbitrariness of the law or abuses of society, the instinct to revolt always flared forth. Nothing could be more consistent than his growing intolerance for all manifestations of man-made civilization. It was the anarchy of extreme individualism. Shortly before this affair and after a visit to Moscow, he had written Granny of his disgust with the idleness, luxury, and ill-gotten wealth of these well-to-do city dwellers. The rottenness spreading into every social stratum shocked him. He threatened never to set foot in the city again and dreaded the

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future when his daughters would be grown up and exposed to all this.

The incident passed off harmlessly enough, for the authorities soon wrote to excuse their precipitate action, and Granny also to twit him for his unreasonable attitude. His feeling of resentment, however, did not die easily, and he felt obliged to answer Granny that in a matter of this sort he would always adhere to his expressed opinion that it was best for a man who esteemed himself "to turn from this dreadful sea of obtrusive triviality, of disgusting idleness, this lie, lie, lie that from all sides floods the tiny island of honest and industrious life that I have built up for myself. Away to England, for there only is personal freedom protected from every kind of outrage, and there alone is it possible to lead a tranquil and independent life!" This incident added fuel to a flame that was soon to become a bonfire and consume the last ties binding him to man's social order.

## VI

England as the domicile of the future exponent of civil disobedience had something of the ludicrous about it. Only in Russia could Tolstoy be moderately contented, or perhaps it would be better to say, only on that plot of land with which he had so completely identified himself—Yasnaya Polyana. However uncertain his spiritual happiness may have been at this time, in the bosom of his blooming family he still thoroughly enjoyed life, despite frequent tribulations.

In March 1872, Tolstoy wrote in a jocular vein to Granny and compared himself to an old, grey-haired, toothless creature. "My life," he added, "is the same as ever, and I could not wish it better. There are a few great intellectual joys—as few as I have it in my power to experience—and a fat fund of *silly joys*, for instance: to teach reading to peasant children, to break in a colt, to admire the large room that has just been built on the house, to calculate the income from a newly purchased estate, to translate a fable of Aesop well, to work at a symphony with my niece, playing four hands, to have fine calves, all of them heifers, and so on. The *great* joys that mean an extremely happy family, all the children lively, healthy, and, I'm almost convinced, clever and unspoiled, and then work."

There was nothing more to add to the silly joys and great joys of Tolstoy's self-contained existence at this time. Happy people, he

remarked, had no history, and at Yasnaya Polyana they were all happy. In September 1873, he mentions the eleventh anniversary of his marriage in a letter to Fet, and finds nothing to comment on, save that his children are learning, that his wife assists in teaching them, and that he is sitting for his portrait by Kramskoi, the distinguished Russian artist.

The children—a sixth, Petya, had been born on June 13, 1872—had each finally won an individual place in the affection of their father. Their sprouting natures fascinated him and he swiftly gained their confidence, not as a father, but as a big brother who knew all the secrets of their little hearts. Another letter to Granny, in October 1872, reveals how deeply he had pondered over these tiny personalities. The oldest, Sergei, he wrote, was somewhat weak and patient in expression, and gentle. "Whenever he laughs, his laugh does not prove contagious, but whenever he cries, I find it difficult to refrain from tears." He had brains, was artistically receptive, learned to perfection, and was clever at jumping and gymnastics, but for the rest, awkward and inattentive. Ilya, the second boy, was a bad pupil and always thought of what he had been forbidden to think about. Original in all things, he was also ardent, violent, and ever ready to strike. When he cried, he was peevish and furious but when he laughed he made the world laugh with him. Forbidden things proved particularly enticing to him, and he was very apt at finding them out. "While quite a little fellow," Tolstoy wrote, "he once overheard somebody saying that my wife had felt the quickening of her child; after this it became his favourite sport for a long time to push a cushion under his smock, to stroke it with his outstretched hand, and to murmur with a smile: 'That's baby.'" Eight-year-old Tanya was already thinking of having children of her own, and graceful Leo did everything skilfully and well. Of Masha, two years old, he remarked with surprising prescience: "She is going to be enigmatical. She will suffer and search and never find. She is always going to search for the unattainable." Petya, the sixth, he set down as quite a colossus but protested his inability to understand or love children under two years of age.

A little more than a year later (November 9, 1873) this same Petya, when seventeen months old, died from a sudden illness. It was the first death in the family. Tolstoy drew comfort from the fact that if one of the eight members of the family had to go, it was better that it should be the youngest. Sonya, however, grieved deeply

over the loss of her child, and her husband sympathized with this sorrow of a mother's heart, that wonderful and highest manifestation of Divinity on earth, as he declared.

Sorrows at Yasnaya Polyana, however, were few during these halcyon days. Informality prevailed in the household, although a few aristocratic traditions clung to the daily routine like grandmother's fine old lace on a modish wedding gown. An editor from Moscow arrived on business. Presently a door in the rear opened and a man, a bit above middle height, appeared. He had a full sandy beard and hair and wore common boots and a worker's dark grey blouse pulled together by a leather belt. The editor took him for a servant and asked for the count. The "servant" enjoyed the mistake and risked a rebuke for his impertinence before announcing that he was Count Tolstoy. At once he changed into the gracious host. Those deep blue eyes under the bushy brows lit up with curiosity. There was something electric about this personality that shocked a visitor into an immediate awareness that he was in contact with the great.

A devotion to work was one of the rules of Tolstoy's life. All the family assembled at breakfast, and the master's jokes and quips rendered the conversation more gay and lively. Finally, he would get up with the words, "It's time to work now," and he would disappear into his study, usually carrying off a glass of strong tea with him. No one dared disturb him. When he emerged in the early afternoon, it was to take his exercise, usually a walk or a ride. At five he returned for dinner, ate voraciously, and when he had satisfied his hunger he would amuse all present by vivid accounts of any experience he had had on his walk. After dinner he retired to his study to read, and at eight he would join the family and any visitors in the living-room for tea. Often there was music, reading aloud, or games with the children.

The children came in for a good deal of attention from both their parents. As one might expect, the democratic educational principles that Tolstoy formulated for peasant youngsters were in good part abandoned in the case of his own children out of deference to the prevailing views of the social circle in which later they would have to move. When the children were old enough, they were placed under the care of foreign governesses and tutors from whom they learned English, French, and German. But the parents kept a strict watch over them. Sonya taught them reading, writing, and music, and Tolstoy arithmetic. The children were not allowed to select

only the subjects they were interested in, as had been the case in Tolstoy's peasant school, but they were not punished for failure in their lessons and were rewarded when they did well. Politeness to servants as well as to members of the family was insisted upon, and kindness to animals.

For the children, their father was the greatest man in the world and they loved to be in his company. He divined their inmost thoughts, and there was nothing they could conceal from him. In their games he was one of them, and they eagerly vied with him in gymnastics, skating, swimming, and riding. Frequently they accompanied him on long walks through the woods when he tried to impress upon them the beauties of nature that he understood and appreciated so well. With an unusual sense of childish fun, he invented games or banished their tears or sulks with some spontaneous outburst of tomfoolery. When all the children would be sitting quietly in the living-room, after the departure of some dull visitor, he would suddenly jump up from his chair, raise one hand, and run around the table at a hopping gallop. All the children flew after him, hopping and waving their hands in imitation. After several gallops around the table, they would fall panting in their chairs, the flat atmosphere having been cleared and gay spirits recovered. He called this restorer of happy spirits his "Numidian Cavalry."

On holidays the house was turned over to the children. At Christmas, for example, all was a beehive of activity as the grown-ups arranged various amusements for the youngsters. Tolstoy always took a leading part in these festivities. The children were gathered around the tree one holiday, fingering their presents. Suddenly an old man appeared leading a bear on a rope. The children screamed with delight. At their demand the bear growled, crawled, danced, and lay down on one side and turned slowly over. Only when the children noticed the absence of their father, who had been there a moment before, did they discover that he was the bear in a fur coat turned inside out.

In the summers Tolstoy spent much time with his children and took them on visits to his sister's or to his other estates. In June 1873, the whole family made the long journey to their new property in Samara. The novel sights and strange Bashkirs provided endless excitement for the youngsters, but the primitive living conditions vastly annoyed their mother. To make matters worse, there was a bad failure of crops in the province of Samara that summer. The

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peasants faced a terrible famine. Tolstoy made an investigation in the district, sent a letter to a Moscow newspaper in which he effectively described the disastrous situation of the peasants, and appealed for funds. He contributed a hundred rubles, and solicited the aid of friends, among them Granny, who interested the Empress in the matter. As a result, almost two million rubles were raised, much grain contributed, and the worst consequences of a famine averted.

The fame of Tolstoy's name had a good deal to do with the initial success of this undertaking. It was his first, but would not be his last, public service of this nature. His sensibilities rarely failed to respond to human suffering, especially among the peasants. Though he might call them swine and sluts, this born aristocrat never ceased to feel a deep, underlying kinship with the peasants.

## Chapter XX

### ANNA KARENINA

**S**HORTLY after the completion of *War and Peace*, the hounds that indefatigably coursed Tolstoy's brain had turned up a fine quarry, but the game had escaped because of various false scents. For in February 1870, Tolstoy had mentioned to Sonya a new theme for a novel; it would concern a married woman in high society who had lapsed morally. "His problem," he said, "was to represent this woman as not guilty but merely pitiful. . . ."

Tolstoy had actually hit upon the theme of his next great novel—*Anna Karenina*, but the various occupations described in the preceding chapter had crowded the project out of his mind. Three years later, impelled by a curious circumstance, he suddenly returned to the theme. One day his son Sergei had been reading to his old aunt from Pushkin's *Tales of Belkin*. The book was left lying around. Tolstoy picked it up, thumbed through it, read bits to Sonya, and was delighted with the narrative skill. The opening sentence of a fragmentary tale in the collection caught his eye: "The guests arrived at the country house."

"How charming that is!" he exclaimed. "That's the way for us to write. Pushkin enters directly into the matter. Another would begin to describe the guests, the rooms, but he jumps into the action at once." That very night, under the inspiration of his reading Pushkin, he began *Anna Karenina*.<sup>1</sup> Sonya noted in her diary that he started the novel on the nineteenth or twentieth of March, 1873.

As usual the family circle hummed with excitement over the beginning of a new work of fiction, and his letters at this time testify to his own enthusiasm. Interruptions occurred. In May,

<sup>1</sup> The story has often been repeated that the direct sentence of Pushkin, "The guests arrived at the country house," gave Tolstoy his cue for the opening of *Anna Karenina*, the second sentence of which reads, "Everything was upset in the Oblonskis' house." But the actual beginning of the novel in the first draft was something quite different.



the five-year-old daughter of Tanya Kuzminski died. This child of his sister-in-law was a general favourite with the Tolstoys, and he wrote the grieving mother a curious, condoling letter. Religion alone, he declared, could comfort her. "Why does a child live and die?" he asked. "This is a terrible problem. But for me, there is only one explanation: *It is better off.*" And he advised Tanya to read every day and learn by heart the 130th Psalm.

By March 1874, Tolstoy had the first part of his novel ready for printing, but four months later he wrote to a friend that *Anna Karenina* was "repulsive and disgusting" to him. In truth, he had already put the novel aside, for once again the restless urge to be doing something that seemed really worth while had run afoul of his creative spirit. What that something was he explained in a letter to Granny: "I find myself in my summer disposition of soul, i.e. not occupied with poetry, and I have given over printing my novel; I'm so displeased with it that I wish to abandon it; I now occupy myself with practical matters, and precisely with pedagogy. . . ."

## II

A sense of unfulfilment in his educational work troubled Tolstoy. Intellectual pride as well as the conviction that he had a public service to perform made it difficult for him to admit defeat after years of effort. And the recent failure of his *ABC Book* still rankled. He had taken up the cudgels again as early as June 1873, when he wrote a letter to a Moscow newspaper to argue against some phases of the German *Lautiermethode*, a phonetic system that had been widely adopted by Russian pedagogues in teaching children to read. And three months later he gathered around him at Yasnaya Polyana a group of village schoolteachers in an effort to induce them to employ his own methods of teaching. Sonya wrote angrily to her sister Tanya of the consequences of this reversion to pedagogy: "The novel is entirely forgotten, and this vexes me."

The first important result of Tolstoy's new drive was that the Moscow Committee on Literacy accepted his offer to appear before them to explain his educational ideas. It was a bold gesture for he was always ill at ease in such large gatherings. The meeting took place in January 1874. About a hundred people were present, for Tolstoy's name attracted many eminent pedagogues. But the eagerly anticipated battle did not take place, for Tolstoy bluntly refused to give an exposition of his method; he offered merely to

answer questions. When the head of the committee asked him how he taught the letters of the alphabet, Tolstoy replied that he drew them in large size on the board, pointed to them and named them, and the pupils repeated them after him. He went through the whole alphabet in one lesson, he explained, and the next day the children knew it perfectly. The assembled pedagogues were naturally confused, for in part Tolstoy obviously employed the very oral method that he professed to scorn. Further questions, however, soon elicited the real nature of his opposition, for he drifted into an explanation of his theory of teaching. His sole aim, he said, was to teach children to read and write what they needed to read and write, not to develop them. His explanations failed to convince, and he agreed to a practical demonstration of the efficiency of his method. He was sure, he told his wife, that it would prove nothing, for they were all "too stupid and stubborn." And the practical demonstration which took place in a Moscow school attached to a factory turned out to be inconclusive. The Committee on Literacy then suggested an extensive test of both methods.

Two groups of illiterate Moscow children of similar ages and social background were provided. An expert in the prevalent phonetic system was designated to teach one group, and P. V. Morozov, an old instructor in the Yasnaya Polyana school, agreed to instruct the other group by Tolstoy's method. The experiment lasted for seven weeks. Tolstoy coached his teacher, followed the competition with close interest, and even journeyed to Moscow to visit the school and offer practical suggestions to Morozov.

At the conclusion of the experiment six members of the Committee on Literacy examined both groups of students. Although there was no unanimity among the examiners, a majority decided that the pupils taught by Tolstoy's opponent had excelled in all three subjects—reading, writing, and arithmetic. Shortly after, a full meeting of the committee was held to appraise the results of the tests. Tolstoy was present and objected that the experiment had failed to prove anything, for it had been conducted under the worst possible conditions. He pointed out that most of the pupils were too young and that the constant presence of visitors had prevented the teachers from holding the children's attention. On this occasion, he went into considerable detail about the system of teaching that he employed, which, he maintained, he had learned from the peasants themselves and not from the pedagogues. After all, he argued, the schools must satisfy the needs of the people and

not what theory-ridden educationalists think they need. His vigorous defence did not convince more than one member of the committee, who was half convinced anyway by the results of the experiment. Whether it was out of consideration for the personal prestige of Tolstoy, or because their own minds had been befuddled by the inconclusiveness of the experiment, the committee finally voted to leave the question open.

Tolstoy decided to put his educational views before a larger public. Strakhov, appalled at this extravagant waste of creative genius on what he considered a lost cause, kindly but firmly remonstrated. Tolstoy testily replied that he valued his pedagogical work more highly than his artistic productions. With a keen sense of publicity he suggested to his old friend Nekrasov, with whom he was now scarcely on speaking terms, that something be done on the educational question in his new and very popular periodical, *Notes of the Fatherland*. The editor, hoping to secure the famous author as a regular contributor, eagerly offered to accept anything he cared to write on pedagogy. This was exactly what Tolstoy desired, for he had already begun work on an extensive article, "On National Education." It appeared in Nekrasov's periodical in September 1874.

This article, which takes the form of a letter addressed to the head of the Committee on Literacy, is largely a reaffirmation of the views Tolstoy expressed in the pages of his own pedagogical magazine twelve years before. With ruthless dogmatism he condemned outright both methods of teaching—the phonetic and the visual—then used in Russian elementary schools. And those native teachers who burned incense to German pedagogical theory he sharply criticized for failing to understand or respect the educational needs of the Russian masses. All a teacher had to know, he maintained, was what to teach and how to teach. To find out what to teach, one must go to the people, to the students and their parents. At present, he asserted, the people demanded that their children learn how to read and write and to cipher. Until they demanded something more, teachers had no right to teach more. As for how to teach, he summed it up in his old phrase: the only criterion for pedagogy was freedom, the only method was experience.

The article created a great stir among the public, infinitely more so than all of Tolstoy's publications on educational themes in the past. To be sure, the work was attractively written, but now it had

also come from the pen of the famous author of *War and Peace*, and he had had the good sense to print it in a widely read and authoritative periodical. In a real sense his efforts suddenly made the public pedagogically minded and inspired a surprisingly large number of articles and letters in a variety of magazines. Although the experts, with few exceptions, vigorously attacked him as a pedagogical nihilist, his views elicited widespread sympathetic response among laymen. After years of striving he at last had the satisfaction of knowing that his theories had reached the public.

With such encouragement, Tolstoy felt impelled to try for further success. In February 1875, he published his *New ABC Book*. It was shorter, cheaper, more practical, and, as he remarked in the foreword, adaptable to any method of teaching. Here, too, he now won success, for the Ministry of National Education recommended the work. It was widely adopted by the schools and ran into many large editions (100,000 copies were printed in the 1900 edition).

At the same time Tolstoy published four children's *Readers*, which contained mostly material taken from his first *ABC Book*. The excellence and variety of the selections, the artistic simplicity of the narratives, and no doubt the inexpensive price, gained an enormous market for these little books, and over the years they sold in tens of thousands.

Tolstoy's former dream seemed on the point of realization—he was beginning to exercise a pronounced influence on the course of elementary education in Russia. The dream now expanded. Vaster projects crowded his brain. He wanted to take a prominent place in the larger field of national education, and he wrote to the Minister to inquire whether the government would consider a detailed programme that he was contemplating on instruction in the schools and another for training teachers. Although the reply was favourable, it was delayed so long that the impatient Tolstoy had already charged off in another direction. Breaking a long rule he had established, he allowed himself to be nominated for the County Council, and when elected, he accepted an appointment to the Education Committee.

One naturally thinks of the poet Matthew Arnold, inspector of schools in England at this time. With Arnold, however, the post was a means of livelihood and a most unpoetic business; Tolstoy in his more restricted sphere, found a world of poetry in the work of inspecting the local schools. "Whatever I may do," he wrote to

Granny in December 1874, "I at least always feel convinced that forty centuries look down upon me from the heights of the pyramids, and that the world will perish if ever I stand still. . . . I have now jumped out of abstract pedagogy into the practical on one side and the abstract on the other—the work of the schools in our district. And I straightway began to love these thousands of children with whom I'm concerned, as I did fourteen years ago. I keep asking people why we want to instruct the population, and there are five answers to it. Do tell me yours. Here is mine: I do not argue about it, but whenever I enter a school and see this multitude of ragged children, thin, dirty, with bright eyes and so often with angelic expressions, I am seized with the anxiety and terror I would experience in seeing people drown. Ah, how to drag them out, and who is to be first, who next! And the thing about to perish is precisely the most precious, most spiritualized, and the most striking thing to be found in children." He next mentioned the lack of progress on *Anna Karenina*, and then added: "But I cannot tear myself away from living creatures to bother about imaginary ones."

Sonya by no means shared his new enthusiasm, and she feared that the novel would never be finished. He had been offered the handsome rate of over thirty rubles a page for *Anna Karenina*, and yet, Sonya complained to her sister, he spent all his time in school or with district teachers in his study. The writing of novels she adored, but all these primers, arithmetics, and grammars she scorned. "I look with perplexity on all this," she wrote her brother, "and I regret the efforts he expends on such occupations, instead of composing a novel, and I do not understand to what degree it is useful, since this activity is restricted to a tiny corner of Russia—the Krapivenski district."

Tolstoy paid little attention to this domestic opposition. His reforming zeal in educational matters had taken complete possession of him. He agitated with some success for inexpensive instruction in the district, and he launched his pet project of establishing at Yasnaya Polyana a teachers' training seminary, for he wished to train peasant teachers to take their place in the milieu in which they had grown up and to provide the kind of education for peasant children that would not instil in them alien desires or render them unfit for the performance of duties to which they would be called by their position in life. This was to be, he remarked, a "university in bast shoes."

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In 1876 the Ministry of National Education approved of Tolstoy's carefully prepared plan for a teachers' training seminary at Yasnaya Polyana. And his request to the Tula government for financial assistance in return for a certain number of tuition-teaching scholarships was granted. A good deal of renovating was done on one wing of the manor house at Yasnaya Polyana that was to be used for classrooms, and many other preparations were made for the opening in September 1877. For some unexplained reason, perhaps because the educational centres in the Tula government did not favour the idea, only twelve candidates applied for the courses. This poor showing discouraged Tolstoy, and he refused to open his "university in bast shoes." It was his last constructive effort to improve formal education in Russia. A long and arduous chapter in the history of Tolstoy's civic conscience had come to an end.

### III

No doubt Sonya felt relieved at the demise of her husband's pedagogical passion. Now he could finish *Anna Karenina*. In December of 1874 he had sold the serial rights to Katkov for the magnificent sum of 20,000 rubles, and a little more than three parts had appeared in 1875 in the early numbers of the *Russian Messenger*. Then work on the novel was interrupted until the next year. Fet egged him on, and Strakhov wrote him of the ecstatic praise going the rounds of Petersburg over the early parts. Family worries, periodic feelings of repugnance for the novel, and a trip to Samara—at the end of which he gloomily wrote Fet that he had not soiled his hand with ink or his heart with thoughts—were used as excuses for his failure to keep at *Anna Karenina*. Several more parts were published in 1876, but only under considerable stress and with such a conviction that the writing was poor that he begged Strakhov not to praise his efforts. Two laudatory reviews that Strakhov sent he burned without reading. As he reached the end, however, he took new courage and expended greater effort. The final parts appeared in 1877 in the first four issues of the *Russian Messenger*. But the eighth and last part Katkov refused to publish because Tolstoy would not change unpatriotic allusions to Russian volunteers who were at that time aiding the Serbs against the Turks. Accordingly, Tolstoy published this last part separately. The whole novel, considerably corrected with Strakhov's aid, appeared in book form the following year.

Tolstoy had built the story of this novel, as that of *War and Peace*, out of the stuff of life, and its greatness rests on those qualities that he thought most important in art—simplicity, goodness, and truth. After eight years of respectable married life to a cold and pompous husband, the warm-hearted and attractive Anna falls in love with Vronski, a passion that is sincerely returned. Her husband, conventional society, and her own moral nature are sacrificed to this consuming love which becomes the only thing left in life for Anna. In her frantic efforts to protect and sustain her love, she becomes egotistic and possessive, and jealousy eventually transforms into hate the love for which she had given up everything. There is only one escape, and Anna's suicide in the end fulfils the epigraph of the novel: "Vengeance is mine, I will repay."

Parallel with the story of Anna and Vronski runs the account of the love of Kitty and Levin. Tolstoy drew heavily upon himself for the character of Levin, and the latter's brother Nicolai is modelled on Tolstoy's dead brother Dmitri. Indeed, the whole story of Levin and Kitty—their courtship, marriage, and family existence—is in many respects the story of Tolstoy and his wife. Scenes from his own life are transformed by art into the magnificent drama of fiction—the birth of Levin's first child, the death of his brother, the unsurpassable mowing scene; and even the tragic suicide of Anna under the wheels of the train was suggested by the similar fate of the jealous mistress of one of Tolstoy's neighbours.

If *Anna Karenina* has nothing of the epic sweep of *War and Peace*, it gains artistically by virtue of its compactness and inner unity. As art it is perfection, Dostoyevsky remarked, and he felt that there was nothing in European literature that could be compared with it. Tolstoy had never probed more deeply the mystery of human fate nor presented more arrestingly the dependence of human happiness on the immutable laws of nature. Anna defied these laws, and nature that neither forgets nor pardons quietly and dispassionately exacted retribution.

With the appearance of *Anna Karenina* the reputation of Tolstoy as Russia's greatest novelist was secure. Almost without exception, the enthusiastic reviews accorded him the leading position. Even abroad, Turgenev, in a foreword to a French translation of the *Two Hussars*, generously declared Tolstoy's pre-eminence. From Petersburg Strakhov maintained a running commentary in his letters to Tolstoy on the reaction of the reading public as the parts

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of the novel appeared. People were in ecstasies; they wept over the unforgettable and pathetic scenes of little Seryozha, and haunted the bookshops for fear of losing out on the next instalment. Nearly every one recognized, as Henry James did some twenty years later in America, that Tolstoy's fiction represented perfection in the art of depicting human life.

### IV

Meanwhile, death continued to stalk the premises at Yasnaya Polyana throughout the period in which *Anna Karenina* was written. In June 1847, Auntie Tatyana, almost eighty years of age, died. Although it was expected, Tolstoy could not fail to be deeply affected by the passing of this foster mother of his childhood, the constant solace and confidante of his youth and manhood, the woman who had taught him "the spiritual happiness of love." "She was a wonderful being," he wrote to Granny, ". . . for fifty years she lived here, and not only did no evil, but not even a disagreeable thing to anyone. Yet she was afraid of death; she did not say she was afraid, but I saw it. What does this signify? I think it is humility. I lived with her all my life, and it will be terrible without her."

The next year, on February 21, Tolstoy's ten-months-old son, Nikolai, died from a sudden illness. He had been born only five months after the death of little Petya, and was so like him that the parents involuntarily called him "Petya." Both Tolstoy and his wife were grief-stricken. Sonya was soon pregnant again, however, and at the end of 1875, falling desperately ill, she gave premature birth to a daughter who lived less than two hours. And very shortly after this, at the end of December, Tolstoy's ancient aunt, Pelageya, who had recently come to live with the family, also died. For some mysterious reason the loss of this last link with his mother and father, his protectress during his Kazan student days, profoundly affected and haunted him for some time. It is little wonder that he wrote to Fet: "Fear, horror, death, the children's jollity, food, vanity, doctors, falseness, death, horror. It was all terribly oppressive."

Death, however, could not absorb for long the interests of a family in which births had become so frequent: a ninth child, Andrei, was born to the Tolstoys on December 6, 1877. With this brood Sonya's tasks were endless. She made their clothes, tended them in all their illnesses, played games with them, and despite the



employment of various governesses and tutors, she also gave lessons to the children. And at night, if guests were not present, she made neat copies of her husband's untidy manuscripts. To her sister Tanya she wrote: "I teach, and nurse like a machine from morn to night, from night to morn."

Tolstoy felt keenly his duty towards the children, particularly in the matter of their education. When they were old enough, he taught them Latin and Greek. After explaining the alphabet, he would set them to reading Xenophon at once, completely ignoring the grammar. Ilya, the second son, surprised all the masters at his school examination by his ability to translate the classics at sight with comparative ease, although he knew no grammar. At night Tolstoy would sometimes read to them romantic fiction, such as the tales of Jules Verne, and on one occasion they were all delighted with the illustrations he drew for one of these stories.

The children always looked forward to the summer, for then their father ordinarily rested from his labours and spent more time with them. In June 1875, he once again took the whole family with him to his Samara estate. On this visit he arranged a horse race that attracted hordes of people from the surrounding countryside. There was much feasting, music, and wrestling, at which the Bashkirs excelled. The horse race was finally run, and Tolstoy presented prizes. After two days of festivities, the guests departed. Tolstoy was delighted with the good order preserved by all, and without the presence of a policeman. The next summer Tolstoy again went to Samara, this time without the family. He proceeded to Orenburg to buy horses, for he wished to develop a large stud farm. At one time he had as many as four hundred horses, but eventually the project failed.

As Tolstoy's creative and pedagogical work demanded more and more of his time, he easily fell into the habit of letting Sonya assume most of the responsibility for their growing family of children. The tense moments when his overcharged sensitivities reacted violently to childish misbehaviour grew more frequent. The "nasty face" of little Ilya, he wrote his wife, on one of the rare occasions when she was away from home, literally tortured him all day. When he finally overcame his indecision and talked to the child, he wept with his son. He had praised all his children to Granny, but in a letter four months later he wrote wearily: "I have felt so much and thought so much about them, and made such efforts—and to what end? In order that at best they may grow

up neither too bad nor too stupid. It's a strangely ordained world, and, as my friend Fet says, the longer I live in it, the less I understand." He was beginning to realize the truth of the Russian proverb: "Few children—few cares, more children—more cares."

Apart from his excursions to Samara in the summers, Tolstoy absented himself from Yasnaya Polyana with more and more reluctance. Trips to Moscow on the business of publishing *Anna Karenina* were unavoidable, but he never remained in the city any longer than necessary. Now, not even Moscow's cultural attractions could detain him. In December 1876, however, he felt a hurried business visit to the city well rewarded, for he made the acquaintance of the great composer Tchaikovsky. From his youth, Tchaikovsky had been an enthusiastic admirer of Tolstoy's works, which he felt had been written by an author with a superhuman power for probing the human heart. After their first meeting Tchaikovsky wrote a friend that he had been completely enchanted by Tolstoy's ideal personality. Tchaikovsky induced N. G. Rubinstein, then Director of the Moscow Conservatory, to give a musical evening solely for Tolstoy's benefit. When Tchaikovsky's "Andante in D Major" was played, Tolstoy burst into tears, not an unusual occurrence when he was deeply affected by music. Tchaikovsky admitted that his vanity as a composer had never been so flattered. After Tolstoy returned home, he wrote Tchaikovsky that his literary efforts had never been so wonderfully rewarded as on that musical evening, and he sent him a collection of folk songs taken down in the Yasnaya Polyana district in the hope that Tchaikovsky would make use of them, he remarked, "in a Mozart-Haydn style and not in the Beethoven-Schumann-Berlioz artificial manner!" Tchaikovsky did not think much of the songs, and it is rather strange that this acquaintance, begun with such ardour and lofty mutual regard on both sides, should have quickly cooled. Later evidence indicates that Tchaikovsky rather resented that Tolstoy, this searcher of souls in his novels, was in real life a simple fellow who had no interest in probing his soul and merely wanted to chat with him about music.

## v

During the period in which *Anna Karenina* was written, Sonya enjoyed and had earned the right to bask in the reflected glory of her husband's genius, but like any practical-minded woman, there were times when she would have willingly exchanged the reflected

glory for some commonplace fun. She was still an attractive young woman, and the long winters at remote Yasnaya Polyana provided her with no stage on which to shine. The summer with its visitors and festivities was always an eagerly anticipated season in a year of isolation, but now Tolstoy, exhibiting a moodiness strange for him, wrote to Fet that these visitors bored him.

Sonya confided her rebellion largely to the pages of her diary. "I hate those people," she wrote, "who tell me that I'm beautiful; I never thought this, and now it is already too late. And what good would beauty do me, what do I need it for? . . . Lyovochka would grow accustomed to the most hideous face, if only his wife were quiet, worshipful, and lived the kind of life that he had selected for her." And in another passage she complained gloomily: "This excessively isolated country existence has finally become insupportable to me. A sad apathy, an indifference to everything; today, tomorrow, the months, the years are all the same to me." At this charming time of their life together, why, she suspiciously asked, did he so willingly leave her for a trip to Samara? She used the excuse of collecting material for his biography to pore over his old diaries, and once again, after almost fifteen years of married life, these records of his old sins of the flesh filled her with brooding jealousy. Passages of fiercely expressed hatred for herself and her daily existence alternated with such pathetic declarations as "I'm much concerned with my own external appearance, and I begin to dream about another life than that which I am now leading. That is, I want to read much, to be educated, to be intellectual. I want to be beautiful, to think about clothes, and stupid things."

No doubt a series of illnesses contributed greatly to Sonya's frayed disposition at this time and kept her husband in a state of constant worry. "What situation can be more terrible for a healthy husband than the illness of a wife," he wrote to a friend in the spring of 1876. "This year I've experienced and continue to experience this situation. My wife has been dangerously ill. All winter she was unwell, grew weak, and is now again in bed. . . . For me, this situation is grievous, especially because I do not believe in doctors or in medicine. . . ." He thought of taking her abroad, but instead he sent her for treatment to a distinguished Petersburg physician in January 1877. And with deep concern he hastened off a letter to Granny in that city, asking her to watch out for his wife and give him an absolutely faithful report of her health. It was the first meeting between these two—the wife and the woman of whom

Sonya could never dispel a twinge of jealousy because of the part, however innocent, that she had played in her husband's past. Granny, as might be expected from this aristocratic lady of exquisite breeding, wrote Tolstoy a warm letter concerning his wife's charms. Sonya was more restrained in her reaction to Granny. The comforting report of the doctor was that he had never seen lungs so sound and strong (they had feared consumption). He found nothing organically wrong and attributed most of her illness to nerves. His concluding advice to husband and wife was that they should live in a normal and philosophic manner.

Tolstoy and his wife, however, had reached a point where life together in a normal and philosophic manner had become quite impossible. Something had quietly and unobtrusively dropped out of the happy harmony of their married existence. It had been caught in the ebb and flow of the ceaseless conflict in his soul, in the throb and stress of a gigantic disharmony. Outwardly, all remained as before, but a mutual dissatisfaction was felt. Nor could Tolstoy interest himself so wholeheartedly in family matters as formerly, and Sonya observed this defection. Tolstoy's mind was now full of thoughts on life and death. He had once again returned to the path that he had stumbled along and had been repeatedly diverted from all his life. He was never again to leave it. The questions that had intermittently tormented him for years must now be answered. The spiritual crisis had been reached. His confused and persistent spiritual quest made for coldness and disharmony in the family. Poor Sonya did not understand this soul-sickness; it depressed her and evoked protest. And she would continue to protest for the next thirty years.

## Chapter XXI

### THE CRISIS

**A**LL HIS life Tolstoy had been searching for God, often in ways that evaded his own consciousness. Instead of sinning his way to God, like Dostoyevsky, he had to reason his way to Him. What was about to take place in his spiritual life did not represent a change or a break with the past, but rather an intensification of a development that had been proceeding slowly ever since his youth. He had had moments of spiritual crisis in the past, when he had confronted the riddle of existence, but always the material concerns of life had intervened. The experience is a common one and is usually dismissed, either because man cannot be bothered or because he lacks the courage to probe to the bottom.

Marriage, with its hope of family happiness, had saved Tolstoy from a period of deep despair that had seemed crucial. What he did not realize, however, was that his fifteen happy years of marriage were a transition period—they had not cured his despair, but had merely diverted it. Shortly after marriage the same gnawing self-examination began again, quietly at first, but with a constantly rising tempo. Innumerable family cares and tremendous creative efforts momentarily lulled him in periods of spiritual agony. As he himself said, he was like a sick man who pays no attention to the first slight signs of an indisposition; then these signs reappear more and more often and merge into one uninterrupted period of suffering; the suffering increases, and before the sick man realizes it, what he took for a mere indisposition has become more important to him than anything in the world—it was death! This was a disease family happiness could no longer cure. Indeed, as the ideal existence he liked to consider it, his family happiness had ended for ever.

An observation in Tolstoy's notebook suggested that even as

early as 1865 he had begun to notice the slight signs of the "in-disposition" that soon developed into intense spiritual suffering. "Everyone knows and experiences in a dream," he wrote, "the conscious feeling of helplessness and at the same time a sense of the possibility of power, when you wish to run or strike a blow and your legs fail you or you hit powerlessly and softly—this feeling of captivity (I am unable to describe it in any better fashion) is momentarily undergone by the best of us even in our conscious state. In the most enduring, happy, and poetic moments, in moments of joyous, satisfied love, one feels even more strongly that there is much that is lacking, that something is cut out, that one's legs will not move, that one's blows are soft and futile." This sense of futility grew like a malignant cancer and slowly began to paralyse all Tolstoy's activities. He experienced moments of perplexity when life seemed to stand still, and he felt dejected, for he did not know what to do or how to live. These moments of perplexity passed, but they returned more and more frequently, and they were always expressed by the question: "What is it for? What does it all lead to?"

At first, Tolstoy thought these were rather stupid and childishly simple questions to which everyone knew the answers. But when he tried to solve them, he became convinced that they were the most important and deepest of life's questions. Now he had to know *why* he did anything—why he built up his estate, bettered the lot of his peasants, educated his children, or wrote novels. He found no satisfactory answer. Life came to a standstill; it had become meaningless. There was nothing ahead, he wrote, but suffering and real death—complete annihilation.

Tolstoy confessed to himself at this time that he had everything to live for—a loving wife, family, wealth, fame, and good health. Yet life seemed stupid, a spiteful joke that someone had played on him. After nearly fifty years of existence he had achieved almost everything man could wish for, but he stood on the summit of life like an archfool, seeing plainly that there was nothing in life, that there had been and would be nothing. And meanwhile someone watched and was amused by it all. He imagined himself clinging to the branch of life, yet knowing that the dragon of death inevitably waited to devour him. His love of family happiness and of art had ceased to be sweet to him. Death waited; all else was false.

The question that brought Tolstoy to the verge of suicide at the age of fifty was, as he expressed it himself, the simplest of questions lying in the soul of every man: Why should I live, why wish for anything, or do anything? In short, has life any meaning that the inevitable death awaiting one does not destroy? And to free himself of this dilemma, he experienced an almost irresistible urge to commit suicide. So strong was this inclination to self-destruction that he had to be wily with himself. He took a cord out of his room lest he be tempted to hang himself from the crossbeam, and he avoided hunting for fear that he would take this easy way out to shoot himself. One cannot doubt the reality of the forces that almost brought him to take his life, but his inquiring mind first imposed upon him the necessity of searching every possible source for a solution to this question. And his *Confession*, which he probably drafted in 1879, contains the remarkable record of this extensive inquiry.

The exact sciences, Tolstoy found, did not deal with the question at all, whereas the speculative sciences, culminating in metaphysics, dealt with it but supplied no satisfactory answer. He read and thought, and the more he read and thought the further he felt from his goal. He could get no answer from the materialists. The answers of all the pure philosophers and great thinkers he consulted may be summed up in the words of Socrates: "The life of the body is a blessing and we should desire it." What these profound minds had declared, Tolstoy concluded, had also been thought by millions upon millions of people. One could not be deceived—all was vanity! Science and philosophy failed to provide him with solace and faith in his hour of spiritual need, and the experience left him forever with the firm conviction that they fail to answer the basic questions of life.

In his search Tolstoy next turned to an inquiry into the lives of the men of his own class, and he decided that they met the problem that beset him in one of four ways. The first way was that of ignorance; some people, mostly women or the very young or dull, did not understand this question of life to which he could not close his eyes. The second way was that of the Epicureans, the majority of the men of his circle, who, because of their leisure, comfort, and all the favourable but accidental circumstances of their position, would not think of the inevitability

of sickness, age, and death, which would destroy all their pleasures.

The third way out, Tolstoy saw, was that of strength and energy, an escape that he wished to adopt himself, for it was suitable only for a few exceptional people who understood that life was an evil and must be destroyed. The last way out was that of the weak people, who saw the truth of the situation and yet clung to life as though they still hoped to obtain something from it. And sadly he realized that he belonged to this category.

The fact that he could reach such conclusions and not act upon them puzzled Tolstoy. If he really believed that life was a stupid joke, then why not get rid of it? Other people were contented and liked what they were doing, so why bother them with this conviction that life was repulsive and dull? His very failure to act convinced him that something was radically wrong with his reasoning and he turned his thoughts in a new direction.

## III

One runs the risk of suggesting that there was something of the amateur philosopher about Tolstoy's setting down in cold-blooded and logical fashion the progressive stages of his spiritual travail. But he did not live by reason alone. The quality of sheer feeling, so prevalent in his artistic productions, constantly warred against his rational convictions and tormented him to the point of physical suffering. Reason might prove to him, as it had to many others, that life was a long disease of which sleep was the only alleviation and death the only cure, but a feeling deep within him told him that there was something more, some ineluctable answer beyond the power of reason to divine.

Tolstoy had found no answer to his doubts either in knowledge or in the personal solution of the social class to which he belonged. Something now obliged him to turn for light to the peasantry. In his *Confession* he related that suddenly he instinctively felt that if he wished to live and to understand the meaning of life, he must seek this meaning not among those who had lost it—his own social class—but among those millions who knew it and who supported the burden of their own existence. Upon examination he saw that the peasantry had a knowledge of the meaning of life, and that that knowledge was their faith in God. This simple faith of the peasant, however, his reason at first rejected.



## THE CRISIS

Tolstoy's dilemma was more terrible than ever. He could find nothing along the path of reasonable knowledge except a denial of life, and in faith he could find nothing but a denial of reason. Yet he quickly realized that it was a mistake to expect finite things to supply a meaning to life, for the finite has no ultimate meaning apart from the infinite. The two must be linked together before an answer to life's problems could be reached. And he at last began to see that however unreasonable might be the replies given by faith in God, they had an advantage in that they introduced a relation between the finite and the infinite, without which no reply was possible.

Religion had hovered on the periphery of Tolstoy's mind for years, and on several occasions, such as during his stay in the Caucasus, at Sevastopol, and in France when his brother Nikolai died, the subject had entirely absorbed his thoughts. But only in the first half of 1870 did religion, with all its unreasonableness, begin to appeal consistently as the most profound expression of the wisdom of humanity. Although religion is illogical, he wrote to Fet in January 1873, "there is something in it." And the next year he jotted down in his notebook his intention (never fulfilled) to write an article on that "something by which people live," and the "something," he indicated, was religion.

Tolstoy saw at this time that religion gave meaning to life, but the Church itself was an insult to his reason. Only faith, however, could make life possible for him, for if a man lived, he must believe in something. His problem now was to reconcile faith and the Church that preached it, for he was willing to accept any faith if only it did not demand of him a direct denial of reason.

Tolstoy next began a detailed investigation of religions—Buddhism, Mohammedanism, and especially Christianity. He studied them in books, and he eagerly sought information from learned people, theologians, and monks. Even the popular "New Christians" of that time, the Evangelicals, who professed salvation by faith in the Redemption, were sympathetically considered. Tolstoy knew followers of Lord Radstock, the ardent and persuasive English Evangelical preacher, who travelled in Russia. One of them, Count A. P. Bobrinski, Minister of Ways of Communication, visited him in February 1876, and he wrote to Granny of this prominent Radstockite: "No one ever spoke better to me about faith than Bobrinski. He is irrefutable because he does not offer evidence, he simply believes, and you feel that he is happier than

those who do not have his faith, and you chiefly feel that it is impossible to acquire this happiness from faith by the power of reason; one must obtain it by a miracle. And this I desire."

But Tolstoy's searching intellect and instinctive hatred of insincerity quickly led him to condemn the Evangelicals, who hoped to make him their spokesman in Russia. He required a faith much more intelligible than the scheme of Redemption by the blood of Jesus. God pouring down grace on aristocratic members of the English Club and well-fed boards of stockholders seemed to him silly and immoral. The faith he sought had to face the facts of life, and he imagined that it could be won only through work and suffering. In a later letter to Granny he wrote: "It is strange and awful to say, but I believe in nothing that is taught by religion. And what is more, I not only hate and despise atheism, but I can see no possibility of living, and still less of dying, without faith. . . . As to the exigencies of my brain and the answers of the Christian faith, I find myself in the position of two hands wanting to clasp each other, but the fingers of which resist uniting."

Throughout 1876 and part of the next year Tolstoy's letters to close friends revealed his attempts, now in passionate outbursts, now in closely reasoned speculation, to reconcile the God of revealed religion with his reason and his demand for a faith that made life worth living. To the ordinarily sympathetic Granny, this complex, tortured searching seemed futile. It had never occurred to her that there was any choice in the matter of religious faith. Why did he not accept the salvation offered him by the Russian Orthodox Church? And she attributed his persistent ratiocination on this theme to false shame. The charge angered him. "The religious problem for me," he replied, "is exactly like the problem of a shipwrecked man: he looks out for something to seize in order to save himself from the imminent danger that he feels with all his being. And now for two years religion has held out to me this possibility of salvation; therefore false shame is utterly out of the question. The fact is that every time I seize this plank of salvation, I am drowned with it; I seem somehow able to float along if I do not catch hold of the plank."

His mind aglow with radiant thoughts that were constantly darkened by doubts, Tolstoy doggedly kept up the search for religious truth. "It is the first time you have spoken to me about the Deity—God," he eagerly wrote Fet in April 1877. "And I have long been thinking about that chief problem. But do not say

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that one cannot think about it. One not only can, but must! In all ages the best, the real people, have thought about it. And if we cannot think about it *as they did*, we must find out *how*."

### IV

Tolstoy's prolonged and profound spiritual struggle seemed to effect a transformation in his whole character. Sonya noted in her diary how the religious spirit in him grew stronger every day; and she wrote to her sister Tanya that his eyes were often fixed and strange; that he hardly talked at all and had quite ceased to belong to this world. His health suffered under the strain and his ebullient nature grew meek and humble. The very thought that he had a single enemy in the world became painful to him. In this temper of mind he remembered his longstanding feud with Turgenev and promptly sent him a letter to Paris, in which he recalled their old friendship and his initial literary indebtedness to him, and concluded: "Sincerely, if you can forgive me, I offer you all the friendship of which I am capable. At our time of life there is only one good—loving relations with people, and I will be very happy if they exist between us." Turgenev was touched and joyfully accepted the offer of reconciliation, promising to visit Tolstoy that summer. The dangerous fascination of the younger for the older writer had never really ceased, and Turgenev had followed closely, though critically, every step of Tolstoy's career during the whole course of their rupture of seventeen years.

True to his promise, Turgenev visited Yasnaya Polyana in the summer of 1878. The whole household bubbled with excitement, for most of its members had never seen the famous author. They were much impressed by his appearance—his huge frame and noble head with its full white beard and shock of hair. Both men seemed delighted to see each other. Turgenev thought Tolstoy had grown quite mature. Much of the time was spent in Tolstoy's study in philosophical and religious discussions. Turgenev charmed the family with his conversation, played chess with young Sergei, and read to all of them one of his tales, "The Dog," which, however, failed to impress his listeners. Despite his years, he was still very active and accompanied Tolstoy and the children in a walk about the estate. Coming across a seesaw that had been set up to amuse the youngsters, the two authors were tempted. The sixty-year-old Turgenev mounted one end of the board and the fifty-year-old

Tolstoy the other, and they seesawed while the children gleefully looked on.

Returning to his own estate Turgenev wrote: "I cannot help repeating to you once more what a fine and agreeable impression my visit to Yasnaya Polyana made on me, and how happy I am that the misunderstanding that existed between us has vanished without a trace, as though it had never been." Yet not even Tolstoy's newly discovered humility could entirely eradicate his suspicion of his rival's sincerity. For in subsequent letters to Fet, Tolstoy complained that Turgenev had not changed, and that it was better to "keep farther away from him and from sin," for he was "an unpleasant sort of quarrel-maker."

The new direction Tolstoy's thoughts were taking was reflected in his attitude towards war. In 1876 Russian volunteers hastened to the aid of Serbia and Montenegro in their hopeless struggle against Turkey, whose relations with Russia became seriously strained. In November, Tolstoy went to Moscow to hear about the war. "This whole affair disturbs me greatly," he wrote to Fet. "It is well for those to whom it is clear, but I am frightened when I reflect on the complexity of the conditions amid which history is made, and on how some Madame A.—with her vanity and false sympathy for something indefinite—becomes an indispensable cog in the machine!" In the last part of *Anna Karenina*, he had expressed his doubts about the self-sacrificing character of the Russian volunteers and the purity of the patriotism of the press. Levin exposes the hypocrisy of the press and condemns the chauvinistic sentiment that leads to war.

When war actually broke out between Russia and Turkey, in April 1877, Tolstoy was torn by conflicting emotions. His own experience with war in the past had left him with a sense of horror over its utter futility. Neither this, however, nor his growing conviction of the sinfulness of war could save him from the wave of patriotic enthusiasm that now swept the country. He followed the course of events with anxious expectancy, and the moral question involved was quickly displaced by a mounting anger over the lack of success of Russian arms. In fact, so agitated did he become over defeats that he began to write an article on the reasons behind these military failures.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A body of Turkish prisoners, held at a place not far from Yasnaya Polyana, interested Tolstoy. Struck by the fact that each captive had a copy of the Koran in his kit, he conversed with the Turks on religion.

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Throughout this period Tolstoy's distraught state of mind made literary work extremely difficult and at times impossible, although it is clear that he found a kind of refuge in creative efforts. Frequently he had lost sight of *Anna Karenina* in this religious mist, and he apparently gained comfort from the work only in describing Levin's painful search for spiritual values that reflected so strikingly his own quest. Towards the end of the novel, however, in 1877, Tolstoy returned to the design of *The Decembrists* which some fourteen years before he had laid aside in favour of *War and Peace*.

This old project, a logical sequel to *War and Peace*, and long conceived of as the second of a great trilogy of novels, aroused Tolstoy's sluggish creative powers. He had in mind a work as prodigious as *War and Peace*, and he now turned to it with something of his former zeal. Historical materials were collected and investigated; old Decembrists were visited and their memories of years of proud suffering in exile were ransacked at his request; and he went to Petersburg to inspect the dungeons of the Petropavlov Fortress, where some of the rebels had been confined—he was told politely that he could see every part of the prison except the dungeons, which only three persons in the whole Empire, the Emperor, the commandant, and the chief of the gendarmes, could leave after having once entered. His interest continued until January 1879, when he once again dropped the subject. His decision was no doubt prompted partly by the fact that the authorities refused him permission to study material in the State Archives, and partly because he lost sympathy with the rebels when he learned that their movement was not a purely national one but had been inspired by French example and thought. On the other hand, it is also clear that a resurgence of his spiritual unrest and his preoccupation with another work at this time—his *Confession*—helped turn him away from the theme.

Indeed, war or novel writing or practical affairs could not contend successfully with the spiritual ferment in his soul. With a sense of relief he wrote to Fet in April 1879: "Heaven knows where my Decembrists are now. I do not think about them, and were I to do so and to write, I flatter myself that my breath alone, of which the story would smell, would be unendurable to those who shoot men for the good of humanity. . . . But I should mention that even now I conscientiously abstain from reading

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newspapers and consider it a duty to wean everyone from that pernicious practice."

The growing intensity of Tolstoy's spiritual search for a religious faith that would solve all his doubts was gradually drawing him away from the material concerns of life. In March 1876, Sonya had written of her husband in her diary: "Today he says that he cannot live long in this terrible religious struggle in which he has been buried over these last two years, and now he hopes that he is close to the time when he may become an entirely religious man." He extracted a curious comfort from the *Pensées* of Pascal, a book that he eagerly read and wrote about to Granny and Fet. It was not, however, the dogmatic theology of the great Frenchman that pleased him, but the consuming and dramatically expressed doubts about life and death that drove Pascal on in his quest for religious faith.

Since the faith of worldly theologians and of the people of his own class repelled him, Tolstoy turned to believers among the poor, simple, unlettered folk: pilgrims, monks, sectarians, and peasants. Pilgrims he sought out on the highway, on their long plodding trips to holy places; peasants he stopped to converse with on their way to and from work; and hermits and monks he visited in their retreats and monasteries. In the summer of 1877, accompanied by Strakhov, he travelled to the famous Optina Monastery in the Kaluga district. There he held long religious discussions with the Elder, Father Ambrose, and was impressed by his wisdom. In June 1879, he visited the catacomb monastery at Kiev, but he gained little spiritual sustenance from this trip.

Tolstoy found a great deal of superstition mixed with Christian truths among these simple people, but the deeper he pondered the more convinced he became that they possessed a faith that was necessary to them and gave their life real meaning. Their days were passed in labour, and whereas people of his own social level were terrified of suffering and death, he observed that these poor folk lived and suffered and approached death with tranquillity. The better he came to know them, the more he loved them, and the easier it was for him to go on living. Under their influence he was conscious of a change taking place in him, a change that had long been preparing and the promise of which had always been in him. The life of his own spoiled and rich circle had lost all meaning for him, but the life of labouring people, of the great masses of mankind that produce life, now appeared to him in its true light.

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Tolstoy had by no means won his spiritual battle, for he saw clearly enough that the mainspring in the lives of these simple people was their faith in God, and this fact once again accentuated his own search for God. He went through endless and tortuous arguments with himself over the cause of causes, but he derived no comfort from the fact that men had persistently denominated "God" the first cause of all. He realized that the conception of God was something that he could evoke or refrain from evoking in himself at will.

The process of fluctuating between belief and unbelief induced in Tolstoy an awareness of something that had hitherto escaped his attention. He noticed that when he believed in God, life seemed worth living; when he forgot Him or disbelieved in Him, he had no further interest in life. "What more do you seek?" a voice exclaimed within him. "This is He. To know God and to live is one and the same thing. God is life. Live seeking God and then you will not live without God."

This experience drove all thoughts of suicide from his head. He recognized that the strength of life that now returned to him was not new; it had belonged to his earliest childhood and youth. He had simply reverted to the belief that the Will that produced him desired something of him—it desired a belief in God, in moral perfecting, and in a tradition transmitting to us the meaning of life.

The humble people of Russia had led Tolstoy to an understanding of the meaning of life and to a belief in God, and like them he felt that he must live "godly," and that he must renounce all the pleasures of life, must labour, humble himself, suffer, and be merciful. He realized that the essence of the peasant's faith in God, like the essence of every faith, consists in its giving life a meaning that death does not destroy. But he still had his exacting reason to contend with. Although he strove with all his soul to mingle with the people and fulfil the ritual side of their religion, his reason rebelled. For a time he accepted the dogma of the Church on the principle that truth reveals itself to love, and if you do not submit to the ritual of the Church, you transgress against love, and by transgressing against love, you deprive yourself of the possibility of recognizing the truth.

Accordingly, Tolstoy humbled his reason, faithfully attended the Russian Orthodox services, fasted, and prepared for communion. This kind of playing bopeep with God by observing

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religious ceremonies, the sincerity and truth of which his reason denied, soon revolted him. When the priest at communion made him say that he believed that what he was about to swallow was the true flesh and blood of the Lord, he felt a pain in his heart. He knew that he was lying and thus destroying his relation to God and losing all possibility of believing.

V. I. Alekseyev, an atheistically inclined tutor whom Tolstoy took into his house at this time, expressed surprise that a man of his intellect and sincerity could pray and observe the rites of the Church. It was a winter morning and they were discussing such questions in the drawing room at Yasnaya Polyana. The sun's slanting rays were striking the frosty tracery on the window. Tolstoy called Alekseyev's attention to the fact that in the wonderfully illuminated flower patterns he saw only the sun's reflected rays, but knew that afar off it was the real sun that produced the effect. The people, continued Tolstoy, saw only a reflected image of religion, but he himself looked further and saw—or at least knew—that very far away there existed the source from which all light comes. But the difference between him and the people, he pointed out, need not prevent their common brotherhood, for both looked at the source of light, only their reason penetrated it to different depths. Yet at times Tolstoy, upon returning from church, admitted that he could stand it no longer. The peasants chatting unconcernedly on everyday affairs at the most solemn moments of the service proved to him that their relation to religion was one of complete unconsciousness.

Fasting also troubled Tolstoy. When his doctor warned him that he was injuring his health, he made a pilgrimage to the Monastery of St. Sergius, some miles from Moscow, to consult the famous monk Leonid. He solved the problem, however, in his own way. One day his wife served up fast-food to all the household save the tutors, who by their own request received regular meals. A dish of the tutors' cutlets was left on the window sill. Tolstoy asked Ilya to pass him this dish, and he ate the cutlets with more than ordinary relish. From that time on he gave up fasting.

In the end, Tolstoy was obliged to confess to himself that belief in Orthodoxy was impossible. He wondered why the priests of his own Church considered the beliefs of all others heretical. Because of the conflicting interpretations of various Churches, the teaching of Christ that promised to unite all in one faith and love had ended in destroying what it sought to create. When he asked a



theologian why these sects should not unite on the main points on which all could agree, he was told that such concessions would bring reproach on the spiritual authorities for deserting the faith of their forefathers.

This was the last straw. Tolstoy was seeking faith, the power of life, and the priests were seeking the best way to fulfil before men certain human obligations. His disillusion was completed when he studied the relation of the Church to war and executions, for by now he had forsworn patriotism as an irrational state of mind. Killing was evil and repugnant to him, yet the teachers of the faith prayed for the success of Russian arms and sanctified murder in war.

Tolstoy did not leave the Church at this time, for he still felt its truth, but he no longer doubted that there was much in it that was false. What deeply concerned him, however, was: Where did the truth and falsehood come from? Both, he was convinced, were contained in the Scriptures and holy tradition and had been handed down by the Church. This conviction led him to a study and investigation of these writings and traditions, for he recognized that somehow a knowledge of the meaning of life was inseparably connected with the religious doctrine of Christianity. He knew that the explanation of everything, like the commencement of everything, must be concealed in infinity. The limits of the intellect he accepted, but he wished to understand in such a way that everything that was inexplicable should present itself to him as being necessarily inexplicable, and not as something he was under an arbitrary obligation to believe.

Tolstoy ended his *Confession* on this promise to write a future work—an examination of Christian theology—in an effort to determine what is true and what is false. He had come a long way from *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*. The *Confession*, however, is one of the noblest and most courageous utterances of man, the outpouring of a soul perplexed in the extreme by life's great problem—the relation of man to the infinite—yet executed with complete sincerity and high art. In it he dared to tell the cynical unbelievers that religion contained the only explanation of the meaning of life, and to the believers in dogmatic and popular religion he declared that the very foundations of their faith were erroneous. And in *Confession* he uncompromisingly turned his back on fifty years of his existence with all their joys and sorrows, all their fame and magnificent artistic achievements, and bravely looked forward to a

new way of life of a man seeking moral perfection in service to God and humanity.

In his diary, which he had resumed again after some thirteen years of interruption, he wrote in October 1879: "There are worldly people, heavy and wingless. Their activity is on the ground. There are strong ones among them: Napoleon. They leave terrible traces among men and cause a commotion, but it is all on earth. There are those whose wings grow equally and who slowly rise and fly: monks. There are light people, winged, who rise easily from among the crowd and again descend: good idealists. There are powerfully-winged ones who, drawn by carnal desires, descend among the crowd and break their wings. Such am I. Then they struggle with broken wings, flutter desperately, and fall. If my wings heal I will fly high. God grant it. There are those who have heavenly wings, and purposely—from love to men—descend to earth (folding their wings) and teach men to fly. When they are needed no more, they fly away: Christ."

*Part IV*

“And Finally  
There Is the Fourth Period . . .  
in Which I Now Live  
and Hope to Die . . .”



## Chapter XXII

### A NEW FAITH

**A**FTER his long spiritual struggle, Tolstoy reached the conclusion that the problem of life is explained only by religion. But at the end of *Confession* he indicated his distrust of the Orthodox Church and declared his intentions of separating what was true from what was false in the teachings of the Church and in the Bible. Over the next few years he devoted himself to this task. With magnificent arrogance, he swept through centuries of accumulated Biblical scholarship, textual exegesis, commentaries, and historical studies. Like an intellectual titan, he absorbed this mountain of material as he had the "whole libraries" connected with the theme of *War and Peace*. Only now he worked with the spirit of God in his heart and fully conscious of the fact that what he wrote might never see the light of day, in Russia at least. That his attitude towards established religion would be deeply hostile was almost a foregone conclusion: his entire previous intellectual history had been steeped in dissent.

Tolstoy entitled his first important religious work, which he wrote in 1880, *An Examination of Dogmatic Theology*.<sup>1</sup> It is perhaps the least read of all his productions, and undeservedly so, for it is a remarkably fervent and compellingly logical attack on the Russian Orthodox Church. There was nothing of the Voltaire in Tolstoy. He combined with a profoundly religious spirit an unsparing truthfulness. Heedless of personal risk in condemning an all-powerful Church, he sought the truth wherever he might find it.

In a sense, the anarchistic temper of Tolstoy's mind admirably fitted him for an examination of dogmatic theology: he was not disposed to accept anything that would not stand the test of

<sup>1</sup> This work was not published until 1891, and then in a poor edition in Geneva. A better version was printed in England in 1903. The most authoritative edition, with variants, may be found in the Jubilee Edition (Vol. XXI). There is no satisfactory English translation.

reason. On the other hand, he had the defect of this virtue, for he was inclined to place too much faith in his own reasoning. After a thorough examination of the dogmas of the Church, he concluded that they were false and an insult to human intelligence. The Church itself, he charged, supported its tenets by deceitful verbal tricks, and sought merely power instead of trying to fulfil its obligation to spread a right understanding of religion on the basis of Christ's teachings. Moreover, he was convinced that nobody really believed the dogmas of the Church, because they meant nothing at all, and a statement must have meaning before it can be believed. To be faithful to a belief, Tolstoy argued, you must have a belief, and a real belief cannot be founded on credulity; it can be achieved only by sincere mental effort.

Tolstoy went still further, for he insisted that Christian dogma deliberately attempts to turn men's minds away from the essential teaching of Christ. Christ had nothing to say about the fall of Adam, the Trinity, or the scheme of the Redemption, but He had a great deal to say about the necessity of love and pity and man's duty to man. The teaching of Christ (about humility, not judging, forgiveness of injuries, self-sacrifice, and love) the Church extolled in words, but in practice it approved of what was incompatible with the teaching. For all human evils—the condemnation of individuals, of whole peoples, of other religions, and the executions and wars that resulted from such condemnations—were all justified by the Church.

After having dismissed the dogmas of the Church and the whole theology in which they were imbedded, Tolstoy turned to an investigation of the Gospels, for he was mystified by what he considered the Church's distortion of the spirit of Christ's teaching. He had observed that those passages in the Gospels on which Church dogmas were based were the most obscure, whereas those from which one derived the practical teaching of Christ were the clearest and most definite. Yet the dogmas and the Christian obligations that resulted from them were defined by the Church in the most precise manner, while mention was made of the practical fulfilment of Christ's teaching only in the most indefinite and mystical manner. Christ, he believed, could not have intended this when He taught his disciples.

At first, Tolstoy's study of the Gospels, particularly the Sermon on the Mount, left him perplexed. The words in the Sermon often were not clear. So complete was the renunciation of everything that

life retained little meaning. Nor could he accept the theological explanation that the precepts of the Sermon on the Mount were indications of the perfection towards which one should strive, but that fallen man cannot by his own efforts attain this perfection, and that his safety lies in faith, prayer, and the Sacraments. Would Christ give admirable rules relating to man's salvation and then deny him the possibility of achieving it by his own individual strength of will?

Tolstoy at last found a key to much that had been unclear to him in the Gospels in the passage in Matthew: "Ye have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, Resist not him that is evil." Previously the words "But I say unto you, Resist not him that is evil" had signified nothing to him, and still less the passage that immediately follows: "But whosoever smiteth thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." This latter statement seemed an exaggeration, as though Christ were extolling suffering for the sake of suffering. Then suddenly Tolstoy perceived that all was explained if he accepted literally Christ's injunction: "Resist not him that is evil." For then it would appear that Christ did not command man to present the cheek in order to make him suffer, but He commanded man not to resist him that is evil, and added that this might involve having to suffer.

By accepting the literal meaning of nonresistance to evil with all its implications, much that had been obscure in the Gospels became plain to Tolstoy. For by not resisting him that is evil one will never do violence, will never do an act contrary to love, which Tolstoy felt was the real substance of Christianity. All who would fulfil the law must be prepared to abandon everything and endure all consequences.

Once having decided upon an acceptance of the literal meaning of Christ's words in this instance, Tolstoy applied the principle to many other significant precepts enunciated in the Sermon on the Mount and in the Gospels in general. The results astonished him. He was able to shear away much of the mystical and allegorical interpretation that had distorted the plain meaning of these precepts over the ages. In some instances, by actual study of the earliest Greek texts, he exposed accidental and perhaps deliberate mistranslations. Particularly in the chapters of the Sermon on the Mount, he came to the conclusion that Christ was patiently summing up his practical advice by indicating what had been

taught in ancient times and then offering an extension or even a direct contradiction to the old precepts. And from this study Tolstoy elucidated five commandments of Christ that he accepted himself, and which if observed by all would alter the whole course of men's lives. Put in brief form they are: *Do not be angry*; *Do not lust*; *Do not swear oaths* (by which is meant: "Do not give away the control of your future actions"); *Resist not him that is evil*; and *Love your enemies*.

Tolstoy maintained that these commandments represented the core of Christ's teaching, and if practised would link religion to our daily lives. He saw clearly all their far-reaching implications. For a man who refuses to swear an oath cannot take any part in the offices of civil government or serve in the army; the complete observance of the commandment *Resist not him that is evil* involves ultimately the entire abolition of compulsory legislation, law courts, police, and prisons, as well as all forcible restraints of man by man; and adherence to *Love your enemies* would mean the end of all wars. He fully realized, of course, that man is weak and incapable of a strict observance of such precepts as *Do not be angry* or *Do not lust*, and to abstain from anger and lust as much as possible, he admitted, was perhaps all that our animal natures would allow.

It would be a mistake to regard Tolstoy as an iconoclast or a mere religious reformer. If there were no God, he might not have invented one, but if his five commandments had not existed in the Gospels, he would very likely have formulated a similar series of rules of life that he would have regarded as his religion. For all these commandments were implicit in much that he had said and written in his diaries, letters, and artistic works before 1880. Unlike the traditional theologian, he was not concerned with the personality of God or the creation and redemption of the world. He simply wanted an explanation of the meaning of life, and he found it in some Higher Power that manifested itself through the workings of reason and conscience. And by experience he became convinced that the existence of that Power in him constituted a moral force for good which in turn gave a meaning and purpose to life that was not defeated by death. His religion, then, amounted to a series of precepts that made life worth living, and which, if sincerely practised, would enable him to accomplish the greatest amount of good. He had the courage to preach this religion and to give it force by sincerely attempting to live it. And he proclaimed his faith in the teeth of a powerful and jealous Church that was



scandalized by his exposure of its fraudulent dogmas, and in the face of a scornful science and materialistic philosophy that often ignored the existence of moral law.

Immediately after finishing his *Examination of Dogmatic Theology* in 1880, Tolstoy began another book, the *Union and Translation of the Four Gospels*,<sup>1</sup> really a continuation of the first work. With characteristic daring he set out to compile his own version of the Gospels and to justify every change. He rearranged the chapters and verses to suit himself and discarded anything he disapproved of or could not understand. The artist's power of selection, as well as scholarship, is reflected in this undertaking. The result is a version of the four Gospels that presents a remarkably consistent and convincing narrative, and at the same time reveals a new, fresh conception of Christ's personality and teaching. While admitting that an author is often mistaken in judging the comparative worth of his own production, Tolstoy insisted that the *Union and Translation of the Four Gospels* was more important than anything he had ever written. It cost him, he remarked years later, the greatest and happiest effort; it was the turning point of his whole life, and served as a basis for everything that he wrote after it.

As by-products of these two large works in 1880 came two smaller productions. From a few rejected fragments of *An Examination of Dogmatic Theology*, a secretary pieced together an article, "Church and State," that circulated widely in manuscript, since its publication was forbidden.

In his *Union and Translation of the Four Gospels*, he had set down in three parallel columns the Greek text, the Russian version, and finally his own translation. Much of this large work is made up of his textual notes and commentaries that cover a vast range of material. The family tutor, V. I. Alekseyev, thought so highly of it that he wished to copy it, in order to make it available to his friends. But his stay in the house was already drawing to a close, so he decided to limit himself to copying only Tolstoy's translation of the four Gospels. Tolstoy looked over the copy and wrote a foreword and conclusion. This smaller work, under the title *A Short Account of the Gospels*, eventually appeared in print and achieved perhaps wider dissemination than any of his formal religious productions.

<sup>1</sup> This book was finished in 1881, but he continued to work on it until the next year. It was not allowed to be printed in Russia until 1908, and will be published for the first time in complete form in the Jubilee Edition (Vols. XXII-XXIII).

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These writings of 1880-1881 laid the solid foundations of Tolstoy's religious thought, although he was to produce many more works, large and small, in which he elaborated and modified his religious thinking and applied it to nearly every aspect of human endeavour. In the course of time his opinions about Christ changed slightly, and, after having become more thoroughly versed in the religions of the world, he ceased to regard Christ's teaching as unique. For he eventually perceived that what is really vital in life lies at the root of all great religions.

Although Tolstoy came to attach less significance to Christ's personality and to the exact phraseology of the Gospels, he always held to his conviction that the Gospels contain the essential truth and that his interpretation of Christ's teaching was correct. Biblical scholars, like professional pedagogues in the past, resented his intrusion upon their domain. They scornfully pointed out his mistakes, and in some cases he made them, though his scholarly ability was considerable. But he brought to his investigation of the texts of the Gospels a genius never found among scholars and capacities that could not fail to be enlightening in a kind of study that had been feeding on its own substance for generations. His essential contributions have never been refuted. Unusual inventive powers, imagination, and wonderful common sense swept away encrusted traditions and supplied emendations and interpretations in textual exegesis that were beyond the powers of most scholars.

## II

In striking contrast to the spiritual suffering Tolstoy had been through was the happiness he now derived from his newly found faith. Experience would soon teach him how difficult it was to conform to his religious precepts. In the meantime, he could not keep quiet about the failure of others to live up to them. In fact, he had scarcely formulated the commandments before he attempted to persuade the Tsar of All the Russias to observe several of them in a situation of grave national consequence.

In the 1860's and 1870's Alexander II had striven to correct the abuses of his predecessor's reign, one of the most reactionary in Russia, by supporting liberal legislation, such as the emancipation act that freed the serfs. These progressive measures by no means satisfied the adherents of a growing revolutionary movement that demanded nothing less than the end of autocratic rule. The

activities of the revolutionists were met with severe reprisals and their organizations were forced underground, but they continued to perpetrate violent acts, freely risking their lives to murder those they considered the enemies of the people. On March 1, 1881, a group of terrorists, belonging to the revolutionary organization Peoples' Freedom, blew up the carriage of Alexander II and killed the Tsar. Six of the terrorists were apprehended (including one woman, Sofya Perovski) and were subsequently condemned to death.

The assassination of the Tsar shocked Tolstoy, as it did nearly everyone in Russia, but he was even more distressed over the condemned terrorists. His instinctive repulsion to capital punishment was now intensified by the faith he had adopted, a faith that regarded the taking of human life as a mortal sin. According to the teaching of Christ, he could not absolve himself from responsibility in the execution of these terrorists simply because he himself was not the executioner. This thought obsessed him, depressed his spirits, and convinced him that he must protest. He could not help thinking of the condemned, and of those who would perform the execution, and especially of the new Tsar Alexander III, who, he imagined, would experience a feeling of joy in pardoning the murderers of his father.

One morning Tolstoy, filled with gloom, came down to his coffee and called Alekseyev into the drawing-room. He explained to the tutor, a well-educated man and a former participator in revolutionary activity, that in accordance with Christ's teaching he was thinking of writing a letter to the Tsar to beseech him to pardon the condemned terrorists, and he asked Alekseyev's opinion of this step. The tutor, who had become a favourite of Tolstoy and was already partial to his new faith, agreed that in the circumstances this was the least he could do. Sonya, who had overheard the conversation in the next room, suddenly entered, and in an agitated voice declared to the tutor: "Vasili Ivanovich, what are you saying! If my son and daughter had been present instead of Leo Nikolayevich, who does not need your advice, I would at once order you to leave!"

After dinner that day Tolstoy went into his study to rest. He fell asleep and saw in a dream the execution of the slayers of Alexander II, and instead of the executioners designated by the court, it was as though he himself executed them. He awoke in horror and at once wrote a letter to Alexander III.

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The letter<sup>1</sup> began in a humble tone: "I, an insignificant, unrecognized, weak, and wretched man, write a letter to the Russian Emperor and advise him how to act in the most complex and difficult circumstances that have ever occurred. I feel how strange, improper, and bold this is, and yet I write." His tone soon changed, however, to that of a tremendously earnest but courageous pleader. He wrote to the Emperor "simply as man to man," he said, and not with the customary "flowers of servile and false eloquence that only obscure both feeling and thought." And at times he boldly assumed the role of prophet that became so characteristic of him in the future.

Tolstoy acknowledged how horrible was the crime that had been committed by the terrorists, and he admitted the possibility that their adherents, "for the sake of the imaginary general good they seek, must wish to kill you too." That the Tsar's soul was filled with a desire for vengeance on his father's murderers, he could well understand. Yet his primary duty was not as Tsar, but as a man, and if he would only follow the teaching of Christ, the temptation of vengeance would be destroyed. Then Tolstoy quoted the passage from Matthew on which he based his commandment: *Love your enemies*, and he implored the Tsar to return good for evil.

Tolstoy then declared that for some twenty years revolutionary organizations had been attempting to destroy the existing order by all manner of crimes against the State. To combat this opposition the government employed two methods: either liberal measures were passed to appease the opposition or else the cruellest repressions were used. Both these methods, he insisted, had failed dismally, for opposition to the government had increased and grew more violent all the time. Why not try a third method—Christian forgiveness—he asked. You stand, he warned the Tsar, at the parting of the ways. If those triumphed who thought that Christian truth was mere talk, and that in political life blood must be spilt, then the Tsar would pass forever from "a blessed condition of purity and life in God, and would enter on the dark path of State-necessity, justifying everything—even the infringement of the law of God and man."

In an eloquent peroration Tolstoy concluded his letter to the Tsar as follows:

<sup>1</sup> Only the first draft of this letter exists, and there is evidence that the one sent to the Emperor differed somewhat from the original version. Tolstoy said the original was longer and more heartfelt.

“Forgive! Return good for evil, and from among a hundred evil-doers scores will turn not to you, not to them (this is not important), but they will turn from the devil to God, and the hearts of thousands, of millions, will throb with joy and tenderness at this example of goodness shown from the throne, at a moment so terrible for the son of a murdered father.

“Monarch! If you should do this, if you should summon the condemned, give them money, and send them away somewhere to America, and should write a manifesto headed with the words: ‘But I say to you, love your enemies,’ I do not know how others would react, but I, a poor subject, would be your dog, your slave. I would weep from tenderness, as I now weep every time I hear your name. But what do I say?—‘I do not know how others would react.’ I know that at those words goodness and love would pour forth like a flood over Russia. The truths of Christ live in the hearts of people, and they alone live, and we love people only in the name of these truths. . . .

“Who are these revolutionists? They are people who hate the existing order of things; they find it bad, and they have in mind the establishment of a future order that will be better. It is impossible to contend against them by killing and destroying them. Their number is not important, but their thought. To struggle against them one must struggle spiritually. Their ideal is a sufficiency for all, equality, and freedom. To oppose them one must oppose their ideal with one that is superior to theirs and includes it. The French, English, and Germans struggle with them now, and also to no purpose.

“There is only one ideal that can be opposed to them. And that ideal, the one from which they start—though not understanding and blaspheming it—and which includes theirs, is the ideal of love, of forgiveness, and of returning good for evil. Only one word of forgiveness and Christian love, spoken and fulfilled from the height of the throne, and the path of Christian rule which is before you, waiting to be trod, can destroy the evil that is corroding Russia. As wax before the fire, every revolutionary struggle will melt away before the man-tsar who fulfils the law of Christ.”

To get such a letter to the Tsar was no easy task. Tolstoy had recourse to his friend Strakhov in Petersburg. He sent him the letter with a covering note, in which he suggested a plan. Strakhov was asked to deliver the letter to K. P. Pobedonostsev, former tutor of Alexander III, and at this time Head of the Holy Synod. Tolstoy

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hoped Pobedonostsev, who had the confidence of the Tsar, would present the letter to him. In his note to Strakhov, he requested that, if possible, the letter be presented without his name, but he insisted that his name be used if the slightest danger were connected with such a presentation.

Tolstoy's agitated wife complicated matters by insisting upon adding a postscript to this note to Strakhov. Despite all her pleas, she wrote, her husband was determined to send the letter to the Tsar. "Read the letter," she begged, "judge it yourself, and then ask Pobedonostsev's opinion whether or not this letter will arouse in the Emperor any disagreeable feelings or ill-will for Leo Nikolayevich. In that case, for God's sake do not permit the letter to get to the Emperor."

Tolstoy also wrote to Pobedonostsev, explaining his sense of moral responsibility which had obliged him to compose the letter, and soliciting his aid in seeing that it reached the Emperor. But the influential Pobedonostsev, who soon gained the reputation of being the most reactionary force in Russia, flatly refused to transmit Tolstoy's letter to the Emperor.

Strakhov then turned the letter over to Professor K. N. Bestuzhev-Ryumin, who put it in the hands of the Grand Duke Sergei Alexandrovich. Through him it is reported to have reached the Emperor, but his only response, how authentic is uncertain, is recorded by Sonya: "Concerning this letter, Alexander III commanded that Count L. N. Tolstoy be told that if an attempt had been made on his own life, he could pardon it, but he did not have the right to pardon the murderers of his father."

Tolstoy's letter to the Emperor, however, did cause some repercussions which appear to have worried the powerful Pobedonostsev. Fearful that rumours of the intervention of so distinguished an author might create a party opposed to the execution, he wrote the Emperor pleading that nothing be allowed to interfere with the executions. Alexander III reassured him. "Be calm," he replied, "no one will dare to come to me with such proposals; I guarantee that *all six will be hanged.*" And so they were.

Three months after Tolstoy had written to him to secure his assistance, and when the terrorists had long been cold in their graves, Pobedonostsev condescended to reply. The letter began with a snivelling excuse for tardiness, but it contained also a veiled warning that boded ill for Tolstoy in the future. "In such an

important affair," he wrote in explanation of his unwillingness to accommodate Tolstoy, "everything must be done in accordance with one's faith. And after reading your letter, I saw that your faith is one thing, and mine and that of the Church another, and that our Christ is not your Christ. Mine I know as a man of strength and truth, healing the weak; but in yours I thought I detected the features of one who is feeble and himself needs to be cured."

So Tolstoy had failed in his first major attempt to persuade another to practise the faith he had embraced. In this instance failure was perhaps the only possible result. The letter to the Emperor is a fair sample of the attitude towards public affairs that Tolstoy retained for the rest of his life. And this attitude raises the question of how thorough was his understanding of the processes of government in Russia. In the past, with few exceptions, he had avoided any active participation in political matters. His distrust of civil institutions had been manifested on frequent occasions. Nor can there be any doubt that deeply rooted prejudice, springing from his own aristocratic background, made it difficult for him to have any sympathy for the widespread revolutionary movement. His conviction that the ills of society could be corrected by observing the law of Christ led him into a dangerous oversimplification of political and social problems. He did not see that pardoning a few terrorists, who were quite willing to sacrifice their lives to achieve their ends, would not solve an age-old problem that involved the deprivation of the most elementary human rights for millions of subjects of a despotic government.

The fact is, Tolstoy was seeking for the Kingdom of God on earth. His premise was that men can exist successfully and happily by living according to the precepts of the Sermon on the Mount alone. Human experience, however, does not support the premise. Outside the confines of society, no limit need be placed on an individual's striving for moral perfection. But as a member of organized society, the individual is obliged to submit to forces that are inimical to the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount. Eventually, Tolstoy recognized this fact. His great virtue and largest service to humanity was his insistence that most of the suffering of mankind resulted from failure to abide by moral laws. Implicit in his letter to the Emperor is the clear realization that the failure of both the established government and its revolutionary opponents, in Russia and elsewhere, was caused then, and always will be caused, by the absence of morality in striving for political and social ends.

## III

Knowledge of Tolstoy's religious experience and his new faith came as a surprise, and sometimes an unpleasant one, to his close friends. Many of his admirers, to whom he was the famous author of *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*, were shocked and bewildered by his abandonment of literature for religion, and idle rumours about this defection quickly went the rounds. "Here in Petersburg," communicated the faithful Strakhov, "all discuss your revolution"; and Dostoyevsky, while on a visit to Moscow, wrote to his wife: "Grigorovich reported that . . . Tolstoy has almost lost his mind and perhaps may have gone completely insane."

Despite sincere efforts to be humble, Tolstoy did not always wear his new religious halo gracefully. Poor Granny, that old and ageing friend, was one of the first to fall afoul of his recently acquired beliefs. For years she had been the pious confidante of his religious and philosophical speculations, and in numerous letters she had kindly but persistently attempted to prod him into an acceptance of Russian Orthodoxy. In January 1880, he went to Petersburg to make arrangements for a fourth edition of his collected works, for which he received the munificent sum of 25,000 rubles. While in the city he visited Granny, whom he had not seen for a long time. The meeting ended in a heated discussion on religion. On this subject he was capable at times of forgetting his Christlike humility for the thundering tone of an Old Testament prophet. He parted from Granny profoundly agitated and left the city without saying farewell to her. A letter of apology quickly followed, in which he could not refrain from reminding her that he had torn himself away from the lies that her Church taught. "You have a sincere love for God, for goodness," he concluded, "yet you cannot understand where He is." She dispatched an indignant reply, but followed it up soon after with a letter in which she calmly argued their points of difference. In a long answer he patiently explained why it was impossible for him to accept the religion of the Church. The Christian love they both professed somehow succeeded in alienating them.

Nor did the many years of intimate friendship with Fet mix well with Tolstoy's religious zeal. Their correspondence dwindled, and in May 1881 Tolstoy wrote what appears to have been his last letter to Fet. Fet was a practical man, as well as a poet, and hence



Tolstoy's extreme religious views, especially his belief that men should not possess property, seemed like so much nonsense to this large and successful estate owner.

Turgenev could only lament the great loss to Russian literature that would result from Tolstoy's preoccupation with religion. As though he felt that praise might tempt Tolstoy to hew to the literary line, he wrote him from Paris in January 1880 to tell him of his success among the French. He quoted a letter from Flaubert on reading *War and Peace*, in which the great French novelist had declared: "It is of the first rank! What painting and what psychology! . . . It seemed to me that at times there were things worthy of Shakespeare! I uttered cries of admiration during the reading!" And to fill the cup, Turgenev quoted from his own letter to About, printed in a Paris newspaper, concerning the merits of the French translation of *War and Peace*. He had called Tolstoy "the most popular of contemporary Russian authors" and *War and Peace* "one of the most remarkable books of our time."

The glamour of artistic success, however, was something that Tolstoy was now beginning to think of as a positive evil. He wrote to V. V. Stasov, librarian and art critic, a recent fervent worshipper and friend: "Concerning *Anna Karenina*: I assure you that this abomination no longer exists for me, and I'm only vexed because there are people for whom this sort of thing is necessary." For Turgenev, on the other hand, artistic success was nearly life's sweetest happiness. He visited Yasnaya Polyana in May 1880 to execute a literary commission. The eightieth anniversary of Pushkin's birth was to be celebrated in Moscow, and the officials in charge of the affair, aware of Tolstoy's dislike for such public celebrations, had asked Turgenev to persuade him to attend. The visit turned out to be an unusually pleasant one, but when Turgenev, at an opportune moment, made his request, Tolstoy flatly refused.

The next year, in July, Tolstoy visited Turgenev at Spasskoye. He arrived unexpectedly at one o'clock in the morning. The poet Ya. P. Polonski, who was also Turgenev's guest, went down to let Tolstoy in, and at first took him for a peasant, for he was sunburnt and dressed in a common blouse with a leather belt. The writers sat up until three in the morning in animated discussion. Polonski had not seen Tolstoy for twenty years, and he was struck by his manner, which seemed to him surprisingly soft and of a winning simplicity. "He appeared to me," said Polonski, "to be reborn, imbued with a different faith, a different love. . . . He did not

impose his own views on us and quietly heard out Ivan Sergeyevich's [Turgenev's] objections. In brief, he was no longer the count as I knew him."

On August 22 of the same year Turgenev paid his last visit to Yasnaya Polyana, for he had not long to live. It was Sonya's birthday and merriment reigned in the household. Turgenev entered into the spirit of the occasion and danced a quadrille that the young folks arranged. Then taking off his coat and sticking his thumbs into his waistcoat, he began to perform weird movements with his legs, declaring that this was the way the cancan was performed in Paris. All were immensely amused, but in his diary that day the stern Tolstoy entered: "Turgenev—the cancan. It is sad."

■ The one Russian author who might have sympathized with Tolstoy's faith in Christ's teaching was Dostoyevsky. And it is an interesting fact that at just about this time he had begun to manifest a lively interest in Dostoyevsky, who had already acclaimed him in print as one of the great writers of the age. Dostoyevsky had been anxious to go to Yasnaya Polyana to meet him, but when he consulted Turgenev on the matter the latter discouraged the visit by telling him how difficult it was to approach Tolstoy. The two never did meet.

Years before (1862) Tolstoy had strongly recommended to Granny Dostoyevsky's *House of the Dead*, and now, in 1880, he wrote to Strakhov, who was close to Dostoyevsky and his future biographer, that he had just reread this work and did not know "of a better book in all modern literature, including Pushkin. Not the tone, but the point of view is surprising—sincere, natural, and Christian. . . . If you see Dostoyevsky, tell him that I love him." Strakhov showed the letter to Dostoyevsky, who was immensely pleased with this praise from a man whose literary art he thought supreme.

The next year Dostoyevsky died. Sonya wrote to her sister Tanya: "He [Tolstoy] and all of us have been terribly affected by Dostoyevsky's death. He had only just become known to all people when he died. This led Lyovochka to think of his own death, and he has become still more concentrated and silent." In answer to a letter from Strakhov about the death, Tolstoy wrote: "How I should like to be able to say all that I feel about Dostoyevsky. You, in describing your own feelings, have in part described mine. I never saw this man and never had any direct relations with him, and suddenly, when he died, I understood that he was the closest,

dearest, and most necessary man to me. . . . I reckoned him as my friend, and never thought otherwise than that we should meet at one time or another. And suddenly at dinner—I ate alone, was late—I read of the death. What a support has been torn from me. I was at a loss, and then it became clear how precious he was to me, and I wept and weep now.”

Tolstoy did not deceive himself. Of all the Russian writers of the time Dostoyevsky was probably closest to him in an ideological sense, however strikingly contrasted their artistic works may be. In their thought and in an insistence upon the importance of morality in life, they had a great deal in common. Dostoyevsky's sweeping doctrine of salvation by suffering and his condemnation of reason as an approach to faith would have repelled Tolstoy. But Christ was their hero. Both men were seekers after God, and in faith in Him they saw the only possibility of salvation. Dostoyevsky, however, attempted to realize the Kingdom of God in his art; Tolstoy sought through his active deeds to establish it on earth.

In his visits to Yasnaya Polyana, Turgenev had noted with dismay that Tolstoy surrounded himself with Bibles and Gospels in nearly all languages, and that he had composed a trunkful of writings on these books. When Tolstoy read some of his religious works to him, he confessed that he simply did not understand them. And he thought with horror of the influence these works might have on younger writers, one of whom, V. M. Garshin, he indicated as already a follower of Tolstoy.

As a matter of fact, the young Garshin, who was then on the verge of a mental breakdown, turned up at Yasnaya Polyana one early spring evening in 1880. He appeared at the door unannounced, and when Tolstoy asked what he wanted, he replied: “The first thing I want is a glass of vodka and the tail of a herring.” There was a mad look in his bold bright expression and childish smile that fascinated Tolstoy. Drink and food were provided, and he soon identified himself as the author of the sensational story, *Four Days on the Battlefield*, which Tolstoy had read with great admiration. Soon he held Tolstoy and the children entranced by accounts of his experiences in the Russo-Turkish War in which he had distinguished himself. And then with breathless haste he outlined his plan to bring about universal happiness. Tolstoy was interested, and he must have been struck by Garshin's moral sensitiveness and his condemnation of the horrors of war. There was in Garshin's

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personality a Dostoyevsky-like sense of infinite compassion and pity that found a ready response in Tolstoy. A few days later this half-mad author was seen riding by on a horse that he had purloined from a Tula cabby, talking to himself and waving his arms wildly.

The one friend from whom Tolstoy could expect a profound sympathetic understanding of his religious transformation was Strakhov. This shy, modest man could be firm to the point of exasperation. He did not tear things with his teeth, Tolstoy wrote him once, but with soft, strong paws. He was interested in everything that Tolstoy did, and since he visited Yasnaya Polyana nearly every summer, he was made a confidant of Tolstoy's developing religious thought. During the entire period of his theological investigations in 1880 and 1881, Tolstoy could always be certain of Strakhov's aid in obtaining material and of his kindly, patient, but independent criticism.

This was more, Tolstoy quickly learned, than he could expect from any of his old friends. Although his new faith obliged him to give no offence and to live in amity with all men, his strenuous nature and emphatic expression often led him into being severe on the conduct and occupations of others. He was soon made to realize that the discoverer of a truth, even though it be old and forgotten, must pay a price in friendship. For his friends and the public, he was a writer of great fiction, and they resented his preaching Christian ethics and donning the prophet's robe. A still greater tragedy brought about by his devotion to the Prince of Peace was that it strained his relations with his family and ultimately left him spiritually alone in his own household.

### IV

Despite God and religion, fifty-two years of life, and a beard plentifully streaked with grey, the young effects in Tolstoy were not defunct, and for a brief time in 1880 they were sorely tried. Nearly every day on his walks he encountered Domna, the buxom young cook, whose husband was absent on military service. At first he was contented merely to walk behind her, observing, but one day he whistled softly, caught up with her, chatted, and made a rendezvous in a quiet lane for the next day. Conscience struggled with desire as he set out for the appointed spot. On the way he had to pass under the windows of the children's schoolroom. At that critical moment little Ilya poked his head out of the window and reminded

his father that it was time for their Greek lesson. Fate was on the side of conscience. He gave the lesson.

Temptation, however, continued. Tolstoy prayed, and strove to overcome his desire for Domna. One day he took the tutor, Alekseyev, aside and excitedly whispered:

"I'm assailed by temptation of the flesh, and it seems that I'm utterly powerless to resist. I'm afraid I'll give in. Help me!"

And he told the whole story as though deliberately trying to humiliate himself.

"Well, what do you want me to do?" asked the puzzled tutor.

"Come with me on my daily walks. We will walk and talk together, and perhaps this desire will pass off."

Tolstoy seemed able to put Satan behind him by this unique device but, not to tempt the devil too far, he finally managed to have the seductive Domna transferred elsewhere.

Fortunately, Sonya knew nothing of this incident; her immediate worries over the family's future were caused by Tolstoy's new religious beliefs.

Try as he might, he could not adjust his new world of Christ to his old world of family happiness. At first, he did not seem fully aware of his transformation and grew irritated over the inability of his family to understand and sympathize with his changed behaviour. The former sinner striving to be a saint found the little domain of Yasnaya Polyana anything but a holy man's hermitage. His new views and religious studies left him little time to devote to farming and the breeding of cattle. His financial affairs went from bad to worse. The income of his three properties of Yasnaya Polyana, Nikolskoye, and the estate in Samara, the capital value of which was some \$250,000, shrank to about \$2,500 a year, a sum far from adequate to meet the mounting expenses of his growing family. More and more he allowed the cares of managing his estate to devolve upon his wife, and Sonya, despite her efforts, was extremely worried over the future.

In her diary at the beginning of 1881, Sonya well described the changed atmosphere of the household. "Every day," she wrote of her husband, "he sits at his work, surrounded by books, and keeps at it until dinner. His health has become very weak, his head aches, and he has grown grey and thin this winter. Obviously, he is not entirely as happy as I should desire, and he has become quiet, self-absorbed, and silent. Almost never does that jolly, lively frame of mind appear which formerly attracted all of us around him.

I attribute this weariness to his weighty, strenuous work. It is not as it used to be when he described the hunt or the ball in *War and Peace*; then, happy and excited, he looked as though he had been present and taken part in these amusements. The clarity and calm of the personal state of his soul are undoubted, but suffering over the misfortunes and injustices of people, their poverty and imprisonment, over the evil of people, over oppression—all this acts on his sensitive spirit and consumes his existence.”

From the outset Sonya did not agree with her husband's new religious beliefs, but at first she was willing to recognize their value, and in moments of spiritual closeness to him she tried hard to believe in them. Such moments, however, grew increasingly rare. The seeds of discord that had been planted in the early years of marriage had begun to bear fruit, and his religious change hastened the ripening.

In letters to her sister Tanya at this time, Sonya, perhaps with a touch of exaggeration and self-pity, complained of her grief, suffering, and her desire for death, and she hinted darkly of a crisis in her life with her husband. There were two reasons for her fear. The first and most important was an old one—her opposition to having more children. Her protests in the past had been swiftly crushed by Tolstoy's uncompromising attitude. Shortly after the birth of her tenth child,<sup>1</sup> she wrote in an almost hysterical tone to Tanya: “At times I should like to fly away to you, to mama, to Moscow—anywhere, anywhere away from my half-dark bedroom where bending over the flushed little face of a new boy fourteen times a day I have shrunk away and almost fallen into a faint from the pain in my breasts. I've resolved to be consistent and nurse the last one too.” And in succeeding letters to Tanya in 1880, Sonya complained bitterly of the “solitary life” forced on her by childbearing. In October of that year, however, she wrote to her sister: “Misha is always throwing up the little milk that he sucks, and I feel ill. On that score, to my extreme horror, I'm surely pregnant again.”

No one would censure Sonya for her protests now, for almost without exception she had spent her whole youth in burdensome pregnancies and painful nursing. Nevertheless, Tolstoy evinced no disposition to take into consideration her physical and psychical limitations. Undoubtedly this vital disagreement aggravated old wounds and intensified the dissension that now arose because of the new demands that his religious life necessitated—the second reason for her fear.

<sup>1</sup> A son, Mikhail, born December 20, 1879.

The uncongenial atmosphere at home, for which he was largely, though unwittingly, responsible, no doubt had something to do with Tolstoy's frequent absence from Yasnaya Polyana during 1880 and part of the following year. With irritation Sonya wrote to her sister in November 1880: "Lyovochka has plunged into his work, visiting prisons, justices of the peace, district courts, and recruiting stations out of extreme pity for people and for all the oppressed. All this is no doubt fine, great, and lofty, if only to feel the more one's own insignificance and nastiness. But, alas! life has its own rights; it longs for the other side, and the discord is only more painful and powerful." She complained of his sudden contempt for money and of the bountiful way in which he had begun to distribute it to poor peasants, and she lent an attentive ear to her brother, Alexander, who asserted that profound religious and philosophical pre-occupation endangered one's mind. For a time relations between husband and wife grew so unpleasant that Sonya confessed to her sister that she even wanted to leave home. "Truly, this is because we have begun to live a Christian life. Formerly, in my opinion, without this Christianity it was much better."

Tolstoy himself was painfully aware of this family dissension. In his diary, amid closely written expressions of horror over the suffering of the poor and the wretched conditions of the prisons he visited, occurred an entry on May 5, 1881: "The family is flesh. To abandon the family is the second temptation—to kill oneself. The family is one body. But do not yield to the third temptation: serve not the family but the one God. The family is an indication of the place one must occupy on the economic ladder. It is flesh; as a weak stomach needs light food, so a pampered family needs more than a family accustomed to privations."

Here was the first recognition of the tragic struggle that had already begun with his family. Some days after the entry just quoted appears another that indicates more pointedly the sharp division of views: "They [members of the family] began a conversation. One must hang, one must flog, one must knock out the teeth of the weak without a witness. Should the masses revolt—it would be terrible. But to beat Jews is all right. . . . Who is insane—they or I?"

On June 10, 1881, Tolstoy, accompanied by one of his servants and a Yasnaya Polyana schoolteacher, set out on foot to make a pilgrimage to Optina Monastery. Perhaps the experience of meeting and talking with the common people on the road, as much as a

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desire to visit this monastery to converse again with its holy men, lay behind his unusual adventure. For the occasion he disguised himself in shabby peasant clothes.

At this first halting place on the road he wrote Sonya: "You cannot imagine to what degree it is new, important, and useful for the soul (for one's view of life) to see how God's world lives, the real big world and not that one which we have constructed for ourselves."

Tolstoy's efforts to remain incognito were not effective for long. On his fourth day on the road, he spent the night at a large village, where he got into an altercation with a drunken elder who was mistreating a peasant woman. The elder demanded Tolstoy's passport, and at once became quite tractable when he saw the name and title. The party reached the monastery on the fifth day and went for the night to a third-class hotel. Because of their humble appearance, the monk in charge shunted them off into a common night dormitory, disgustingly filthy and insect-ridden. Only a bribe won them a room for themselves. The next day Tolstoy visited the archimandrite of the monastery and the famous Elder Ambrose, with whom he had a long conversation. He left dissatisfied with his talks and returned home by way of Kaluga, where he took the train for Tula.

Two days after his return, Tolstoy jotted down the substance of a conversation about God that he had with his eighteen-year-old son Sergei. "He and they think that to say: I do not know that; it cannot be proved; I don't need it, shows wisdom and education. On the contrary, it shows ignorance. . . . Men have carefully taught them theology and church rites, knowing in advance that these would not stand the test of maturity; they have taught them much totally disconnected knowledge. And they are all left without unity, with disjointed knowledge, and they think this a gain." And he continued: "Seryozha admitted that he loves the life of the flesh and believes in it. I'm glad to have a clear statement of the question. . . . We had an enormous dinner with champagne. The two Tanyas [his sister-in-law and his daughter] were dressed up. Sashes at five rubles on each of the children. While we were at dinner a cart was already starting for the picnic, and passed among peasant carts that were carrying people exhausted by overwork. I went to them but had not the strength to speak out."

Restless and troubled in mind Tolstoy set out again, this time for his Samara estate, and he was accompanied by Sergei. His attitude towards this distant property, which a few years ago he had



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regarded as a good financial speculation, had now changed. He could no longer take any pride in this large stud farm nor could he think of his own profits when he saw so much poverty in the surrounding countryside. The prospects for an income from the property that year, he wrote Sonya, were very fine, and then he almost apologetically added: "There are so many poor in the villages that it would be sad if we could not give at least a little help. And it is a timid poverty, unaware of itself."

Sonya did not let the suggestion pass without a comment—her husband's generous and often indiscriminate almsgiving of late alarmed her. She began her letter on an unsympathetic note: "I'm glad that physically you feel fine in Samara. At least, this separation is not in vain. In general, it is more interesting for you there, quieter, and more agreeable than at home. This is sad but so." Then she added: "Even if there will be large profits, the money will reach neither me nor the children if it is given away. In any case, you know my opinion about helping the poor; we cannot feed thousands in Samara and other poor people."

While in Samara Tolstoy saw a good deal of the Molokans and other religious sectarians in whom he was deeply interested. A group of Molokans visited his estate. "I read them fragments from my *Account* [*Short Account of the Gospels*]," he wrote Sonya, "and the seriousness, interest, and healthy clear sense of these half-literate people is surprising." Without any show of condescension he dealt simply and naturally with the Molokans and frankly discussed their spiritual beliefs. In turn, these coarse steppe peasants, with their rugged necks and horny hands, eagerly, trustingly and touchingly opened up their souls to him. "Obviously, for them as for me," remarked A. S. Prugavin, a student of Russian religious sects who was present at one of these discussions with the Molokans, "it became entirely clear and unquestioned that this noble, this titled aristocrat, not only understood the peasant, but loved him, sincerely loved him with the great and passionate heart of a talented man."

While Tolstoy was discussing theology with the Molokans in the Samara steppes, his wife was engaged in the more prosaic and more burdensome task of house-hunting in Moscow. Sergei wished to enter the university. In the normal course of things he would have been sent along to Moscow to pursue his studies, for he had arrived at the college age when such freedom was considered a necessity. The assassination of Alexander II, however, had stirred up the university students and intensified revolutionary activities among

them. Already the government had instituted repressive measures. Sonya feared that her son might become involved in the radical movement if he were freed from parental supervision. Besides, the younger children could obtain better educational facilities in the city, and Tanya, who would soon be seventeen, needed to be brought out into the social life of Moscow.

The decision was largely Sonya's, and it was she who had to hunt down a house in Moscow that would suit their social position and also their dwindling income. It was an onerous task. Further, it had to be undertaken at a time when she was expecting her eleventh child.<sup>1</sup> Her letters to Samara concerning the difficulties she was encountering in finding a suitable house and of all her trials with the children eventually touched her husband and evoked a sudden upsurge of his former sense of duty and devotion to his wife: "You would not believe how troubled I am at the thought that you may be overtaxing your strength," he wrote, "and how I repent of having given you little or no help. . . . My justification is that in order to work with the intensity with which I have worked, and to get something done, one has to forget all else. And I have forgotten you too much, and I now repent. For God's sake and for the sake of our love, take care of yourself as much as possible. Put off as much as you can till my return. I will gladly do everything and will not do it badly, because I will take pains."

Yet Tolstoy did not hurry home, and by the time he arrived the removal to Moscow had been nearly all arranged. In truth, he regarded this event with dark foreboding. Just before he left Yasnaya Polyana, he wrote to friends in Samara: "My disagreement with the life around me is greater and more emphatic than before. All the time I see more clearly and definitely my own role, and I will hold to it: humility and a consciousness that everything to which I am now opposed is the fruit of my own mistakes, and therefore I have only pardon for others and blame for myself. . . . We are leaving on the 15th of September. I cannot imagine how I will live there." He dreaded the life in a great city with all its glaring contrasts of wealth and poverty. What his reactions would be are suggested in a striking entry in his diary shortly before his departure: "An economic revolution not only may but must come. It is extraordinary that it has not come already."

<sup>1</sup> The child, Aleksei, the eighth boy, was born October 31, 1881. In all eleven children had been born to Sonya in nineteen years of married life. Three of them had already died.

## Chapter XXIII

### A JEREMIAH IN THE FAMILY

ON MORE than one occasion since his marriage Tolstoy had expressed a dislike for city life, but for Sonya it offered the glad promise of a change from the monotony that had bored and fretted her spirit at Yasnaya Polyana. At last she would be able to assume a social position and enjoy the sophisticated pleasures of Moscow.

The family settled in a spacious rented house in Money Lane. Sergei enrolled in Moscow University; Ilya and young Leo entered a *Gymnasium*; and Tanya soon began her studies in an art school. The pattern of their future existence in Moscow was quickly determined. Comings and goings of playmates of the children, relatives and literary friends of Tolstoy, and persistent worshippers of the famous author kept the house as busy as a railway station. "What a quantity and variety of people come to see us," Sonya wrote her sister, "authors and painters . . . *le grand monde*, nihilists, and all sorts!" Sonya, still young, attractive, and elegantly dressed in the latest style, played the charming hostess at the samovar. If her husband was in the mood, he would enter the large drawing-room at the tea hour. All conversation ceased upon his appearance, and he would behave with gracious aristocratic politeness to the guests who hung upon his every word. At times, however, something of the real contempt he felt for convention would manifest itself, much to Sonya's chagrin, in a refusal to wear his coat when company was present, because the room was too hot. More often he preferred to desert the large drawing-room for the two small chambers that he had appropriated for himself. There, amid clouds of tobacco smoke, he held forth to eager admirers.

Beneath the pleasing surface that confronted their guests, family dissension grew with increasing tempo. The nature of their life

together had changed; it had lost its simplicity, its artlessness, its originality. The older children, as well as husband and wife, felt this growing estrangement. The new life according to God that Tolstoy wished to live had nothing in common with the traditional aristocratic city existence that had been instilled into the family. The children felt it was not that they failed to understand their father, but that he had ceased to understand them, and they unconsciously drew away from him in order not to have their own happiness spoiled. Gloomily he walked the streets and grew irritated at the curious eyes that stared at him and at the occasional strangers who, recognizing the author of *War and Peace*, obsequiously bowed. Healthy policemen carrying revolvers annoyed him; and he once angrily remarked to his niece of the hordes of shoppers: "Why are they bustling about? Where are they hurrying? Always business, yet they do not see the principal thing; thus all their life passes and they do not notice that death approaches." When he returned home after such walks, his pent-up feelings often found an outlet in angry criticism of the family.

Before Tolstoy had been long in Moscow, he entered his reactions in his diary: "A month has passed. The most miserable in my life. The move to Moscow. All are busy arranging—when will they begin to live? All is not for the sake of living, but in order to be like other people. Unfortunates! There is no life. Stench, stones, luxury, poverty, debauchery. Malefactors have come together, robbing the people; they have collected soldiers and set up law courts to protect their orgies, and they feast. There is nothing for the people to do except to take advantage of the passions of these others and lure back from them what has been stolen. The peasants are cleverest at this. Their wives remain at home, while they wax our floors, rub our bodies in the bath, and ply as cabmen."

If Tolstoy's reactions to life in Moscow were bitter, his wife's were no less so on the score of his behaviour, for she wrote her sister Tanya: "We have been here a month tomorrow and I have not written a word to anyone. During the first two weeks I cried every day, because Lyovochka not only became sad, but even fell into a kind of desperate apathy. He didn't sleep or eat and sometimes literally wept, and I thought I would really go mad. You would be surprised to see how I have changed and how thin I have grown. . . . Now he has arranged to work in a wing of the house, where he has hired two small quiet rooms for himself at six rubles a month; he walks to Maiden Field, makes his way across the river to the Sparrow

## A JEREMIAH IN THE FAMILY

Hills and there saws and splits wood with some peasants. It is good for his health and cheers him up.”

### II

Feeling utterly lonely and like an alien in Moscow, Tolstoy visited his friends the Bakunins<sup>1</sup> in the province of Tver. While there he received a letter from Prugavin about an unusual peasant, V. K. Syutayev, who was living in that neighbourhood and seemed to share Tolstoy's views. He hastened to hunt him out in a village near by, hoping to assuage his longing for spiritual comradeship. There was nothing striking in the appearance of this peasant—he had a thin, mud-coloured beard and wore, indoors and out, a greasy black sheepskin jacket—but he had already acquired a reputation for originality and holiness. In his youth, when he had learned to read, he spent all his spare time with the Bible. The New Testament he had by heart. There was a quiet, simple dignity about him, and in his slow peasant speech one heard an earthy wisdom and a power of conviction that impressed his hearers.

Tolstoy was no less amazed than delighted to find that Syutayev's religious beliefs were so similar to his own. He had rejected the Church and preached brotherhood, love, and life “according to God.” Everything is in you, he was fond of saying, for where love is, there is God. Like Tolstoy, he condemned violence and would not allow it even as a means of resisting evil. He refused on principle to pay taxes, and when the authorities eventually dispossessed him of his small property, he accepted the situation without a murmur. His entire family clung to his beliefs. One son had been sent to prison for refusing to serve in the army, for he considered it a sin to take an oath, and would not handle a rifle because it “smelt of blood.” Syutayev would allow no priest to officiate at the marriages of his children. When his daughter took a husband, he described how he spoke to the young couple of the way they ought to live, then made their bed, put them to sleep together, extinguished the light, and that was the whole wedding.

What particularly impressed Tolstoy was that Syutayev had the courage to live the life he believed in. Here was a simple peasant who scorned shams and endeavoured by hard work and frugality to exist according to his conscience and the teaching of the Gospels. At their first meeting Tolstoy listened with wonderment to his

<sup>1</sup> A liberal and artistic family.

preaching that all things should be held in common, that fields and forests ought not to be divided, and that there should be no locks, no restraints, no war. When Syutayev drove him back to the Bakunins', so absorbed did they become in their discussion of the imminence of the Kingdom of God that the horse strayed off the road and upset their cart in a gully. Fortunately neither disputant was hurt.

Syutayev soon appeared in Moscow, where he gained some fame. Tolstoy frequently entertained him and invited people to hear him expound his views. No doubt Tolstoy obtained a vicarious pleasure from hearing some of his own beliefs put with so much pith and homely wisdom. Sonya wrote her sister that all Moscow was talking of Syutayev and that an article about him had already been published. "Really, he is a remarkable old man," she continued. "The moment he began to preach in the study all rushed there from the drawing-room. . . ." While he talked, the celebrated artist Repin and Tolstoy's young daughter Tanya made portrait studies of him. The city authorities grew suspicious over the visits of this strange and heretical peasant at Count Tolstoy's house and made inquiries. But the bewildered gendarme sent to investigate was almost bodily thrown out by the infuriated host. Since Syutayev left the city soon after this incident, the police let the matter drop.

Tolstoy's search for spiritual companionship during these first weeks after the move to Moscow met with further success. V. F. Orlov, a poverty-stricken teacher in a school for children of railway employees, sought him out. He had at one time been imprisoned for revolutionary activities, but now he worked hard, supported a large family on his meagre earnings, and tried to live his life according to the teaching of the Gospels. A more interesting fellow traveller of the spirit was N. F. Fyodorov, librarian of the Moscow Rumyantsev Museum. An emaciated little old man and always shabbily dressed, Fyodorov had about him the aspect of a saint. He lived in a garret like an ascetic, sleeping on bare boards and subsisting on scraps of food, for he could not bear to keep a kopek of his own while anyone was in need. A light of inner goodness illuminated his face and shone from penetrating, intelligent eyes. Tolstoy admired his asceticism, and he always listened to Fyodorov with an attentive air. Despite his customary impetuosity in arguing the tenets of his new faith, he never lost his temper with this Christlike librarian.

These new friends inspired Tolstoy with the desire to practise the faith he preached. Yet he was tormented at this time by his

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inability to break completely with his past and emancipate himself from the old existence. A month after his arrival in the city, he wrote Alekseyev: "I now see that though I knew about all the evil, about all the mass of temptations amid which people live, I did not believe in them and could not realize them, just as you knew from geography that Kansas<sup>1</sup> existed but didn't really know it until you arrived there. And this mass of evil oppresses me, brings me to despair and inspires distrust. I'm amazed that no one sees this. Perhaps I needed to undergo it in order to discover more clearly my own private path in life. At first one of two paths exists: either abandon all and suffer passively, yielding to despair, or make peace with evil, befogging oneself with cards and chatter and bustle. But fortunately, I cannot do the latter, and the former is too painful, so I seek an outlet. The outlet that presents itself to me is preaching and printing, but there stand vanity, pride, and perhaps self-deception, so I fear this outlet. The second outlet is to help others, but here the immensity of the number of unfortunates overwhelms one. . . . The only outlet I see is to live well, always turning one's good side to all. But I have not yet been able to do this as you do it."

### III

Although the poverty and evil Tolstoy observed in the city discouraged him, he felt keenly that he must do something to remedy the situation. Such human misery struck deeply at the roots of his new faith and called into question his own way of life. He first felt the need to inform himself fully of the extent and causes of all this suffering. Frequently he stopped and talked with beggars on the streets; their obviously lying accounts gave him some insight into their psychology but little information concerning the true reasons behind their degradation.

Determined to see the worst the city had to offer, one late December afternoon in 1881 Tolstoy made his way to the Khitrov market, a disreputable section of the town. His well-dressed appearance quickly attracted attention among the throng of ragged, shivering, hungry, importunate human derelicts and they crowded around him. He listened to their tales of desperate circumstances, and in an agony of helplessness he bought them

<sup>1</sup> Alekseyev, before he became a tutor in Tolstoy's home, had spent two years (1875-1877) in Kansas, where, with a group of like-minded Russians, he had set up an agricultural community on primitive communist lines. The experiment failed.

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hot drinks and distributed money freely. The news of the ministering angel ran through the street. Each upturned begging face seemed to him more pitiful and degraded than the last. The press of people became great; disorder and a crush ensued. Tolstoy took refuge in Lyapin House, a charitable institution that provided free night lodgings. The sight of these tiers of bunks, each with its impoverished occupant in tatters, further sickened him. Feeling terribly ashamed of himself, he hurried away.

Tolstoy reached home that night, ascended the carpeted stairway, took off his fur coat, and sat down to a five-course dinner served by two lackeys in dress clothes with white ties and gloves. And at that moment he understood with his whole being that the existence of tens of thousands of destitute people in Moscow was a crime, not committed once, but again and again; and that he with his luxury not merely tolerated it, but shared in it. He should have given not only hot drinks and small sums of money to those wretched people in the Khitrov market, but the overcoat that he wore and all that he possessed at home. Yet he had not done this, and therefore he felt and would continue to feel that as long as he had any superfluous food, money, and belongings, and someone else had none, then he shared in a constantly repeated crime.

That same evening, after returning from Lyapin House, Tolstoy described his impressions to a friend. With some satisfaction the friend began to explain that poverty was a most natural thing in the city and an inevitable condition of civilization. In the argument that followed Tolstoy, quite unconscious of his rising temper, waved his arms at his friend and with tears in his voice shouted: "One cannot live so, one cannot live so! It is impossible!" His alarmed wife ran into the room, and both she and the friend remonstrated with him for his unnecessary ardour and reminded him that the existence of poverty-stricken people did not justify his spoiling the lives of those around him.

Tolstoy agreed that their criticism was just, but in the depths of his heart he felt that he too was right. When he told his experiences to other friends and acquaintances, they approved of his kind-heartedness, but insisted that the most that wealthy people could do was to attempt to alleviate the misery of the poor by philanthropy.

Perhaps organized philanthropy, Tolstoy thought, was the only answer to the problem of the poor, and he decided to make use of the approaching decennial census (January 1882) for this purpose. His plan was to persuade the numerous census takers to conduct



a canvass of the city's poor in the course of their official duties. On the basis of the detailed information thus obtained, a complete list of the most worthy cases would be compiled along with the relevant data necessary to provide the most effective kind of aid. In order to implement the scheme, he intended to use his influence in setting up a large charitable fund.

Tolstoy began the campaign with a stirring newspaper article, "On the Moscow Census," in which he outlined his plan and made a forthright appeal for aid. Carried away by his own enthusiasm, he declared towards the end of the article: "However little may be done, it will be of importance. But why not hope that everything will be done? Why not hope that we will strive so that in Moscow there will not be one person unclothed, not one hungry, not one human being sold for money, not one unfortunate crushed by fate who does not know where to find brotherly aid? It is not surprising that this has not been done, but it is surprising that these things exist side by side with our superfluity of leisure and wealth, and that we can live untroubled knowing that they exist." He repeated the substance of this plea in the homes of wealthy friends and received promises of financial assistance, but he did not fail to notice among those he solicited the uncomfortable feeling of guilty people and an attitude plainly indicating that his plan was a well-intentioned yet hopeless endeavour.

Tolstoy secured a position as an organizer in the census and asked to have assigned to him one of the worst sections of the city, where was situated Rzhanov House, a series of cheap lodgings that had the reputation of being a den of extreme poverty and vice. His first reaction was one of pained disillusion. He saw that the majority of wretched inhabitants of these cheap lodgings were not at all exceptional, but just such people as those among whom he lived, and that their unhappiness depended not on external conditions, but on themselves—a kind of unhappiness that money could not remedy. He was amazed at the contentedness and self-sufficiency of many of these poor people and at their charity to each other. Their conditions of life were appalling, but he did not realize then, as he did later, that they could be helped only by changing their outlook on life. To change another man's outlook on life, however, one must oneself have a better outlook and live in accord with it, and Tolstoy was aware that his own view on life had to be altered before he could really assist these unhappy people.

The many loose women who lived in Rzhanov House gave him

deep concern. During his rounds he heard of one mother, a prostitute, who had sold her thirteen-year-old daughter. He visited the mother in the hope of saving the girl, for he thought of speaking to ladies of his acquaintance who took a charitable interest in such cases. The mother and daughter he found living in the direst poverty. After talking with the mother, he reflected on the hard sacrifices she had made to rear her child, and later he understood that in selling her daughter she was not doing anything unmoral but only what she considered best for the child. To save the daughter, one ought long ago to have saved the mother—saved her from a view of life approved by nearly everybody in Russia. If he had thought of that then, he wrote later, he would have realized that the fine ladies whose aid he wished to seek themselves lived without work, serving merely to satisfy sensuality, and deliberately educating their own daughters for such a life. "One mother leads her daughter to the tavern," he maintained, "another leads hers to Court or to balls. But both mothers share the same view of life: namely, that a woman must satisfy a man's lust, and for that she must be fed, clothed, and cared for. How, then, will our ladies save this woman and her daughter?"

The more he worked among the poor during the census and thought of the ultimate causes of all this poverty the more Tolstoy lost heart in the practicality of his grandiose philanthropic scheme. He soon began to wonder whether dispensing money was a remedy. People constantly told him lies to get a few kopeks, and he knew that often the money did them more harm than good. Was not money an evil in itself? Tolstoy described the last night he visited Rzhanov House in the company of census takers and some interested friends: "All the lodgings were full, all the bunks occupied, and not only by one, but often by two people. This crowding was a horrible spectacle in which men and women were mingled together. Women, who were not dead-drunk, slept with men. Many women with children were sleeping with strange men in the narrow bunks. Terrible was the sight of the destitution, filth, raggedness, and fear of these people. And especially terrible was the immense number of people in this condition. One tenement, another the same way, then a third, a tenth, a twentieth, and no end to them. And everywhere the same stench, the same stifling atmosphere, the same overcrowding, the same mingling of the sexes, the same spectacle of men and women drunk to stupefaction, and the same fear, submissiveness, and culpability on all faces; and again I felt pained

and ashamed of myself, as I had done at Lyapin House, and I understood that what I had undertaken was horrid, stupid, and therefore impossible."

Perplexed, his nerves frayed, Tolstoy left Moscow for a rest at Yasnaya Polyana at the beginning of February, 1882. He also wished to write an article about the reasons for the failure of his philanthropic plan. And it was at this time (February 3) that he began *What Then Must We Do?* Somehow the article did not get on. He had an abundance of material, but he worked under the influence of irritation induced by the discouraging experiences he had just been through. The real cause of the whole matter, which he later discovered to be rooted in himself, evaded him. Shortly before this, that remarkable peasant Syutayev had suggested the reason for his failure. With enthusiasm he had explained to Syutayev the nature of his charitable plan and all that he hoped would be accomplished by it. The peasant listened patiently for some time, his small eyes dim, as though turned inwards.

"It's all useless," said he.

"Why?" asked Tolstoy.

"This whole enterprise of yours is useless and nothing good will come of it," Syutayev said with conviction.

"Why will nothing come of it? Is it useless to help thousands, or even hundreds, of unfortunates? Is it wrong to clothe the naked and feed the hungry, as the Gospel bids us?"

"I know, I know, but not as you are doing it. Can one help in that fashion? You go walking and a man asks you for twenty kopeks. You give it to him. Is that charity? Give him spiritual charity; teach him. But what have you given him? It only means that you have got rid of him."

"No, that is not what we are about. We want to find out a man's needs and help him with money and obtain work for him."

"You won't do anything with these people that way."

"Are they then to die of cold and hunger?"

"Why should they die? Are there so many of them?"

"Many of them?" said Tolstoy, thinking that Syutayev treated the matter lightly because he did not know what an enormous number there were. "Do you know," he said, "that in Moscow alone there are, I suppose, some 20,000 cold and hungry people? And in Petersburg and in other towns?"

Syutayev smiled. "Twenty thousand! And how many homes are there in Russia alone? A million?"

“Well, what of it?”

“What of it?” and his eyes shone and he grew animated. “Well, let us divide them among us. I’m not rich, but I will at once take two. There is that lad you had in your kitchen; I asked him, but he won’t come. If there were ten times as many we could place them all. You take one and I’ll take one. We could go to work together. He will see how I work and will learn how to live; and we shall sit at one table, and he will hear a word now from me, now from you. That is charity, but your scheme is entirely useless.”

Tolstoy was struck by these words of Syutayev at the time, but he did not take in their full implication. And when he started to write *What Then Must We Do?* he still did not fully realize the significance of Syutayev’s argument: that the life of the rich consisted in or was inextricably bound up with what separated the rich as far as possible from the poor. Aware that he had not found the solution of the problem of poverty and riches, Tolstoy abandoned his article. After much more reflection he later resumed the work, finally convinced that he had hit upon the truth, and the original article eventually developed into one of his most soul-searching books.

## IV

Tolstoy dutifully wrote Sonya of his safe arrival in Yasnaya Polyana. The next day he tried to explain to her in another letter why he preferred the country to the city, although he softened this by admitting that his Moscow experiences had been fruitful and that he had learned much from his new spiritual friends, Syutayev, Orlov, and Fyodorov. All this reasoning was wormwood to Sonya. She felt that he had run away, and her own letters struck an entirely new note of bitterness and clearly reflected their sorry existence together in Moscow. After a kind of enraged recital of her manifold domestic duties during his absence, she sarcastically added in her first letter: “My little one [the four-months-old Aleksei] is still unwell, and I’m very tender and pitying. You and Syutayev may not especially love *your own* children, but we simple mortals are neither able nor wish to distort our feelings or to justify our lack of love for *a person* by professing some love or other *for the whole world.*” Then, with a suggestion of hysteria, she concluded: “I’m vile, sick, my life is hateful; I cry all day, and if there were poison at hand, it seems as though I would do away with myself.”

Letters from Sonya followed in quick succession, filled with a confusing mixture of love and hate, censure, and self-castigation. She wanted him to return and then ordered him to remain away, for she was no longer of any use to him. "How I wish to wound you," she wrote in a pathetic vein, "but if you only knew how I weep every day, when after a day of torment for the *life of the flesh*, as you call it, I remain alone at night with my own thoughts and grief; then my sole happiness is when Andryusha says to me as he did today: 'Mama, who loves you?' I tell him: 'Andryusha, no one loves me; papa has gone away.' And he says: 'I love you, Mama.'" In her very next letter Sonya told her husband that for the first time in her life she did not look forward to his return, for "you will again begin to suffer, be bored, be alive although entirely silent, while censuring my life in Moscow. God, how this wearies me and torments my soul!"

Perhaps Tolstoy took fright over the morbid, almost ominous, tone of his wife's letters, for he cut short his stay at Yasnaya Polyana. He was also expecting a visit from Granny in Moscow. His new faith was an irresistible challenge to this old friend, whose years—she was now over sixty—had dulled the keen perception and upset the fine intellectual balance that had always distinguished her intercourse with Tolstoy. The Orthodox Church was her weakness, and after their last unpleasant altercation over this subject, she had returned again and again to the charge with more assiduity than good sense. Tolstoy suspected her mission on this occasion, and in writing to accept her request to visit him, he begged her not to attempt "to convert him." They saw a good deal of each other during the ten days of her stay, but the armed religious neutrality they sought to preserve frequently broke out into open warfare. Once he lectured her roundly on what he considered her mistaken views of Christianity. "I have nothing to reply," she remarked coldly, "but I will only say that while you were speaking I saw that you were in the power of someone standing behind your chair." He turned swiftly and almost shouted: "Who is it?" "Lucifer himself, the incarnation of pride," she answered. "Of course," he quickly rejoined, "I'm proud to be the only one who has put his hand on the truth." They parted more hostile than ever to each other's faith. Soon after, Granny wrote to defend once more the Orthodox Church. Her letter seemed insincere and agitated him, and he answered sharply that Orthodoxy was a "loathsome deceit." He recalled the letter and wrote another less provocative,

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but this too, on second thought, he decided not to send. Like Tolstoy, Granny was an aristocrat, and she found it almost impossible to believe that one of her own class would forsake the faith in which he had been nurtured. Tolstoy was proud, but he never mistook tradition for truth.

### v

Tolstoy had been home only a little more than two weeks when he fled again to the refuge of Yasnaya Polyana. Sonya plaintively entered in her diary: "Our life in Moscow would be very fine, if only Lyovochka were not so unhappy in Moscow. He is too impressionable to endure city life, and besides this, his Christian temper doesn't at all harmonize with the conditions of luxury, sloth, and struggle of city life."

Once in the country Tolstoy's disposition mended, as much as it could mend while he was under the constant strain of spiritual obligations he could never seem to fulfil. There was no family to prick his conscience, only familiar country scenes to delight in and servants who loved and appreciated him without criticizing him. He would hold long amusing conversations with Gasha, who tended the dogs. She was an original old woman who had been in the service of his grandmother and hence occupied a privileged position in the household. Her affection for the dogs she cared for was so extreme that she insisted upon living with them in filth and smells. Indeed she loved all animals. So fond was she of sheep that she would never touch mutton. And once when a mouse that she used to feed crumbs to on the table got stuck in the jam pot, she washed the rodent with warm water and set it down on the table again. But she threw away the jam, declaring to the Tolstoy children that a mouse was a heathen beast and hence she wouldn't eat anything a mouse had been at. Prince L. D. Urusov, Vice-Governor of Tula and a cousin of Tolstoy's mathematical friend of the same name, provided almost the only intellectual conversation at Yasnaya Polyana during this visit and others when the family was away. His presence now was not always too welcome, for Tolstoy wished to be alone, but Urusov had become an ardent apostle of his new views and sought enlightenment.

Nearly every day Tolstoy wrote to Sonya, not from a sense of guilt over this second escape from the city, but because it was a long established habit to write her frequently when he was away

from home. "In any case," he remarked in one letter, "it is very healthy for me to get away from that mirthful world of the city and get back to myself—to read the thoughts of others on religion, to listen to the chattering of Gasha, and to think not about people but about God."

Sonya answered with restraint and showed concern for his health and mental unrest. She implored him to be happy and jolly. "There is only one thing in the world that I desire, and that is your peace of mind and your happiness." His continual low spirits, however, prompted her to review his position. "Here is my day," she wrote. "The first, most sad mournful thing when I awoke was your letter. It all gets worse and worse. I begin to think that if a happy man suddenly sees in life *only* everything that is terrible and closes his eyes to what is good, then this is the result of illness. You ought to undergo a cure. I say this without any *arrière pensée*, for it seems clear to me. I'm awfully sorry for you, and if you would consider my words and your own position without vexation, you would perhaps find a way out. This grievous condition first befell you long ago; you said then that from 'lack of faith' you wanted to hang yourself. And now? You do not live without faith now, so why are you unhappy? Did you not know before that hungry, sick, unhappy, and evil people existed? Look around you more carefully: there are also jolly, happy, healthy and good people. May God help you, but what can I do in the matter?"

This had its own logic which was irrefutable if one accepted the premise. Sonya could not be expected to see that the elucidation of the moral law was the chief business of humanity. Her proper concern was the future of her family, not the future of humanity, and she expected her husband to devote himself to the same end. Tolstoy always secretly hoped that his wife might share with him the obligation that he felt to society at large, but he was never intentionally ungenerous about her failure to understand or to sympathize with his mission. In a spirit of fairness he replied to her letter: "Do not trouble about me, and above all do not accuse yourself. . . . I long ago ceased to blame you. . . . Life in Moscow has given me very much and has made plain to me my line of activity, if any still lies before me; then it has brought us closer together than before." And in his next he wrote cheerfully and tenderly: "I fear that we may change roles; I shall become healthy and lively and you will be gloomy and run down. You say: 'I love you, but you do not want that now.' It is the one thing I do want. Nothing

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else can so cheer me, and your letters have cheered me. One's liver counts for something, but one's spiritual life goes its own way. My solitude was very necessary and has refreshed me, and your love gladdens me more than anything in life." Although she had urged him to remain in the country until he got thoroughly bored, he returned to Moscow within ten days.

### VI

Shortly after his return to the city Tolstoy made the acquaintance of N. N. Ge, one of Russia's most distinguished painters. Curiously enough, Ge had been going through a spiritual crisis not unlike that which Tolstoy had recently experienced. He had ceased to take any interest in art and had retired to his Ukrainian estate in deep dejection, feeling that life was no longer worth living. And again like Tolstoy in his search for truth, he had arrived at a study of the Gospels. His quest had been in vain, however, until Tolstoy's newspaper article, "On the Moscow Census," came to his attention. "In it I found words precious to me," he related in his *Memoirs*. "Tolstoy, visiting cellars and finding miserable people in them, writes: 'Our lack of love for the humblest is the cause of their wretched condition.' As a spark kindles inflammable material, so that word set me aflame . . . I went to Moscow to embrace that great man and work for him."

Ge arrived in the city with canvas and paints and presented himself to the Tolstoys. Long grey curls clustered beneath his bald head, and an eager kindly face illuminated by wide-open clear blue eyes gave him the appearance of a Biblical prophet. With charming naïveté he kissed Tolstoy and at once offered to paint his wife or daughter. Both men understood each other immediately and a friendship began that lasted until Ge's death in 1904. He became literally a member of the family and was loved by all. His devotion to Tolstoy was boundless, and he subscribed to all his doctrines with implicit faith that they gave purpose and meaning to his life. Tolstoy repaid the love and devotion of this apostle by taking a keen and understanding interest in his art. Some of Ge's most remarkable paintings were inspired by the warm friendship of Tolstoy and influenced by his ideas.

Other distinguished men sought Tolstoy out in Moscow to hear him expound his views, for the story of his religious transformation was already widely known. The astute critic N. K. Mikhailovski,



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who had defended Tolstoy's educational theories in 1875 and had predicted the spiritual crisis towards which he was then drifting, called on him at this time, hoping to get an article for his magazine. On this and subsequent visits Mikhailovski found him very much a man of the world, but simple and sincere, despite his social polish. They often disputed warmly, and Mikhailovski was amazed that Tolstoy could turn his back on all the aristocratic traditions of his life that were so utterly opposed to the conclusions that he had lately reached. Yet he admired him as a powerful thinker and one whom all were bound to respect. When their discussions grew acrimonious, Tolstoy would say: "Come, we are beginning to get warm; that is not well! Let us each smoke a cigarette and rest a bit." With the well-known philosopher V. S. Solovyov, who was also a frequent visitor, the disputes came dangerously close to quarrels. When Tolstoy was seeing his guest off, however, he would give him his hand with a guilty smile and ask to be forgiven for getting so heated. He regarded Solovyov, as he did many other intellectuals, as a brainy man who lived exclusively on what he could get from books.

### VII

Admiring friends and the pleasures of social intercourse in the city only served to intensify Tolstoy's feeling of moral dereliction. The year 1882 was one of the most difficult in making adjustments with his new way of life. Repeated trips to Yasnaya Polyana were again a measure of his discontent. Spring in the country revived his drooping spirits. The poet in him responded, and he wrote to Sonya in a lyric strain of the little spikes and tufts of grass pushing up from under the dead leaves and straw in the frost glaze of the foot-paths. The buds were swelling on the lilac bushes, "the birds no longer sing at random but have already begun to converse about something, and round the sheltered corners of the house and by the manure heaps bees are humming." In an exultant mood he told her that "everywhere are grass, birds, and honey-bees; no policemen, no pavements, no cabmen, no smells, and it is very pleasant—so pleasant that I grow sorry for you and think that you and the children must certainly come here earlier, and I will remain in Moscow with the boys."

Sonya took his advice and came to Yasnaya Polyana for the summer late in May, and Tolstoy went to Moscow to see the older boys through their examinations. He soon returned to his estate

with his sons, and after their first year of discord in Moscow the whole family joyfully resumed the country life that they loved—swimming in the pond, tennis, croquet, picnics, and amateur theatricals. As customary, sister-in-law Tanya and her children were there to add to the general merriment. Every Sunday the Yasnaya Polyana Letter Box was opened with mock solemnity. This had long been a favourite summer amusement. Everyone in the household, young or old, was privileged to drop his unsigned composition into the Letter Box. All the gossip, puppy love affairs, and comic incidents were commemorated in verse or prose. Usually Tolstoy, his wife, or Tanya read the compositions to the assembled family and guests, and there was much giggling and laughter at every good hit or when an anonymous author betrayed himself. Tanya, when in a bad temper, had the habit of sending everyone around her to the devil, and this inspired a composition by Tolstoy, in which he pictured the devil receiving all the unfortunates consigned to him by Tanya. At times a playful malice ran through the offerings, as in the list of Yasnaya Polyana ideals, probably compiled by Tanya. Tolstoy's were set down as "Poverty, peace and concord," and "To burn everything he worshipped, to worship everything he burnt."

Tolstoy turned the tables on all the family in an amusing Letter Box composition called "Asylum Bulletin." An insane peasant by the name of Blokhin used to appear frequently at Yasnaya Polyana. He laboured under the delusion that, like the gentlefolk, he need not work, but would receive the maintenance due him from the Emperor. When asked if he wished some work, he always replied grandiloquently that work was for the peasants and that he lived simply to pass the time. In the "Asylum Bulletin" Tolstoy compared Blokhin to many of the other "patients" at Yasnaya Polyana, all of whom he described as dangerously insane; Blokhin, however, he considered the only one who could be certified as cured, because he was the only one who reasoned consistently.

The summer domestic harmony that reigned at Yasnaya Polyana was suddenly ruined by one of those painful quarrels between husband and wife that had become so frequent since the move to Moscow. Sonya chronicled the affair in her diary: "Twenty years ago, happy and young, I began writing this book—the whole story of my love for Lyovochka. In it there is hardly anything other than love. And now, after twenty years, I'm sitting up all night reading it and weeping over my love. For the first time in my life Lyovochka

has run away from me and is spending the night in his study. We quarrelled over trifles. I attacked him for not troubling himself over the children, for not attending to Ilya who is sick, and for not making their jackets. But it is not a matter of jackets, the matter is that he is growing cold towards me and the children. Today he loudly shouted that his most passionate desire is to get away from the family. To my dying day I shall not forget that sincere cry of his, for it was as if he had torn the heart out of me. I pray to God for death. It is terrible to live without his love, and I felt this deeply that his love went from me. I cannot show him how strongly I still love him as of old, with twenty years of love. This would humiliate *me* and annoy *him*. He is imbued with Christianity and thoughts of self-perfection. I am jealous of him. . . . Ilya is ill, lying in the drawing-room in a fever; he has typhus, and I keep watch to give him quinine at frequent intervals, which I'm afraid of missing. I will not lie down tonight on the bed my husband has deserted. God help me. I want to take my life; my thoughts are confused. It is striking four.

"I thought—if he doesn't come, then he loves another. He has not come. Duty—I used to know so well what my duty was, but now?

"He came, but we made it up only the next day. We both wept, and I saw with joy that the love I had lamented over on that terrible night had not died. I shall never forget that lovely morning, clear, cold, sparkling with silver dew, when after a sleepless night I went along the leafy path to the bathhouse. It is long since I've seen nature in such triumphant beauty. I sat for some time in the icy water with the idea of catching cold and dying. But I did not catch cold, and I returned home and began nursing little Alyosha, who was glad to see me and smiled."

## VIII

As though reconciled to the fact that the children's education would require years of residence in the city, Tolstoy decided to purchase a home. He found a large wooden one with an attractive garden on Weaver's Lane in a quiet section near the Moscow River, which he quickly purchased for 27,000 rubles (about \$13,500). The business of extensive remodelling and furnishing he took upon himself, and throughout most of September he worked industriously at the task in order that Sonya might have a completely equipped home when she returned to the city. He visited

furniture shops and bought antique pieces with excellent taste. Christ and the Gospels were now crowded out of the letters he sent to Sonya by elaborate details concerning the redecoration of rooms and the purchase of divans, lamps, and cretonne.

Sonya's reaction to this domestic activity of her husband was curious in the light of her former complaints. She seemed to resent his successful aid in a sphere in which she dominated. What of the state of his soul, and of what was he thinking?—these were the matters she wanted him to comment on in his letters. "You write only about practical things," she protested, "or do you already think that I have grown entirely stiff? I'm not interested merely in parquet floors and waterclosets. I wanted to copy out for you a whole passage from Seneca<sup>1</sup> so that you could instruct me in it, for it refers to what is alien to the soul, as the city in your case."

Here was a palpable hit. Her husband ignored it and got on with the business of putting the new house into perfect order. When all was ready and Sonya finally arrived on October 8, she displayed a lamentable lack of appreciation. "At Moscow Lyovochka met us with two carriages," she wrote her sister. "At home a dinner was ready, and tea, and there was fruit on the table. But I was so tired from the trip and a week of packing and had become so irritable that nothing pleased me."

The second winter in Moscow brought an improvement in Tolstoy's relations with his family. It was only an external improvement, for he had lost none of his repugnance for the life they were leading. A firmer hold on the humility he strove to impose upon himself made relations in the household more bearable. Sonya heralded the apparent change with pleasure in letters to her sister. He had become quieter and more kind, she wrote, and his tirades against their easy existence briefer and rarer. In months they had quarrelled only once, and she added: "Lyovochka is in such fine spirits; it is charming. May God grant that it continue."

Obviously Sonya was also beginning to understand a little more clearly the change that had taken place in her husband's spiritual life and to appreciate the new demands—although she did not sympathize with them. Writing to her sister of his less frequent outbursts against the life of the rich, she remarked: "This pains me, but I know he cannot help it. He is a leader; he goes ahead of the crowd showing the way people should go. But I am *the crowd*; I live in its current. Together with the crowd I see the light of the lantern

<sup>1</sup> She had recently taken to reading Seneca.

that every leader carries (and, of course, Lyovochka's also), and I acknowledge it to be *the light*, but I cannot go faster, for I am held back by the crowd, and by my surroundings and my habits."

This household of growing children, constantly swarming with their young friends, recalls the merry Bers family of some twenty years ago, when Tolstoy first courted Sonya. Now, as the mother, seeking the best introduction for her own children into Moscow society, Sonya was in her element. With obvious pleasure, she described in a letter to Tanya the Christmas festivities of 1882: the tree; an evening party at one friend's house; a French play and a large children's gathering at the home of another friend, where young Masha and Leo danced until three in the morning; then the next night a ball at the Shcherbatovs'. Her daughter Tanya was arrayed in the latest style and her mother more conservatively in "a very splendid dress" that cost 250 rubles. Young Tanya danced with the director and was in ecstasies, and she and her mother remained at the ball until six in the morning. "It now seems that we are fully launched in society," she informed her sister, "but the money vanishes terribly!" And she concluded with some scathing remarks on the bad manners of the young cavaliers of this generation who appeared at her regular Thursday receptions.

The gloomy father watched these expensive, empty pleasures, while his recent experiences among the poor at Lyapin and Rzhanov Houses seared his brain. In his diary for December 22, he noted: "Again in Moscow. Again I experience horrible spiritual torments. For more than a month. But they are not unfruitful."

Shortly before this, Alekseyev had written Tolstoy from Samara to complain of his lonely life there. Tolstoy replied, telling him how much he envied his lot. "There has been illness in the family," he wrote, "but now all are fine and more or less as of old. Seryozha is much occupied and believes in the university. Tanya, half-kind, half-serious, and half-wise, does not grow worse—rather better. Ilyusha [Ilya] is lazy and growing, and his soul is not yet strangled by the organic processes. Lyolya [Leo] and Masha seem to me better. They do not possess my harshness, which has taken hold of the older ones, and I think they are growing up under better conditions and are better and kinder than the older ones. The babies are fine little boys and healthy.

"I am fairly quiet, but sad—often because of the triumphant, self-assured insanity of the life around me. Often I do not understand

why it has been granted to me to perceive their insanity, while they are quite unable to understand their own madness and mistakes; and so we stand face to face, not comprehending each other, and wondering at and condemning each other. But they are legion and I am alone. They are seemingly gay, and I am seemingly sad.”

His only diversion, he told Alekseyev, was a passion for a new language. He had begun to study Hebrew in October 1882, taking lessons from the Moscow Rabbi Minor. He read the Old Testament, but concentrated largely on those parts that were of interest to him in his work. Sonya now objected to the considerable effort he expended on Hebrew as she had earlier complained of his study of Greek.

In December 1882, Tolstoy received a letter from a total stranger, M. A. Engelhardt. This young man—he was only twenty-one at the time—had been exiled to his father’s estate for engaging in political activities in the university. Having failed to find a publisher for an article opposing the Orthodox Church, he sent it on to Tolstoy because he had heard of his deep interest in religious questions. Tolstoy’s reply so encouraged him that he sent a second letter, in which he attempted to justify the violence of revolutionary struggle for the common good by the teaching of Christ. This drew a lengthy answer.<sup>1</sup>

To this correspondent whom he had never met, Tolstoy began his letter as follows: “You perhaps do not think it, but you cannot imagine to what degree I am alone and to what degree that which is my real ‘I’ is despised by all around me. I know that he who endures to the end will be saved. I know that only in trifles is it granted man to enjoy the fruit of his own labour or even to see that fruit, and that in the matter of Divine truth, which is eternal, it cannot be given to man to see the fruit of his own work, especially in the short period of his brief life. I know all that and yet I am often sad, and therefore to have encountered you and the hope, almost the assurance, of finding in you a man sincerely travelling the same road to the same goal as myself is a great joy to me.”<sup>2</sup>

Sonya, who read the letter, was much offended by these frank comments to a complete stranger, comments that reflected so

<sup>1</sup> The letter is really an extensive article, the first of a series of such epistolary articles that he eventually wrote. His reply to Engelhardt, which is on the general theme of non-violence, contains passages of considerable biographical value.

<sup>2</sup> Engelhardt soon disappointed Tolstoy’s hopes. Tolstoy sent a friend to represent him with a manuscript copy of his *Short Account of the Gospels*. The friend, after lengthy discussions with Engelhardt, reported to Tolstoy that he believed more in the violence of revolution than in Christian love.

severely on her and her family, and Tolstoy finally decided not to send it.

In the body of the letter, apart from developing his theory of non-violence, Tolstoy expressed in concise form some of his principal convictions. "It seems to me now, that if Christ and His teaching had never existed, I myself would have discovered this truth—it now appears to me so simple and clear and convincing. . . . To love God means to love truth; to love one's neighbour as oneself means to recognize the unity of one's soul and life with every other human life, with eternal truth—with God. . . . The significance of Christianity consists of pointing out the possibilities and the happiness of fulfilling the law of love. . . . Only that teaching is true which leads to activity, to a life, which while satisfying the needs of the spirit is at the same time a continual working for the good of others. Such is the teaching of Christ."

In the light of the charge that was repeatedly brought against Tolstoy of not living according to his beliefs, the conclusion of this letter is a remarkably sincere and humble confession of human limitations that goes far to explain his whole present and future struggle with himself, with his family, and with society. "Now another question directly and involuntarily follows from this, 'Well, but you, Leo Nikolayevich, how do you practise what you preach?' That is the most natural question: people always put it to me and always triumphantly shut my mouth with it. 'You preach, but how do you live?' And I answer that I do not preach and cannot preach, although I passionately desire to do so. I can only preach by deeds, and my deeds are bad. What I say is not a sermon; it is only a refutation of a false understanding of Christian teaching and an explanation of its real meaning. Its meaning is not that we should in its name rearrange society by violence; its significance is to find the meaning of life in this world. The fulfilment of Christ's five commands gives that meaning. If you wish to be a Christian, then you must fulfil these commands; if you do not wish to fulfil them, then do not talk about Christianity apart from the fulfilment of these commands. But, people say to me: 'If you find that apart from the fulfilment of Christian teaching there is no reasonable life, and if you love that reasonable life, why do you not fulfil the commands?' I reply that I am at fault and a disgusting creature and deserve scorn for not fulfilling them; but yet not so much in justification as in explanation of my inconsistency, I say: 'Look at my former life and at my life now and you will see that I try to fulfil

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them. I have not fulfilled one-thousandth part of them, it is true, and I am at fault in this; but it is not because I do not wish to fulfil them, but because I am unable to. Teach me how to escape from the nets of temptations that have ensnared me, help me, and I will fulfil them; but even without help I wish and hope to do so. Blame me—I do that myself—but blame me and not the road I follow, and show it to those who ask me where in my opinion the road lies. If I know the road home and go along it drunk, staggering from side to side, does that make the road by which I go the wrong one? If it be wrong, show me another; if I have lost my way and stagger, help me, support me in the right path as I am ready to support you; and do not confuse me, do not rejoice that I have lost my way; do not cry out with delight: Look at him! He says that he's going home yet he's slipping into the bog! Do not rejoice at that, but help me and support me.'

"So that is my relation to teaching and to its practice. With all my strength I try to practise it, and at every failure I not only repent, but I beg for help in order to be able to practise it, and with joy I meet and listen to anyone who, like myself, is seeking the road."

### IX

Tolstoy remained in Moscow during 1883 until the end of April, when he went to Yasnaya Polyana. Shortly after his arrival, a disastrous fire broke out in the village, and the huts of twenty-two peasant families were burned down. He took an active part in fighting the conflagration and was amazed at the calm, uncomplaining manner in which the peasants accepted their severe loss and at their faith in their ability to remedy it. To the victims he gave financial aid and grain, and even timber to rebuild their huts.<sup>1</sup>

On May 23, Tolstoy set out for his Samara estate. The ostensible reason was ill health and the desire to take a *kumys* cure. It is curious that on the day of his departure he signed over to Sonya rights of attorney on all his property. In one of his earliest letters to her from Samara, he implored: "Please, write me frankly—not in moments of agitation, but when you are calm—how you regard my absence; I must know in order to decide when to return. *Kumys*—this was essentially a fantasy. I'm ready to return at once, and in my heart I wish to, and will be very happy to return immediately."

<sup>1</sup> Tolstoy's aid at the time of the fire is described by Anna Seuron, a volatile French governess in the family at this time, whose published recollections of Tolstoy, however, are not always trustworthy.



Sonya's reply was evasive: his health was her first concern, so he must not expect her to summon him back. Let him return when his health and the spirit moved him. There was an undertone of resentment in her letters over the fact that he had once again walked out on her, leaving her with all the domestic cares of the estate and several sick children. More than this, she now exuded a new spirit of emotional independence. He did not seem to need her, well, neither did she particularly need him. "Why do you write that when you return you will be closer to me than before you left?" she coldly asked. "What you do not indicate is: Why? This would be fine if it were again possible. In a letter I did not send, I described to you all my feelings, and then I decided that my sincere feelings were not wanted by you; you have become so careless in your treatment of them that it would be better for you never to know them. It may be that you will become again the same as in years past. But will I be the same?"

Justice seemed to be on Sonya's side in this quarrel, and Tolstoy's answers reflected the fact. Perhaps as a peace offering, he sent her *What I Believe*, the manuscript he was working on, and solicited her opinion. "I read your article, or better, your composition," she wrote. "Of course, it is impossible to say anything against your idea that it would be fine for people to be perfect, and undoubtedly one must remind people that it is necessary to be perfect and what paths they must follow to achieve perfection.<sup>1</sup> Yet I can scarcely refrain from saying that it is *hard* to give up all the toys of life with which one plays, and everyone—and I more than others—keeps a firm grasp on these playthings, and rejoices in the way they glitter, make a noise, and amuse." Without surrendering anything fundamental in his beliefs, Tolstoy was slowly beginning to realize that Sonya's attitude was the natural and prevailing one in a society that would not be saved if it had to sacrifice its toys.

The nonchalant air of Sonya's correspondence caused Tolstoy deep concern all the time he was in Samara. He had never for a moment entertained the thought that his new convictions might result in the loss of her love. Finally an unmistakable note of anguish burst forth in his reply to one of her particularly chilly letters. "The further I read, the more I became cold all over. I wanted to send this letter back to you, but it would only annoy you. It was nothing in particular in the letter, but I did not sleep all night, and I have become terribly sad and pained. I have loved you so,

<sup>1</sup> Sonya has somewhat garbled the thesis of *What I Believe*.

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and you have reminded me of all the things with which you assiduously kill my love. I wrote to you that it pained me to think that I had too coldly and hurriedly left you. But to this you write me that you will try to live so that I will be unnecessary to you, and that you are very successfully achieving this. Concerning me and what governs my life, you write as though it were a weakness which you hope I will cure by means of *kumys*. About our future meeting, which for me is joyous, a bright point to look forward to, and about which I try not to think so that I might not depart at once, you write as though you anticipated from me censure and unpleasantness. Of yourself you write that you are so calm and contented that there only remains for me to wish not to disturb your contentment and calm by my presence. About V. I.,<sup>1</sup> a pitiful, kind, but entirely uninteresting man to me, you write as though he were an enemy and a trouble-maker between us. Then I vividly recalled these horrible moods of yours, so tormenting to me, and about which I had entirely forgotten. Yet I love you so simply and clearly that it has all hurt me terribly."

Shortly after this troubled letter Tolstoy returned to Yasnaya Polyana. On the whole, his stay in Samara had been unprofitable and disagreeable. One bright spot had been meeting his old friends the Molokans, but this too had its unpleasant aspects, for he was aware that the police were now spying on these meetings and reporting to the authorities. The police reports, which have turned up, would have amused him by their official appraisal of his talks and of his influence over these harmless sectarians. One report describes how he tried to "inspire principles of equality, pointing out that all must share with each other," and that "to adorn the church is stupid. We gathered from his talk to the peasantry that he rejects authority and government, and on the basis of his conversation we concluded that he is not a sectarian, but simply a socialist." From this time on, the baleful eyes of the Tsar's secret police kept Tolstoy, as so many Russian writers, under continual surveillance.

### X

Upon his arrival in Yasnaya Polyana on June 28, Tolstoy received a sorrowful and last letter from Turgenev:

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Alekseyev, the ex-tutor now on Tolstoy's Samara estate, and a man whom Sonya heartily disliked, largely, perhaps, because she felt that he influenced her husband's religious beliefs.

## A JEREMIAH IN THE FAMILY

Kind and dear Leo Nikolayevich. It is long since I wrote you, for I have been and am, speaking frankly, on my deathbed. I cannot recover—there is no use thinking of it. I am writing to you particularly to tell you how glad I am to have been your contemporary, and to express to you my last, sincere request. My friend, return to literary activity! That gift came to you from whence comes all the rest. Ah, how happy I should be if I could think that my request would have an effect on you!! I am a doomed man—even the doctors do not know what to call my malady, *Névralgie stomacale goutteuse*. I can neither walk, nor eat, nor sleep. It is even wearisome to repeat all this! My friend, great writer of the Russian land, heed my request! Let me know if you receive this bit of paper, and permit me once more to embrace you *heartily*, heartily, and your wife and all yours. I can write no more, I am weary.

To the very end Turgenev could not understand why Tolstoy had forfeited art to solve the riddle of existence. He did not see that for Tolstoy the measure of true greatness was not what we were, but what we strove to be in the ceaseless struggle to achieve moral perfection. Nor did he realize that the same magnificent qualities that made Tolstoy's art immortal—his sincerity and love of truth—were the very qualities that drove him on in his religious and social mission.

After Turgenev's last visit to Tolstoy two years before, they had kept up a desultory correspondence in the friendly spirit of their recent reconciliation. Time had softened without entirely eliminating Tolstoy's reservations on Turgenev, and his new religious feelings induced an attitude of Christian love in his relations. At the first report of Turgenev's illness, he immediately wrote of his concern and of the thought he had entertained of going to Paris to be near him.

The end came for Turgenev on August 22. In a letter to Strakhov after he heard the news, Tolstoy simply remarked: "The death of Turgenev I expected, yet I often think of him now." In September, Tolstoy was asked by the Society of Lovers of Russian Literature to speak at a public memorial meeting in honour of Turgenev. He agreed either to read a paper or to have someone else deliver it.

Although Tolstoy went with the family to Moscow in September for the winter, he quickly returned to the country to work. He also had another purpose that he did not communicate to Sonya—he had been summoned as a juryman in the District Court. The first she heard of it was in a letter, in which he wrote that he had

appeared at the court and emphatically refused to serve as a juryman because of his religious convictions. He begged her not to get angry with him, for he had not told her because he feared that his intentions might have needlessly worried her. "It was not necessary to put in an appearance at all," he wrote. "There would have been the same fines, but then I should have been summoned again next time. Now I have told them once and for all that I cannot serve." He was fined a hundred rubles for his refusal to serve as a juryman.

This action was Tolstoy's first defiance of civil authority in an effort to remain true to his religious faith. He regarded his act as a protest against the whole system of public justice. It was a slight act, unostentatiously performed, but it gave him immense satisfaction as his initial attempt to repudiate constituted authority. Sonya's reply to his letter told of her fears that his punishment would not end with a mere fine, and without approving or disapproving his act, she scolded him for not taking her into his confidence.

Tolstoy remained a short time at Yasnaya Polyana to write and to read Turgenev's works in preparation for his address. Delighted with two pleasant letters from Sonya, he answered: "Never have I thought of you so much and so well and so entirely purely as I do now. In every respect you are precious to me. I think about Turgenev always, love him terribly, and wish to read all of his works." When he returned to the city, however, the "strained, even unhappy expression on his face" suggested only too clearly to Sonya that he wished he were back in the country.

Preparing his address on Turgenev had become a labour of love. Sonya wrote her sister that all Moscow was stirred up in anticipation of a public oration by Tolstoy, and that an enormous crowd was expected to attend. Meanwhile, the dark forces of the government were at work. The Minister of the Interior had reported to the Emperor Tolstoy's refusal to serve as a juryman, and gratuitously added in the official jargon of the time that "the dignity of the court having been so offended, the declaration of Count L. N. Tolstoy is subject to a categorically sharp censure on the part of the government, and invokes the necessity of taking measures as a warning against similar objectionable declarations capable of undermining trust in the courts and in arousing indignation among all sincerely believing people."

On top of this the Minister was informed by a Moscow government factotum of the impending public celebration in honour of Turgenev, in which Tolstoy would deliver a speech. But this

Tolstoy, he continued, "is a madman, from whom one might expect anything; he may say unbelievable things, and there may be a considerable scandal." And the Minister was advised to take the precaution of reading the speech in advance. The matter was looked into, and the Governor General of Moscow coolly informed the President of the Society of Lovers of Russian Literature to advertise the fact that the meeting in honour of Turgenev "had been postponed for an indefinite time."

The upshot of this whole business, so characteristic of the reactionary reign of Alexander III, is told in a letter from Sonya to her sister: "As you have no doubt seen from the papers and know by rumour, the lecture in memory to Turgenev has been forbidden by your disgusting Petersburg. They say that Tolstoy<sup>1</sup> (the Minister) forbade it. Well, what could you expect from him except tactless and awkward tricks? Only think, the lecture was to have been quite innocent and most peaceful; no one thought of shooting off any liberal squibs. But everyone is terribly surprised. What could have been said? Where could there have been any danger to the government? . . . Everyone without exception is angry about it, except Lyovochka, who is even glad to be excused from appearing in public—a thing he is so unaccustomed to."

## XI

Tolstoy's distraught state of mind from September 1881 to the end of 1883 would seem to have precluded any serious writing and reading. It had become his habit not only to read, but to think with pen in hand. Most of his reading had been of the weightier sort—religious works, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius. The English novelists, Dickens, Thackeray, and Trollope, who had for so long been his favourites, were now neglected. But he read Balzac "with satisfaction," and reread much of Turgenev and Stendhal's *The Red and the Black*. Of the latter masterpiece, he wrote to Sonya: "I read it some forty years ago, but remembered nothing save my relations to the author: sympathy with his boldness and a feeling of kinship—yet an unsatisfied feeling. And strangely enough I feel the same now, but with a clear consciousness of why and wherefore." He also read Strakhov's biography of Dostoyevsky, a book that altered somewhat his unqualified admiration for this great contemporary.

<sup>1</sup> The name of the Minister of the Interior was D. A. Tolstoy.

During this period Tolstoy's literary endeavours were largely of the instructional or didactic genre. In April 1882, he made the first attempt to print his *Confession* in the magazine *Russian Thought*. He offered an introduction to this work and, on the request of the editor, softened some of the phraseology. Nevertheless, the censor banned the production. This was the first of many failures to get his controversial works printed in Russia, but he appears to have accepted such prohibitions calmly, as part of the price he must pay for opposing the accepted order of things.

Some time was spent on polishing the manuscripts of *An Examination of Dogmatic Theology* and his *Union and Translation of the Four Gospels*, although there was virtually no hope of getting them published. The press abroad presented possibilities, for rumours about his new religious views and forbidden theological writings were already causing some stir outside of Russia, and soon an article on the subject was published in a French periodical. And in July 1883, there appeared in the Paris *La Nouvelle Revue* a translation of the introduction to his *Short Account of the Gospels*, the first of many translations of his religious and philosophical works abroad.

During the whole of 1883, Tolstoy devoted himself primarily to writing his remarkable book, *What I Believe*. The distilled essence of virtually everything he had written or thought on the subject of religion and on his personal relation to it up to this time is lucidly and artistically set down in this book. As in *Confession*, the conclusion he reaches is that life is a misfortune for him who seeks only the personal welfare that death inevitably destroys, but a blessing for him who identifies himself with the teaching of Christ and the task of establishing the Kingdom of God on earth, here and now. Despite the didactic nature of the book, it has a profound human quality by virtue of his ability to share with his readers the tremendous inner struggle and intense experience that finally led him to his convictions.

Tolstoy hoped to print *What I Believe*, and when he was putting the finishing touches on it in December 1883, Sonya wrote to her sister: "Lyovochka has finished his work for the press, which they will burn, but I hope that he will now grow and no longer write in this vein." In her most charitable moments, Sonya adopted an attitude of resignation towards her husband's religious writings: it was "the will of God," she sighed, and perhaps these works were "for great purposes," the implication being that they were

beyond her comprehension. Her real feeling—at this time at least—was one of disgust. She had no natural interest in his religious and didactic works, and she worried over the hostility they might provoke in the authorities. Finally, and perhaps most important for her, such literary efforts were unremunerative.

Sonya on more than one occasion expressed sincere regrets that her husband had turned his back on purely artistic works. She had obtained a lasting pleasure from copying and reading his novels, and the effort had given her a sense of being an integral part of the creative genius that she so much admired in him. In one of those voluntary exiles to Yasnaya Polyana, in March 1882, he wrote that an idea for a “poetical work” had occurred to him. Her response was immediate and touching. “What a joyous feeling suddenly seized me,” she declared in her reply, “when I read that you want to write again in a *poetical vein*. You have sensed what I have long waited for and desired. In that is salvation, happiness; in that, which gives you solace and brightens our life, we will again be united. This is the real kind of work for which you were created, and outside of this sphere there is no peace in your soul.”

As a matter of fact, Tolstoy did not entirely abandon imaginative literature over this period. In 1882 he contributed “What Men Live By,” to a children’s magazine, the first of a series of exquisite stories intended primarily for children and peasants, but which have become popular in many languages among readers of all ages. “What Men Live By” is a simple beautiful retelling of a story based on the widespread theme of the angel whom God sent to earth, but whose actions men could not understand. There are also fragments of unfinished tales that belong to this period, and it was in 1882 that he probably began his memorable story, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*.

Immersed in his religious and philosophical studies, however, Tolstoy paid little attention to his wife or to those close friends and admirers who urged him to return to fiction. On occasions he would turn on these well-intentioned critics with some asperity. When his friend, the novelist P. D. Boborykin, remonstrated with him for not employing his artistic powers, he replied: “Why you know, that is just like the former admirers of some ancient French whore repeating to her: ‘Oh, how adorably you used to sing chansonnettes and flip up your petticoats!’”

In actuality, Tolstoy had not turned his back on art; he had simply rejected his former conception of it, just as he rejected the

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kind of life he had led before his spiritual conversion. There is a suggestion that he would like to have broken cleanly with art, as with everything else, but art was too much a part of his being. He could not tear it out of himself, and at the same time he recognized that the aesthetic aim that he had formerly entertained could have no place in the new morality and ethics to which he now subscribed.

This dilemma prompted Tolstoy to try to develop a theory of art that would be in accord with his new views of life.<sup>1</sup> He wrote an article in the form of a letter to the editor of a Moscow art magazine, and in it he tried to formulate a definition of art that would satisfy a moral and useful purpose in life. He did not get very far and left the article unfinished, apparently conscious of the fact that he had not thought the problem through. But he had actually begun the long train of aesthetic speculation that ended fifteen years later with his astounding book, *What is Art?*

## XII

Towards the end of 1883 Tolstoy made the acquaintance of V. G. Chertkov, a man who as both guardian angel and evil genius played a most significant role throughout the remaining years of his life. He first heard of Chertkov from G. A. Rusanov, a young man who suddenly turned up at Yasnaya Polyana in August 1883. He had read a lithograph copy of *Confession*—lithograph, hectograph, and manuscript copies of Tolstoy's religious works forbidden by the censor had already begun to be disseminated throughout Russia—and had been seized with the desire to see the author and ask him many questions connected with his works. Tolstoy received the visitor affably, quickly put him at his ease, and they had a long talk made up mostly of Tolstoy's keen and witty replies to reverent questions on his literary productions.<sup>2</sup>

In the course of their conversation, Rusanov told Tolstoy of a young Captain of the Guards by the name of Chertkov, the son of a rich Adjutant General, who had returned from the army and settled on his estate, where he spent his time in performing good deeds for the peasants. Naturally enough Chertkov's behaviour had

<sup>1</sup> He actually began this attempt in 1882, instead of several years later, as is commonly supposed.

<sup>2</sup> Rusanov soon became one of Tolstoy's most devoted and most valued followers. In his will he paid tribute to the master's tremendous influence on his life by declaring: "Thanks to that greatest of men, Leo Tolstoy, I won faith in God and believed in Christ. Tolstoy gave me happiness, and I became a Christian."



become a subject of common gossip, for his family was high in Petersburg social circles and intimate with the royal family. His career in a Guards regiment subjected him, as he said, to the three classical vices of these aristocratic officers—wine, cards, and women. But he soon wearied of debauchery, no doubt much influenced by the deeply religious attitude of his mother. He read a great deal and was particularly attracted to the works of Dostoyevsky, which (no doubt) helped to lead him to a study of the Gospels and the teaching of Christ. The conclusions he came to on the wickedness of violence, the necessity of productive work, and the need of humility were quite similar to those of Tolstoy. Aware that his new convictions would not permit him to continue an army career, he tendered his resignation, much against the wishes of his parents, in 1881, when he was only twenty-seven. He then retired to his huge estate in the province of Voronezh and engaged in all manner of practical activities, aimed at bettering the material existence of the peasants. At the same time he abandoned all luxuries and endeavoured to live a life as simple and frugal as that of the peasants.

It was not until 1883, when Chertkov grew agitated over the relation of social questions to the teaching of the Gospels, that he learned from a friend of Tolstoy's concern with this same problem. And it was just about this time that Tolstoy's interest in Chertkov had been aroused by Rusanov. Chertkov eagerly desired a meeting, and this was brought about in October 1883, when he was passing through Moscow on his way to Petersburg to see his parents.

From Tolstoy's first letter to Chertkov, a little more than a month after their meeting, it is clear that he was immensely pleased with his latest disciple. He wrote to thank Chertkov for some English books on theological subjects that he had sent, and he flatteringly commented on how Chertkov's marginal notes had helped him to follow "your intellectual and zealous work." But scenting the breath of heresy because one of the books treated at length the subject of the Resurrection, he sternly reproved his young pupil for concerning himself with such metaphysical nonsense. The relationship had begun auspiciously enough. Tolstoy had found a new saint, and Sonya a devil incarnate.

## Chapter XXIV

### JUST PLAIN LEO NIKOLAYEVICH

**T**OLSTOY had been slowly coming to the conclusion that the only way to encourage the Christian life he believed in was by personal example. He realized that the method would be slow, difficult, and indefinite, but at least he would cease being a parasite living on the back of the working class, as he expressed it.

The initial difficulty was that his life was not his own. At the beginning of 1884 he was the father of eight children,<sup>1</sup> with another on the way. Domestic problems were numerous, and his advice and authority were in constant demand. Despite his wife's careful management, the family expenses in Moscow mounted. Social caste, tradition, and custom dictated a certain standard of living. No less than five tutors and governesses lived with the family, and as many more teachers were employed from outside to give lessons to the children. Eleven servants worked in the house, took care of the grounds, and operated a carriage, calash, droshky, and two sledges. Food alone for the twenty-six members of this household was a considerable item in the budget. Sonya reckoned her monthly expenses at 910 rubles,<sup>2</sup> a large but not extravagant amount for so numerous a family.

The income had been derived mostly from Tolstoy's estates until his literary earnings had provided a substantial and important addition. Now he not only questioned the right of private property, which had troubled him for years, but he believed it immoral to live off the money earned by the toil of others.

It did not occur to Tolstoy to demand that his family should at once repudiate the idle self-indulgent existence they were leading for one of frugality, simplicity, and hard manual work. However

<sup>1</sup> Eleven children had been born to the Tolstoys at this time, but three had died.

<sup>2</sup> Approximately \$455, but the purchasing price of this sum then was several times what it is today.

unbending he might be about expressing the rightness of his moral principles, he understood human nature too well to expect miracles of self-sacrifice. He placed his hope in an attitude of "sweet reasonableness"—a famous phrase of Matthew Arnold that he admired—and in persuasion by example.

## II

Tolstoy began his long struggle to practise what he preached in a mild manner. He dropped his title and requested servants to address him as plain "Leo Nikolayevich." In January 1884, after having finished *What I Believe*, he went to Yasnaya Polyana for a short visit. From there he wrote Sonya that he was making a pair of boots for old Gasha, for manual labour he now deemed an absolute necessity. At the same time his letters criticized Sonya's fondness for balls, and the obvious pleasure that she and her oldest daughter derived from the attention paid them by the Governor General at the last dance. And as a moral lesson, he contrasted the well-being of his own children with the poverty of a poor orphan who had appealed to him in the village. Sonya reacted unfavourably: "Moral perfection I will never attain—that is now clear to me. And I cannot enjoy material pleasures because some discerning and stern critic always appears and plunges me into despair at once. That is why I do not love life."

Upon his return to Moscow in February, Tolstoy's behaviour baffled his friends and irritated his family. The tasks that servants were accustomed to perform for him, he now dispensed with. Entries such as the following occurred regularly in his diary at this time: "With the children I gaily cleaned up my room. I was ashamed to do what had to be done—empty the chamber pot." But a few days later he recorded his triumph over shame and the chamber pot. Making shoes he now took up in real earnest, employing a workman to teach him the craft. Master and pupil sat at a bench in one of the two little rooms that Tolstoy had reserved for himself in the Moscow house. The smell of leather and tobacco filled the low-roofed, ill-ventilated workshop. As the impatient pupil sat huddled over his task, carefully waxing the thread and splicing the bristles, he groaned over every failure and yet stubbornly refused the attempts of his awed instructor to assist him. When success crowned his efforts, he rejoiced like a triumphant schoolboy. Sometimes he went to his teacher's wretched dwelling

for lessons. In his diary he jotted down, after his departure from the shoemaker's abode: "How like a light morally splendid in his dirty, dark corner."

In this effort to produce more and consume less, the principle succeeded better than the shoemaking. A pair of shoes which he turned out for one of his sons went unworn, although Tolstoy himself proudly wore hunting boots of his own manufacture. With mock seriousness, Fet, who had renewed his visits, ordered a pair of boots from his old literary friend turned shoemaker. Puzzled callers were obliged to wait until he drove the last peg into the leather sole. Any scoffer who thought the task easy might find himself challenged to a contest of peg-driving; Tolstoy would gleefully win and hand over the money wagered to his poor teacher in the craft. Once, after a long session at his last, he wrote in the diary: "It makes one feel like becoming a worker, for the soul flowers."

At first the family were alternately amused and annoyed by what seemed a bit of proletarian play-acting. Tolstoy was in earnest. Did not the Gospels support his endeavour? He went into raptures over the discovery of the manuscript, *Industry and Idleness*, of a peasant-sectarian, T. M. Bondarev, who had been exiled to Siberia. The author attempted to prove that the evil in men's lives resulted from regarding empty regulations as religious duties while failing to realize the chief duty announced at the beginning of the Holy Scripture: "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread." Tolstoy sent an enthusiastic letter to Bondarev, in which he admitted his indebtedness to the work, and later he wrote an essay on it. The indebtedness was slight, for Tolstoy had independently reached the same conclusions. He believed that every man should earn his bread with his own hands, understanding by "bread-labour" all heavy, rough work necessary to save man from death by hunger and cold. For he felt it impossible to serve men while consuming what others labour to produce.

The new regime transformed existence at Yasnaya Polyana during the summers. Tolstoy had always enjoyed farm work for the physical exercise and pleasure he got out of it; now he regarded it as a duty sanctified by Holy Scripture. Dressed more like a peasant than a country gentleman, he stood in the hot sun sweating and mowing. He would plough the land of a poor widow, assist at building a hut, or stack and carry grain. Nothing was too menial for him, and he performed all manner of work about the estate with zeal if not always well. One could see him any day carting manure, lugging

timber, or sitting astride a top beam of a hut that he was rebuilding, cutting a place for the cross-rafter to fit into; his sleeves would be rolled up, hair dishevelled, unbuttoned shirt showing his bare chest, a chisel stuck in his leather girdle, a saw hanging from his waist, and his greying beard shaking at each blow of the axe. It would be a mistake to imagine, however, that all was done merely for the sake of a theory, or to subdue the flesh and elevate the spirit. Like many intellectuals, he sincerely enjoyed manual toil, the physical well-being it provided, the healthy appetite, and the sound, peaceful sleep that followed bodily exhaustion.

The family at first went on with its croquet, visitors, and endless round of summer amusements. They felt sorry that their father should waste his valuable energies on such heavy toil, and perhaps they grew a bit ashamed of their own idle existence. Although he said nothing to them, they knew what he thought, and this made them uncomfortable and spoiled their fun. His proof-by-example began slowly to have an effect on the family. Nineteen-year-old Ilya finally asked his father to assign him some outdoor work. He was at once set to ploughing the field of a woman whose husband had deserted her, and he relished the experience. Soon his brothers Sergei and Leo joined him in manual labour, and presently field work became a fashion that swept through the entire household. Young and old, men and women, formed groups and competed in mowing, hacking awkwardly with their scythes, and cheerfully raising blisters in long hours of raking up the hay. Even Sonya in a sophisticated version of a peasant dress did her share, along with the younger children and the governesses.

Nor were visitors immune to this virus of toil. That summer (1885) a young Jew by the name of Isaak Fainerman suddenly turned up at Yasnaya Polyana. Tolstoy's teaching had weaned him away from the revolutionary movement, and he had come to follow humbly in the wake of the prophet. Tolstoy was pleased with his straightforward manner and directed him to work in the village. Fainerman refused to accept money for his labour and almost starved to death. He lived in the most abject poverty, gave away what few good clothes he had, and went around the village in rags. His extreme spirit of self-sacrifice distressed rather than pleased Tolstoy, who always preferred common sense to fanaticism.

Fainerman's success with children suggested the position of teacher in the village school, and he willingly allowed himself to be baptized in the Orthodox faith in order to obtain the post. But

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the authorities would not permit him to hold the position, and Tolstoy was obliged to give him odd copy jobs. To complicate matters, he confessed that he had a wife and child and asked permission for them to come and live with him at Yasnaya Polyana. His pretty young wife soon revolted against his beggarly existence and deserted him. Army service finally took Fainerman away from the village.<sup>1</sup>

Fainerman was one of the "dark people," as Sonya truculently called them, that growing army of men and women from all walks of life who now began to join up under the new Christian banner of Tolstoy. Two others in the vanguard to appear at Yasnaya Polyana in the summer of 1885 to work in the fields were Marya Alexandrovna Schmidt and Olga Alekseyevna Barshev. In the spring of the preceding year these two mouselike, old-maid school-teachers in a Moscow institute for girls had stumbled upon Tolstoy's new faith. By chance Marya had heard at a friend's house passages read from a hectograph copy of Tolstoy's *Short Account of the Gospels*. A sincere Orthodox believer, she was both impressed and puzzled by the realistic approach to things holy in this work. With charming naiveté, she and her companion, Olga, went around to various bookshops in an effort to buy this illegal work and were astonished that the production of so famous a novelist was on sale nowhere. They determined to appeal to Tolstoy himself.

The two teachers had heard from students that Tolstoy's wife did not agree with his beliefs, and that it was wiser to go to his house early in the morning, while she was still asleep. They set out at eight o'clock. When they rang the bell, however, a servant told them that the count had not yet come down. They departed, walked for a bit, and returned at nine. This time they were admitted to the hall and waited, feeling shy.

Suddenly they heard a light step. Tolstoy entered, very sprightly, and inquired in a harmonious voice:

"What can I do for you?"

They explained that they wished to obtain a copy of his *Short Account of the Gospels*.

"But what do you wish to do with it?"

Marya told him that twenty-five young girls were entrusted to her care, and hence she must know what the truth is. The chief thing in life for her, she said, was the religious question.

<sup>1</sup> Under the pseudonym of Teneromo, Fainerman wrote a number of works based upon his relations with Tolstoy, but they are extremely untrustworthy.

"But I have only one copy."

"Give it to me and we shall make another."

Marya made the copy, and she was soon employed to make copies of other forbidden religious works of Tolstoy. At Yasnaya Polyana the following summer she worked harder than any in the fields, for by now she had decided to abandon her genteel existence for a life devoted to simplicity and rough toil. She soon left Yasnaya Polyana and became a member of a Tolstoyan colony on the shore of the Black Sea.<sup>1</sup> There she cheerfully performed the most difficult kind of physical work and recommended herself to all by her meek, uncomplaining nature. Eventually she returned to Yasnaya Polyana and settled on a small property near by that belonged to one of Tolstoy's daughters. She supported herself by the sale of vegetables from her garden and milk from her cow. The family held her in high esteem and Tolstoy, who said that he had never known a woman so profoundly spiritual, loved her and valued her judgment. In turn, she literally worshipped him, and her nature, fully attuned to selfless service to others, was essentially more Tolstoyan than that of the master.

Even distinguished guests at Yasnaya Polyana were caught up by this strange enthusiasm for toiling in the fields. Ge, whose friendship with Tolstoy had ripened, and who shared his views on the necessity of physical labour, was one of the visitors who eagerly joined the bands of workers that summer. The previous winter he had come to Moscow to paint Tolstoy, who allowed the artist to observe him while he was writing in his study. And Ge observed him with enraptured eyes, as though anxious not to miss a single detail of his subject. The result was the well-known portrait in which the massive head of Tolstoy resembles that of a Zeus with meditation sitting upon his brow, as though in the very act of formulating great universal truths. The artist saw a quite different Tolstoy at Yasnaya Polyana, when both of them, clad in old clothes, worked industriously together to build a brick oven for a peasant widow.

An unusual man who called himself William Frey visited Tolstoy early in October, shortly before the family left for the city at the conclusion of this unique summer of outdoor work. His real name was V. K. Geins; he was a Russian by birth, but a cosmopolitan by nature. An excellent mathematician and deeply versed in

<sup>1</sup> This was one of the first of the agricultural colonies organized by disciples to carry out Tolstoy's teachings in a practical sense. Soon others started in Russia, and the movement spread abroad.

science, he had had an extraordinary career, first serving with distinction in the army, and then, moved by some strong moral impulse, retiring in order to emigrate to America in 1868 where he eventually set up an agricultural communal colony. The experiment failed, and he joined forces with a similar colony in Kansas of which Alekseyev was a member. When this colony also failed, Frey worked for some time as a common labourer in the United States and finally returned to Russia in 1885, after having spent a brief time in England. He heard of Tolstoy's new faith and activities, and upon investigation he realized that they had much in common. A letter to Tolstoy concerning his beliefs brought an invitation to visit him at Yasnaya Polyana.

Tolstoy received Frey with all the delight and ardour he customarily displayed at this time upon discovering anyone who shared his views. He absorbed greedily all that Frey could tell him of existence in Russian communal colonies in America, and he held up as a model to his family and friends the life of moral purity and hard labour led by these idealists, apparently preferring to disregard the obvious conclusion to be drawn from the failure of such social experiments, in which, as one of the colonists expressed it, everyone went crazy in his own way. From Frey, Tolstoy also learned a good deal about the theory and practice of vegetarianism. He was delighted, for he had already been sporadically observing this practice, and now he wholeheartedly embraced it and abstained from meat for the rest of his life.

Frey paid another visit in December (1885), and Tolstoy read to him one of the chapters of *What Then Must We Do?* in which he condemned the positivism of Auguste Comte, a scientific system that he believed usurped the place of religion and abolished the control that moral principles should exercise. This was a mistake. Frey was a fanatical devotee of the philosophy of Comte and fiercely objected to Tolstoy's condemnation of this system. Tolstoy refused to alter his position, and their promising friendship ended abruptly, its only memento a lot of absurd and at times unprintable accusations against Tolstoy in Frey's notebook.

The decision to give up meat was not the only renunciation of Tolstoy during this first vigorous attempt to live the new life at Yasnaya Polyana. He gave up wine; and hunting—the sport that had provided him with so much pleasure and with the material for some of the most brilliant passages of his fiction—was firmly abandoned. The previous fall, after Sonya had returned to Moscow,



he wrote in one of his letters to her: "Today I busied myself with the affairs of the estate and then went off on my horse; the dogs stuck to me. . . . I wanted to test my own feeling for hunting. To ride and to pursue game has been a very agreeable habit for forty years. But when a hare jumped out, I wished him luck. Above all, I felt ashamed." Smoking, too, he attempted to give up, having first made the effort in the summer of 1884. He now considered smoking a luxury and declared that, instead of tobacco, grain should be grown to feed the famished. The struggle was hard. He loved to smoke and believed the practice soothed his nerves. Dilating his nostrils, he would eagerly inhale when someone smoked in his presence. The deprivation was a torment and backsliding not infrequent, and not until several years later did he finally conquer the habit.

These renunciations were not thrust upon the family, although Tolstoy always hoped that his example might influence them. In general, they respected his wishes in regard to his own behaviour, but they lacked a sympathetic understanding and any spirit of discipleship. When they laboured in the fields, they did so not for the reasons impelling him, but because it had become a kind of vogue and furnished them with good healthy exercise. However, Masha, aged fifteen, was beginning to regard her father's views seriously, and so was his oldest daughter, Tanya.

## III

After the family had returned to the city at the end of the summer vacation of 1885, Tolstoy lingered on at Yasnaya Polyana to write. Sonya wrote her sister shortly after her return to Moscow on November 1: "He has changed his habits still more. . . . He gets up at seven, when it is still dark. He pumps water for the whole house and lugs it in an enormous tub on a sledge; he saws long logs, chops them for kindling and stacks the wood. He does not eat white bread and positively does not go anywhere."

The "new life" did not permit attendance at those gay social functions that attracted Tolstoy's wife and older children. When he went out, it was usually alone, and in order to probe into the disreputable corners of the city in search of material for his writing. The previous year he had visited Rzhanov House again to inquire about a laundress who had been evicted and died of starvation. On another occasion he went to the police station to

ask about a bleary-eyed, drunken, fifteen-year-old prostitute who had been arrested, and he was horrified to be told casually that these girls began their trade at a still tenderer age. After inspecting a stocking factory, in order to acquaint himself with the conditions of the workers, he wrote in his diary: "Sorry factory people—starvelings. Teach me, God, how to serve them."

Although Tolstoy hardly ever went into society now, his house swarmed with people who sought him out for one reason or another. Artists and writers, professors, and men and women of all degree came to ask what they should do to help establish the Kingdom of God on earth. The great painter I. E. Repin, who sympathized with but could never wholly accept Tolstoy's religious views, visited at this time; so did another distinguished painter, V. M. Vasnetsov. And the famous collector of paintings, P. M. Tretyakov, whose artistic taste was considerably influenced by Tolstoy, came to call more than once.

The previous winter, Chertkov had brought to Tolstoy's house his friend P. I. Biryukov, who soon became one of his most devoted disciples and his future biographer. As a young student finishing the naval academy, where he had specialized in astronomy, Biryukov had already decided for himself that nonviolence was the essence of Christianity. His friendship with Chertkov had helped to shape his religious convictions, and his contact with Tolstoy changed the whole course of his life.

Tolstoy's unusual views, which were becoming more and more widely publicized, began to expose him to appeals from a variety of people, some sincere seekers after truth, others religious fanatics or mere mountebanks. This harassment increased through the years as his fame spread far and wide and caused him many unhappy moments. For with a faith based on service to humanity, he felt compelled to lend an ear to every plea. Sometimes he even initiated efforts to help unfortunates, usually the victims of government oppression.

One case that particularly aroused his sympathy in 1884 was that of Natalya Alexandrovna Arnfeldt, a young woman who had been exiled to Siberia for political conspiracy. At the request of the girl's mother, he attempted to persuade the authorities to move her to a prison closer to her mother or to permit the mother to live near her daughter. It was almost inevitable that he should appeal to Granny, as he had on many similar occasions. After nearly two years of silence, he wrote to ask her to intercede through her connection with the Empress, although he did not fail to anticipate further

disagreements with his old friend by begging her at the end of his letter: "Only, please, *do not convert* me to the Christian faith." Granny, as always, did not fail him, and managed to have the petition of the exile's mother favourably received. In their correspondence on the matter, their former quarrel came dangerously close to the surface. Granny could not resist hinting once again that it was pride that had led him to abandon Orthodoxy, and his rejoinder amounted to advising her to concentrate her proselyting efforts on those aristocratic "Christians" of her government set who were so heedless of the precepts of real Christianity that they willingly persecuted poor victims like the Arnfeldt woman.

A different cause for worry was those young men who, influenced by Tolstoy's writings on nonviolence, turned to him for advice on whether or not they ought to refuse to serve in the army. The moral responsibility in such cases weighed upon his conscience and caused him severe mental anguish.

At the end of 1885, A.P. Zalyubovski, a young man who had learned of Tolstoy's convictions through his friend N. L. Ozmidov, who was employed to copy Tolstoy's forbidden works, wrote to Tolstoy for advice. His term of military service was approaching, he explained, and he felt that his religious beliefs would oblige him to refuse to serve, but he feared the effect this decision would have on his mother. After much thought on the matter, Tolstoy decided not to answer. Later, in a letter to Zalyubovski's brother, he gave as a reason: "The teaching of Christ does not dictate anyone's actions; it points out the truth: questions of how one should act in a given occasion must be decided by each person in his own soul according to the degree of clarity and the strength of one's understanding of truth; and they should not be decided as I wish or do not wish to act according to the teaching of Christ, for I cannot act otherwise."

Zalyubovski, not hearing from Tolstoy, refused nevertheless to serve in the army. He was immediately arrested and thrown into a disciplinary battalion for two years and deprived of all legal rights. When Tolstoy learned of this he was deeply moved by the misfortunes of the young man and immediately set in motion every resource at his command to influence high authorities in order to obtain a pardon. His efforts failed. After Zalyubovski had served out his time in the disciplinary battalion, he was excused from further service. The incident left a scar on Tolstoy's conscience, but in no sense weakened his determination to oppose military service and war with all his powers.

A more successful effort to perform a Christian service at about this time was Tolstoy's care of his sick friend and disciple Prince L. D. Urusov. When Urusov's poor health made it necessary for him to go to the Crimea in March 1885, no member of his family was available to accompany him. Tolstoy, although not too well himself and swamped with family difficulties and literary affairs, immediately dropped everything and offered to go with Urusov. The trip had its compensations, for it enabled him to revisit Sevastopol and live again the thrilling scenes of his youth. In a radiant mood he wrote to Sonya: "The flowers bloom and it is hot even in one's shirt. The woods are bare, but in the air, sensitive, springlike, are mixed the smells of dead leaves, human refuse, and violets—all intermingled. We wandered among places that seemed inaccessible, where the enemies' batteries had been, and strangely the remembrance of war was even united with a feeling of liveliness and youth." Just five months after their return from this brief trip, Urusov died, much lamented by Tolstoy and his whole family, particularly by Sonya, who was perhaps more partial to him than to any of her husband's disciples.

## IV

Chertkov, that newer and younger disciple, whom Sonya had already begun to distrust, was gaining a firm hold on Tolstoy's affections and an important place in his daily affairs. The relations between the two men assumed that peculiar intimacy possible only between master and pupil when they discover that they hate the same things and are willing to compromise on what they love."<sup>1</sup>

At first Sonya's attitude toward Chertkov was variable. She once described him as a "tall, handsome, manly person, a real aristocrat from the first glance." And it is true that Chertkov was an attractive-looking man. Shortly after his first visit, Sonya wrote her husband, who was at Yasnaya Polyana: "I'm sending on to you a letter from Chertkov. Will you always *intentionally* close your eyes to people in whom you do not *wish* to see anything except what is good? Truly this is blindness!" Yet the next year, when Chertkov visited her in Petersburg, she seemed quite flattered and wrote to her

<sup>1</sup> Tolstoy's correspondence with Chertkov over this period (1884-1885) has recently been published in full, and it contains many letters that have never before been printed. (See Vol. LXXXV of the Jubilee Edition.) The remaining letters of Tolstoy in this extensive correspondence, almost a thousand in all, are being published in the succeeding volumes of the edition. Two more volumes (LXXXVI-LXXXVII) have already appeared.

husband: "I liked him here very much; he is so simple, affable, and he even seemed jolly."

Indeed, Chertkov could charm when he had a mind to, and at this time he appeared anxious to deserve the good opinion of the Tolstoy family. There was an instability in his nature, however, that led him to offend where he desired most to please. His relations with Tolstoy—in this early period at least—often suffered from this instability. No doubt a morbid attachment to his mother had much to do with his unevenness in human relations. She was a strong-minded woman, and after the death of her husband she concentrated all her affection on her son. A prominent Radstockite, she spent a good deal of her time abroad, particularly in England, in order to be near V. A. Pashkov,<sup>1</sup> the leader of the Russian Evangelical sect, who had been exiled in 1884.

The mother at first disliked Tolstoy, for she feared his influence over her son. Tolstoy, fully aware of the fact, behaved towards her with delicacy, trying to gain her friendship. "Two letters from Chertkov," Tolstoy noted in his diary in July 1884. "His mother, as is natural, hates me." There were moments when Chertkov appeared to reflect his mother's distrust of Tolstoy. With an exaggerated frankness, he confessed to him in a letter from England in July 1884: "Even while thinking of you, I notice a nasty little devil in my relation to you. A rascally feeling of smugness often takes the place of my sincere friendship when I realize that I am in close, intimate relations with such a 'remarkable man' as you. I feel this is quite like that vain satisfaction I formerly experienced, when the Emperor or even some Grand Duke favoured me with special attention in the presence of others."

Chertkov never wearied of admitting to Tolstoy that he was an egoist. The persistent self-criticism may have been an unconscious imitation of a habit common to the master, but in the matter of egoism, Chertkov was abundantly at fault. Tolstoy worried over a lack of warmth in the friendship of his young disciple. With his own ardent nature he often wrote in letters to Chertkov that he "loved him"—as he was accustomed to do in correspondence with people dear to him—and he complained to his friend: "In your letters there is little simple love for me, as for a human being who loves you." Chertkov's answer was curious and deserves to be remembered in the light of his general behaviour and future events. "I love you," he wrote, "although I love separate

<sup>1</sup> He was married to the sister of Chertkov's mother.

personalities very little . . . with the exception of children, and in particular little boys, whom I especially love. But I positively love you, although I'm a little afraid." Shortly before this he excused himself for a poor letter he had written because of low spirits, and then added: "I have now arranged things so that I shall again sleep in the same room with Peter [a young peasant servant]. I do not know why, but when I sleep in the same room with someone, I sleep much better and more quietly in this manner."

Whatever Tolstoy may have thought about Chertkov's lack of warmth in their friendship, he strongly urged him to marry. Chertkov categorically replied that he was in love with no one; that the wife he took must understand and agree with his views on the significance and purpose of life; and finally that he was convinced that any wife he considered suitable would not please his mother. And he concluded, in answer to Tolstoy's warning concerning the temptations of the flesh in the path of a single man: "It is understandable that I do not wish to marry merely for physical reasons. You correctly refer to a meagre life and work. But it seems to me that the principal thing is the will, the internal struggle, and the success of this depends on the internal state of the spirit." Chertkov soon changed his mind; or rather he found the woman he wished to marry not merely for physical reasons.

Although the precious tone of a few of these early letters suggests that their friendship had something in it of the "eternal bond" of a couple of boarding-school misses, when they dealt with doctrinal matters the sharpest kind of criticism resulted. There was more religiosity than religion in Chertkov, and at times a Calvinistic spirit in him annoyed Tolstoy. He sensed a proselyting streak in Chertkov, who adopted a rather stuffy attitude towards the faith of others and felt that he had been ordained to lead man to the fount of his own beliefs. Tolstoy censured him for this failing, mitigating his reproof by freely admitting that he himself had also once burned with the desire to proselyte. But now he felt that he had no right to urge people to accept his own religious convictions, nor did he believe that his path was the only one to the truths he held. Any path was acceptable if it reached the same goal. "I am so firmly convinced," he wrote to Chertkov, "that the truth for me is the truth for all people that the question about when and how people will arrive at that truth does not interest me."

Chertkov's argumentativeness on doctrinal points no doubt represented a sincere desire for knowledge, for in such matters Tolstoy

was sometimes inconsistent and not clear in his exposition; yet there is also reason to suppose that the young disciple's proneness to equivocate arose from a desire to preserve some degree of intellectual and spiritual independence in the face of the master. In his letters he raised the question of external aid from God, which Tolstoy dismissed as dangerously metaphysical, and the question of prayer. Prayer to God, Tolstoy explained, was a superstition; one should pray only for those things that can be fulfilled by people and by oneself. With a large unearned income, Chertkov was disposed to quibble endlessly over Tolstoy's uncompromising stand on the evil of property. It is impossible to be a Christian and possess property, he warned Chertkov. For the important thing in Christianity is not to live so that others will serve you, but to live in order to serve others. Since the possession of unearned money enables one to avoid labour and to exploit the work of others, Tolstoy condemned money.

The aristocratic Chertkov had a distaste for physical toil, if one may believe the report of Tolstoy's son Ilya.<sup>1</sup> Chertkov visited Yasnaya Polyana in the summer of 1885, when the enthusiasm for work in the fields was at its height. After breakfast the whole company went to the stables for their tools and set about their various tasks. Tolstoy's daughter Tanya, who was always lively and fond of fun, seeing that Chertkov was going off with empty hands, called to him:

"And where are you going?"

"To the villa-a-age."

"What for?"

"To he-e-lp."

"Why, how are you going to help? You haven't got any tools. Here, take a rake; it'll do to hand them up the straw."

"Oh, I shall help them with advi-i-ice," said Mr.——, speaking as he always did, with a drawl like an Englishman, quite unaware of Tanya's irony, and how ridiculous and useless he would be with his advice in "the villa-a-age," where everybody has to work hard and where people dressed up in baggy English knickerbockers and Norfolk jackets are merely in the way and interfere with other people's work.

There were occasions in these early days of their friendship when the young disciple made bold to question the fundamental truths of the master's faith. Tolstoy would then sternly pull him up and let him understand that if anyone were going to commit

<sup>1</sup> In this account the author does not name Chertkov, but the person indicated could be no one else.

heresy, it was he. In a controversy in April 1885 with L. E. Obolenski, a writer and sympathizer, Chertkov supported his views against Tolstoy. The point at issue appears to have been Tolstoy's insistence on the five commandments as the essential basis of Christ's teaching. In a sharp letter to Chertkov he sarcastically observed that it was Christ and not he who had set the number of commandments. "No, you say, these commandments are insufficient. Well, tell me then what ones are sufficient. Then I will accept yours. Provide another programme, your own, or find it in the teaching of Christ. But until you have devised your own commandments, permit me to live better by Christ's, guided by them in life, for to my feeble mind they seem more fully to envision the Kingdom of God."

Such outbursts were rare, and the whole tenor of the extensive correspondence between Tolstoy and Chertkov over these two years emphasizes the deepening bond of friendship and their growing dependence on each other. In the practical matters connected with his literary output and in the propagation of his new faith, Tolstoy began to develop the habit of leaning upon Chertkov, who possessed considerable organizing and financial abilities. In fact, Chertkov was already well on the way towards becoming a sort of self-appointed business manager of Tolstoyism. His crusading zeal was enormous, and he acted as the gadfly in Tolstoy's literary endeavours with consequences of extreme importance.

## v

Early in the correspondence of Tolstoy and Chertkov, the necessity for the cheap publication of good literature was discussed. Since the spread of elementary education, the reading public in Russia had grown considerably. Apart from cheap productions of legends, lives of saints, and penny-dreadfuls, no attempt had been made to publish good literature inexpensively enough to be within the reach of the poor. Tolstoy had long recognized this problem. When he had been conducting his school at Yasnaya Polyana, he had been struck by the receptivity of peasants to artistic literature. Now he felt strongly that authors who wrote their books in comfort and consumed what the toil of the poor produced should at least attempt to provide literary food worthy of these people.

In February 1884, Tolstoy read an article that he had written on the necessity of cheap editions of good literature for the masses



to a group of people interested in public education. And in October Chertkov proposed the publication of a popular magazine designed for the masses, a proposal that Tolstoy enthusiastically encouraged. By November the project had changed somewhat after Chertkov had had a conference with I. D. Sytin, a Moscow publisher of inexpensive books. An agreement was reached for the printing of cheap booklets and pictures that would bring to the people tales and illustrations in the spirit of Tolstoy's Christian teaching. The stories were to be written by the best Russian authors and the illustrations would be done by the most distinguished artists. Thus the pioneering publishing business, called the *Intermediary*, was founded, one of the most practical and worth-while ventures inspired by Tolstoy's influence, although due credit for its establishment must be given to Chertkov who, along with Biryukov, managed its fortunes for some years. In the first four years of its existence the little *Intermediary* booklets, priced at one and one-half kopeks, sold twelve million copies.

Tolstoy's theory that the masses would read good literature if they could afford to buy it was proved to the hilt. And something of the initial popularity of the publications must be attributed to the fact that three of the first four issues were stories from his pen. Chertkov, mindful of the success of Tolstoy's tale "What Men Live By," written several years before, kept urging him to contribute similar stories for *Intermediary*. And during 1884 and 1885 he wrote no less than fifteen tales and texts describing pictures, most of which were quickly published by *Intermediary*. They include such well-known short stories as "Two Brothers and Gold"; "Ilyas"; "Where Love Is, God Is"; "A Spark Neglected Burns the House"; and "Two Old Men." These stories are mostly retellings of popular folk tales, for which he had a special gift. Their clear religious or moral lesson is never allowed to obtrude upon the narrative interest which is sustained with his usual skill. And the tales are told in that simple language which Tolstoy was beginning to favour more and more as the proper artistic medium for the mass of readers he hoped to reach.

Tolstoy encouraged *Intermediary* not only with contributions of his own, but also with suggestions of works that might be printed. These were all books that he had read and valued highly: Dickens's short stories, *Oliver Twist*, *Little Dorrit*, *Bleak House*, and *Edwin Drood*, George Eliot's *Felix Holt* and Kingsley's *Hypatia*. Matthew Arnold's *Literature and Dogma* he also strongly urged upon

Chertkov. Tolstoy was enthusiastic about this work. He wrote to a friend that it was "a remarkable production" and contained many of his own thoughts. "He will bring you great satisfaction," he remarked, "because he particularly insists on destroying the notion of God as something outside us, a 'magnified man' as he calls Him." And he requested Chertkov when he was in England to present Arnold with a copy of the French rendering of *What I Believe*, a commission that was fulfilled.<sup>1</sup>

Of the American books that he read at this time, Tolstoy recommended Prescott's *Conquest of Mexico*; and in the works of the noted Unitarian preacher Theodore Parker<sup>2</sup> he "was very happy to find that my own thoughts had been excellently expressed twenty years ago." Emerson's famous essay "Self-Reliance" he found "charming," and the author "profound, bold, but often capricious and muddled." But the books of Henry George—*Progress and Poverty* and *Social Problems*—which he discovered at this time, made a lasting impression on him and influenced his own economic theories. Of *Progress and Poverty* he wrote to Sonya: "This is an important book. It is as important a step on the path of public life as the freeing of the serfs—freedom from private ownership of land. One's view on this subject is the text of a man. It is necessary to read George, who has put this question clearly and definitely. After him it is impossible to prevaricate; one must directly take a stand on his or on the other side. My demands go much further than his; but his are a step on the first rung of the ladder that I'm climbing." Tolstoy urged his friends to read George, and to Chertkov, he wrote of *Progress and Poverty*: "The book has not been unnoticed, but not valued because it demolishes that whole scientific web of Spencer-Mill<sup>3</sup>—all that futile nonsense, and appeals directly to the moral consciousness and occupation of people and even defines that occupation. There are weaknesses in it, as in all things human, but in it there is real human thought and heart, and not scientific rubbish." In truth, Henry George's idea of the nationalization of land by means of a single land tax took such a hold on Tolstoy that for the rest of his life he popularized the idea in conversations and in his writings.

<sup>1</sup> Arnold in 1887 wrote a highly interesting article on Tolstoy's literary, religious, and philosophical productions, which is filled with high praise but with certain reservations on his religious views.

<sup>2</sup> *The Transient and Permanent in Christianity and Discourse of Matters Pertaining to Religion.*

<sup>3</sup> Herbert Spencer and John Stuart Mill.

The wide reading that Tolstoy did over this period inspired a fruitful idea, for in his diary in March 1884, after a note on his reading of Confucius, he jotted down: "Must compose for myself a Circle of Reading: Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius, Lao-Tse, Buddha, Pascal, the Gospels." For he felt that from these and other great works he could cull thoughts that would best guide man's moral and religious life. More than twenty years later he completed this vast project.

The publication of Tolstoy's own productions at this time was continually encumbered by difficulties with the censor. *What I Believe* was not actually finished until January 22, 1884, after he had lost the first set of proofs when his suitcase was stolen in a Moscow railway station. Convinced by his previous experience with *Confession* that such a religious work would never pass the censor in the ordinary course of events, he attempted a rather familiar dodge. He arranged for an expensive edition of only fifty copies in the hope that the book, obviously not intended for popular circulation, would be certified. The ruse failed. The head of the Moscow Civil Censorship Committee reported that *What I Believe* "must be considered an extremely harmful book as it undermines the foundations of social and governmental institutions and wholly destroys the teaching of the Church." On the basis of this report the spiritual censor Pobedonostsev ordered all copies of the book to be seized and burnt.

Actually, not one copy was burnt; the whole edition was sent to Petersburg and illegally distributed among high officials and their friends. "That is fine," Tolstoy wrote when he heard of the fate of his book. As so often happens in cases of prohibition, there arose a widespread demand for his banned publications. News of them spread, and he appears to have been unconcerned over the unauthorized reproduction of these works. Secret printing presses and hectograph and lithograph machines were not uncommon in the hands of political revolutionists. And in some cases it is known that they reproduced in quantity Tolstoy's forbidden works, for there was often much in them that revolutionists could use to their own purpose. The situation intensified the hostility of the government towards Tolstoy. A German translation of *What I Believe* appeared in Leipzig in 1884, and the next year in Paris a French version. And in the same year Chertkov published English translations of *Confession*, *What I Believe*, and *A Short Account of the Gospels*, none of which works had as yet been printed in Russia.

## LEO TOLSTOY

Like a ghost from the past, there appeared in print, at the end of 1885, several fragments of the beginning of his old projected novel on the Decembrists. He had dug them out at the request of the Society to Aid Needy Authors and Scholars, the organization that he had helped to establish twenty-seven years before. Shortly before these fragments appeared, he received a letter from Granny to tell him that she had uncovered some rich material on the Decembrists. With a nostalgic longing for the literary past of his great novels that she loved, she sadly added that now he probably would not want this material. Although he eschewed a full-length novel, in his spare moments he did work on "The Notes of a Madman" and *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, which he particularly wished to finish as a surprise for Sonya.

As in the previous year, his major literary concern in 1884 and 1885 was *What Then Must We Do?* In alternate moods of exultation and despair over his progress, he doggedly kept at this work, fully convinced that it would resolve all the problems that had arisen from the clash of his new faith with contemporary economic and social life. As 1885 drew to a close, he saw the end of this long, arduous task in sight.<sup>1</sup> But at just this time a new family crisis arose that utterly ruined his peace of mind and made literary work impossible.

## VI

When Tolstoy departed suddenly for Yasnaya Polyana in January 1884, he wished a rest after finishing *What I Believe*, but a contributing factor was no doubt his displeasure over the family's indulgence in the social events of the New Year. For Sonya's letters were almost apologetic on the score of the various balls she had been attending, and she expressed regret that she could not enjoy with him the brisk country air and the moral freedom of his solitude. In a letter to her sister Tanya, she revealed a quite different frame of mind over his absence. "Yesterday Sergei Nikolayevich<sup>2</sup> returned from Tula," she wrote. "He had seen Lyovochka at Yasnaya Polyana. He [her husband] sits in a blouse, in filthy woollen socks, dishevelled and gloomy; with Mitrofan he stitches boots for Mikhailovna. The schoolteacher reads aloud the

<sup>1</sup> Tolstoy published three fragments from *What Then Must We Do?* in 1885, and also *The Greek Teacher Socrates*, the work of a friend, A. M. Kalmykov, to which he contributed a large part. In the same year he translated from the Greek *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* of Bishop Bryennios.

<sup>2</sup> Tolstoy's brother.

lives of the saints. He will not return to Moscow unless I call him back or unless something happens to us. Though he has a swarm of children, he is unable to find in the family any occupation, joy, or duties, and I more and more feel towards him contempt and coldness. We do not dispute at all; I do not even tell him this—do not think so. But it has become so difficult for me with the older children, with a huge family, and with my pregnancy, so that I await with a certain avidity to see if I fall ill or be trampled by horses—if only I could somehow rest and escape this life.”

In a few months Sonya would be forty. In twenty-two years of married life she had been pregnant twelve times, and in the last few years she had fought in vain against having more children. Her condition now unquestionably contributed to the mounting hysteria that made living with her a torment for Tolstoy. About two months before the birth of her child, a letter to her sister clearly echoed Sonya’s despair: “Sometimes I get wildly despondent. I’m ready to scream and fly into a rage. I will not nurse the child but will get a wet nurse; and I have bought everything at Moscow in cheap shops in order to clothe it.”

Meanwhile Tolstoy had returned to the city. He tidied his room, hammered pegs into shoes, read Confucius, and watched Sonya with “silent, critical, and stern” eyes. His diary records the approaching storm. “I remained alone with her,” he noted on April 12. “Conversation. I had the misfortune and cruelty to wound her pride, and it began. I did not remain silent. . . . She is seriously, mentally ill. And the point is this pregnancy. And it is a great, great sin and shame.”

The behaviour of his children intensified Tolstoy’s misery. They thought him mad and told him so. “It is very sad in the family,” he wrote. “It is sad that I cannot sympathize with them. All their joys, examinations, social success, music, furniture, purchases—all this I reckon a misfortune and an evil for them, and I cannot tell them this. I can, I speak, but my words do not affect anyone. They, as it were, do not know the meaning of my words, only that I have a bad habit of speaking thus. In weak moments—such as now—I am astonished at their ruthlessness.” And a few days later he exploded: “What for and why do I have such a terrible misunderstanding with the family! I must find a way out of it.”

About a month before the birth of the child, relations between Tolstoy and his wife were rapidly reaching a breaking point. The family had moved for the summer to Yasnaya Polyana. He tried to

talk to Sonya about the necessity of changing their way of life, but such conversations only infuriated her. "Poor thing," he entered in the diary, "how she hates me. Lord, help me." All his misery, he confessed, was owing to the absence of a loving and beloved wife. And with unusual frankness he wrote a few days later: "The luxury and debauchery of the life that I live is terrible. I have done it myself, I'm depraved, and I cannot reform. I can say that I'm mending myself, but it is so slow. I cannot give over smoking, I cannot find an approach to my wife so as neither to offend nor to indulge her. I search, I try. They do not see and do not know my suffering."

It is a measure of the intimacy that he had already reached with Chertkov that he now felt impelled to make him a confidant of his domestic woes. "On one occasion this year I lay in bed beside my wife," he wrote him. "She was not asleep, nor was I, and I suffered grievously from a consciousness of my own isolation in the family because of my beliefs, and because all of them in my eyes, seeing the truth, turn away from it. I suffered both for them and for myself, and because there was no hope to be seen. At the moment, I do not remember how, but being weighed down and sad, and with tears in my eyes I began to pray to God to open the heart of my wife. She fell asleep. I heard her quiet breathing, and suddenly it came into my head: I suffer because my wife does not share my convictions. When I speak with her under the influence of vexation about her repulsing me, I often speak coldly, even in a hostile manner; never have I entreated her with tears to believe in the truth or told her all simply, lovingly, softly; yet here she lies beside me and I say nothing to her, but what ought to be said to her I say to God."

Sonya was in no condition to listen even to what her husband spoke only to God. He noted that "the estrangement with my wife grows always. She does not see and does not wish to see." If he were only sure of himself, he asserted, he would not continue his present unhappy life. This thought came to him on the eve of the birth of his child. What happened next has sometimes been misrepresented and hence it will be helpful to translate the account of the incident in his diary.

"I went to bathe. I returned cheerful, jolly, and suddenly from my wife came senseless reproaches about the horses, which I had no need of and from which I wish to be released. I said nothing but I fell terribly in the dumps. I left and wanted to go away for good, but her pregnancy compelled me to return when I was halfway to

Tula. At home, bearded peasants and my two young sons were playing *vint*. 'She is playing croquet; did you not see her?' said her sister Tanya. 'I do not wish to see her.' I went to the divan to sleep, but I could not from grief. Ach, how sad! Yet, I pity her. However, I cannot believe that she is entirely wooden. I had just fallen asleep at three o'clock when she entered, woke me. 'Forgive me, I'm about to give birth and perhaps I shall die.' We went upstairs. The confinement began. What is the most joyous, happiest event in a family took place as something unnecessary and sad. A wet nurse had been provided to give milk." Under such unhappy circumstances Alexandra was born (June 18, 1884).

The new arrival brought no peace into the household. Tolstoy's diary for the month of July is a poignant record of his sufferings, and his wife must have suffered correspondingly. The problem of the resumption of marital relations widened the breach between them. Of late, after the birth of children that she had not wanted, Sonya had feared this period. Now it was her husband who, still profoundly shaken by their prolonged differences, found it impossible to renew relations. Torn by desire and forgetting that his was the active role, he unfairly blamed his wife for her passivity. He murmured against the unfulfilled "sensual temptation" that he struggled with at night. And less than a month after the birth of Alexandra, he angrily burst forth in his diary: "Cohabitation with a woman alien in spirit, i.e. with her, is terribly disgusting. Just as I wrote this she came to me and began an hysterical scene. There is the thought that it is impossible to change anything, that she is unhappy, and that she must escape somewhere. I was sorry for her, but together with this I recognized that it was hopeless. To my death, she will remain a millstone on my neck and on the children's." Once again the situation became so impossible that he decided to go away. At night he packed his things, awoke Sonya to say farewell, but after a talk with her, he agreed to remain. The next morning he wrote in his diary: "I do not understand how to save myself from suffering or her from the destruction towards which she flies with haste."

Except for fitful bursts of anger, Sonya's hysteria vanished and the remainder of the summer passed off calmly enough with Tolstoy working in the fields and feeling immensely pleased that his daughters had begun to evince some sympathy for his new way of life. When the family returned to the city, he remained in the country for a short time in the autumn. Letters between husband

and wife reveal a marked improvement in their relations over the nightmarish summer. The separation may have contributed, but the deep affection they had for each other was never far below the surface; it flowed freely whenever the dam of spiritual and material obstacles crumbled.

With genuine concern Sonya reproved him for playing the Robinson Crusoe in the country while he neglected that "mental work which I regard as higher than anything in life." And with mingled irony and humour she continued: "So it would have been better and more useful had you stayed with the children. Of course you will say that to live so accords with your convictions, and that you enjoy it. That is another matter, and I can only say, 'Enjoy yourself!' However, I'm distressed that such intellectual powers should be wasted on chopping wood, tending samovars, and stitching boots—all that is fine as a rest or a change of occupation, but not as a special employment. Well, enough of that! Had I not written it, I should have remained vexed, but now it is past, and the thing amuses me, and I have grown calm, saying: 'Let the child amuse itself as it likes, so long as it doesn't cry.'"<sup>1</sup> Then, as though fearful that she had been too severe, she concluded her letter on a touching note of sympathy and understanding that at once revealed the real place he held in her heart: "Farewell, my dear, I kiss you. All at once I vividly pictured you to myself, and a sudden flood of tenderness for you rose in me. There is something in you so wise, kind, naive, and stubborn, and it is all lit up by that tender interest for everyone, natural to you alone, and by your look that reaches straight to people's souls."

Tolstoy was grateful. Sonya's criticism he took in good part, and his letters were filled with loving concern over her illness. Her worries over money matters he cheerfully dismissed. "Do not be angry, darling, that I cannot attribute any importance to these money matters. That life should not appear trivial, one must take a wider and deeper view. What our life together is, with our joys and sorrows, will appear to our nine children real life, and therefore it is important to help them acquire what gave us happiness, and to help them to free themselves from what gave us unhappiness; but neither languages, nor diplomas, nor society, and, still less, money performed any part in our happiness or unhappiness. And therefore the question how much our income shrinks cannot occupy me. If one attributes importance to that, it hides what is really important."

During this brief separation, a passionate longing for her husband

<sup>1</sup> A Russian proverb.



seems to have banished the ill-feeling in Sonya's heart. "You ask: Why do I not summon you home? Ach, Lyovochka, if I were to write at this moment when I wish to see you I would write everything that I feel—then I would give vent to such a flood of passionate, tender, demanding words that you would not remain content merely with words. In all relations I am sometimes inexpressibly sad without you; but I have accepted the idea of *fulfilling my duty* in my relation to you as a writer, as a man requiring first of all his freedom, and therefore I demand nothing from you."

This newly won harmony was quickly disrupted by the impact of city life when Tolstoy returned to Moscow at the beginning of November. Scarcely a month passed before he fled again to the solitude of Yasnaya Polyana. The need of quiet to write was his excuse, and his letters were full of the progress he made. Sonya was hurt, disappointed, and the familiar aggravation, caused by his insistence on the new life, reappeared.

## VII

By this time the struggle had assumed a definite character. Sonya was opposed to every move of her husband that threatened the security of herself and her family. For Tolstoy, it was a necessity to change his manner of life without thought of anyone's security. There were frequent compromises on both sides, for the habits of years of happy married existence were a bulwark against deterioration in their relations. Each suffered for the other in the tragic struggle in which principles warred against love. But their external differences were slowly poisoning the wellspring of this love.

Aroused over what she with some justice considered offensive references to the family in the manuscript of *What Then Must We Do?* Sonya demanded that they be expunged. Tolstoy wrote to Ge's son, of whom he was very fond, that it made him ill to be asked by his family to alter thoughts in an article "about my own life and therefore about theirs." If the thoughts were true, he argued with Sonya, then why must they be altered? In the end he agreed to delete the offensive references, but the controversy drove him to write to Sonya that it was terrible to live without love and still more terrible to die without it.

At the beginning of 1885, Sonya obtained her husband's permission to republish all his works that had appeared before 1881 in a new edition (the fifth). This was not a unique venture for she had the successful precedent of Dostoyevsky's widow, who gave

Sonya much helpful advice. Sonya borrowed money to start with and herself did all the work of reading the proofs.<sup>1</sup> While going over the proof for her edition of his first work, *Childhood*, charming memories were recalled, and she wrote to her husband, who was off to the Crimea at the time: "I went through the chapters of *Childhood* and there arose in me that former girlish feeling that I first experienced when I was eleven, and again my eyes grew dim, and instead of quietly correcting the misprints, I took to weeping. But I know what I loved in you when I was thirteen to fourteen, and I love the same thing now; but that which has been added to it and hardened—that I do not love; that is an addition, an excrescence. Scrape it away, and what is left will be pure gold." Always a bit of a romantic, poor Sonya wanted her girlhood hero to remain a girlhood hero and not a titan dedicated to founding the Kingdom of God on earth.

The business of the edition took her to Petersburg. While she was there, visiting a distant relative high in Court circles, the Empress was suddenly announced. "I frankly confess," Sonya wrote to her husband, "that I was very agitated but not embarrassed. She, i.e., the Empress, asked:

"'Have you been here long?'"<sup>2</sup>

"'No, madame, only since yesterday.' Then we went into the hall. The Empress again turned to me:

"'How is your husband's health?' I said: 'Your majesty is very kind; he is well.'

"'I hope that he is writing something.' I said: 'No, madame, not at the moment, but I believe that he intends to write something for the schools in the nature of "What Men Live By."'

"Ekaterina Nikolayevna<sup>3</sup> intervened, saying: 'Countess Alexandra Tolstoy<sup>4</sup> says that he will never write any more novels.'

"The Empress said: 'Surely you do not desire this; it astonishes me.' And having turned to me, I said: 'I hope that your majesty's children have read my husband's books.'

"She inclined her head and said: 'Oh, I surely believe so.'"

In his reply Tolstoy's only comment on this meeting with the Empress was to remark dryly: "Really your joy is surprising. You desired this very much. It was flattering to my vanity but rather disagreeable. Nothing good comes from this sort of thing."

<sup>1</sup> During the first year, Sonya made a gross turnover of some 60,000 rubles (about \$30,000).

<sup>2</sup> The conversation was carried on in French.

<sup>3</sup> Sonya's relative and hostess, Mme. Shostak.

<sup>4</sup> Granny.

In her edition, Sonya soon fell afoul of Chertkov, who wished certain works for his own publishing venture, *Intermediary*. He grew disagreeable, for he was already developing a proprietary attitude towards the products of Tolstoy's pen, and a long and bitter quarrel was in the making.

So intimate had their friendship become that Tolstoy did not hesitate to write Chertkov at this time a very frank letter concerning his troubles in the family. He complained of "the systematic debauchery" of his children, and continued: "I do not fear death, I even desire it. But this is bad; it means that I have lost the thread granted to me by God for guidance in this life, and for full satisfaction." And as the only means of escape, he revealed an idea that had no doubt been in the back of his mind ever since his spiritual transformation. Must he stay in this "insane, immoral house," he asked Chertkov, "in which I am now forced to suffer every hour," without ever having lived at least a single year in a human way, that is "in a hut with working people, working together with them according to my strength and abilities, bartering my efforts, nourishing and clothing myself as they, and without shame boldly speaking to all the truth of Christ that I know." But he put aside this precious ideal of perfect Christian life that he preached as a temptation, convinced that he must work out his salvation in the milieu where God had placed him.

Chertkov did not hesitate in his reply to offer his own opinion on these intimate personal family difficulties and to advise Tolstoy what course of action he should adopt. "You say that you live in an atmosphere entirely hostile to your faith," he wrote. "And therefore it is entirely natural that from time to time you should have made plans to go away or change the whole family atmosphere. But I cannot agree that this indicates that you are weak and bad." Then citing the example of Christ, he concluded that after Tolstoy had done everything in his power to correct the life of his family and failed, he would then be justified in leaving them in order to live the life he desired.

The summer of 1885, however, was not without its domestic compensations and victories. By his example Tolstoy had inspired the whole household to take up his work in the village and fields. The slightest evidence of interest in his new beliefs on the part of his children gave him great pleasure. And when his oldest daughter, Tanya, confessed to him that her views on things had changed, he hastened to write her: "My *one* dream and possible joy, in which I do not dare to hope, is to find in my own family brothers and

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sisters and not what I have observed up to now—estrangement and deliberate opposition in which I see a certain scorn, not for me, but for truth,—a certain fear before something. . . . It is more important for you to tidy your own room, cook your own soup (it would be fine if you endeavoured to see through everything that obstructs this, especially opinion) than it is for you to get married well or badly.” Masha followed suit, and even interested herself in vegetarianism. Chertkov, who visited them that summer, also had an influence on Tolstoy’s daughters. The hope that the father had secretly entertained of a family living in peace and harmony according to the teaching of Christ took on a fugitive aspect of reality.

Sonya was horrified. All along she had feared the influence of her husband’s views on the children, and she was determined to prevent heresy from undermining the foundations of the family. The family, she insisted, needed no reforming; its life, its traditions, and its social and religious views, must remain unchanged.

### VIII

With misgivings Tolstoy returned to Moscow on November 1, fearful that life with his family in the city would again become insupportable. They greeted him with joy, but soon the atmosphere became tense. Sonya wrote to her sister that it was impossible to adjust herself to her husband’s convictions. The strain was somewhat relieved when she was obliged to go to Petersburg to try to obtain permission from the censor to include *What I Believe* in the twelfth volume of her edition of Tolstoy’s works. Despite all the influence she marshalled up, the permission was not granted.

After her return, Tolstoy’s relations with his wife once again reached a crisis. His simmering feelings boiled over. Sonya wrote to her sister: “There happened what has already happened so many times. Lyovochka had fallen into an extremely nervous and gloomy condition. I was sitting, writing; he entered and I looked up—his face was terrifying. Up to that time we had been living excellently, not *one* disagreeable word had been said, none whatsoever. ‘I’ve come to say that I wish to divorce you; I cannot live this way; I’m going to Paris or America.’

“Imagine, Tanya, if the whole house had tumbled down on my head, I would not have been more astonished. I asked in surprise: ‘What has happened?’ ‘Nothing, but if the cart is loaded more and more, the horse stands and does not pull it.’ What was loaded on

him, I don't know. But he set up a howl, reproaches, rude words, all getting worse and worse. I was patient, was patient but answered almost nothing. I saw that the man was mad, and when he said that where you are the air is poisoned, I finally ordered my trunk to be brought and began to pack. I wanted to go to you if only for a few days.

"The children came running in, wailing. Tanya [daughter] said: 'I'll go with you; what is this?' He began to beg me: 'Remain.' I remained, but suddenly hysterical sobbing started; it was simply frightful. Think: Lyovochka all torn and twitching from sobbing. At this point I became sorry for him." The upshot of all this was that Tolstoy went with his daughter Tanya to the country to stay with the Olsufyevs, family friends.

The reasons for this hysterical outburst Sonya did not tell her sister. Perhaps she did not clearly know, for the scene was the outcome of an accumulation of everything unpleasant in their relations over the last four years. Tolstoy, however, felt it necessary to explain once and for all why their life together had become unbearable. For before he departed for the country, he left behind a long and unusual letter for Sonya which has only recently been published in full. That she read it we know from one Masha sent her sister at the Olsufyevs', in which she wrote: "After dinner today we had quite a disagreeable conversation. Mama attacked vegetarianism. She read a letter that papa left for her, and it obviously upset her."

This long letter of Tolstoy amounts literally to a history of his spiritual development and of the conflict his views had brought about in his relations with his wife. "For the last seven or eight years," he wrote, "all our discussions have ended after much grievous torment in the same thing, on my side at least. I said: there cannot be agreement and a loving life between us until—I said as long as—you do not come to what I have come to, either through love for me, or through that scent given to all of us, or through conviction, and yet you have not gone along with me. I said: as long as you do not agree with me, but I did not say: as long as I do not agree with you, because this is impossible for me. I say impossible, because the way you live is the very way that I have just been saved from, as from a terrible horror, almost leading me to suicide. I cannot return to the way I lived, in which I found destruction, and which I have acknowledged to be the greatest evil and misfortune. But you can attempt to come to what you still do not know about, and which in general features is precisely a life

not for one's own satisfaction (I do not speak of your life, but of the children's life), not for one's own ambition but for God and for others—a way of life always accounted the best by everybody, and which your own conscience responds to."

He next begged her to realize that the very illegal works for which she had so zealously been trying to obtain permission to print, he wrote not for the public or as exercises in style, but because his suffering and searching had obliged him to write them. And he asked her to read in these works the reasons why they were written. There she would find also why he could not continue to live the life of the family. He could not now reject the faith that he had found. His faith could not change; nor could he allow it to be a mere matter of words: it must be acted upon. Conscience and intellect demanded it of him, he said, and "I cannot see people, joined to me by love, knowing yet not doing what intellect and conscience demand, and not suffer myself."

Then with passionate earnestness he pointed out that she and the family had always tended to regard his spiritual revelation as an experience suitable perhaps as literary material but not something by which to guide one's life. But only by living according to his new convictions had he been saved from despair and returned to life. Finally, when she began to see that he was serious in his efforts to lead a new life, she condemned it all as a form of mental illness from which she must protect herself and the children.

There followed a long recital of their life over the last few years in both city and country, in which he and the family had steadily drifted apart. At times, he indicated, there seemed only one solution—that he must leave the family. But he had resisted this as a temptation. He had felt it necessary to continue to live as he had lived, struggling with all his power against evil, but always lovingly and meekly. Must this struggle go on, he asked? "It will be sad for me to die with a reproach for all the useless burden of the last years of my life, of which few remain, and it will be sad for you to see me off with the doubt that you ought not to have brought me those grievous sufferings that I experienced in life." And he ended with the ominous warning: "Between us there is a struggle to the death. Either God or no God."

This extraordinary letter from a husband to a wife is a curious mixture of arrant didacticism and the anguished cry of a human soul perplexed in the extreme. But throughout all of it runs an intransigent attitude that gives the lie to Tolstoy's expressed

distaste for proselyting. The only justification, or rather excuse, is that he wanted to live with his wife and family and he could not do this with a clear conscience unless they agreed to live according to his beliefs.

It is interesting to observe that at this same time Tolstoy wrote a letter to Chertkov, as the one person who was able "to love in him what was fine," in which he freely expressed all the unhappiness caused by his family. He finally decided not to send this letter, but certain statements in it were revealing. He complained that his children would not read what he wrote concerning the worldly, wasteful life they led, and that when he spoke they did not listen or they answered with irritation. And one of the immediate reasons for the quarrel he had had with his wife was his condemnation of the subscription sale of Sonya's edition of his works, a practice that now outraged his views on property and money and threatened to make him an object of ridicule.

There was little that was new to Sonya in this letter, although for the first time she must have seen their situation in a clearer perspective. Yet the letter does not appear to have changed her attitude in the slightest. She felt offended by his recent treatment, and in her letters to him she did not attempt to justify herself any more; she only reproached him.

Soon after his arrival at the Olsufyevs', Tolstoy wrote Sonya a letter that was intended to be kindly and even apologetic for his behaviour. "Ach, my darling," he wrote, "how sorry I am that you torment yourself so, or that the matter [her edition] that you are busy with so torments you. . . . I rejoice that I have now reached such a normal condition that I will not trouble and torment you as I have tormented you lately."

In a reply of mingled sarcasm and seriousness, Sonya made the most of some news she had heard about his young disciples: "Chertkov, in a quarrel with his mother, wished to go away. Fainerman wants to desert his wife; you wish to run away from your family. Truly, if all this were not so, how happy we would be, since in the depths of our souls, we *certainly* love each other. And surely both Chertkov and Fainerman love their own. That is what I will never understand; why the *truth* must bring *evil* and *dissension*? Dissension not with bandits, but with quiet, *loving* people? For the first time in my life I was glad that you departed. How painful and sad this is! But I, of course, will be still more glad when you return."

## Chapter XXV

“DARK, DARK PEOPLE”!

**T**HE YEAR 1886 began badly for the Tolstoy family: the youngest son, four-year-old Alyosha, died from croup on January 18. Sonya's grief was intensified by the belief that God had punished her by taking a child she had never wanted. Her husband was sad, but he found solace in his faith. With composure, he wrote Chertkov the day he lost his son: “I know only that the death of a child, which formerly seemed incomprehensible and cruel to me, now appears sensible and good. The death has united us all more lovingly and closely than before.”

Shortly after the loss of his son, Tolstoy at last finished, on February 14, his remarkable book, *What Then Must We Do?* For several years he had wrestled with the intricate problems connected with this work, for he felt that upon their solution would depend the justification of his new faith. With overwhelming evidence and irrefutable logic he stated the case of the poor against the rich. Not content with this, he insisted that such economic disparity inevitably resulted in the moral impoverishment of both classes. He did not except himself from the general condemnation of the well-to-do; if anything, he was most severe on what he considered his own guilt.

Tolstoy's experiences and then his reason had convinced him that private or organized charity was not the answer to the problem of the poor. In truth, he observed that the giving of money worked a positive harm and he had come to believe that there was something evil and unmoral in money. His investigation convinced him that money does not usually represent work done by its owner, but rather the power to make others work. That is, money is the modern form of slavery, for it makes the poor the common slaves of all the rich.

In all this theorizing Tolstoy examined his own way of life in the



light of his conclusions, and he decided that he ought to consume as little as possible of the work of others in order not to cause suffering and vice. He was convinced that no one possesses any rights or privileges, but only endless duties and obligations, and that man's first duty is to participate in the struggle with nature to support his own life and that of others. When he asked himself the question that his book raised for all mankind, What must I do? he answered in a practical manner that he must attend to his own room, heat his stove, fetch water, mend his clothes, and do everything possible to take care of his own needs. If he had any time and strength left, he must try to serve the needs of others.

The vicious economic contradictions of society, Tolstoy decided, resulted from the exploitation by some of the labours of others, and at the bottom of it all was property. This conclusion was an old one with him, but now he saw it in a new light. Formerly men seized upon the labour of others by violence—slavery; now, it was done by means of property. The division and safeguarding of property, he declared, occupies the whole world. Property is the root of all evil, for it brings about the sufferings of those who possess it or are deprived of it, the reproaches of conscience of those who misuse it, and it causes deadly quarrels between those who have a superfluity of property and those who are in need.

Tolstoy dedicated the last chapter of *What Then Must We Do?* to a subject that had little relevance to the principal theme of the book, but one that had been much on his mind over the last few years—the duty of women. Woman's real work is to bear children, he maintained, and not to shun this law of nature by spending all her time on exercising the charm of her allurements or by imitating the sham work done by men. With uncompromising severity he declared that a woman who refrains from childbirth without refraining from sexual relations is a whore. No doubt he had in mind the common practices of women in his own social set, but behind the indictment lies also a warning to his own wife for her opposition to bearing more children. The book ends with a glorification of the fruitful mother who knows that real life is a matter of danger and effort and self-sacrifice, a tribute that must have left Sonya with a mixed feeling of pride and bitterness.

*What Then Must We Do?* is a unique work and perhaps did more than any other book up to that time to expose the tremendous problem of poverty in modern society. Tolstoy felt the problem

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acutely and described its unhappy effects with the skill of a great literary artist, and he condemned the causes of poverty with all the moral indignation of an eloquent preacher. In many respects, however, he may be said to have diagnosed the disease correctly and then prescribed an incantation as a cure. His outlook was circumscribed by the backward conditions of the Russian society of that time, and still more limited by his instinctive devotion to his own class. He was ignorant of the changes that developing industry and commerce were bringing about in the economics of capitalism, and this unawareness was rendered virtually incurable by an ethical arrogance that made him all too ready to condemn achievements remote from his own experience. An enemy of progress in terms of modern technical advancement, he oversimplified the complex phenomena of industrial and economic life. That government in its systematic organization of society might logically strive to achieve righteousness, he emphatically denied. Yet in *What Then Must We Do?* Tolstoy performed a signal service in his frank and fresh treatment of one of the most acute problems of modern times, and his prediction that if the problem were not solved, a "workers' revolution with horrors of destruction and murder" would ensue, was fulfilled in his own country not many years afterwards.

## II

Life in the Moscow household of the Tolstoys was rapidly taking on the aspect of a religious revival. Ready-made disciples, who had caught the virus from widely circulated contraband works, called to see the master in the flesh. Or perhaps an old disciple like Ge came to renew his faith at the fountainhead. He arrived early in 1886 to paint more pictures on New Testament themes, and incidentally to do portraits of members of the family and to help young Tanya in her art work. Unlike many of the followers, this gentle artist was always a welcome guest with the family. Tolstoy loved him with a tender and brotherly affection, and for Ge the master was "holy Leo Nikolayevich," whose teaching he yearned to interpret with the immensely talented brush. The author V. G. Korolenko presented himself in February, and shortly after Chertkov, accompanied by Anna K. Diterikhs, who was soon to become his wife, paid a visit. Tolstoy was pleased that Chertkov's proselyting zeal was beginning to have its effect on young Ilya, and even Sergei was not immune to the persistent religious probing

of this devoted disciple. As for Sonya, she wrote to her sister that Chertkov frequently irritated her.

And apparently the future bride of Chertkov also irritated Sonya on this occasion of her first visit to the Tolstoys. Anna Diterikhs was presented by Chertkov and Biryukov, who had already inoculated her with the virus of Tolstoyism, and she anticipated her introduction to the master with awe and trembling. Tolstoy greeted her kindly, but he soon left her marooned in the living room with his wife, for he had some business matters to talk over with her escorts. Sonya, after she had ascertained the girl's devotion to her husband's beliefs, vented on her the spleen that she felt for all these disciples.

“Well, I'll tell you frankly,” Sonya said, “that you are mistaken, as are many other youths and these shaggy nihilists who come to him from everywhere. He's not at all what you imagine, and I tell you plainly he is not that which he tries to be. What if he does stitch boots and split wood? He was and has remained a Count, and all this simplicity—I speak to you plainly just as I would to him, Leo Nikolayevich—I say that all this is only affectation, simply a pretence, a kind of amusement; he always loved originality. Even in his youth he played various tricks in order to shock people and make them speak about him.”

The astonished guest protested that Tolstoy had no need to attempt to be original and that his new faith had brought him blame rather than praise.

“And they blame him justly,” Sonya interrupted. “He was a writer, an artist; he wrote novels, tales, and suddenly for no reason he took to philosophy, to religion. Is this his affair?”

At this point Uncle Kostya,<sup>1</sup> a shiftless relative of Sonya's whom Tolstoy sheltered in his home, broke in to add his condemnation of his benefactor's new faith.

The dumbfounded visitor was overwhelmed by this criticism of her idol from sources whence she would have expected only adoration. When the question of Tolstoy's novels entered the discussion, Sonya warmly declared:

“Do you know I copied *War and Peace* seven times, but this rubbish of his, this *Criticism*<sup>2</sup> and things like it I have refused to copy. I will not soil my hands with them. I would burn all these manuscripts with pleasure. Who wants them? Who will read

<sup>1</sup> Konstantin Alexandrovich Islavin.

<sup>2</sup> Tolstoy's *Criticism of Dogmatic Theology*.

them? . . . He is an artist, and suddenly he becomes a shoemaker! It is plain insanity! He forgets what I meant for him; he sacrifices the interest of his family. I'm convinced that this is madness! It began when he wrote of this Levin of his<sup>1</sup>—in fact, this is he, he described himself. But Kitty—that is I, yes, yes! Are you surprised? . . . In general, all the types of his *best* women he modelled on me. . . .”

In March Tolstoy answered a letter that he had received from Wendell P. Garrison, the son of William Lloyd Garrison. *What I Believe* had found its way to America, and Garrison, struck by the similarity between Tolstoy's views on nonresistance and those of his famous father, had sent him the first two volumes of the biography of William Lloyd Garrison. “To learn of the existence of such a pure Christian being as your father,” Tolstoy wrote the son, “was a great joy to me. I have not yet read the books through, but the declarations on nonresistance, in my opinion, really mark an era in the history of humanity.” The son's reply mentioned the growing fame of Tolstoy in America.

In April Tolstoy set out on foot from Moscow to Yasnaya Polyana, a distance of a hundred and thirty miles. Not only his dislike of railways and his new desire not to use money prompted this excursion; he thoroughly enjoyed such exercise and the opportunity of meeting peasants on the open road. For companions on this occasion he had two lively young men and fervent admirers, M. A. Stakhovich and the son of Ge. He took with him a linen sack containing food, an extra pair of shoes, a soft shirt, socks, and handkerchiefs. There was also his little notebook with the pencil tied to it for his observations on the road, and stomach drops for his indigestion. Five days later he entered the gates of Yasnaya Polyana, tanned, merry, and exuding satisfaction. A triumphant letter was dispatched to Sonya to announce his arrival: the hike would be “one of the best remembrances” of his life; he had slept in a hut with twelve other people, and never had he slept better; he had met an ancient soldier, ninety-five years of age, who told him of army life in the good old days of Tsar Nicholas, when they took down a man's breeches and gave him two or three hundred strokes at a time! The result was “Nicholas Stick,” a vivid sketch by Tolstoy that could not pass the censor but was circulated in a hectographed edition and caused the arrest of the man who surreptitiously issued it.

<sup>1</sup> Levin in *Anna Karenina*.

Having reached the conclusion that he must take care of his own personal needs as far as that was possible, Tolstoy did not spare himself. His conscience worried him, but his future way of life seemed clear, and during the summer of 1886 at Yasnaya Polyana he began to lead this way of life in earnest. He worked hard in the fields, ploughing, mowing, and carting. Any poor peasant who required assistance was sure to receive his aid. And his example, as in the previous year, was infectious. His older children, especially Masha and Ilya, vied with him.

Meanwhile Tolstoy's fame as a teacher of a new way of life had begun to attract to Yasnaya Polyana all manner of eager seekers for light. The stream started as a trickle, but as the years went on it became a torrent. At first he was pleased with this recognition; later, it became the bane of his existence.

The summer of 1886 brought some unusual devotees and curiosity seekers. A sickly girl from Odessa turned up. She had been attracted by an article; at Yasnaya Polyana she read *What I Believe* and at once declared that the book had changed all her ideas. Tolstoy was puzzled over what to do with her; Sonya was vastly annoyed by these "dark people." A compromise was effected by obtaining a position for the girl on the *Intermediary*.

Déroulède, the French poet-patriot, arrived. His mission was not religion but revenge—a French revenge on Germany for the defeat of 1871. He hoped to prevail upon Tolstoy to use his influence to bring about an alliance of France and Russia to crush Germany. Tolstoy liked the man's striking personality, but as an advocate of nonviolence he gave his warmongering short shrift. He related how he posed Déroulède's theme of *revanche* to one of the wise old peasants of Yasnaya Polyana. The peasant addressed Déroulède with a good-natured smile that showed the stumps of his worn teeth: "You'd better come and work with us and bring the Germans along too, and when we've done our work we'll have some merrymaking together. The Germans are men too, like ourselves."

Another interesting visitor that summer was the American traveller George Kennan, who had just returned from a trip to Siberia, where he had been collecting material for a book on Russian convicts exiled to that region. Tolstoy wrote of him to Chertkov: ". . . he is an agreeable and sincere man, but one with partitions separating his soul from his head—partitions of which we Russians have no understanding, and I am always perplexed upon

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encountering them." Kennan was equally nonplussed by Tolstoy, as he indicated in an article that he wrote about this visit.<sup>1</sup> When he asked Tolstoy if his theory of nonviolence would oblige him to tolerate the persecution of defenceless women, Tolstoy's only reply was to say with tears in his eyes that violence as an answer to violence could never achieve any good purpose. Despite what he considered the heroic fallacies of Tolstoy, Kennan professed warm esteem and love for him.

### III

During this busy summer of work in the fields, and of the entertainment of numerous visitors, Tolstoy also maintained a wide correspondence. For now complete strangers began to seek his spiritual guidance through the post and to ask his aid in literary and other matters. He felt a real responsibility toward these new correspondents, although as the years passed their number increased so that to answer them all tried his strength and often his patience.

Poems and stories would arrive from budding authors, who pleaded for his advice and a kind word to a publisher on their behalf. Frequently, he read the manuscripts with care, and if he thought the effort showed talent, he offered sympathetic but uncompromising criticism. To one young author he wrote: "The life of your characters is not apparent, and it is clear that the author relates something that never existed; it is even apparent that it was boring for him to be concerned with this empty matter. . . . Live the lives of the characters described; describe the inner feelings of the characters by images, then the characters themselves will do what they must do according to their natures; i.e. the denouement will come of itself." Ashamed now of the commercial uses to which he had put his art in the past, he advised these hopeful authors to forgo writing for money. "If you need money," he wrote to one, "then you will receive it for such work. But for the sake of Christ do not construct your material life on literary work. This is debauchery [*sic*]." And he beseeched them to write for the masses and always with the teachings of Christ in their hearts.

A total stranger wrote for advice on a quarrel with his wife, and like some Biblical lawgiver, Tolstoy handed down judgement. Several girl students of Tiflis, who were dismayed upon reading in

<sup>1</sup> "A Visit to Count Tolstoi," *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine* (1887), No. 34.

one of Tolstoy's articles that woman's mission in life was to bear and raise children, wrote to ask if there were not some other useful tasks they could perform. He replied that they could render a real service if they would correct and improve any of the cheap school texts and moral tales of Moscow publishers that were sold in large quantities to poor people. The great man's letter was published in a Tiflis newspaper, and he was soon deluged with offers from various correspondents to take a hand in correcting and improving these inexpensive schoolbooks.

An unknown admirer in America wrote Tolstoy that one of his books<sup>1</sup> had made disciples for him in that country. He replied gratefully—and in fairly correct English: “In answer to your question, I can state to you that there are 30 or 40 persons known to me who confess with me the Christian principles exposed in my book, and that with every year and month their number increases. We are not organized in a church and never will be. I think that the sole means to get in a true church is not to organize churches or communities, but to seek only after the Kingdom of God and its truth.”

Tolstoy was not entirely correct in this statement, for a movement had already got under way to organize Tolstoyan communities or colonies, and at the outset it had the master's encouragement. In 1881, one of his disciples, N. L. Ozmidov, who had hitherto existed on the money he obtained from copying and selling Tolstoy's forbidden works, had started an agricultural colony in the Caucasus. Tolstoy kept in close touch with the project through correspondence, and offered advice and comfort. After about six months of effort to live according to Tolstoy's principles, the colonists abandoned the project.

Other colonies soon sprang up in various parts of Russia, and later in England, Holland, and the United States. Without exception, they all eventually failed. Yet somehow these failures did not convince Tolstoy that his Christian-anarchist beliefs were incapable of practical application. The fact that he himself never actively participated in the life of any of these colonies blinded him to their faults. It was not difficult for the colonists to accept his dictum that to love God meant to do the business of God, and that if you loved God, you would unfailingly love people. When the

<sup>1</sup> No doubt *Christ's Christianity*, which included an English translation of *What I Believe, Confession*, and *A Short Account of the Gospels*, which had been published in England in 1884.

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“business of God,” however, involved a practical application of nonresistance to evil and a condemnation of property, the services of government, and all the customary aids of modern society, then the business of daily life itself broke down completely. In the struggle for existence man could only be guided by ethical and moral precepts. In trying to adhere rigidly to Tolstoy’s principles, the colonists were easily victimized by the first member who manifested a natural desire for economic security. It was human nature to protect oneself against violence or deprivation of the necessities of life. If moral and ethical principles failed to afford this protection, then man would rebel against them. And so ultimately did the Tolstoyan colonists.

Tolstoy’s reaction to these efforts of his disciples was a mixed one; later he grew hostile to them. He wished to see his beliefs propagated, for he had a supreme faith in their efficacy, but organized proselyting he deeply distrusted. He was not a dry moralist but at times he fell into arbitrary distinctions, such as his insistence to A. S. Butkevich, who visited him that summer, that to be an army doctor was every bit as bad as to be a soldier. “Tolstoyans,” he said, “are the most insupportable people.” Yet many of his most radical followers hoped to give the Tolstoyan movement a definite form by attracting masses to it and trying to persuade the master to leave his home, surround himself with disciples, and create a kind of moral Eden. But Tolstoy knew that to tag a movement in the realm of ideas with forms, limitations, and labels meant its destruction—this was the first step in the direction of a church. He said to Butkevich: “To stand aloof, to shut oneself up in a monastery, surrounded by such angels as oneself, amounts to creating a hothouse and those conditions in which it will be easy to be good oneself, but no one else will be warm. Live in the world and be good—that is what is needed.”

## IV

All evil arises from an absence of love, Tolstoy remarked to Chertkov in the summer of 1886. But love flourished with increasing difficulty in the Tolstoy household. Chertkov himself was one of the reasons that the little devil of evil reared its ugly head in the family circle. The hostility between him and Sonya over priorities on Tolstoy’s writings grew apace: she wanted them for her edition, he for the *Intermediary*. With some feeling he wrote to Tolstoy:



"Sofya Andreyevna told me that when I'm away she is less disposed towards me than when I'm in her presence. I fear that this arises from the fact when she hears of my activities concerning the publication of your works, she ascribes motives to me that I do not at all have. I don't know what I would give to settle such misunderstandings." She accused Chertkov of treating her husband's productions as though they were his own. Both disputants appealed to Tolstoy. He made peace between them, but it was an uneasy peace.

Sonya viewed with dismay the growing hold that this chief disciple was obtaining over her husband. The two friends now exchanged diaries. Chertkov wrote that he obtained from Tolstoy's infinite comfort and support on life's journey. Their voluminous correspondence was burdened with intimate confessions, and a frankness prevailed that is possible only when two men possess each other's confidence to the fullest degree. Tolstoy was closer to him, said Chertkov, than any other being, save Christ. The hesitancy that Tolstoy had formerly evinced in confiding in Chertkov his family affairs had entirely disappeared. Indeed, Chertkov now projected himself into the domestic life of Tolstoy with the assurance of a member of the family. In one letter he censured Tolstoy for his irritable behaviour towards Sergei, and offered him a little homily on the evils that might result from such thoughtless treatment. Humbly Tolstoy replied: "Your advice on my relations with my son I very much needed. Many thanks to you for this." When Chertkov finally married Anna Diterikhs, a helper with the *Intermediary* and a woman who fully shared his convictions, Tolstoy rejoiced, but perhaps with his own frequently unhappy relations with Sonya in mind, he hastened to write this first bit of advice to the newlyweds: "It is possible that you will quarrel, that you will have your moments of irritation and coolness. May the Lord preserve you. Beware of this sort of thing with all your strength."

Family life at Yasnaya Polyana during the summer of 1886 was complicated by the severe illness of Tolstoy. A neglected sore on his leg resulted in erysipelas that kept him in bed for some nine weeks. Sonya had difficulty in overcoming his scruples against doctors, but when the pain was at its height and his life was in danger, his antipathy vanished and he himself called loudly for a physician. With devotion and an efficiency that was almost aggravating at times, Sonya nursed him back to health. Perhaps with her persistent

attentions in mind, he wrote to her son Ilya, who was in Moscow at the time: "General condition good. If anything to complain of it's bad nights, in consequence of which my head is unclear and I cannot work. I lie and listen to women talking; am so lapped in femininity I begin to talk of myself as 'she.'<sup>1</sup> Am peaceful in mind; sometimes a little anxious about some of you, but do not allow myself to worry, and wait and rejoice in the forward course of life. As long as you don't undertake too much, and live without doing evil, all will be well."

However much at peace he was with God, Tolstoy felt it more and more necessary to exercise a degree of restraint in the household. Butkevich noted at this time that among the family he did not display his customary jollity. Sonya was forever screwing up her eyes, scolding, and expressing a dislike for his "dark people." No doubt the sickness and death of her mother (November 11) contributed to Sonya's distraught state of mind over the autumn of this year. She made a few entries in her diary for October, and they reflect the anguish in her heart. She feared she was going mad. Tending Tolstoy in his illness had been sheer joy for her. She was wanted, wanted by the man she loved. Now that he was almost well, she noticed with deep pain that she was no longer wanted . . . "again I'm thrown aside like an unnecessary thing." The children blamed her for her disagreements with their father. In her diary she plaintively wrote, as though taking fright at her morbid thoughts: "If Lyovochka will work in Moscow, I'll become calm. I'll be careful with him, attentive, in order to look out for him because of my love for his work."

## v

Sonya achieved some degree of calm, for when her husband returned to Moscow that winter he was able to work hard at his writing. In fact, throughout most of 1886 and the next year he found time to write even amid the manifold tasks he imposed upon himself. The practice of a new faith in no sense exhausted his energies, rather it seemed to intensify his mental and moral strength without diminishing his physical powers.

Tolstoy continued to write those legends and moral tales which were designed to exemplify his teaching, and they found wide

<sup>1</sup> Literally: "I begin to say *Ya spalá*," *I slept*, that is, in the feminine, instead of *Ya spal*, in the masculine.

dissemination in the pages of the *Intermediary*.<sup>1</sup> Indeed he expended much effort on this publishing firm, searching for material among foreign writers for translation and correcting the manuscripts of young authors. *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, which he had worked on the previous year, was published in 1886. The piece pleased Sonya, for she correctly appraised it as the first purely artistic work he had written since *Anna Karenina*. Although the same wonderful realism of his earlier fiction is recaptured in this tale, it is definitely a problem story, in which he does not so much preach as communicate his own experiences.

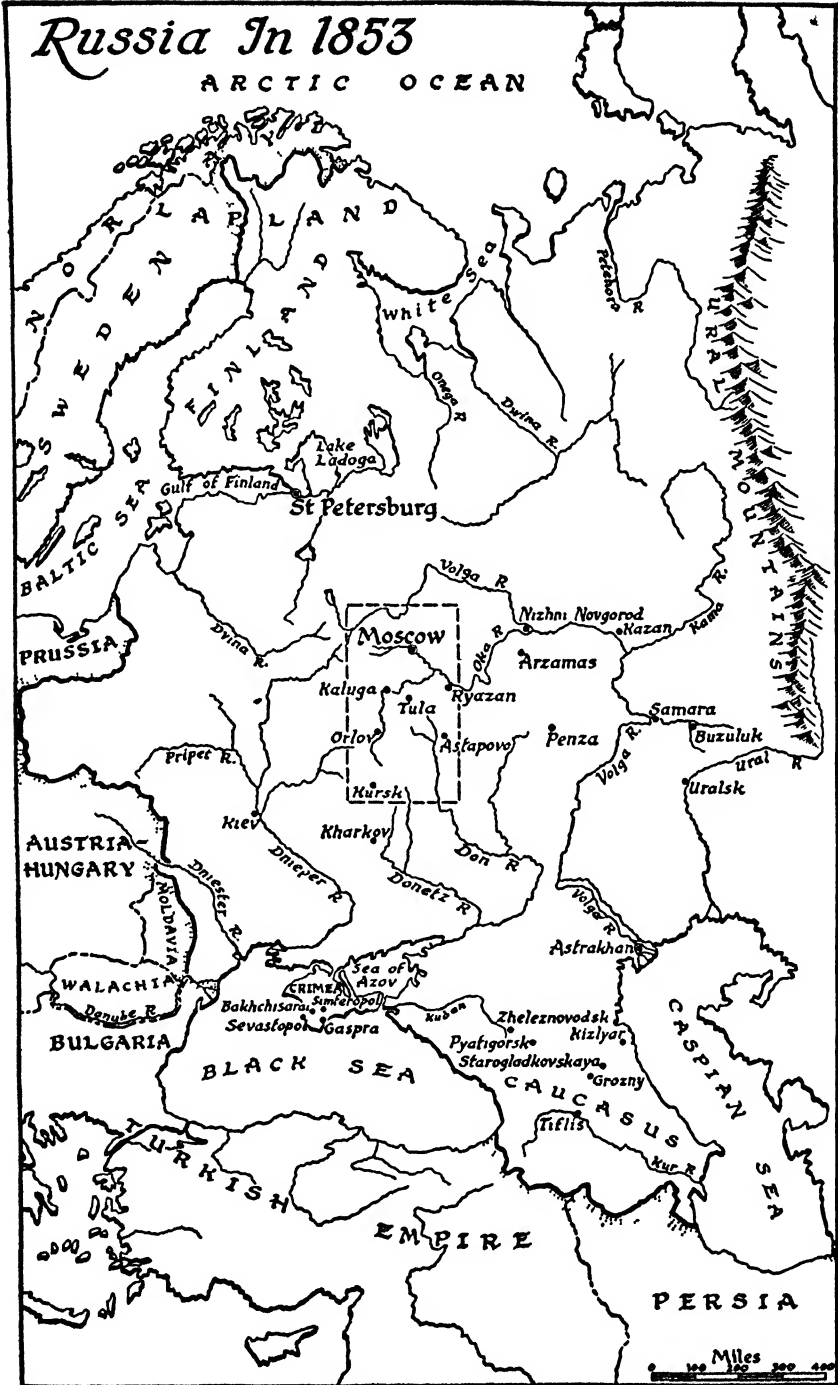
Tolstoy was inspired to try his hand at playwriting once again, in 1886, by the request of the well-known actor, P. A. Denisenko, who asked him to rework some of his moral tales into plays for a people's theatre. The idea pleased him and he quickly turned out a comedy, *The First Distiller*, a dramatization of his tale, “The Imp and the Crust.” It is a highly amusing piece of temperance propaganda. The First Distiller is the Devil, who makes great inroads among the rich and idle, but he succeeds in corrupting the hard-working peasant only by teaching him how to make spirits.

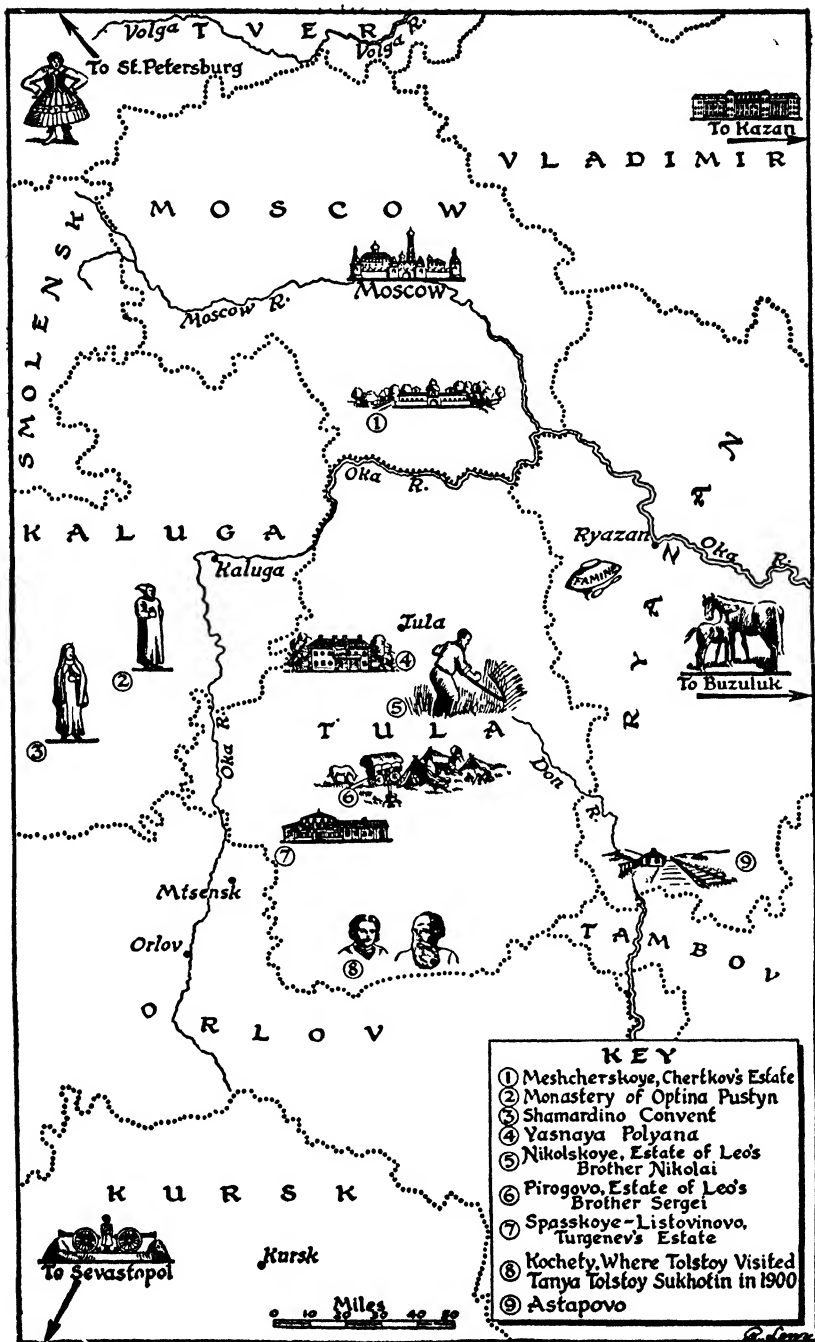
Another request for a play for the people's theatre led Tolstoy to write his grim realistic tragedy, *The Power of Darkness* (1886). It is based directly on an account of a crime he had heard several years before: a peasant confessed to the guests assembled at the marriage of his step-daughter that he had murdered a child he had had by her and afterwards attempted to kill his own six-year-old daughter. Upon the foundation of this sordid crime Tolstoy built a moving drama that involved the darker aspects of peasant life. A good part of the play he wrote over the autumn of 1886, while he lay ill in bed with his infected leg. Members of the household went about on tiptoe. At times he would drop his pencil, throw his head back on the pillow, and his face took on an expression of pain that arose from his bodily illness mingled with the spiritual suffering he experienced in creating the horrific scenes of his play that dealt with poison, adultery, and infanticide. He admitted that he could never read without tears the scene in the cellar where Nikita crushed his child with a board so that its “bones crunched.” The horror of it all is strangely neutralized by a sense of atonement for

<sup>1</sup> In 1886 he wrote “The Repentant Sinner”; “Three Hermits”; “The Grain as Big as a Hen's Egg”; “How Much Land Does a Man Need?”; “The Imp and the Crust”; in 1887 he wrote “Walk in the Light While There is Light.”

# Russia In 1853

ARCTIC OCEAN





sin and by the moral message of the terrible evil-begetting power of evil.

*The Power of Darkness* possessed excellent acting qualities and Tolstoy was anxious to have it staged as well as published. His friend, A. A. Stakhovich, a lover of the theatre and a talented dramatic reader, read the play with much success to Petersburg society gatherings at the beginning of 1887. He was asked to give a reading of it before Emperor Alexander III and high Court officials. The Emperor seemed impressed, pronounced the play "a marvellous thing," and suggested that it be staged by the best actors and actresses of both the Moscow and the Petersburg theatres. Preparations went forward rapidly, until the plans were brought to the attention of Pobedonostsev, the Procurator of the Holy Synod, and the archenemy of Tolstoy's new religious beliefs. He read the play and lost no time in writing to the Emperor that the drama filled him with horror and that it represented a "negation of ideals," a "debasing of moral feelings," and "an offence against taste." Alexander III judiciously recanted in his reply. He admitted that the play had made a strong impression on him, but that it had filled him with aversion and that it was his "opinion and conviction that it was impossible to stage the drama, because it was too realistic and frightful in its subject matter." With this fickle royal favour withdrawn, the play could not be acted, although it was published in 1887. A few weeks later the Emperor sent a memorandum to the Ministry of the Interior, in which he used much sharper language about the play and its author: "One ought to put an end to this mischief of L. Tolstoy. He is a downright nihilist and atheist. It would not be bad now to forbid the sale of his drama, *The Power of Darkness*, for he has already succeeded in selling enough of this nastiness and in spreading it among the people." *The Power of Darkness* was not staged in Russia until 1895, but with the aid of Zola it was acted earlier (1888) in Paris, where it at once won a remarkable success.

Purely artistic works, however, Tolstoy regarded as almost a diversion now, and they were indulged in because the creative urge would often give him no rest. The literary effort that really excited him at this time was a lengthy didactic work. In September 1886 he wrote one of his long essays in the form of a letter. It was on the subject of life and death. The theme gripped his attention and he decided to elaborate it. Throughout most of 1887 he could think of little else, and his letters contained frequent enthusiastic references

to his progress on the work. He attended meetings of the Moscow Psychological Society, perhaps with the hope that his ideas on life and death would receive some support from such learned men. At one of the meetings he even made bold to read a paper on “Life’s Meaning,” but his effort was not well received by these disciples of the new materialism. Visitors to Yasnaya Polyana that summer were often treated to readings of the work in progress, and the reactions were not always flattering to the author. Finally, he finished in August of 1887.

Although *On Life*<sup>1</sup> is an important philosophical treatment of Tolstoy’s views on the subject, the work is comparatively little known. All the mature wisdom of ten years of meditation on man and his relations to the world is to be found in this treatise, and the beliefs expressed here were little altered during the remainder of his life. Much of what he says had been set down in previous religious and philosophical works, but in one significant respect he seems to have changed his view. In *What I Believe* (1884) he had firmly indicated a disbelief in a personal resurrection and immortality, which had never been asserted by Christ, he maintained; in *On Life*, however, he rather vaguely suggests the possibility of a future life. The teaching of *On Life* amounts to a complete submergence of the self in a selfless, loving service for the good of others.

VI

In the summer of 1887 Tolstoy’s favourite brother-in-law, Stepan Bers, whom he had not seen for nine years, visited Yasnaya Polyana. He found Tolstoy considerably altered. Not only did he seem older and greyer, but the prolonged mental and spiritual struggle he had endured had changed his whole personality. There was scarcely a trace of his former liveliness and playfulness. As though guessing the painful shock to Bers of the transformation in him, Tolstoy purposefully reverted to type as it were, played tricks on him, and suddenly jumped upon his back as he walked about the room, as in the old days. But none of this enforced gaiety concealed the calm, sad, serious look in his face.

Tolstoy made no effort to impose his views on the many visitors who sought him out at Yasnaya Polyana that summer. He was willing enough to set forth his doctrines to those who cared to listen,

<sup>1</sup> He used this short title because in the final version of the work he devoted little space to the theme of death.

but he left it up to his hearers to exercise their free judgement, fully convinced that his beliefs would prove a blessing to those who adopted them. Some of the visitors who came to hear were distinguished men. T. G. Masaryk, the future President of Czechoslovakia, then a young doctor of philosophy, turned up. He had been preceded by his doctoral dissertation on suicide, and Tolstoy had been attracted by the serious religious views expressed in the study. They liked each other, and their friendship lasted. A result of the visit was Tolstoy's election in 1887 to membership in the Czech Literary Society. The well-known writer, Leskov, who was already partial to Tolstoy's religious views, came. He was a wise and original man, and one consequence of the firm friendship that developed was Leskov's contributions to the *Intermediary*. The brilliant jurist A. F. Koni arrived to make the acquaintance of the man about whom all Russia was talking. Tolstoy's charming behaviour attracted him no less than his lofty conversation. On a walk together one fine June evening they came upon a swarm of glow-worms in the bushes. With childish joy Tolstoy gathered them up in his hat and carried them home, his triumphant, coarse peasant face intermittently illumined in the dark by the phosphorescent flashes of the glow-worms. That striking face was painted during the summer by the famous artist Repin, who came to begin his series of portraits and studies of Tolstoy.

One visitor whose admiration for his genius did not prevent her from playing the stern critic of his religious views was his old friend Granny. During her whole stay at Yasnaya Polyana, her first, these greying antagonists sparred cautiously, afraid to offend each other, yet determined not to relinquish a single conviction. She liked the morning hours when he would emerge from his room, refreshed by sleep and in excellent spirits. Then they conversed calmly, and he would read her his favourite poetry. If the name of Christ appeared in a line of verse, his voice trembled and his eyes filled with tears. She found it difficult to understand such emotion when she knew that he did not accept the divinity of the Saviour.

When Tolstoy retired to his study to work, he gave Granny all the books, pamphlets, and mail that he had received the previous day to peruse. She was appalled at the numerous letters from nearly every country in Europe and even from America. "What fearful pap for your pride, my dear friend," she told him. "I really fear that one day you will turn into a Nebuchadnezzar before his conversion."



He promptly answered: “Why do you think that this makes me proud? When I go into the great world [so he called the huts of the peasants], my glory does not exist for them; hence, it does not exist at all.”

Granny observed in these numerous letters requests for money, advice, contributions to magazines, and often the expression of a good deal of nonsense. But if some convert appealed to Tolstoy in his own language, he seemed touched. Yet when she pointed out the crudeness of the expressions, he rather sheepishly admitted with a smile that what he had praised was really stupid. He asked her to read a letter of Chertkov, in which this favourite disciple related how he had told a peasant that he did not believe the opening words of the Gospel of Saint John, and how his wife complained that despite all their efforts they could not convince the peasants to accept them as equals. Granny was infuriated and conveyed her feelings to Tolstoy. And she observed with some scorn that for all his convictions about the evils of money, Tolstoy still continued to dole out kopeks to the numerous beggars who applied to him.

Granny and other visitors and members of the family were drafted to take dictation when Tolstoy was suddenly faced with the need to get out some copy in a hurry. Kuzminski, Tolstoy’s brother-in-law, was assigned to Granny as a helper. The work before him was *On Life*. “He dictated,” she related, “and I wrote. Entirely unexpectedly such awkward phrases began to burst forth that I involuntarily recalled the ‘impassable swamp’ that Turgenev once mentioned apropos of Tolstoy, and I could not resolve to circumvent the swamp or to set it down for printing in just this form. Kuzminski, although he agreed with me, reckoned it impossible for a simple mortal to dare to correct Tolstoy.” Granny had more courage, for she said: “Do you know, my dear, that I am just about to correct your prose to the great scandal of your brother-in-law.” Tolstoy instantly replied: “And you would be perfectly right, for I’m concerned only with the idea and pay no attention to my style.” Perhaps what Granny did not know was that this piece of writing, both before printing and after it got into proof, would receive numerous, painstaking revisions from an artist who cared infinitely about his style.

Granny took away from Yasnaya Polyana a sense of warm and loving hospitality, but she pitied Sonya and still worried over the husband’s unorthodox faith. It was all an amalgamation of truth

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and darkness, she safely wrote him after she had returned to Petersburg. The hero of his work *On Life* was Reason, but she reminded him that we need something more exalted than reason to subdue our inherently iniquitous tendencies. If he would only regard Christ as a divine personality instead of merely as a moralist, then she would try to harmonize their other points of religious differences. Patiently he replied to her that to lead a true life meant to aspire towards God, drawing nearer to Him with the help of Christ. But why must he see God exactly as she visualized Him? Hers was the traditional faith which he had rejected; if she could advance something new, then she would be right in trying to persuade him to her view. He preferred to arrive at his beliefs rationally, "but you don't," he concluded. "I am fully aware of it; you neither can nor will. It makes you feel at ease. You must follow your own path. All those who make for the same goal will meet there. I love you and embrace you with all my heart."

Among the foreign letters that Granny might have inspected was one from a young French student in the École Normale—Romain Rolland. It was soon followed by another, in which Rolland spoke of a moral crisis in his life that had arisen over his doubts concerning service to science and art as opposed to the demands of physical work and service to one's neighbour. Tolstoy read the letter with tears in his eyes, and in reply sent one of his long epistolary essays on the subject of physical labour and intellectual activity. Rolland became a devoted admirer and a future biographer of Tolstoy, whom he credited with being his first guide in art and life. In truth, Tolstoy was already exercising a powerful influence on the intellectual youth of France.

## VII

On her visit to Yasnaya Polyana in the summer of 1887 Granny was charmed with the Tolstoy children. There were eight of them. They were kind, simple, gay, and quite gifted. She observed how attached they were to their parents, and how they worshipped their father. Not all of them shared his views, particularly the eldest son, Sergei, a thoughtful man and a talented musician. The second son, Ilya, erratic but warmhearted, strove hard to follow his father's religious and social creed, and his efforts were repaid by a tender solicitude on the part of Tolstoy. His father once suddenly asked Ilya if he ever had anything to do with women, and when he

answered in the negative, Tolstoy wept from joy. At about this time Ilya was thinking of marrying, and his father wrote him a long and earnest letter to warn him that he and his future wife must be certain that they both had a useful purpose in life or otherwise they would not be happy together. “Your purpose in life,” he counselled, “must not be to enjoy the delight of wedlock but, by your life, to bring more love and truth into the world. The object of marriage is to help one another in the attainment of that purpose.”

Although the third son, temperamental Leo, early showed a disposition to subscribe to his father’s views, he soon opposed them, and even in print. The younger sons, the ebullient Andrei and stolid Mikhail, had little regard for the teaching of their father, and later they openly displayed their antipathy by voluntarily serving in the army.

Tolstoy once remarked that he had reason to thank God for his daughters, and it is true that they served him with a devotion and sympathy that his sons did not possess. Tatyana, the eldest, while always maintaining certain reservations of her own concerning her father’s faith, was much influenced by his teaching and proved a willing helper in his work. But the second daughter, Masha, was a true disciple, and often risked the anger of her mother because of her quiet insistence upon living up to her father’s teachings. She worked in the fields, taught the village children, faithfully attended sick peasants, and in her spare time aided her father in his voluminous correspondence and in his literary labours. When these two sisters eventually married, the youngest, Alexandra, took their place as an assiduous disciple, helper, and favourite child of her father.

The deep interest Tolstoy had formerly taken in the education of his children had quite vanished since his preoccupation with religious and moral questions. By now he had lost all respect for the formal education that his children were undergoing, and the matter was already becoming a subject for quarrels with his wife, who insisted that her children should receive the conventional education that would enable them to take their proper place in the class into which they had been born. Tolstoy believed that conventional education was harmful, because its aim was to fit men to rise above their fellow men. The only kind of education he thought worth while was that which taught love and compassion for one’s neighbour and service to the masses.

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Learning of the temperance movement in America at this time, Tolstoy promptly started a Temperance Society in his own home. Sonya had no objections to his signing the pledge, but she was annoyed by his persuading several members of the household to do likewise and by his preaching to the peasants the evils of tobacco and vodka.

With the financial gain of Sonya's edition of his works in mind, Tolstoy read her a lecture on the evils of money and property, and on her desire to preserve all for her children. Angrily she turned on him with the charge that she asked only eight rubles for the twelve volumes of her edition, whereas he had demanded ten rubles for *War and Peace* alone when he had published it.

Added to Sonya's grief that Tolstoy was voluntarily drawing away from her was her conviction that more and more he was turning to his chief disciple with the confidence and trust he had formerly placed in her. Towards Chertkov she now began to display that jealousy which soon developed into a morbid obsession. "I do not like him," she wrote in her diary (March 6, 1887). "He is unintelligent, crafty, narrow, and unkind. L.N. [Tolstoy] is partial to him because of his adoration." In the next entry she complained: "These so-called new Christian *friends* arouse L.N. against me, and not always without success. I read over again a letter from Chertkov about his happiness in spiritual communion with his wife, and about his sympathy for L.N. because he does not have this happiness, and how sorry he is that he, so worthy of it, is deprived of this communion—hinting at me. I read it again and was hurt. This dull, cunning, and dishonest man, enmeshing L.N. by his flattery, wants (probably by way of being a *Christian*) to destroy that union which now for 25 years has so closely bound us together."

If Sonya had been reading much of the correspondence between her husband and Chertkov at this time—which was probably the case—then it is little wonder that her naturally jealous nature was further provoked. For Tolstoy took a deep interest in all the intimate details of his disciple's married life. When Chertkov's wife was about to have her first child, Tolstoy's advice was sought on whether or not chloroform or gas should be used at the delivery. Sternly he counselled against the use of any drugs and urged that nature be allowed to take its course. And when the infant girl arrived, he rejoiced as though it were his own child, and all agreed that she must be called his "granddaughter."

“DARK, DARK PEOPLE”!

Of all the disciples that had begun to collect around her husband, Chertkov was only the chief thorn in Sonya's side. “How unsympathetic are all these types that cleave to the teaching of Leo Nikolayevich,” she jotted down in her diary. “Not one of them is a normal person. The women also for the most part are hysterical.” Each new one added to the fold she regarded with disgust and foreboding. The latest, in 1887, was a Prince D. A. Khilkov. He had abandoned a successful army career, repudiated the Russian Church, and was exiled by the authorities to the Caucasus, where he lived among the Dukhobors. With scorn Sonya wrote to her husband, who was at Yasnaya Polyana, that she had heard that Khilkov was living with a peasant girl, but since he was a Dukhobor, it was unnecessary for him to recognize either the Church or marriage. “All these are very sad manifestations,” she added. “Their victims are always the same, i.e. women and children. . . . Dark, dark people! Morally sick and wretched!”

The dark people, however, were only one of the many factors poisoning the relations between husband and wife. On September 23, 1887, Tolstoy and his wife celebrated quietly their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary. In his diary he scribbled that the course of his family life “could have been better.” About a month before, in her own diary, the forty-three-year-old Sonya wrote: “Pregnancy both physically and morally tortures me. Iyovochka's health has gone down hill; family life becomes complicated, and my own moral strength diminishes.” On March 31, 1888, Sonya gave birth to her thirteenth child, Ivan.

## Chapter XXVI

### “LEAVE THY WIFE AND FOLLOW ME”

**M**ANY PEOPLE in Russia were wondering if the author of *War and Peace* had not lost his mind. For some ten years now, instead of exploiting his great literary success, he had been serving up to readers and listeners religious treatises and moral exhortations. The Church was becoming alarmed over his wholesale condemnation of its dogma and practices, and government officials, long since suspicious, now secretly reported every move of Tolstoy. Because of his wide fame, the police feared to arrest him and granted a kind of extra-territoriality to his estate at Yasnaya Polyana. In January 1888, the Governor-General of Moscow sent a confidential report to the Ministry of the Interior, in which he cautiously declared that “every repressive measure taken against Count L. Tolstoy will surround him with an aureole of suffering and will all the more assist in the dissemination of his thought and teaching.” Both Church and State were uninterested in his search for the meaning and purpose of life, but the uncompromising Tolstoy failed to understand how anyone could go through life without asking himself: “What the devil does it all mean?” Such satisfied individuals—he might have agreed later with George Bernard Shaw—fell into the category that Calvin predestinately damned.

Of greater consequence to Tolstoy’s immediate peace of mind was the fact that his wife’s hostility to his views had become more irreconcilable than ever. By 1888, at the age of sixty, he had finally renounced meat, alcohol, and tobacco, and the next year he wrote an article, “Why Do Men Stupefy Themselves?” in which he roundly condemned drinking and smoking as habits employed by mankind to still the voice of conscience. The peasants of Yasnaya Polyana were among his first converts; they reluctantly surrendered their tobacco pouches and took the pledge not to drink, and then broke it by stealth. In two years of effort, after which he gave up his

personal crusade, he managed to persuade 741 persons to take the temperance oath, but how many kept it, we are not informed. The five commandments that he had distilled from the Gospels guided his whole existence. Devotion to the Christian ideal as he understood it—a renunciation of one’s self in order to serve God and one’s neighbour—made of his conscience a watchdog to detect the slightest intrusion of heretical thoughts or actions.

The luxury, frock coats, and singing at the wedding of his son Ilya<sup>1</sup> offended Tolstoy’s new sense of proprieties, and he complained of it in a letter to Chertkov. Sonya found her husband’s Christian idealism something less than ideal. Having a child at forty-four had placed a terrific strain on her physical powers. Tolstoy wept over her suffering, but it was a joyous compensation for her to see him fondle and kiss the newborn Ivan.

Then, less than three weeks after this event, and in the face of his exhausted wife’s bitter protests, Tolstoy, with knapsack on his shoulders, set off from Moscow to Yasnaya Polyana on foot, accompanied by young Ge. He has “again taken the bit in his teeth,” the chagrined Sonya wrote her sister Tanya.

Sonya knew that he had gone to plough and sow in the village and to live among his disciples. Even from afar, the very thought of these “dark people” increased her anger over his desertion at this trying time. She jealously rebuked him when she heard that his doting and saintlike follower, Marya Schmidt, actually entered his room at Yasnaya Polyana while he was still in bed. In her irritation she communicated to her sister that “never was Lyovochka so extremely stubborn and obstinate in his lunacies as during the present year.” Almost with satisfaction, it seems, she filled her letters to him with details of the terrible pain she endured while nursing Ivan, because of a sore breast and lack of milk, and she suggested the possibility of a wet nurse.

That a mother should nurse her own children had long been one of Tolstoy’s most stubborn convictions. In fact, he had just terminated an acrimonious controversy on the subject with Chertkov, who had innocently asked his help in finding a working woman to take the place of his wife in nursing their second child. Tolstoy’s initial cool rejoinder eventually developed into a forthright scolding of Chertkov for having more faith in doctors, medicine, and wet nurses than in God, and his final advice in the situation was to let nature take its course. After Chertkov’s testy

<sup>1</sup> Ilya married Sofya Nikolayevna Filosofov on February 28, 1888.

reply that simply because he held another view in this matter he ought not to be accused of lack of faith in God, Tolstoy relented and with reluctance agreed to help his disciple find a wet nurse.

Either because she was not a disciple or simply because she was his wife, Tolstoy evinced no disposition to agree with Sonya's justifiable suggestion. He wrote her: "Darling, do not lose heart over Ivan, and do not burden yourself with thoughts, God gave the infant, and God will give it food." The whole question of feeding babies so agitated him that he wanted to write a treatise on the subject. He never got around to doing this, but he did insert a note in a physician's article on the care of children, which he helped to prepare for the press. The note strongly advocated breast-feeding by mothers, and concluded with an extraordinary statement concerning the artificial nipple, dipped in a food preparation, commonly used at this time: "The pacifier has killed in Russia more human beings than the plague and cholera and all illnesses. We must arm ourselves against it and help each other to destroy it."

There was little in the correspondence between husband and wife on this occasion to suggest that Ivan's birth had been anything other than an unnecessary and superfluous event in their lives. All Tolstoy's attempts to change his wife's views and way of life had failed. She simply could not understand his transformed attitude, and was frankly annoyed by the evidence of the Gospels that he quoted to her. Husband and wife had become spiritual and intellectual strangers to each other. The only real bond left was the physical and that too was soon endangered.

## II

During the summer of 1888, work—hard physical labour—was part of Tolstoy's daily regimen. The sixty-year-old prophet would return at evening after a full day in the fields, sweaty, grimy, the clay clinging to his boots, a spade on his shoulder and his face happy with the expression of duty well done. He would exclaim: "How fine it is to live in this world!" In letters to protesting friends he took a peculiar delight in telling them that because of his ploughing, sowing, and harvesting he had no time to write. If he found a spare hour or two, he worked away at making shoes for his daughters.



With autumn came visitors. Among them was Tolstoy's old friend Fet, who had not appeared at Yasnaya Polyana for a long time. He read to the household selections from his reminiscences, in which was included his extensive correspondence with Tolstoy. Pleasant memories of their early community of thought returned to remind these two old friends how far they had drifted apart.

Upon his return to Moscow in November, Tolstoy resumed his city form of “bread-labour.” That is, he made shoes, cared for his room, started the fires in the morning, cut wood, and carted water. He even visited the district school and, appalled by the stupidity of the teaching and the mechanical nature of the discipline, he offered his services, which were politely rejected. His progressive educational ideas were too well known in school circles.

As always, after returning from the country, city life aroused his antagonism as the most uncivilized of existences; it was like some huge monster designed to grind man down, physically and spiritually. In his diary he described one of the large fashionable Moscow stores at this time as “worse than a hospital for syphilitics!” The earnest young men and women who continued to come to his city home to hear the “word” of the master were made to feel like intruders by Sonya. It was a source of constant worry to Tolstoy, and occasionally he vented his anger over his wife's behaviour. Among the unusual guests that winter was the American Isabel Hapgood. Earlier she had sent him some of her articles, which he found uninteresting, and soon she undertook to translate his work *On Life*.

Tolstoy's gloomy feelings were momentarily cheered by the news, on the twenty-fourth of December, of the birth of his first grandchild, Anna. He wrote a warm letter of congratulation to Ilya and his daughter-in-law, but he did not neglect to proffer characteristic advice to avoid the mistakes of the times in bringing up their child.

III

The year 1889 in the Moscow household began with some excitement. Tolstoy had written an article for one of the newspapers to deplore the customary carousing and drunkenness on Tatyana's Day, January 12, traditionally celebrated by university students with much merrymaking. The youths did not take kindly to this preaching, and some of them sent him a telegram in which they facetiously “drank to his health.” And he was even

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warned by government officials that a mob of students intended to march on his house and make him eat his words. Fortunately, nothing came of the projected demonstration.

Always glad of an excuse to leave the detested city, Tolstoy accepted an invitation in March to visit his old Sevastopol comrade-in-arms, the brilliant but queer mathematician, Prince S. S. Urusov. His estate was not far from Moscow, near the Troitse-Sergei Monastery. Tolstoy was pursued there by two Americans—an Episcopal minister and a scholar. Sonya had tried to hold them in Moscow until her husband's return on the plea that there was much of interest to see in the city. But they stubbornly insisted that they had come to Russia only to see Count Leo Tolstoy.

They were probably the same two Americans who a short time before had visited Granny in Petersburg. Such visits of foreigners were not uncommon, for they imagined that she, being a relative, would facilitate their access to Tolstoy, a rather needless precaution, for he saw nearly anyone who took the trouble to call on him.

They had come across the ocean, they said, solely to talk with Tolstoy on a very important matter. "You may know," added the theologian, a handsome and still very young man, "that in America we have very many sects and still not the trace of a ruling religion. Therefore, I have conceived the idea of bringing at least a part of these heterogeneous sects under one roof, so to speak, so that they may have some unity of views and faith. But this is not an easy matter, and I must tell you frankly that we definitely do not know how to bring it about."

Despite her fine breeding, Granny could not keep from laughing over this solemn declaration.

"Is it possible," she exclaimed, "that you have made so long a journey only for this reason? In truth, I'm very sorry for you. Don't you know that Count Tolstoy is the enemy of every church, beginning with his own, and not only does not sympathize with religious ritualism, but accounts as pernicious the worship of God in any form? You will hardly find him a practical and useful director. I can even foresee in part exactly what he will say to your request, and it will not be what you expect."

The poor Americans were not a little dumbfounded by this information, but it did not prevent them from going to Moscow to the court of Solomon. "I don't know how this court ended," concluded Granny with cheerful malice, "or what temple was raised as a consequence of their conversation with the universal

patriarch. My Americans I saw no more; they apparently, like the Magi, returned by another path.”

In his tramps about the neighbourhood of the Urusov estate, Tolstoy saw all the evidence of poverty and debauchery among the peasantry and factory workers that always threw him into despair. And he poured out his indignation and sorrow in a letter to Sonya, who had been souring his visit with customary complaints about the family and her illnesses. Nor did she miss this particular opportunity to drive home a moral lesson. “How hopeless is your letter in its views on people and on Russia!” she wrote. “But you are right, entirely right. Not without purpose, although half in jest, have I been always saying lately: ‘I suffer from a dislike for everything Russian.’ You have always carefully avoided, however, the question of your family obligations. In truth, if it were not for these obligations, which I do not invent but feel in my whole being, I too would dedicate myself to the service of the common good. . . . But I cannot bring up wretched and uneducated children, given to me by God, simply for the sake of the well-being of people alien to me. Perhaps in my old age I will realize this sacred dream.”

Shortly after his return to Moscow, Tolstoy visited an exhibit of paintings. He was well acquainted with many artists, and his knowledge of native painting was considerable. Although his judgements were usually well-informed, they were often flecked with that cross-grained criticism with which he appreciated so much art. On this occasion he was particularly anxious to see a new canvas of Ge that depicted Christ’s departure from Gethsemane. Not long before he had written to this devoted friend and disciple, whose paintings he sometimes inspired, to explain his conviction that what matters most to the artist is not praise, but the feeling that he is saying something new and important, something needed by the people. Here Tolstoy echoed his feeling about his own art: he believed that he saw things that other people did not see, and that he had an imperative duty to make others see them through his writings. Ge’s picture impressed him as succeeding in precisely this respect, for it revealed Christ in a new and profound way. He contrasted Ge’s canvas with another at the exhibition on a religious subject by Repin; it conveyed nothing new, said Tolstoy, nothing that people did not already envisage in the treatment.

The grown-up members of his family were becoming impatient with the preacher in their father and had lost their enthusiasm

for the hard physical labour he still persisted in on the estate. Puzzled peasants were convinced that he ploughed, sowed, and cut wood simply because he had nothing else to do. Only his serious daughter Masha still abided by his doctrine of work. "I have a great tenderness for her, for her alone," he wrote in his diary. "It is as though she redeems the others."

One of the most welcome of the several visitors that summer of 1889 was Strakhov, who had not been at Yasnaya Polyana for some time. He found it a "centre of spiritual activity," and he saw in the master's calm moral beauty a power of conviction that could afford to dispense with verbal persuasion. To Strakhov, Tolstoy seemed already to have discovered truth, and his serene faith in it required no demonstration beyond his sincere willingness to live what he believed.

The centre of spiritual activity, however, was largely in Tolstoy's study, where the "dark people" paid him furtive visits. The rest of Yasnaya Polyana seemed like a palace of pleasure. For the family had decided to remain there for the winter, and they made every effort to keep up their gay social city existence. Sergei had finished the university and had settled down in sedate bachelordom on an estate in the neighbouring Chern district, from whence he paid frequent visits to Yasnaya Polyana. Ilya lived with his wife on an estate in the same district. The third son, Leo, a favourite of his mother, had just entered the medical school at Moscow University, but he soon abandoned this and further study in order to try his fortune as a writer. The two younger boys, Andrei and Mikhail, lazy and inattentive pupils, had not even finished the *Gymnasium*, and were now under the charge of a new tutor, A. M. Novikov. Ivan, the baby, was the apple of his parents' eye. The two oldest daughters, Tatyana and Masha, still unmarried, remained with the family in the country, and five-year-old Alexandra was in the charge of an English governess.

As in the city, the entire life of the family at Yasnaya Polyana revolved about the mother. Sonya ran the household, looked after the children's education, edited a new edition of her husband's works, and collected rents from the estate. The numerous children, servants, and peasants turned to her alone for the daily decisions of their lives.

For the most part the father, like a guest in his own house, kept singularly aloof from domestic cares and the affairs of the estate. He serenely led his own existence—a life of the spirit. When the



*Hertz*

Tolstoy on the road from Moscow to Yasnaya Polyana



A view of Yasnaya Polyana  
Showing "the tree of the poor" (left) under which Tolstoy  
received his visitors

summer work in the fields was over, Tolstoy's daily regimen was fixed, and no one and nothing were permitted to interfere with it. He rose about eight, emptied his chamber pot, swept his room out, and brushed his clothes. If a mouse were caught in the cage—there were many mice in the house that year—he took the cage out to the orchard and carefully released the rodent. No matter what the weather, he went on a solitary walk in the morning and returned about ten for coffee. Then he shut himself up in his study and worked till twelve, when he emerged for a quick lunch and returned to his reading and writing until three or four. It was only now that he grew sociable, for he would invite any member of the family or guests to walk with him, chatting with his companion in lively fashion and questioning peasants on the road. The peasants liked to banter with him and hear his deep, sincere, toothless laugh. Returning for dinner at five, he kept the table in lively conversation and remained until eight, when he retired to his study to write up his diary for the day. He would soon emerge and entertain the family circle with conversation or readings from his own compositions or from French, English, or Russian novels. He read well. Sometimes there would be music or a quiet game of chess, which he played badly but with great seriousness. At about midnight the mail arrived, and after going over his letters, he went to bed.

Sometimes the family's traditional fun-making interrupted the search for God. If the entertainment caught his fancy, he quickly became the life of the party as in the old days. Such an occasion was the performance of his play, *The Fruits of Enlightenment*, at Yasnaya Polyana in December of this year. Tanya and Masha had thought it time to liven up the household, and a play seemed like a good excuse to invite people. They had difficulty in finding a satisfactory piece until Masha remembered seeing the manuscript of a drama among her father's papers. She purloined the manuscript, and with Tanya and the young tutor Novikov read it over with much amusement. It was just the thing—a merry comedy in four acts, in which high society and spiritualism were blisteringly satirized, while some wonderful peasant characters were introduced who provided a combination of farce and genuine distress over their lack of land. To the delight of the readers they at once recognized in the numerous characters members of the family, their friends, and even some of their own peasants. Tolstoy at first remonstrated: staging a play, he said, was simply an amusement of rich and idle

people. The young folks stood their ground and soon the author was more deeply involved than his children.

Telegrams were hurried off to Moscow, Tula, and Chern, and in a few days *troikas* dashed up to the house with prospective actors, among them the three Tolstoy sons, Sergei, Ilya, and Leo. Parts were quickly cast and soon rehearsals were being held daily. The author was nearly always present, directing and encouraging the actors, slapping his sides and wagging his head in peasant fashion, and laughing until the tears came when his humorous lines were effectively rendered. With animation he lectured the cast on dramatic art, and during the rehearsals the artist in him was never dormant. He observed attentively the performance of each actor and took notes on the dialogue. At night he collected all the roles, retired to his study, and altered the speeches, sometimes on the basis of the individual abilities of the players. These alterations continued right up to the very performance of the play.

Yasnaya Polyana rang with merriment from morning to night. The guests did not spend all their time at rehearsals. Young people coasted on the hill, skated on the pond, and went on sleigh rides by moonlight along the wooded trails. A well-spread table awaited them upon their return. But decanters of innocuous *kvas* always discouraged the frozen men of the party (intoxicants were not allowed in the house since Tolstoy had taken the pledge), and one by one they stealthily slipped out to a place under the stairs to warm themselves with vodka, which some knowing guest had thoughtfully provided.

On another occasion, when Tolstoy was deep in a conversation with the actors, little Andrei ran in to tell his father that two peasant women urgently wished to see him in the kitchen. Tolstoy went immediately, followed by several of the guests who were aware that something was up. As soon as he entered and asked the women what they wished, they fell on their knees and began to wail. Tolstoy was embarrassed and confused.

"Get up, mother, get up, get up," he said, turning to each in turn, but they did not arise and continued to howl. Tolstoy's features grew stern, his chin trembled, and he helplessly appealed to the women, assuring them that he was not God, and finally, falling on his own knees, he declared:

"Well, now I shall kneel too. What is it you wish of me?"

But they still remained on their knees lamenting.

"Well, I'm on my own knees, I am, I am! Now, what do you want?"



pleaded Tolstoy, bowing to the floor before the women. Suddenly the wailing changed to hysterical laughter, and only then did Tolstoy, looking hard at them, recognize in the disguised women his own daughters. Jumping to his feet, Tolstoy shook with laughter, and finally through his tears he said: "No, this is really impiety," and he went to his study.

*The Fruits of Enlightenment* was finally performed on December 30 in the big salon room before a large audience and it achieved a triumphant success.<sup>1</sup> It had been a long time since such high spirits and jollity had reigned in the great manor house of Yasnaya Polyana, which now became once again a "centre of spiritual activity."

IV

Over these two years (1888-1889) Tolstoy's developing social and moral dogma was reflected in his intellectual and artistic interests. His reading consisted chiefly of controversial books and articles on religion, ethics, and political science. Fiction seemed to be worked in merely as a relief from sterner stuff: Goncharov's *Oblomov* he thought a poor novel; Saltykov-Shchedrin's satirical tales he liked; and the works of a new novelist, A. I. Ertel, especially his *Gardenins*, he praised highly (this novel was much influenced by Tolstoy's art). For the first time he read Chekhov, who was just beginning to publish, and on this occasion his judgement fluctuated between approval and severe criticism. Nor was the fiction of foreign authors neglected—Hugo, Maupassant, Jean Paul Richter, and Mrs. Humphry Ward's *Robert Elsmere*. The comedies of Ibsen, however, he dismissed as bad. It was also in 1889 that Tolstoy read for the first time the verse of Walt Whitman. He jotted down in his diary: "There is much bombast, emptiness, but I have already found something in him that is fine." The next year he described him as the "most original and bold of poets," and recommended him for translation. Tolstoy once wrote to Chertkov that, "after America, the country that is most sympathetic to me is Denmark."

American writers were beginning to appear with greater frequency on his reading list, a fact not unconnected with his growing reputation in the United States. This reputation was amusingly

<sup>1</sup> Shortly after, it was publicly performed for the first time with equal success at Tula. When Tolstoy arrived for one of the rehearsals, the doorman, who did not know him and believed him to be some begging peasant, turned him out.

revealed in a visit to Tolstoy, at about this time, by Professor I. I. Yanzhul, a devoted admirer. He found his host stitching shoes and was asked to make himself comfortable in the adjoining study with a bundle of newspapers freshly arrived from America until Tolstoy had completed his task. The first newspaper Yanzhul looked at was a copy of the *Sandusky Times*. Much to his amazement he discovered a full account of a sermon delivered at a Sandusky church on Tolstoy's rendering of the Gospels. The ecstatic praise ascended to a final lyrical outburst over Tolstoy, the "Thirteenth Apostle," whose teaching was declared to be as important as that of the other twelve. The contrast between the American newspaper's description of the thirteenth Apostle and Tolstoy in the next room in shirt sleeves and apron sewing away at a pair of shoes sent Yanzhul into gales of laughter, in which the new Apostle heartily joined when the cause was explained to him. A few years later, when Yanzhul had occasion to visit America, he found that letters from Tolstoy, and even the mere fact that he was personally acquainted with the great man, opened any door for him.

For some time now American religious and social thinking had begun to attract Tolstoy. Admirers of his views in the United States sent him periodicals, such as the Swedenborgian organ, the *New Christianity*, and the *World's Advance Thought*, from a reading of which he experienced "a great devotion of spirit." A perusal of the Mormon Bible and a biography of Joseph Smith, however, prompted the following entry in his diary: "Religion proper is a product of deceit—lies for a good purpose." But an American book on the teachings of the Shakers produced a powerful and favourable impression on him, and he thought of writing an article on religious movements in the United States.

At this time (1889) Tolstoy also read the strangely prophetic Utopian romance of Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward*, which he considered an extraordinary performance. But the American book that now stirred him most and won his spiritual gratitude was Adin Ballou's *Christian Non-Resistance*. Since Tolstoy had declared his own belief in nonresistance in *What I Believe*, it had been a source of joy to discover that American thinkers had long since anticipated his convictions in this respect. To be sure, the doctrine went back to Christ's Sermon on the Mount, and had been repeated for centuries in one form or another by various religious sects, reformers, and moralists. Tolstoy, however, had formulated the

doctrine in an uncompromising manner. For him, nonresistance meant that no physical force be used to compel any man to do what he does not want to do, or to make him desist from doing what he likes. This extreme position has perhaps done more than any of his convictions to damage his reputation as a thinker. For his understanding of nonresistance not only led him to condemn all forms of government that employed any degree of force to compel obedience to its laws, but also to go so far as to maintain that it is wrong even to prevent a madman by force from killing a person. While admitting that compromise with the doctrine of nonresistance was inevitable in practice, he would not admit it in theory, which would be acting, in his opinion, quite contrary to the law of Christ.

Tolstoy's horror of violence led him to accept the request, in 1889, of A. I. Ershov that he write a preface to the author's *Recollections of Sevastopol*. In performing the task he relived again his experiences of thirty-four years ago at the famous siege, and he remembered with loathing the complacency with which he had then accepted the soldier's duty to kill his fellow men. The preface, which the censor banned, is a brief but powerful condemnation of war.

v

The year 1889 was particularly noteworthy, for it marked the return of Tolstoy to the larger field of creative literature. In this year he finished his famous piece, *The Kreutzer Sonata*. According to Sonya, Tolstoy obtained the initial idea for it from the actor, V. N. Andreyev-Burlak. He told the family of meeting on a train an unfortunate stranger who poured out to him the story of his wife's betrayal. Tolstoy originally began this tale of "sexual love," as he first called it, in 1887, but he put it aside after a mere start. The following year an incident provided him with new inspiration and added a new motif—that of music. In a gathering at the family's Moscow house in the spring, the violinist Yuli Lyasotta, accompanied by young Sergei Tolstoy at the piano, performed Beethoven's "Kreutzer Sonata." Tolstoy had long been acquainted with the piece, but this performance produced a powerful impression on him. He turned to the distinguished painter Repin and the actor Andreyev-Burlak, who were present, and offered to write a story based on the sonata, if the actor would read it publicly in the presence of a canvas, inspired by the same music, that Repin would

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engage to paint. Tolstoy once again took up the unfinished tale of "sexual love" which now became *The Kreutzer Sonata*, but of the three artists, he was the only one to fulfill his part of the agreement.

For the rest of 1888 and at various times during the next year Tolstoy worked away at this strange story of Pozdnyshv, whose violent jealousy over the attention paid his wife by a musician drove him to kill her and thereafter to preach the doctrine that sex should be eliminated from human life as far as possible. Draft followed draft until Tolstoy had accumulated nine of them. Behind this extensive effort was not merely his sense of artistic perfection; *The Kreutzer Sonata* had finally taken on a deep personal significance for him. Later, in a letter to his friend Alekseyev about the finished story, he declared: "The contents of what I wrote were as new to me as to those who read them. In this connection an ideal remote from my activity was revealed to me so that I at first became horrified and did not believe it, but then I grew convinced, repented, and rejoiced in what was to me and to others a happy impulse."

The new ideal that had gripped Tolstoy, and for the expression of which his unhappy hero Pozdnyshv became the mouthpiece, was the necessity of absolute chastity not only for unmarried, but even for married people. All his life Tolstoy had advocated marriage as the only normal and moral outlet for sexual satisfaction. And a few years previously, in *What I Believe* (1883), he had roundly condemned a celibate life for those who were ripe for marriage. But the factors compelling him to repudiate his former beliefs and to adopt the ideal of chastity must be studied against the background of his own recent marital difficulties.

"Man survives earthquakes, epidemics, terrible illnesses and every kind of spiritual suffering," said Tolstoy, "but always the most poignant tragedy was, is, and ever will be the tragedy of the bedroom." This new view, ironically enough, he began to express in correspondence with Chertkov, whom only a few years before he had been urging to marry for the good of his health and morals. In several letters to him during 1888, Tolstoy developed his thoughts on marriage and chastity, progressing swiftly from compromise to an extreme position. As so often since his spiritual change, he sought support for his new convictions in the Bible and found it in Matthew (XIX, 11-12): "But he said unto them, All men cannot receive this saying, but they to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's

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womb: and there are eunuchs, which were made eunuchs by men: and there are eunuchs, which made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.”

This new light did not immediately illuminate all the dark corners of Chertkov's mind on this vexed question. Finally, in November, Tolstoy wrote his disciple a rather full and important explanation of his position, which at that very time was being artistically formulated in order to be placed in the mouth of the hero of *The Kreutzer Sonata*.

Tolstoy began his letter by frankly confessing that in his own marriage he had failed utterly to live up to his new convictions, but that in the future he would try to abide by them as the teaching of Christ. Then he outlined his argument. A man and woman fall in love, he wrote, and they marry, and the result is a child. When pregnancy begins, a sexual coolness develops between husband and wife which interrupts relations, as it does among animals. The coolness continues until after the weaning of the child, when once again husband and wife feel sexually attracted to each other. Tolstoy concluded from this that “sexual union when a woman is not ready for childbearing, that is, when she does not have her monthly periods, has no reasonable sense whatever and is only physical enjoyment. . . .” Thus sexual relations can have no physical or moral justification except to produce children. During the time of pregnancy and nursing, husband and wife live like brother and sister, unless the husband, thinking only of his own pleasure, insists on continuing sexual relations. In this abuse, Tolstoy declared, may be found “the key to all the suffering hidden in the enormous majority of families.”

“It seems to me,” Tolstoy continued, “that when husband and wife live as brother and sister, she quietly, inviolably gives birth, nurses, and in this morally develops, and only in the free periods do they give themselves up once more to love, continuing for weeks, and again there is calm. It seems to me that this amorousness makes for a kind of steam pressure in the course of which the boiler would burst if the safety valve were not opened. The valve opens only during this powerful pressure, but otherwise it is always closed, carefully closed, and our aim ought to be consciously to keep it closed as tightly as possible and to place a weight on it so that it should not open. It is in this sense that I understand: ‘He that is able to receive it, let him receive it,’ that is, let everyone aspire never to

marry, but having married, let him live with his wife as a brother with his sister."

Tolstoy eagerly sought support for his new beliefs in contemporary theory and practice, and he found it mostly in America. At the end of 1888 he received from its American author, Dr. Alice B. Stockham, *Tocology; A Book for Every Woman*. In Chapter XI of this work, on chastity in married life, Tolstoy was delighted to find his own views echoed. In fact, it would be more correct to say that he obtained ideas from the book, for not only his thoughts on the subject of chastity in married life in *The Kreutzer Sonata*, but even the very form of their expression suggest clearly the influence of *Tocology*. He gratefully wrote the author to tell her that her book was not only for women but for all mankind. In October 1889, she visited him at Yasnaya Polyana, and they talked about the religious movements in the United States. When her book was translated into Russian, he wrote a highly laudatory introduction.

Nor were the Shakers without influence, for in 1889 members of this American sect sent Tolstoy some of their literature. Soon there appeared an entry in his diary: "I read the Shakers. Excellent. Complete sexual restraint. How strange it is that just now, when I'm concerned with these questions, I should receive this." He wrote Chertkov of his approval of the Shakers' belief in celibacy and chastity, and later he corresponded with a member of the sect in America and expressed his agreement with their ideas. His reading of Shaker literature served to strengthen his own views on absolute chastity, and it is interesting to observe that in a variant of *The Kreutzer Sonata*, he included a bit of dialogue (deleted in the final version) where the hero supported his argument for celibacy by mentioning the example of the Shakers which, he declared, was based on the fact that Christ had not married.

The original story on sexual love was rapidly turning into a moral treatise on Tolstoy's new faith in celibacy and chastity. But his wonderful artistic sense prevented *The Kreutzer Sonata* from becoming a mere didactic tract. Nothing could be more realistically and psychologically convincing than the half-mad hero's narrative of his moral and spiritual struggle. But Pozdnyshev's presentation of the problems of sex undoubtedly reflects Tolstoy's own opinions at this time, a fact substantiated by the *Afterword* to *The Kreutzer Sonata*, which he later felt compelled to write in order that there should be no mistake about his own views on sex, for some people actually read into the story an advocacy of free love. The *Afterword*,

however, clearly differentiates the idealistic but logically developed thought of Tolstoy on these matters from the extravagant conviction of the deranged Pozdnyshev. In brief, Tolstoy's ultimate position in the *Afterword* is that the Christian ideal is one of love of God and of one's fellow man, a love incompatible with sexual love or marriage which amounts to serving one's self.

Tolstoy finished his story at the end of 1889. At that time the house was filled with young people rehearsing *The Fruits of Enlightenment*. Anxious to obtain a reaction to *The Kreutzer Sonata*, he had one of the actors, M. A. Stakhovich, read the tale to the company. Stakhovich soon halted, embarrassed at such outspoken language on the theme of sex in the presence of young ladies. The women were asked to leave, and the reader resumed and finished the story.

“Well, what about it?” asked Tolstoy.

There was a general silence, and one after the other the guests took their leave of the host and went downstairs.

They gathered in the library, closed the door, and began to discuss the story, the idea of which had puzzled them. The consensus was that the tale was weak, the idea too artificial, too pretentious, and the development of the narrative laboured. In the middle of the discussion the tutor Novikov opened the door and collided with the eavesdropping Tolstoy. Obviously, he passionately wanted to know whether he had succeeded in conveying his thought clearly, because the new ideas expressed in *The Kreutzer Sonata* were precious to him.

Something of this same bewilderment was evinced by the public at large over the story, which perhaps aroused more popular controversy than any work of Tolstoy. At first there seemed little chance of the censor's permitting its publication. When the story was originally submitted, like so many of Tolstoy's works that had the aura of the forbidden about them, it was eagerly passed around and read by high government and church officials. They of course condemned the tale, the Empress declared herself shocked, and the Emperor categorically forbade its printing.

Sonya, however, very much wished to include *The Kreutzer Sonata* in the thirteenth volume of her husband's works that she was publishing, and much against Tolstoy's will she sought an interview with Alexander III in the hope of obtaining permission to print the story. The interview did not take place until April 1891, after infinite wire-pulling by the stubborn Sonya. When she pointed

out that *The Kreutzer Sonata* had been suppressed, the Emperor replied:

“But then it is written in such a way that I’m sure even you would not give it to your children to read.”

Sonya replied: “Unfortunately the story has taken a rather extreme form, but the idea underlying it is this: the ideal is always unattainable; if this ideal is perfect chastity, then people can only be pure in matrimony”—an ignorant or wilful misrepresentation on the part of Sonya.

When she boldly asked the Emperor to lift the ban on the story, he answered:

“Yes, we might allow you to print it in the complete works, because not everyone could afford to buy the full set, and it would not be too widely disseminated.”

Sonya won her fight, and in 1891 *The Kreutzer Sonata* appeared for the first time in print in Russia in the thirteenth volume of Tolstoy’s collected works. But on her own responsibility Sonya made numerous changes in the text (about two hundred), toning down certain sections and softening the forthright realism of the language.<sup>1</sup>

Long before the first published version, *The Kreutzer Sonata* was known far and wide in Russia and even abroad. Copies of the manuscript (not the final redaction) were sent to friends, who read them to large gatherings in Petersburg and Moscow. Surreptitiously hectograph copies were made and widely distributed in large numbers. So much in demand were they that they sold in bookshops that dared to handle this contraband literature for as high as fifteen rubles. Strakhov told Tolstoy that people, instead of saying “How do you do?” generally asked, “Have you read *The Kreutzer Sonata*?”

An interesting passage in Granny’s *Reminiscences* gives some idea of the tremendous impression these illegal works of Tolstoy made upon Russian society. The government never seemed to learn the old truth that repressions increased interest.

It is difficult to imagine [wrote Granny] what happened when, for example, *The Kreutzer Sonata* and *The Power of Darkness* appeared. Still forbidden to be printed, these works were reproduced in hundreds

<sup>1</sup> In fact, until the recent Jubilee Edition, *The Kreutzer Sonata* had never been published in exactly the form in which Tolstoy completed it in his corrected ninth and last redaction. See the Jubilee Edition, Vol. XXVII. This volume also contains the several variants of *The Kreutzer Sonata*.



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and thousands of copies; they passed from hand to hand, were translated into all languages, and were read everywhere with incredible passion. It seemed at times, that the public, forgetting all its personal cares, lived only for the literature of Count Tolstoy. The most important political events rarely seized everyone with such force and completeness.

Readers of these illegal copies of *The Kreutzer Sonata* deluged Tolstoy with letters. Although the story was eagerly read, it met with little approval. Some thought it a straight piece of autobiography—as though Tolstoy had murdered his wife—others accused him of preaching immorality, and the Archbishop of Kherson denounced him as a “wolf in sheep’s clothing.”

Tolstoy’s story did not achieve its purpose—to preach a moral ideal through the medium of an artistic narrative. The author was perfectly aware that the didactic purpose obtruded. And discerning critics made this same distinction. The acutely critical but always generous Chekhov praised the design, beauty of execution, and the provocative thought of the story, but he complained that Tolstoy’s remarks about syphilis, foundling hospitals, and women’s aversion to conception not only were open to dispute, but clearly revealed an ignorant man, who during his long life had not taken the trouble to read a couple of books by specialists. Strakhov wrote Tolstoy of the impressions created by *The Kreutzer Sonata*:

Only sensible and reasonable young people and sensitive and reasonable women . . . have recognized the evils you attack, and sympathize with your inculcation of chastity. Even Countess Alexandra Andreyevna Tolstoy amazed me by exclaiming: “How is this? He wants to end the human race!” As if it was someone’s business to look after the perpetuation of that race! Or ought we to organize stud-farms for it?

This might also have been Tolstoy’s answer to the customary objection that his ideal of chastity, if carried to its logical conclusion, would result in the end of the human race. But he never imagined that his views of complete chastity were anything other than an unattainable ideal. He believed literally the statement in the Bible that “every one that looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.” Nor did he believe that sex permitted of any compromises with the devil or with fine words. When the lady in *The Kreutzer Sonata* indignantly declared: “But you are speaking of physical love! Don’t you admit

the existence of love founded on identity of ideals and on spiritual affinity?" Tolstoy would have heartily seconded Pozdnyshév's incisive answer: "Spiritual affinity! Identity of ideals! But in that case (excuse my rudeness) why do they go to bed together?"

Nor did Tolstoy entertain any illusion that he of all people could achieve his ideal of perfect chastity. Cynical critics, after the appearance of *The Kreutzer Sonata*, slyly suggested that the author was getting old and that the grapes had turned sour. Yet when he was nearly seventy Tolstoy told his biographer, Aylmer Maude: "I was myself a husband last night, but that is no reason for abandoning the struggle. God may grant me not to be so again." In fact, not until he was eighty-one, a year before his death, did he admit—again to Maude—that he was no longer troubled by sexual desires.

## VI

No, when Tolstoy wrote *The Kreutzer Sonata*, the grapes were still very tempting, and this fact has an important connection with the story itself. His wife's plea to the Emperor to be allowed to print the work in no sense indicated her approval of it. Her effort to see the Emperor on behalf of the work has sometimes been represented as an instance of her self-sacrifice for the sake of her husband. In her diary, however, she explained that she sought the Emperor's permission to print the book not so much out of devotion to her husband as a desire to defend her own and her family's reputation, to prove to the world that *The Kreutzer Sonata* had nothing to do with the intimate life between her and her husband.

Despite the many sharp differences in their life, and of late their serious quarrels, Tolstoy had clung firmly to the institution of marriage as an ultimate good. He had remained scrupulously faithful to his wife, and in his writings he had uncompromisingly condemned any violation of the sacred bonds of matrimony. Then, suddenly, towards the end of 1888, his whole attitude changed. He decided that marriage was not one of the forms of service to God, and he concluded by advising bachelors not to marry, and married couples to preserve chastity.

With his usual sincerity, Tolstoy attempted to practise what he preached. It was no easy task. As during the period of his youth, he chronicled in his diary the lapses in his struggle to be chaste. Only now the temptation was not a Caucasian beauty or a bewitching

gypsy wench, but a forty-five-year-old wife who had borne him thirteen children. “The devil fell upon me,” he wrote. “The next day, the morning of the 30th, I slept badly. It was so loathsome, as after a crime. And on that same day, the 30th, still more powerfully possessed, I fell.” In a later conscience-stricken entry, he jotted down: “What if a child should be born? How shameful, especially before the children. They will reckon when it happened, and they will read what I write [*The Kreutzer Sonata*]. It has become shameful, sad. And I considered: not before people, but before God must one be afraid. I asked myself: In this relation how do I stand before God, and I at once grew calmer.”

If other evidence were unconvincing, Tolstoy's wife read into *The Kreutzer Sonata* a clear expression of her husband's new ideal. In all their quarrels in the past, they had never once seriously differed about marriage—its sanctity, its duties and privileges. Of late, worn-out by constant childbearing, she had murmured complaints, but she had never once suggested contraceptives, which she knew were morally and physically repugnant to her husband. And in the end, she had always surrendered. Marriage and all it entailed had been the rock on which Sonya had built her happiness, and on which she instinctively felt her future secure no matter how seriously her views may have otherwise differed from those of her husband. Then, suddenly, after twenty-seven years of life together, and without any apparent reason, this rock was smashed to bits. Now she could not help but feel that during all these long years they had been living a cruel lie.

Having constant access to Tolstoy's diary, which she was accustomed to copy, Sonya could hardly fail to relate these new entries concerning his struggle to preserve his chastity to those ancient jottings, which she had read with horror even before her marriage, of his youthful attempts to fight the devil of sex that tempted him in the form of loose women. In his youth he had condemned lust, and now in his old age he condemned all sexual relations. The conclusion was inescapable to Sonya: her husband, even throughout all his married life, had possessed the same aversion to sexual relations that he had expressed as a youth. The possibility had perhaps always existed that she might eventually dwindle into an acceptance of his new way of life. And now the very fabric of their whole married existence together had been torn to shreds. Here there could be no compromise. The family drama had changed from a tragicomedy to pure tragedy.

What Sonya considered personal allusions to her married life in *The Kreutzer Sonata* deeply offended her and inspired a curious answer in the form of a short story entitled "Whose Fault?" This literary effort was intended to treat the same theme as that of *The Kreutzer Sonata*, only from the point of view of the wife and in her defence. The autobiographical elements are painfully evident. The heroine in the tale is Sonya and the hero her husband. The story tells of a certain Prince Prozorovski who, after a gay youth, marries at the age of thirty-five an eighteen-year-old girl by the name of Anna. In her description of Anna, Sonya spares no virtues or charms. The prince, on the other hand, is portrayed as coarse and brutishly sensual. When walking behind his bride-to-be, Sonya related, the prince hungrily sizes up her hips and mentally disrobes her. In the carriage on their wedding journey, this coarse prince, reeking of tobacco, literally violates his innocent bride, an act that fills her with immeasurable disgust, as no doubt did the incident in the *dormeuse* on Sonya's marriage night. Her husband's sensual love dismays Anna. Then a young artist appears on the scene and manifests a purely platonic affection for her, and the story ends with the husband murdering his pure and innocent wife in a fit of rage over her harmless affair with the artist.

Sonya did not hesitate to read "Whose Fault?" to visitors, and for the guileless who missed the point, she would carefully explain the personal background of the story. She even thought of publishing it, but better sense prevailed. At times, in her anger and self-pity over this latest defection of her husband, she could not refrain from holding him up to ridicule. When Alekseyev visited, he found Sonya alone and had a long talk with her, while she held the baby Vanichka in her arms. The conversation finally turned on *The Kreutzer Sonata*. Sonya, affecting a laugh over Tolstoy's intention in the story, said: "It is fine for Leo Nikolayevich to write and advise others to be chaste, but what of himself?" and with a malignant smile she motioned towards the child.

In these circumstances, relations between husband and wife became terribly strained. Tolstoy's diary mercilessly recalls her reactions. One entry reads: "This morning and last night I thought much and clearly about *The Kreutzer Sonata*. Sonya copies it; it agitates her, and last night she spoke about the disillusionment of the young woman, about the feelings of the man, so strange at first because of his lack of feeling towards the children. She is unjust, because she wishes to justify herself; but in order to

understand and speak the truth, one must repent.” Another entry runs: “After dinner Sonya, while looking at an oncoming train, spoke of how she wished to throw herself under it. And I became very sorry for her.” And a third note: “Sonya came with the news that she is not pregnant. I said that it is necessary to sleep apart. . . .” “I spoke with Sonya. She says that she is glad. But she does not wish to be apart.”

One may date from this time a pronounced development of the hysteria of Tolstoy’s wife, traces of which she had exhibited in the first years of their disagreements. This condition was aggravated by his desire to sever the last bond that bound them together. For now, with increasing frequency, extravagant unbalanced declarations began to appear in Sonya’s own diary. “He is killing me very systematically . . .” she complained. “I want to kill myself, to run somewhere, to fall in love with someone—anything only not to live with the man whom I have loved all my life. . . .” And shortly after this, she wrote in her diary: “It would be terrible to become pregnant, for all would learn of this shame and would repeat with malicious joy a joke just now invented in Moscow society: ‘There is the real *Afterword* of *The Kreutzer Sonata*.’”

## Chapter XXVII

### MONEY IS THE ROOT OF ALL EVIL

IN FEBRUARY 1890, Tolstoy set out with his daughter Masha to visit his sister, now a nun, at the convent of Shamardino. Not finding her there, they went on to Optina Monastery near by, where she was visiting. At this famous hermitage he once again discussed various faiths with the celebrated Elder Ambrose.<sup>1</sup> Shortly after this visit, Tolstoy held forth to company at Yasnaya Polyana on the evils of monasteries. The monks should get rid of their sham ceremonials, he said, of their begging for crusts and kopeks, and earn their own keep.

During this year and part of the next, Tolstoy's health was failing, and at one point he thought he would soon die. At the age of sixty-two, it was becoming more difficult for him to carry out his conviction of service when it involved physical labour. He tried to compensate in other ways. His daughters, Tanya and Masha, set up a school on the estate for peasant children, and he took an active part in the instruction. A few months later the governor of the province closed the school because it had been opened without permission of the authorities. Permission would hardly have been granted, although the governor was sympathetic to Tolstoy. In fact, this friendliness was soon to result in his being removed to another province.

Peasants came to ask Tolstoy's help for comrades who had fallen afoul of the law, and he always found these requests extremely hard to refuse. Towards the end of 1890 he visited in the district jail four peasants of Yasnaya Polyana who were on trial for murder. His very presence at the trial brought about a mitigation of the sentence. The court proceedings he condemned as a "shameful comedy." His long hostility to institutions of government had been intensified by his new beliefs, and already he was contemplating

<sup>1</sup> The model for Dostoyevsky's Father Zosima in *The Brothers Karamazov*.

an open protest. When a follower at this time wrote him for advice on the project of a newspaper for the lower classes that would reflect Tolstoyan views, he replied that though the idea was a good one it was impossible under the prevailing conditions of censorship, for the government, he declared, "knows that its destruction will follow enlightenment of the masses," and hence it will prevent any sincere attempt to instruct the common people.

Tolstoy's courage in the face of a reactionary government was shown this same year in his answer to the philosopher V. S. Solovyov, who asked for his support in opposing a new anti-Semitic law. Tolstoy permitted his name to be used in a public protest, and he wrote Solovyov: "With all my soul I am glad to take part in this matter, and I know in advance that if you, Vladimir Sergeyevich, express what you think about this objective, that you will also express my thoughts and feelings, for the basis of our abhorrence of oppressing the Hebrew nationality is one and the same—a recognition of the brotherly union of all peoples, and more so with the Hebrews, among whom Christ was born, and who have suffered so much and still suffer from the heathenish ignorance of so-called Christians."

The government quietly took its own measures against Tolstoy, largely through its minion the Church and the reactionary head of the Holy Synod, Pobedonostsev. Even the priests of Yasnaya Polyana were set to spying on Tolstoy, a fact which his wife did not forget to call to the attention of the Emperor when she had her interview with him over the censorship of *The Kreutzer Sonata*. Instances of the close surveillance under which Tolstoy was kept, of the persecution of his followers, and of the censorship directed against his works have already been noted. To this was now added slander. In his annual report to the Tsar on the state of the Church for 1887, Pobedonostsev devoted some space to the harmful views of Tolstoy and the anti-religious propaganda he was carrying on among the members of his own family. Three years later in a newspaper account of Tolstoy's heresies, a statement was lifted from Pobedonostsev's report to the effect that Tolstoy "was no longer able to render assistance to the peasants of his estate, and hence his oldest sons have begun to curb his wastefulness." The newspaper was at once requested by the three indignant sons to print a repudiation of this slander.

The next year the Church returned to the charge. A Kharkov priest preached in the cathedral of that city a sermon in which he

charged that Tolstoy "more than all others agitates the minds of the educated and uneducated" with his works, possessed of a "destructive power and depraved nature"; that he preached "disbelief, and atheism"; that *The Kreutzer Sonata* was "an incoherent, dirty, and immoral tale"; and that he hoped that "the most pious Emperor will suppress in good time" the subversive activity of Tolstoy.

Shortly after this tirade, the "most pious Emperor" was importuned by Pobedonostsev to do precisely this—suppress the activity of Tolstoy. The attempt came about largely because of *The Kreutzer Sonata*. Tolstoy had disapproved of Sonya's request to the Tsar that he permit its publication. "Her wheedling of the Emperor was disagreeable," he jotted down in his diary. And now he wrote to Chertkov: "There was something nasty in *The Kreutzer Sonata*. It has become terribly revolting to me, every remembrance of it. There was something bad in the motives directing my writing of it, for it has evoked such wickedness." No doubt the distasteful *succès de scandale* that was already connected with the story, as well as the persistent misinterpretation of its meaning and the widespread denunciation, had given him cause to regret. He had recently heard that the post-office authorities in America had banned the work in the mails. Now a new factor had arisen. Although the Emperor had taken pains to qualify his permission to print *The Kreutzer Sonata* by insisting that it should appear only in the thirteenth volume of Sonya's edition of her husband's works, he had not realized that that volume might be sold separately. Nor had this thought been in Sonya's mind. But now the bookstalls were jammed with copies of the thirteenth volume. Pobedonostsev wrote an acrimonious letter to the Emperor, in which he indicated his comprehensive knowledge of Tolstoy's influence and the rising temper of the authorities over his activities:

"I have decided to write your majesty about unpleasant matters.

"If I had known in advance that the wife of Leo Tolstoy had requested an audience of your majesty, I would have begged you not to receive her. What has happened is what one might have feared. Countess Tolstoy returned from you with the thought that her husband has in you a defence and justification for all those things in him over which the healthy-minded and religious people of Russia are indignant. You permitted her to print *The Kreutzer Sonata* in the complete collection of the works of Tolstoy. It might have been possible to foresee how they would make use of this permission. This complete collection consists of 13 volumes, which



can be placed on sale separately. The 13th volume is a small book, in which has been published, together with *The Kreutzer Sonata*, certain slight articles in the same spirit. They have placed this book on sale separately, and already three separate editions of it have appeared. Now this book is in the hands of *Gymnasium* students and young girls. On the road from Sevastopol, I saw it on sale in the station and being read in the trains. The book market is full of the 13th volume of Tolstoy. . . . Tolstoy is a fanatic in the matter of his own insensate ideas, and unfortunately attracts and leads to madness thousands of giddy people. The amount of harm and ruin he has produced would be difficult to estimate. Unhappily the madmen who believe in Tolstoy are just as possessed as he is of a spirit of untamable propaganda, and they strive to put his teaching into practice and to bring it to the people. There are not a few such examples, but the most striking at present is Prince Khilkov, a Guards officer, who settled in the Sumski district of the Kharkov Province. He has distributed all his land to the peasants, keeping only a farm for himself, and has been preaching to the peasants the Tolstoyan gospel, with its repudiation of the Church and marriage, which is based on the principles of socialism. One may imagine what effect this produces on the ignorant masses. The evil grows and spreads even to the borders of the Kursk Province, in districts where for some time an unquiet spirit has been observed among the people. It is almost five years since I wrote about this matter to the governor and the ministry, but I cannot obtain any resolute measures, and meanwhile Khilkov has already succeeded in corrupting the whole population of the village of Pavlovka and the neighbouring countryside. He distributes far and wide harmful pamphlets which the peasants believe. The populace has entirely forsaken the Church; in two parishes the churches stand empty, and the clergy go hungry and are exposed to ridicule and insults. In a parish of 6,000 souls, even on the highest feast days there were only 5 old women in the church. Under Khilkov's influence the peasantry refuses to take oaths. Such a situation is pregnant with the greatest danger, and on the basis of the latest information I shall most earnestly request the minister to exile Khilkov, who now boasts before the people: 'They do nothing to me because I teach the truth.' Now, I hope, the ministry will issue an appropriate decree.

"It is impossible to conceal from oneself that in the last few years the intellectual stimulation under the influence of the works of

Count Tolstoy has greatly strengthened and threatens to spread strange, perverted notions about faith, the Church, government, and society. The direction is entirely negative, alien not only to the Church, but to nationality. A kind of insanity that is epidemic has taken possession of people's minds."

Alexander III was much displeased by the abuse of his permission to print *The Kreutzer Sonata*, and he is reported to have expressed his chagrin over the behaviour of Countess Tolstoy in the matter, although she had acted entirely in good faith. Khilkov was quickly exiled, but Pobedonostsev's letter represented a dire threat not only against the followers of Tolstoy, but against the master himself.

## II

The Church struck at Tolstoy's disciples in various ways. Ge was the next to feel its heavy hand. In 1890 his celebrated canvas, "What Is Truth," depicting Christ before Pilate, was quietly removed from the exhibition room in Petersburg by order of the Church authorities. It was a cruel blow, for the sale of the picture meant much to Ge, whose livelihood partly depended on the income from his painting.

Tolstoy at once became his champion. On the way to Petersburg, Ge had made his customary visit to Yasnaya Polyana and had exhibited the picture to the family. Tolstoy was in raptures and for days he could hardly speak of anything else. Ge had omitted the question mark in the title, "What Is Truth," an indication of his interpretation of the famous scene, which agreed with that of Tolstoy in his translation of this account in the Gospel. That is, Pilate utters the phrase ironically, not expecting an answer. When Christ says that he has come into the world as a witness of truth, Pilate sneeringly throws the words back at him: "What is truth?" Truth is a relative thing which everyone understands as he wishes. The picture clearly suggests this interpretation by its striking contrast of the harried figure of Christ, who during the night had undergone arrest, judgment, and suffering, with the majestic figure of the Roman governor, with his fat, shaven neck, sensual body, and with the arm outstretched in a gesture of contempt.

Tolstoy wrote to his friend, the well-known art connoisseur, P. M. Tretyakov, to persuade him to buy the picture, and he supported his plea by a long critique on why the canvas constituted "an epoch in the history of Christian art." Tretyakov bought the

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picture, but since he was as yet unable to exhibit it in Russia, he made arrangements for showings abroad. Again Tolstoy lent his aid by writing another long letter to George Kennan, who had visited him at Yasnaya Polyana, to explain the picture and to ask him to sponsor the exhibitions of it in America.

Ge was not the only artist to visit Yasnaya Polyana at this time, an unusual period for the production of art devoted to Tolstoy. In the fall of 1890, Ge did a bust of Tolstoy and also painted a portrait of his daughter Masha, who had endeared herself to the artist. The next summer the more famous painter Repin and the distinguished sculptor I. Ya. Ginsburg visited. On this occasion Repin painted his well-known picture of Tolstoy in his room, with the spade, saw, and scythe standing against the wall; he also executed his less known but excellent study of Tolstoy standing barefoot in the woods, and drawings of Tolstoy reading in the garden and of Sonya with her two youngest children. At the same time he and Ginsburg did busts of Tolstoy. In a letter to Ge, Tolstoy wrote that Ginsburg's bust was bad, Repin's a good likeness, but Ge's was the best of all. On one of their walks, Tolstoy presented Repin to the caretaker of the bees, a peasant by the name of Yermil, who had formerly been educated in Tolstoy's village school. Tolstoy highly valued him for his amazing memory and independent ways. At Tolstoy's request, the peasant treated him quite as an equal and made no attempt to modify his language. During the conversation, however, Yermil suddenly turned on the master and berated him soundly.

"Leo Nikolayevich, I can't understand you! You dress like a beggar, eat no meat, and lead the life of an ascetic. If I were in your place, I should keep a woman—better still, two at a time. . . ."

Tolstoy blushed up to the ears as he broke in: "Fie! You ought to be ashamed to say such things! Think of your soul!"

"You let my soul alone!" said the bee-man, with a cynical laugh. "Who believes in a soul nowadays, I should like to know!"

The shocked Tolstoy trembled all over but made no reply. Yermil, taking advantage of his defenceless position in the presence of a guest, grew still bolder and began to abuse him in the most shameless manner. Tolstoy silently took Repin's arm and walked away.

### III

As he grew older, Tolstoy's reading grew more and more eclectic. He was in no sense a bibliophile, for he regarded books as

the tools of his craft and collected them largely for use in connection with his writing. Hence the library of some 14,000 volumes that he amassed at Yasnaya Polyana provides striking evidence of the extraordinary variety of his interests, although a considerable number of these volumes were gifts from authors. The broad fields represented by the books, in the order of the number of volumes, are literature and criticism, religion and philosophy, history and biography, pedagogy and children's books, medicine, economics and law, the natural sciences, and geography and travel. Russian books predominate, but there are a great many in English, French, and German, which languages he read with ease. Of the foreign books, English leads with some 3,600 titles. His fondness for English and American literature, particularly fiction, has already been indicated. In 1890-1891, we find him reading Thackeray's *The Newcomes*, which he thought poor, and re-reading a favourite work, Matthew Arnold's *Literature and Dogma*. Colridge he read for the first time and jotted down in his diary: "A writer very attractive to me, precise, clear, but unfortunately timid." He made an effort to keep abreast of contemporary literature, both native and foreign,<sup>1</sup> and often surprised young writers who visited him with his acute criticisms of their works. The burden of his reading in 1890-1891, however, consisted, as it had during the last few years, of books and articles on religion, ethics, vegetarianism, and temperance.

This same division of interest is reflected in Tolstoy's writing at this time. He began to outline *Resurrection*, and he did some work on two tales, *The Devil* and *Father Sergei*. But the major portion of his efforts was expended on didactic works.<sup>2</sup>

There was at this time a manifest falling off of interest in encouraging others to live a Tolstoyan existence. Individual spiritual growth now seemed to him somehow more important. His emphatic distrust of organized efforts to achieve the good life no doubt contributed to this tendency to shift the emphasis to right thinking and right feeling. First things come first; hence each individual must first seek ways of improving his own spiritual health before worrying about the sick lives of others. He noted in his diary (January 3, 1890): "I read that they told Emerson that the world would soon

<sup>1</sup> In 1890 he read works of Minski, Leskov, Sienkiewicz, Björnson, and Ibsen.

<sup>2</sup> The *Afterword to The Kreutzer Sonata*, the article on drink and tobacco, "Why Do Men Stupefy Themselves?" but principally on the longer and more significant work, *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*, which he was not to finish until two years later.

end. He answered: 'Well, I can get along without it.' Very important." Actually much of the unhappy disagreement with his wife arose not from the fact that she refused to accept his way of life, but that she prevented him from living it.

Though Tolstoy could be dogmatic about the ends of his faith, he was anything but dogmatic about the means of achieving them. He realized that the goal he set was often perfection, and whereas he might be uncompromising about it as a goal, he never expected men, least of all himself, to achieve it. Striving for perfection became the end. An entry in the diary immediately following the one quoted above reads: "We search for mind, powers, goodness, perfection in all this, but perfection is not given to man in any thing. . . ."

The expression of certain moral and religious objectives in his major works invited public ridicule that Tolstoy might have been spared had readers gone on to his further treatment of these matters in his lesser known productions. Thus the impractical ideal of complete chastity suggested by *The Kreutzer Sonata* and the *Afterword* is reduced to a wholly practical rule of life in *Christian Teaching*, where, six years later, he wrote:

To overcome the habit of this sin [unchastity] man must first of all refrain from increasing it. If he be chaste, let him not infringe his chastity; if he be married, let him be true to his partner; if he have sexual intercourse with many, let him not invent unnatural forms of vice. Let him refrain from augmenting his sexual sin. If men would do this, many of their sufferings would come to an end. . . . Although only in rare cases are men able to be altogether chaste, still everyone should understand and remember that he can always be more chaste than he formerly was, or can return to the chastity he has lost, and that the nearer he approaches to perfect chastity according to his powers, the more true welfare will he attain, the more earthly welfare will be added to him, and the more will he contribute to the welfare of mankind.

Concentration on his own spiritual development made Tolstoy impatient with those who constantly sought his advice on how to change their way of life and lead a godly existence. These seekers were wearisome, he wrote Ge, but he rarely turned a deaf ear to them. And he did not fail now to censure the Tolstoyans who placed the observance of forms and of ideal communal living isolated from the practical world above individual spiritual betterment in the world of living men. He wrote on this subject to Khilkov, who had sacrificed much in his cause and had now

become a special object of persecution by Pobedonostsev. Khilkov had little sympathy for moral precepts that were not actually carried out to the letter in daily existence, and hence he had organized his own Tolstoyan commune. His insistence on action no doubt contributed later to his abandoning Tolstoyism for forthright revolutionary activity. "So I think," Tolstoy wrote to him, "that every organization, every definition, every concentration of the conscience on any condition means the prevalence of anxiety about strengthening love in oneself, self-perfection without good deeds. The most coarse form is standing on a pillar, but every form is more or less such a standing. Every form separates one from the people and consequently from the possibility of good deeds and from invoking love in them. Such are the communes, and this is their insufficiency if we are to recognize them as a permanent form. Standing on a pillar and going into a wilderness to live in a commune may be necessary for people for a time, but as a continual form, it is obviously a sin and foolishness. To live a pure, holy life on a pillar or in a commune is impossible, because man is deprived of one-half of life—communion with the world, without which his life has no sense."

These sudden shifts of Tolstoy, without ever losing sight of his ultimate objectives, disturbed the more literal-minded disciples who lived by dogma. Tolstoy often seemed dogmatic because circumstances had led him to propound a new way of life. Actually no one was more dogmatic than the average man clinging to his traditions and conventions. A rationalist and an acute logician, Tolstoy would not permanently allow dogma to lead him where his common sense could not follow. When his "second thoughts" indicated, as they occasionally did, that his dogma falsified common sense, he did not hesitate to recant. But it was always his own common sense, not common sense dictated by convention. One sometimes suspects that the zest for his new faith was partly sustained by the problems it created and the fresh paths of intellectual and moral speculation which it led him into. To another disciple, V. V. Rakhmanov, who had expressed some dismay over doctrinal differences between an earlier work of the master and what he had been saying of late, Tolstoy cheerfully wrote in March 1891: "Do not imagine that I defend the point of view I formerly expressed in *What I Believe*. Not only do I not defend it, but I am glad we have outlived it. When starting on a new road one cannot help rejoicing at what one first sees before one, and it is excusable to mistake what is at the beginning of the road for the journey's aim."

Tolstoy's fame abroad had already begun to bring foreign newspaper men to Yasnaya Polyana. Knowing his hostility to both the government and the Church, the newsmen no doubt hoped for some revealing copy about the Russian enigma. Besides, Tolstoy had now definitely become "news" for all the world. In December 1890, Dr. E. J. Dillon, scholar and correspondent of the London *Daily Telegraph*, visited him, and in March of the next year an editor of the *New York Herald*, Creelman, turned up.

But apart from foreigners and old friends like Ge, Strakhov, and Fet, the most numerous visitors during 1890-1891, much to Sonya's disgust, were Tolstoy's followers. "The *dark ones* have arrived," runs one entry in her diary (December 17, 1890). "There is stupid Popov, an oriental-looking, lazy, weak fellow; and stupid, fat, Khokhlov, a merchant. And these are disciples of the great man! The wretched spawn of human society, chatterers to no purpose, idlers without breeding." She was infuriated when her young son Andrei reported to her that one of the "dark" visitors had stopped him from studying that morning by asking: "Why do you study; you will destroy your soul. Surely your father does not desire this."

Sonya's spleen at this time was particularly directed against the visits of Biryukov, whom she found less difficult to accept, however, than most of the "dark people." But he had fallen in love with Masha, who tended to reciprocate the feeling, and the thought of such a marriage horrified her mother. Sonya's feelings are suggested by an incident that took place in December 1890. During Biryukov's visit, another of the "dark people," Butkevich, arrived, accompanied by a Jewish girl, who (so Sonya decided) was his mistress. Masha and Biryukov at once made a great deal of the Jewish girl, no doubt regarding her as a new convert. "I grew indignant," Sonya noted in her diary, "that a respectable girl, my daughter, should associate with such trash and that her father, as it were, sympathized with this. And I lost my temper, shouted, and remembering in the diary of Leo Nikolayevich<sup>1</sup> . . . everything that tortured me in copying it, I evilly said to him: 'You have been accustomed all your life to associate with such trash, but I have not been accustomed to it and do not wish my daughters to be associated with them.'" Masha did not marry her father's disciple Biryukov.

<sup>1</sup> Four words are deleted in the Russian edition. Words and expressions of a very intimate nature or unprintable are frequently deleted by the editor of Sonya's diaries, her son, Sergei Lvovich Tolstoy.

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The heir-apparent of the kingdom of the "dark people," Chertkov, also visited in the winter of 1890. In sharing their spiritual experiences and in conducting the affairs of the new faith, personal meetings of Tolstoy and Chertkov were less essential, for they maintained and even increased their voluminous correspondence over 1890-1891. The letters are concerned with the details of the *Intermediary* publishing venture, moot points of doctrine, Tolstoy's and even Chertkov's writings, and new converts. It is a curious fact that Tolstoy, at Chertkov's request, returned to him all his letters as soon as possible after reading them. The business of saving souls had now been reduced to something of a routine. Seekers after light would find their way to Yasnaya Polyana. Tolstoy would talk to them and then furnish them with letters of introduction to Chertkov or other well-grounded disciples for further instruction or activity. Such candidates were much discussed in the correspondence of Tolstoy and Chertkov.

The success of the *Intermediary* publications had grown enormously, despite the suspicions of government authorities. Chertkov had attracted another young follower into the business, I. I. Gorbunov-Posadov, and he and Biryukov were occasionally sent to Yasnaya Polyana on matters of the publication. Tolstoy was constantly suggesting books and articles for reprinting by the *Intermediary*, and these suggestions nearly all turned out successfully. Occasionally he read new manuscripts for approval and correction.

Hardly a work of his own was undertaken without writing to Chertkov about it, keeping him posted by mail on progress made, and sometimes sending him early manuscript drafts. Anything that came from Tolstoy's pen, however trifling, had now become sacred for Chertkov. At times he referred to him in his letters as though he were already dead and among the immortals. Since 1889 he had begun a systematic collection of all of Tolstoy's thoughts, which he referred to as his "Vault." He and several Tolstoyans worked at this task, selecting and arranging the thoughts under subject headings with the intention of publishing a work in many volumes.<sup>1</sup> Chertkov's literary detective work got him into difficulties. He had arranged with Tolstoy to have his daughter Masha copy out his diaries and letters and send them to him. Masha soon objected and wrote Chertkov that this copying of her father's intimate papers was distasteful to her. Tolstoy agreed, explaining that

<sup>1</sup> This work was never published and the manuscript is now in the Chertkov archives.



it was difficult for him to keep up his diary when he knew that his personal thoughts were to be at someone's disposal. This was probably not the whole reason, for apparently Sonya also objected. Chertkov grudgingly accepted the decision on this occasion, asking only that Masha be allowed to copy sections of Tolstoy's letters, where he developed his thought or threw new light on old questions for, he added, such material was absolutely essential for his "Vault."

There was little friction now to disturb the harmonious business and spiritual relations between Tolstoy and Chertkov. Occasional matters of doctrine ruffled the disciple, such as the master's extreme position on nonviolence and marriage. Tolstoy patiently but firmly reiterated his stand on both points in letters of 1890, and Chertkov's questioning was silenced. The closeness of the bond between them is reflected in Tolstoy's frequent expressions of concern for the personal existence and health of Chertkov and of his wife and son. His tender solicitude for this invalid wife, who so completely accepted her husband's faith, contrasts ironically with his behaviour towards Sonya at this time. In a fit of depression over illness, Chertkov's wife wrote Tolstoy in September 1890: "One thing I desire and only one—complete reconciliation with God—otherwise I do not wish to die. So little remains of life (it seems to me), and yet there is still so much to understand. But you will help me. I am much comforted by this, that always, whatever may happen, you and Dima [Chertkov] will be as one—in complete harmony, as now."

One visitor in July 1891 whom Sonya could now unreservedly accept was Countess Alexandra Tolstoy. Granny brought with her that aroma of the Court that Sonya respected and an intimacy with the imperial family and great personages of state that she secretly hankered after. In Tolstoy's eyes her lofty connections were the least attractive thing about Granny, though he never hesitated to make use of them in times of trouble. Yet he had not lost his affection and admiration for this old friend who neither asked for nor gave quarter in her brilliant conversations and correspondence with him.

"Do you know, Granny," Sonya confessed to her, "you are truly the only person who can talk with him without constraint and without concealing anything of the truth; all the others are afraid and tremble before his greatness."

Mindful of the unpleasant passages of arms in the past, Granny had vowed to herself that on this visit she would avoid any arguments. It was not an easy promise to keep. On the very first day of

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her visit, Tolstoy trapped her while she was resting in the garden and for two hours assailed her with a reading of parts of his latest manuscript on the abolition of war. "There were many separate, fine, and healthy thoughts expressed there," she recalled in her recollections, "but taken altogether it represented such a bouquet of fantastic, romantic, and ultra-idyllic utopias that only the exalted worshippers of Leo could possibly accept them. I heard him out in silence. Only once or twice did it occur to me to answer with a few words to his questioning glance: 'Yes, it is all very fine on paper. Only what a pity that it should be so unrealizable.'"

The Tolstoy children were awed by the authoritative bearing of Granny in the presence of their father, who seemed to them the last authority on everything, and they secretly sought out her opinion on his articles of faith. One of the daughters asked her what she thought about vegetarianism, and she bluntly dismissed it on the authority of the Apostle Paul. Tolstoy happened to overhear her remarks but said nothing. At the tea table that evening, when she stretched out her hand for a ham sandwich, he sarcastically exclaimed in a loud voice: "My congratulations. You wish to eat a carcass." After this remark she found herself unable to touch the meat. Granny observed that the practice of vegetarianism in the household caused Sonya infinite difficulty. There were two camps, those who ate meat and those who did not. At the table Sonya would triumphantly declare that she would not allow her children—meaning by this the younger ones—to be vegetarians. She worried over her husband's meatless diet, which, she believed, did not agree with his chronic liver trouble. But Granny rejected the rumour that during his illnesses Sonya artfully mixed a meat broth in all his dishes, and that he did not notice this or did not care to notice it.

One day in a gloomy frame of mind, he invited Granny into his study and said to her: "You always say that I breathe and live only for flattery, yet so many people disapprove of me, and quite justly, because my life does not accord with my theories."

"It seems to me," she answered, "that they blame you most of all exactly for your unrealizable theories. In order to fulfil them literally, you would have to begin by going away—is this not true? But you have a family, and you have no right to desert them or to force upon them your inclinations and convictions. You have lived until recently happily and agreeably; they also wish to live so, not experiencing the slightest calling for beggary and work in the fields, or for life in a peasant hut."

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Tolstoy listened in silence and a shadow of annoyance passed over his face. Sighing deeply, he said: "You see, I'm doing just this, but it is hard for me."

There was much more that Granny wished to say by way of criticism, but she refrained. Yet she could not resist a parting shot on a matter that deeply concerned her as a Christian and as a relative sincerely fond of him and his family:

"Still one word more, my dear Leo, instead of mourning over the fantastic, the impossible, and, I might even say, over the useless, have you never thought seriously over your responsibility to your children? All of them produce the effect on me of wandering between heaven and earth. What will you give them in place of the beliefs that you have probably weaned them from? For they love you too much not to attempt to follow you."

Granny was sure that this arrow had struck home. She recalled: "Leo's whole face changed and grew dark. I hastened to leave the room."

Sonya would have blessed her for these words. The arrow struck home all right, but what Granny did not guess (or maybe she did, for Sonya now poured out her complaints to any willing ear) was that for months similar barbs had been launched at the same target with remorseless frequency.

### v

Towards the end of 1890 exaggerated stories had appeared in the press of the gay holiday festivities at Yasnaya Polyana and of a ball there in which Tolstoy, advocate of the simple life, had danced, dressed in a frock coat. Incredible letters from the faithful soon began to arrive. His exasperation over this state of affairs was primarily directed against Sonya and was expressed in his aloofness from the family and in his frequent cold impersonal treatment of her.

As usual, Tolstoy's most intimate thoughts on his tribulations were set down in his diary. During 1890-1891 there are numerous entries on his acute dissatisfaction with his family life. In June 1890, he wrote: ". . . I live tied to a wife's petticoat and subservient to her, leading myself and with all the children a dirty, despicable existence, which they all lyingly excuse by the fact that I cannot transgress love." Another entry in August runs: "The egoism and dissoluteness of our life, of ours and of our guests, are horrifying. It seems to me that it all goes on, grows stronger. It must soon end."

Tolstoy's sincerity in wishing to live fully the life he preached can hardly be doubted, nor can his belief that his family prevented him from doing this. Despite the charges of his wife, he felt keenly his responsibilities to his family. His dilemma was to repudiate those responsibilities and live the life he yearned after, or accept the responsibilities and repudiate his own life of the spirit. His situation was further complicated by the belief that his family's way of life was morally wrong and would prove harmful to them, and that he ought therefore to do his utmost to save them, not by exercising authority, but by his own example. Finally, he always felt that to leave his family in order to live his own life would amount to evading a moral problem he ought to solve. In this situation his efforts amounted to a compromise, little understood by his family, and entirely misunderstood by the public. He endeavoured to approach closer and closer to his ideal of life in an atmosphere that was quite alien and unsympathetic to it.

If Tolstoy felt dissatisfied with the behaviour of his children, he did not absolve himself from blame. "I get angry over the moral stupidity of the children, except Masha," he wrote in his diary. "But who indeed are they? They are my children, my productions from all sides—from the fleshly and from the spiritual. I made them what they are. They are my sins, always before me. I have nowhere to go from them, and that is impossible. They ought to be educated, but I am unable to do this, for I myself am bad. I have often said to myself: If only I had no wife and children, I would live a holy life. I have blamed them for preventing this, but after all they are my doing, as the muzhiks say."

For some time Tolstoy had refused to have anything to do with his property, for he considered it an evil. He now decided that the idleness and moral sickness of his family were in part at least caused by wealth. And this wealth ultimately came from him. In the public press he was being called a "pharisee," and propertyless Tolstoyans living thriftily in communes wondered why the master remained the possessor of a large estate. To deprive himself and his family entirely of the property would have fulfilled the letter of his convictions, and this was what he wished to do. Had he attempted such a solution, however, he knew that his wife would appeal to the government, which would have been only too eager to declare him incapable of managing his affairs. He then tried to persuade Sonya to rid him of this evil by taking over all his property in full ownership. "So you wish to hand over that evil to me, the

creature nearest to you," she said in tears. "I do not want it and I shall take nothing." His ultimate decision was a compromise—to rid himself of the property by dividing it among his wife and children, just as though he were dead.

This decision was hastened by an unhappy event in the winter of 1890. The bailiff of Yasnaya Polyana caught several peasants felling trees; they were arrested, sentenced to six weeks in jail, and fined. They had come to Sonya to plead for a pardon, but she refused to do anything for them. Her own version in her diary was that she hesitated to act and in the meantime the peasants were sentenced. The incident shocked Tolstoy—here were peasants being punished for taking from him what he regarded as theirs and as necessary for their existence. He could not sleep at night. Stormy scenes with Sonya followed. She noted in her diary that she had "spasms in her throat," wanted to weep all day, and that she thought of "saying farewell to all and quietly lying down somewhere on the rails." Finally he told her in the early hours of the morning, after another sleepless night over this affair, that he saw only two ways out for him: either to leave home or to give all his land to the peasants.

After this incident, steps were soon taken to bring about Tolstoy's compromise decision to divide his estate among the family. There was no strong opposition to this solution. Sonya found something "sad and indelicate" in the whole business and complained about all the details which were thrust upon her, since her husband would have nothing to do with the matter. Unpleasant quarrels took place between the older children and their mother over the division, for her main endeavour was to protect the rights of the younger children. And Masha, believing in her father's principles, refused her share and came in for much criticism from the others. The bickering disgusted Tolstoy. After witnessing one scene, he wrote in his diary: "It is terrible. I cannot write. I have wept and want to weep again. They say: 'We ourselves would like to do this, but this would be bad.' My wife says to them: 'Leave me.' They are silent. It is horrible! Never have I seen such obvious lying and its motives. It is sad, sad, painfully tormenting."

The official act did not become effective until September 28, 1892. The total evaluation of the property was 580,000 rubles (about \$290,000) and it was divided into ten equal parts to be distributed by lot between Sonya and her nine children. Under various conditions, the division gave Nìkolskoye to Sergei, Ovsyannikovo to Tatyana, Grinyovka to Ilya, the Moscow house and some land

in Samara to young Leo, a larger allotment of Samara land to Mikhail, Andrei, and Alexandra, and Yasnaya Polyana to Ivan and Sonya. Although Masha refused to take her portion (part interest in Yasnaya Polyana and a money allotment), her mother kept it in trust for her. At last, Tolstoy was free of his property.

Tolstoy fully realized that to surrender the ownership of his estate was not a final solution of his dilemma. The struggle between truth and the material welfare of the family continued. A still more vexatious problem, and one that had troubled him for a long time, was the income from his writings. In particular, it pained him to think that the works produced since his change of faith, containing the very thoughts by which he lived, should be sold for money, which in turn was used to support and facilitate the harmful existence of his family. Since he had already given Sonya the right to publish his works written before his religious change, he felt at the time that he could not retract his permission.

His concern is reflected in a number of diary jottings. In one (June 18, 1890), he wrote: "My sons swamp Sonya with requests for money. It will get still worse. Would it not be better if she should reject at least the income from literature? How it would leave her in peace, her sons morally healthful, me joyous, and how useful to people and pleasing to God."

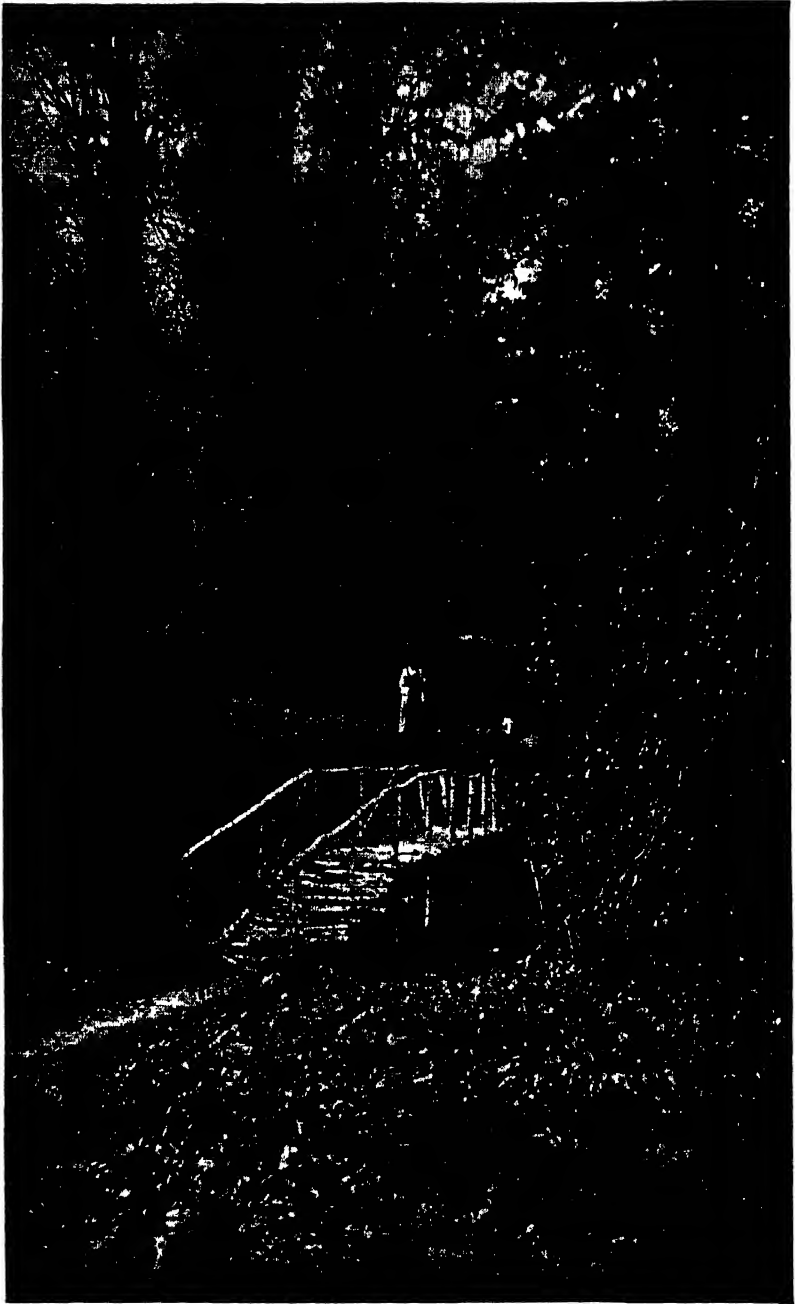
Sonya vigorously opposed this latest "madness" of her husband. The income from his writing was considerable and the expenses of the family were constantly growing. Again stormy scenes, re-criminations, weepings, and reconciliations. But he insisted and wanted her to write a letter to the newspapers, in which he would renounce his copyrights. She refused. He entered in his diary after one of these quarrels: "Conversation with my wife, always about the same things: to renounce the copyrights of my works. Again the same misunderstanding of me. 'I'm obligated to the children . . . .' She does not understand, and the children do not understand, that in spending the money every ruble squandered by them out of the profits of the books is my suffering and shame."

The matter came to a head in July 1891. Tolstoy declared to his wife that he himself would write a letter to the press, renouncing the copyrights of his latest works. Sonya now felt that such an action would be a public avowal of his disagreement with her and his family. Harsh words followed. According to the account in her diary, he called her a greedy and stupid woman, always out for money, and said that she spoiled the children with it. She retaliated



*Drawn by Repin*

Count Leo Tolstoy



A view in the grounds at Yasnaya Polyana



by declaring that he was ambitious and vainglorious, and always endeavouring to humiliate her. He ended by shouting at her and demanding to be left alone.

Sonya then related how she left the house, sat down by a ditch in the orchard, and wrote in her notebook that she was going to Kozlovka (the little railway station near Yasnaya Polyana) to kill herself because she was worn-out with the constant trouble with her husband. Her intention apparently was to throw herself under a train, like Anna Karenina. On the way to Kozlovka, she met her brother-in-law, Alexander Kuzminski, who, noticing her distraught state, persuaded her to return to Yasnaya Polyana with him. Tolstoy acted as though nothing had happened, but later that evening when they were alone, he kissed her and made some conciliatory remarks. She now asked him to publish his announcement in the newspapers, but he said that he would not until she understood why it must be done. Sonya replied that she could not understand such an action, and she ended her account in her diary as follows: "I again told him today that I would . . .<sup>1</sup> no longer live with him as his wife. He affirmed that was just what he desired, but I did not believe him. He is now asleep, and I cannot go to him."

Nothing now could change Tolstoy's resolution in this matter. In July 1891, he gave Sonya two statements to publish in the newspapers, one under his name, the other under hers. She did not publish either. In September he sent her a new statement in his own name, directing that it be published in the press. He renounced the copyrights of all his works written since 1881, excepting *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, which he had personally given to Sonya for her new edition of his works. She was in Moscow at the time, and he accompanied his statement with a letter, in which he wrote: "Please, darling, reflect well 'with God' (I say 'with God' as a person thinks before death, in the sight of God), and do this with good feeling, and with the consciousness that for you yourself it is a happy thing, because by this you redeem a man whom you love from a grievous situation. Any loss here, I think, will not be yours, but if that should be the case, then it ought to be more joyous for you, because a good deed is only good when it is done at some sacrifice."

This time Sonya bowed to her husband's will. On September 16, 1891, the announcement appeared in the form of a letter to the editor. In it Tolstoy gave free permission, to all desiring to do so, to publish in Russia and abroad, in Russian and in translation, and

<sup>1</sup> Twenty-nine words are deleted here in the Russian edition.

also to perform on the stage, all his works written since 1881; and he gave the same permission for any of his works appearing in the future. Although she agreed, Sonya never became reconciled to this step, and even after her husband's death she complained against this act which had deprived a numerous and not rich family of its rightful income.

## VI

The effort to defend the welfare of her children against what she considered the ruinous demands of their father's faith was only one phase of the emotional struggle that had long been going on between husband and wife. The family quarrels of 1890-1891 aggravated Sonya's growing hysteria, and no doubt another contributory cause was her physiological condition—her approaching "critical age." In these circumstances, her husband's aloofness was regarded by Sonya as a deliberate desire on his part to cast her aside as of no further use. With the lesson of *The Kreutzer Sonata* ever in her mind, she now understood all his attempts at intimacy as sheer physical lust. Her attitude towards him fluctuated between an overpowering desire for pure loving relations and a positive dislike.

A tendency to dwell upon pleasant memories of their married life before the "change" served further to poison Sonya's reactions to her present existence. Expressions of affection for her husband in her diary became less frequent, and criticism of him, not lacking occasional words of contempt for his new faith, noticeably increased. There was now a suggestive concentration on the subject of sex, and the picture she drew of their intimate life together reflected an abnormal state of mind. Although Tolstoy's own diary at this time recorded his struggle with the desires of the flesh, she taunted him for his lapses, and while responding to his passion, she evinced disgust and a conviction that her place in his life had always been that of an instrument for his pleasure.

Feeling ill, Sonya noted in her diary: "The fear seizes me that all these are signs of pregnancy. And it would be no wonder. . . .<sup>1</sup> Lyvochka is tender and always remembers me, where I am and what I'm doing. Ach, if there were only the same relations without this! But it rarely happens with him!" After correcting proof of *The Kreutzer Sonata*, she took exception to her husband's views in that work about the passions of young women. A young woman, wrote Sonya, satisfies her husband only because she loves him; her

<sup>1</sup>Eight words deleted in the Russian edition.

passion does not awake until she is thirty. Then her tender, sentimental love disappears and she becomes like her husband, that is, a seeker after her own sensual satisfaction. Sonya, however, concluded this criticism with a peculiarly Tolstoyan observation: "Happiness exists only where the spirit and the will overcome the body and passions."

Two weeks later she wrote: "Last night I became so angry that I would not talk to him. He kept me awake until two in the morning. To begin with, he was downstairs washing himself for so long that I thought he was ill. For him, washing is an event. He told me that his feet were so calloused with dirt that they had become sore. It quite revolted me. . . .<sup>1</sup> Then he lay down and read for a long time. I am in his way when I am not needed for his satisfaction. These days of aversion to the physical side of my husband's life are terribly depressing to me—but I cannot, I cannot get used to it—I can never get used to the dirt, the smell. . . .<sup>2</sup> I try with all my strength to see only his spiritual side, and I succeed when he is kind to me."

Spitefully she struck at him after a conversation they had on food, luxury, and vegetarianism, for she wrote: "He said that he saw a vegetarian menu in a German paper that consisted of bread and almonds. No doubt the person preaching this regime practises it as much as Lyovochka, preaching chastity in *The Kreutzer Sonata*, practises that." In the same vein she noted that he was kind and cheerful again, but she knew the reason, and then she added: "If those who read *The Kreutzer Sonata* with veneration could look for a moment at the erotic life that Lyovochka lives—the one thing that makes him happy and kind—they would cast down this little god from the pedestal on which they have placed him! But I love him when he is normal, weak, and good in his habits. One ought not to be an animal, but then neither should one be a preacher of principles which one is unable to practise."

Although his sensuality was contagious, Sonya admitted, yet her "whole moral being protested against it." And she feared the day "when he will no longer be *amorous*, and then he will cast me out of his life—cynically, cruelly, and coldly." Then she entered in her diary on April 23, 1891: "Tanya has just gone past and said that Lyovochka had asked her to tell me that he had gone to bed and had put out the light. Her innocent lips have brought me a message that is far from innocent. I know what it means, and I'm annoyed."

<sup>1</sup> Twenty-two words deleted in the Russian edition.

<sup>2</sup> Twelve words deleted in the Russian edition.

## Chapter XXVIII

### THE FAMINE

**I**N THE summer of 1891 Sonya had already begun to plan for a winter in Moscow. It was time for Misha and Andrei to enter a *Gymnasium*. Then she worried for fear young Leo would give up the university if he had to continue to live alone; and Tanya, she felt, would never make a match in the country. But there was the old problem of Tolstoy's loathing of city life. When she put the question to him, he refused to move. Arguments followed. Why didn't she and the children go; he would remain at Yasnaya Polyana and she could make an occasional trip to see him. No, never! she exclaimed in tears. He was throwing her away like an old piece of clothing. In the end, Sonya won; with an aggravating show of resignation, he finally agreed to do whatever she wished.

Before the time of departure, however, there were rumours of an approaching famine because of crop failures in central and south-eastern Russia. Millions of peasants faced starvation. Tolstoy's first reaction seemed negative. I. I. Rayevski, a Tula official and an old friend of the family, dropped in at Yasnaya Polyana. He could talk of nothing but the danger of famine. His conversation obviously annoyed Tolstoy, who contradicted him at every turn and kept muttering to himself that it was all nonsense, and that if there were a famine, all one could do was to submit to the will of God. That summer the young family tutor, Novikov, helped Rayevski and his sons to gather statistics on the crops and stores in the neighbouring district. Upon his return, he found Tolstoy unpleasantly apathetic about the famine conditions. There are always many who are hungry, he said, but the only way to help a horse to drag its load is to get off its back.

Inwardly, however, he was much concerned, as his diary indicates. The larger question of why there should be a famine at all and of the moral aspects of the customary forms of relief troubled

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him. "All are talking about the famine, all are worried over the starving and want to help them, to save them. And how repulsive this is. Individuals who have never thought about others, about the people, are suddenly for some reason or other seized with a desire to serve them. In this is expressed either vanity or fear, but not good." He understood that some form of organized aid was necessary, but he had long since taken his stand against conventional philanthropy. For the rich to dole out charity to the poor was an evasion of their moral responsibility. In a letter in July to his friend Leskov, who sought advice on what to do to aid the famine sufferers, he wrote in part: "A good deed does not consist merely of feeding the hungry with bread, but of loving both the hungry and the satisfied. For it is more important to love than to feed, because one may feed and not love, but it is impossible to love and not to feed." Yet he concluded by urging Leskov, a distinguished author, to write that which would touch the hearts of the rich and obtain their aid for the famine-stricken.

Without the permission of either Tolstoy or Leskov, the passage in this letter on the famine appeared in a newspaper in September. The clipping stirred Tolstoy to renewed efforts; he wished to write a long, circumstantial article, for which he needed practical experience in the famine region. For this purpose he visited his brother Sergei at Pirogovo on the edge of one of the famine districts toward the end of September, and shortly thereafter he made several other inspection tours. The conditions of the starving, disease-ridden peasants appalled him. During his travels he again met Rayevski, whom he advised to set up free food kitchens in the villages. Rayevski in turn invited him to settle at his estate, Begichevka, in the Ryazan Province, and help him organize relief in the surrounding regions. Tolstoy agreed.

The news came as a shock to Sonya. It had been such an effort to win his consent to go to Moscow for the winter; now he decided to spend it in a remote district a hundred miles from Yasnaya Polyana, and with his two oldest daughters. What would become of his indigestion and of the girls living in that wilderness? And she would be all alone in Moscow with the young children. He was even asking her for money to help the starving after giving away all his copyrights. Her first reaction was to oppose the whole undertaking. "Sonya is unwell and not in spirits, and I also," he jotted down in his diary. "I hardly slept all night. In the morning I said that this feeding of the hungry is a serious matter. She

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understood that I did not wish to go to Moscow. A scene began. I said venomous things and behaved badly. . . . Returning home I found her ready for a reconciliation and we made it up."

The cause was a humane one. Sonya's better instincts prevailed. She finally consented, and her husband compromised by agreeing to spend some time in the city. Sonya went to Moscow with the young children, and on October 26 Tolstoy, with his two daughters Tanya and Masha, and his niece, Vera Kuzminski, set out for the village of Begichevka in Ryazan. He was to spend a good deal of the next two years there in humanitarian work that endeared him to the Russian people.

### II

Before Tolstoy busied himself with the matter, the famine had remained a kind of state secret. The government did not desire to advertise the country's misery at home or abroad. At a gathering, Alexander III replied to a question on the existence of a famine: "In Russia there is no famine, but there are localities suffering from a failure of crops." And "failure of crops" quickly replaced "famine" in the newspapers. To Tolstoy it was a famine, and he persisted in using the word in his discussions of the subject. In fact, it was partly through his publicizing it that the Russian famine of 1891-1892 became known to the world. His humanitarian efforts strangely increased the hostility of the government, Church, and reactionary individuals.

Although his theories symbolized to many the height of human folly, Tolstoy's famine relief work was undertaken without any illusions and was guided by a keen practical sense. Practicality was a trait of his nature, which manifested itself on various occasions and contributed to the extraordinary plausibility that he often instilled into his more extreme views on life. And this trait is again suggested by the wealth of homely, practical illustrations employed in his moral writings. In Rayevski's unpretentious country residence at Begichevka, a small room ordinarily occupied by the manager of the estate was assigned to Tolstoy. This room, bare of any carpet, curtains, or ornaments, and furnished merely with an iron bed, rough table, chair, and a bookshelf, became his headquarters during all his work in the famine region.

Tolstoy set to work immediately. On the basis of detailed information collected by Rayevski in the district that lay towards the southern part of the provinces of Tula and Ryazan, both men began

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to organize free food kitchens. They selected a central hut from among one of the poorest families in a village and offered to supply the householder with his food if he would bake bread and cook for the old, the weak, and the children up to the number of thirty or forty persons. Then provisions of flour, bran, potatoes, cabbage, beetroot, peas, lentils, oatmeal, and salt were collected. If one kitchen did not suffice in a village, a second was set up. A list was made of people who ought to be fed, and strict supervision was maintained over those who were admitted to the kitchens and over the quality of the food.

Within a month thirty kitchens were opened in twenty villages, and fifteen hundred people were receiving two meals daily. Although no meat was served, a special effort was made to keep the diet reasonably varied and yet inexpensive. This came as a surprise to the peasants, who firmly believed that rye bread was the most appetizing, wholesome, and cheapest form of food. By serving bread in smaller quantities and accompanying it with dishes such as cabbage soup, porridge, potatoes, peas, and millet broth, it was possible to provide a cheaper meal than by serving bread alone in necessarily larger quantities.

With the varied menus, a peasant could be fed for an average of seventy-five cents a month, but on a straight diet of bread it would cost a dollar and twelve cents a month. The peasants were loud in their praise of the kitchen diet, and declared that they had never eaten better food.

Scarcely had this excellent beginning been made when Rayevski, literally sacrificing his health in relief work, died from influenza. Tolstoy felt the loss greatly, for in their work together he had come to value him highly. Several weeks before his death, Tolstoy had heard from Moscow of another death that grieved him deeply—the friend of his youth, Dyakov. For many years their meetings had been infrequent but always hallowed by memories of youthful pleasures mutually enjoyed and treasured in confidence. He wrote to Sonya that nothing reminded him so much of the nearness of his own death as that of a friend who had been so close to him.

### III

Tolstoy did not allow personal sorrows to interfere with the task at hand. As the winter came on, the increasing misery of the peasants and the widening of the famine belt doubled his anxiety. He saw that the job required a great deal more than the efforts of

himself and his two daughters. And his was only one small district. Reports of famine conditions were coming in from other regions. His two oldest sons, Sergei and Ilya, were organizing relief in Tula Province, and young Leo had gone to Samara to set up kitchens. Above all, large sums of money were needed to buy up quantities of food for distribution. At this juncture unexpected aid came from Sonya.

Shortly after her arrival in Moscow, Sonya's attitude towards the relief work of the family changed, despite her chagrin at being left alone with the younger children in the city. She wrote her husband on November 1: "I am now entirely reconciled to your activities and I am in sympathy with them." Under this new impulse she indulged in some forthright Tolstoyan self-analysis in her diary: "As I sat down to dinner with the children today, it occurred to me how egotistical, fat, and soporific is our bourgeois city existence, without any contact with the common people, and with its lack of sympathy and help for others! I could hardly eat, so sad did I become over those who were dying from hunger, while my children and I were morally perishing in an atmosphere without any vital activity. But what is the solution?"

Sonya quickly found something to do. She wrote a letter to the editor of the *Russian Gazette*, a letter that her husband might have been proud of, and which seemed to follow his advice to Leskov to write something that would "touch the hearts of the rich." With unconscious art she described the efforts of her family, quoted a passage from a letter of her daughter Tanya about the unbelievable conditions that existed in the famine district, and concluded with a stirring appeal for help. The letter was published. Gifts of money, linen, clothes, and provisions came pouring in. Within a few weeks she collected a sum amounting to over twelve thousand rubles. The letter had been reproduced in all the Russian newspapers, translations appeared in the European and American press, and inquiries and gifts came from abroad. Sonya was in her element talking with tearful donors and listing contributions. Soon she was sending money and materials to her husband and sons, and she busied herself buying up large quantities of foodstuffs for the hungry. Sonya had become a very important part of the relief work of the Tolstoy family.

From the outset Tolstoy himself had fully realized the need of arousing the public. The conspiracy of silence fostered by the government had left the cities partly unaware of the critical situation,



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and urban dwellers who had some knowledge of it were peculiarly apathetic. As early as September he had sent one article on the famine to a magazine, but as time went on there seemed little chance of getting it approved by the censor. Another article, "A Fearful Problem," he finally managed to get printed in the *Russian Gazette* (November 6, 1891). His main argument in the article was that no positive knowledge existed of the amount of wheat in the country, and that this should be ascertained as soon as possible, for if the quantity were insufficient to tide the population over until the next harvest, then steps should at once be taken to buy food supplies from abroad.

This article served its purpose. The public became alarmed, and energetic measures were demanded. Further, the government's hand was forced, and wheat was supplied to the *Zemstvos*, the County Councils, in the famine districts for free distribution, but under conditions that limited the effectiveness of this aid. Tolstoy's efforts at publicity also stirred up violent criticism, no doubt encouraged by government officials. For the reactionary newspaper, the *Moscow Gazette*, published four articles in quick succession, attacking Tolstoy and his family for exaggerating the famine situation and for their personal crusade on behalf of the hungry sufferers. And one of the writers added a sinister note by reading into "A Fearful Problem" the political ambitions of Tolstoy as a member of a "new liberal party"; the suggestion, of course, was that the revolutionaries might well regard Tolstoy as one of themselves. This was dangerous. The government had always been hesitant to take positive action against Tolstoy in his guise as a kind of "thirteenth apostle," but as a political revolutionist they could whistle him off down the wind into exile with a clearer conscience.

Tolstoy's enemies did not have long to wait for another opening. Because of the public stir aroused by "A Fearful Problem," the government warned newspapers not to print anything further on the famine from Tolstoy's pen. Nevertheless, learning at the end of November that the first article he had written on the famine away back in September had been definitely rejected by the censors, he instructed Sonya to send copies to English, French, and Danish admirers for translation and publication in these countries. He hoped by this means to bring the article to the attention of Russian newspapers and thus force them to reproduce it. The English translator was E. J. Dillon, then correspondent in Russia of the *London Daily Telegraph*.

Meanwhile, Tolstoy had succeeded in obtaining the censor's approval for a very abbreviated and much adulterated version of his article, which appeared in the first number of *Books of the Week* in January 1892. Dillon's translation of the original article, with deletions permitted by the author, appeared in the *Daily Telegraph* in London on January 26. Eight days later the "Moscow rats," as Granny called them, devoted the leading article of the *Moscow Gazette* to Tolstoy, a violent attack consisting of an extensive excerpt from his article in the *Daily Telegraph*, translated back into Russian, accompanied by a commentary on the author and his purpose. In one place the commentary declared: "The letters [Tolstoy's article was in the form of letters] of Count Tolstoy do not need a commentary: they are frank propaganda for the overthrow of the whole social and economic structure of the world, which, with a most understandable purpose, the Count thinks of in terms of Russia alone. The Count's propaganda is propaganda of the most unbridled socialism before which even our underground propaganda pales." Tolstoy's device had achieved its purpose, but in a manner he did not expect and did not wish.

The malicious intent of the *Moscow Gazette*, in which Pobedonostsev very likely had an interest, was clear, but there can be no question that Tolstoy provided his enemies with an easy opening. His original article, the publication of which was not permitted in Russia until 1912, contains forceful language and highly provocative ideas, but no more so than *What Then Must We Do?* finished six years before. In "Letters on the Famine," he tried to show the social and moral obligations of all to the starving masses of Russians. After describing the growing danger in the famine district and the precise needs of the peasants, he pointed out that the failure of government attempts at aid resulted from the separation of these officials from the masses. He dwelt on the ineffectiveness of the usual forms of charitable relief among the poor, and on the anomaly of the rich feeding the peasants with the food the peasants grew to feed the rich. "The common people are hungry because we are too full," he wrote. It was not a temporary situation but a permanent one, and the accepted remedy amounted merely to a vicious circle. "All our palaces," he declared, "all our theatres, museums, all this stuff, these riches of ours we owe to the effort of these same hungry people who make these things, which are useless to them, simply because they are fed by this means, that is, they will always be obliged to do this kind of work to save themselves from the death

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by starvation that constantly hangs over their heads." His conclusion was that help for the needy was not a matter of occasional organized relief but the personal obligation of everybody at all times. And, "The basis of every action that has for its purpose help for one's neighbour must be self-sacrifice and love." This was the kind of material in which the *Moscow Gazette* found evidence of "unbridled socialism." To be sure the commentator strengthened his position by taking a selection out of its context and by translating Dillon's English version in such a way as to sharpen the phrases and to provide false emphasis. But such adventitious support was hardly required by this newspaper in order to discover revolutionary sentiments in what Tolstoy wrote.

This attack on Tolstoy at once created a public furore. Government and Church circles in Moscow and Petersburg evinced alarm, and high society buzzed with excitement and with a breathless sense of something terrible impending. Conservatives were elated—at last, Tolstoy, the revolutionist, unmasked; the faithful were depressed. Newspapers were categorically forbidden to reprint anything in the *Moscow Gazette* article or to comment on it. The fantastic price of twenty-five rubles was offered for a copy of the issue containing the article.

Of course, the person most alarmed was Sonya. When the safety of the family was threatened, she lost all sense of perspective and was capable of going to any extreme to protect her nest. Her sympathies were naturally on the side of the authorities and high society, and now, fearing the arrest of her husband, she was quite willing to compromise him by protesting publicly, if need be, his usefulness to the government and his loyalty to the Emperor at a time when she knew he was writing a book—*The Kingdom of God Is Within You*—that condemned all governments.

Sonya, however, had genuine cause for alarm. What she did not know at the time was that the Minister of the Interior, I. N. Durново, had sent a report to the Emperor on the account in the *Moscow Gazette*. He wrote that the contents of Tolstoy's article "must be considered tantamount to a most shocking revolutionary proclamation," and since this might cause an "undesirable disturbance in certain minds," he advised that Count Tolstoy in the future should be forbidden to publish in the foreign press any article directed against the government. If he refused to agree, the Minister significantly concluded, "then unfortunately it will be necessary to take other means to prevent the harmful consequences

of such propaganda." Alexander III scribbled on the report: "No action at this time."

Nevertheless, to Sonya came dark rumours that she could not fail to take seriously. Her sister Tanya in Petersburg had access to government circles through her husband, and shortly after the newspaper article she wrote Sonya: "Did you know that the Council of Ministers had met and that they had already decided to propose exile abroad, but the Emperor stopped it in time. I heard the same thing from various sources. The Emperor is offended. He said that 'I received his wife, which I do not do for everyone.' And that he did not expect that they would betray him to the English, his worst enemies, etc. Of course, these are my own words; I am writing you only the sense. But concerning the proposal to exile abroad, they still tenaciously hold to it and therefore I advise you to act."

That the danger of arrest was real may be gathered from Granny's account of the situation. She was mistakenly convinced that a "son of perfidious Albion," namely Dillon, had published Tolstoy's article in England without his permission. She received anxious letters from abroad, even from America, with requests for information of what would happen to her stubborn relative, for the incident had received wide European publicity. When Granny heard the rumour that the Minister of the Interior designed to incarcerate Tolstoy in the dread dungeons of Suzdal Monastery, that graveyard of forgotten victims of the Church, she at once took action, resolved, she said, "to use all my influence to save him [Tolstoy]." A visit to the Minister<sup>1</sup> brought no results; he was being deluged with denunciations of Tolstoy, he protested, and could no longer keep the matter from the Emperor. Granny next sought an audience with Alexander III. He graciously called on her instead. She immediately came to the point.

"In a few days a report will be made to you about shutting up in a monastery the greatest genius in Russia."

"Tolstoy?" he tersely remarked.

"You have guessed it, Sire," she answered.

"Does that mean he is plotting against my life?" the Emperor asked.

<sup>1</sup> In her account, she names the Minister as Count D. A. Tolstoy, instead of I. N. Durnovo. But Count D. A. Tolstoy, who had been Minister of the Interior, had died in 1889, whereas Granny's account refers to January 1892. This was no doubt a slip of the memory on her part, for she wrote the account several years after the events described.

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At this Granny inwardly rejoiced, for she realized that the Emperor would not accept the severe punishment suggested by the Minister for the offence that he would charge against Tolstoy. Such turned out to be the case, and she concluded her account by saying that the Emperor answered the report of the Minister by firmly declaring: "I ask you not to touch Tolstoy. I have no intention of making a martyr out of him and thus earning for myself universal indignation. If he is at fault, then so much the worse for him."

Sonya, at the time, did not know of Granny's efforts. In a positive fright she hurried off letters to her husband to inform him of all the dire rumours and threats. Bitterly she blamed him for this new catastrophe: "You will destroy all of us with your rash article. Where, indeed, is that *love and non-resistance*? You do not have the right, with 9 children, to destroy them and me." Tanya, she wrote, had remarked: "How weary I am of being the daughter of a distinguished father," and Sonya concluded: "And how weary I am of being the wife of a distinguished husband." When it was brought to her attention that an article had appeared abroad, declaring that Tolstoy had been imprisoned, she wrote a letter to the foreign press, in which she criticized the enemies of her husband and asserted the good intentions of the government towards him. This letter received wide currency abroad. She also wrote to the Minister of the Interior and visited the Governor General of Moscow to seek advice on what could be done to ward off any danger that might be threatening her husband. From these sources, and from the Emperor himself, indirectly through Granny, came the suggestion that what was needed was Tolstoy's public repudiation of his article. She at once turned to her husband, begging him to write the desired letter for publication. "For God's sake, do this, quiet my fears. I'm in a terrible state of mind. What fate has entered my life to destroy it. I neither eat nor sleep, and I'm wearied as never before."

At Begichevka, calmly going about his relief work, Tolstoy was little concerned with the furore his article had caused in Russia or abroad, or with the possible dire consequences that his wife reported. But he was concerned with her extreme worry and the increasingly frantic note of despair that filled her letters as time went on and he failed to write the requested repudiation. Finally, against his better judgment, he agreed. He wrote her on February 25, 1892: "How sorry I am, my dear, that the stupid talk about

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the article in the *Moscow Gazette* has so troubled you and that you went to Sergei Alexandrovich.<sup>1</sup> Really nothing new has happened. What I wrote in the article on the famine I had said before many times and expressed much more strongly. What, then, is there new in it? All this is a matter of the mob, a hypnotized mob, growing like a ball of snow. I have written the repudiation. But please, my dear, *do not change or add a single word*, and do not even permit it to be changed."

The repudiation was equivocal and hardly did Tolstoy justice. He declared that he did not deliberately write the article in question for an English newspaper; that the selection from it attributed to him in the *Moscow Gazette* had been much altered by virtue of the twofold translation from Russian into English and then back again into Russian; that the article had been originally written for a Moscow magazine and when publication had been refused, he had, according to his custom, released it to foreign translators, and finally that an expression attributed to him by the writer of the *Moscow Gazette* concerning the steps the masses should take in order to save themselves from hunger was a complete fiction, and that his words had been used in a sense entirely opposed to his convictions.

The intention of Sonya had been to publish this repudiation in the official *Government News*, but this organ now refused to print it on the grounds that it eschewed polemical material; and other Russian newspapers had been forbidden to carry anything on this subject. However, many copies of the statement were made by Sonya and distributed through her and friends to interested people and to editors abroad. Further, when the affair had quieted down a bit, the statement appeared in print in the Russian press. Then the repudiation became generally known.

The chief victim of the repudiation was Dillon, who had originally translated Tolstoy's article for the *Daily Telegraph*. For the statement clearly implied that Dillon had published the article without Tolstoy's permission, and that his translation was faulty. The truth is Dillon had been asked by Tolstoy to translate and publish the article, and his translation is a reasonably faithful version. He visited Tolstoy and appealed to him to set the matter right, for with his honesty questioned, he was in danger of being discharged by his newspaper. Further, mutual friends, Leskov and V.S. Solovyov, protested to Tolstoy over this reflection, however

<sup>1</sup> The Governor General of Moscow.

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unintentional, on Dillon's good faith. Tolstoy accordingly furnished Dillon with a letter, in which he affirmed the authenticity of his article in the *Daily Telegraph* and explained that mistakes in the selection from it in the *Moscow Gazette* were the result of incorrect translation from the English. Dillon forthwith published in the eager *Moscow Gazette*, and also in the *Citizen*, an explanation, accompanied by Tolstoy's letter mentioned above and an earlier letter which he had written Dillon about the translation of his article. At once, the editors of the *Moscow Gazette* returned to the charge with this new ammunition. They printed in parallel columns the Tolstoy original of their selection from his article, Dillon's English translation of it, and their Russian translation of Dillon's version, and they reached the conclusion that the revolutionary ideas they had ascribed to Tolstoy in their initial article were fully justified.<sup>1</sup>

Tolstoy was saddened by this whole matter, as were some of his close friends and disciples. Even Chertkov was for a moment shaken, but by indulging in sophistical hair-splitting he managed to clear the master of any moral turpitude. He stood on the dubious ground that Tolstoy's repudiation was factually correct: he could not possibly accept the altered selection from his article in the *Moscow Gazette* as his own.

However, the talk in high society circles that he had not really meant what he had said in his article on the famine and that hence an explanation to the public was due irritated Tolstoy. He no doubt blamed Sonya for some of this loose talk because of her pathetic eagerness to explain to all that her husband's intentions towards the government and the Emperor were the best in the world. Using a letter of Granny's to Sonya as an excuse, he endeavoured to set his wife straight on this score. He wrote: "I see from the tone of dear Alexandra Andreyevna's letter<sup>2</sup> that I have been at fault in something and that I ought to justify myself before someone or other. This tone is unacceptable. For the last 12 years I have been writing what I think, and that which could hardly please either the government or the rich, and I have been writing not simply by chance, but quite consciously, and not only have I no intention of justifying myself, but I hope that those who desire this will not try to justify themselves, but will purify themselves of

<sup>1</sup> Dillon has given his side of this whole incident in his book, *Count Leo Tolstoy: a New Portrait*.

<sup>2</sup> Granny's letter which Sonya had sent to him.

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that which not I, but all life, accuse them. In this particular instance the following has happened: the government has a censorship, absurd and unlawful, which prevents the thoughts of people from appearing in their true light, and it naturally follows that these things appear in a distorted light abroad. The Government becomes agitated, and instead of frankly and honestly correcting the situation, it again hides behind the censorship and takes offence over something and permits itself to accuse others but not itself. What I wrote in my article about the famine is part of what I have been writing and saying on all sides for 12 years and will say to my death, and what everyone in the world who is enlightened and honest says with me, what the heart of every uncorrupt person says, and what Christianity says, that very Christianity which is the faith of those who are terrified. . . . Note that my writings are in tens of thousands of copies in various languages, writings in which my views are put forth. And suddenly, because of certain mysterious letters appearing in an English newspaper, all at once understand that I am the guilty one. Truly, it is ridiculous. Only those ignorant, of whom the most ignorant are the people who belong to the Court, could fail to know what I have written, and could actually think that such views as mine could suddenly change in a single day and become revolutionary. All this is laughable, and for me to reason with such people is degrading and offensive."

## IV

This last newspaper attack left Tolstoy at Begichevka somewhat disturbed, but he contented himself by writing a few sharp remarks about the press and Dillon to the worried Chertkov. Meanwhile aid from abroad for the famine sufferers increased. Three shiploads of provisions were sent from the United States, and within two months American financial contributions reached the total of some \$500,000; in England a special committee was set up to raise funds, and a part of the money was specifically allocated for the use of Tolstoy; and an independent effort of the English Quakers resulted in a contribution of £26,000. The famine, partly through the efforts of Tolstoy, had become world news, and the Russian government could no longer ignore or soft-pedal it. Tolstoy's daughter, Tanya, tells how a few peasants collected twenty rubles for a trip to Moscow to complain to the Governor General of the plight of their district, and for their efforts, it was



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said, they were promptly put in jail. But the government now discreetly encouraged private and public aid, and it issued an order that the County Councils were to assist peasants who deserved help but to withhold it from those who refused any work offered them. A kind of boondoggling sprang up, and some of the peasants almost preferred to starve than perform the nonsensical jobs invented for them.

With his understanding of peasant psychology and of their conditions of life, Tolstoy avoided the mistakes of the County Councils in the task of relief. It was not merely the immediate question of the famine; so many of these peasants were constantly undernourished and their diet hopelessly unvaried. They were also in rags: he was shocked at the sight of the children of a widow going around in the winter almost naked. They had little fuel to warm themselves in their damp, wretched, one-room huts, in which the whole family and the livestock lived in the winter. He noted that they literally got inside the ovens of their stoves to keep warm. Then there were drunkenness and laziness to combat, their ignorant opposition to improvements to overcome, and the need to explain, if not justify, the frustrations of those among them who aspired to a better life. In the face of these conditions, he clearly realized that at best all his efforts amounted to a compromise, and he told his co-workers in relief that either the peasants would remain in a state of slavery or else they would revolt, and he prophetically declared that revolt was the more likely.

Tolstoy's guiding principles in his relief activities were two: to provide work for those capable of working, in order that the peasant economy should not break down entirely, and through his kitchens to feed the starving young and old, the weak and the sick. Contrary to the fumbling efforts of government officials, however, he maintained that the work provided should be the kind that the peasants were used to, that the proper conditions for such work should be maintained, and, when required, materials should be furnished.

On the whole, Tolstoy achieved a huge measure of success in abiding by these principles. By March 1892, he and his helpers had organized 187 kitchens in four districts that fed daily some 10,000 people. Huge quantities of wood for fuel had been bought and distributed. By an arrangement with sympathetic people in regions not hit by the famine, peasant horses were sent there to be fed. Large quantities of flax and bast were given free to the peasants for the manufacture of sacking and shoes. Separate kitchens were

set up for children from one to three years of age, in which special nutritious foods were provided. Seed was distributed in preparation for the spring sowing. Clothes and material for making clothes were given out to the needy. A few schools were set up in villages, and many small sums of money were supplied as gifts to individuals for debts, funerals, books, and so on. It was a fine record of achievement for less than six months of effort.

## v

Throughout most of the winter and spring of 1892 Tolstoy remained at Begichevka to direct the work of relief. He returned to Moscow during this period for several short visits, at the insistence of his wife. Sonya worried over him and her two daughters, and with reason, for the famine district was ridden with disease. A surprising improvement in the relations between husband and wife may be observed in their correspondence during these months. The reason is obvious. Sonya had identified herself with her husband's work, and her own considerable efforts in raising funds and buying provisions contributed to the success of his enterprise. Here she was closely joined with him in mutual service to others—a Christian ideal of which he had often dreamed.

In the midst of his work at Begichevka, he wrote to Ge's son that for ten years, "I have not been so close to my wife as now, and this is more important than anything else." Lonely in Moscow without him, and weary with her own efforts, she asked him to come home, saying: "What a misfortune at my age to be so attached to and to love a man such as you." And he wrote in turn: "I know only one thing, that I love you with all my soul, and I want to see and calm you."

It is interesting that in a quarrel between Sonya and Chertkov at this time, Tolstoy gently rebuked his chief disciple. Chertkov was engaged in famine relief in his own province of Voronezh, and he wrote Sonya to ask her aid in obtaining certain provisions. In informing him that his request had been fulfilled, she also took the occasion to scold him for urging her husband, "a tired, nervous old man," to hurry and finish a manuscript he was working on in order that he could send it to him as soon as possible. Chertkov, highly indignant, answered that Tolstoy himself anxiously wished to finish the work, and that he ordinarily sent his manuscripts to him, Chertkov, without his having to ask for them. Then he

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proceeded to lecture Sonya on the score that her husband was less nervous and possessed more spiritual equanimity than all those surrounding him, even those "quite close to him." "I am firmly convinced," he wrote, "that if you survive Leo Nikolayevich, you will in time recognize, as all the sincere friends of your family do now, that by your actions, often contrary to the desires of Leo Nikolayevich, and even though performed with the best of intentions, you not only cause him personally great suffering, but even in the practical, external conditions of life, you do him harm."

Sonya's rejoinder was prompt and tart, and the essence of it may be summed up in one sentence from her letter: "All have seen and still do see our 30 years of happily married life, and if lately it sometimes appeared that there were grievous moments, they have existed only thanks to the interference of people entirely alien to us, who have consciously and unconsciously intruded upon our family life and spoiled it." And in her letter to her husband about this quarrel, she angrily remarked: "What a stupid and one-track mind of a man! I am sorry and vexed that people see so narrowly and so little."

Chertkov sent Sonya's first letter to Tolstoy and a copy of his answer, with a pious justification for writing it and an anxious request for the master's reaction. When it came, it was crisp and edged: "I received your letter with that of my wife and your answer. You are right, but she is not at fault. She does not see in me what you see."

Although Tolstoy's visits to Moscow from Begichevka were made largely to please Sonya, most of the time spent in the city he continued to devote to relief work—writing to influential figures for aid, searching out supplies, and recruiting helpers. During his visit in January 1892, he persuaded the musician, A. G. Rubinstein, to give a concert on behalf of the famine relief. During this same visit, Tolstoy went to see his play, *The Fruits of Enlightenment*, at the Maly Theatre, the author's proceeds of which were also spent on relief. According to a newspaper account the following day, he had been taken for some old muzhik at the theatre, appearing there in a peasant's jacket, sheepskin hat, and felt boots, and it required some persuasion before he was admitted.

Such visits to the city during the relief work were as brief as Tolstoy could make them. Back at his "general staff headquarters," as the Rayevski house came to be called, he would plunge into manifold activities. There were numerous kitchens to inspect and

new ones to set up. Statistics were compiled of the peasants fed and of their further needs, and Tolstoy kept a full account of income and disbursements. Heaps of letters on the famine from all over the world had to be answered. Much of his time was also spent in listening to individual petitions of peasants—125 separate requests, he reckoned, were made on a single day. Many were heart-rending. A peasant and his young son kneeled before him and begged for aid. Tolstoy kneeled himself and with tears in his eyes beseeched this poor muzhik, beaten by want, not to humble himself in this fashion. Another petitioner, a peasant woman, implored him not to let her daughter take food at the kitchen. Surprised, he finally drew from her that she feared her child would lose her soul to the devil if she received food from Antichrist.

This belief was one of the major annoyances that Tolstoy had to contend with in his relief work. The Church grew alarmed over his activities among the peasants in the famine district, simply because he was Tolstoy. Two priests were sent from Tula to investigate. And, no doubt acting from orders higher up, some local priests carried out an insidious campaign directed against his efforts to help the poor. Playing upon the superstitions of the peasants, they told them: "You think that Antichrist will come to you in an evil guise. No, he will come to you with kindness, with bread at the very time when you will be dying of hunger. But woe to him who is seduced by this bread!"

Such a malicious story was fraught with danger, for gullible peasants were quite capable of taking things into their own hands, and on several occasions co-workers of Tolstoy had reason to fear the hostility of villagers. Under the impetus of the priests, a whole folklore grew up in the region about Tolstoy as Antichrist. "What kind of Count is this, dressed in peasant fashion, going about the huts?" one of the inhabitants demanded. "Has he no shame! Always on foot, or grubbing about on horseback in storm and blizzard! He's not a human being, he's Antichrist! Where does he get such power? He merely waves one arm—money pours down like rain! He waves the other—a cart with bread rolls right up to him! The bread he gives us comes from the devil . . . !" Tolstoy told with some humour that upon entering one of the villages, a youngster ran after him all the way down the road, shouting: "Antichrist! Antichrist!"

In general, however, the peasants were not deeply influenced by the whisperings of their priests. They were starving and Tolstoy

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gave them good food, and they blessed him for it. A relief worker overheard two peasants talking. One said: "This Count ought to be destroyed." And the other replied: "You're a jackass to talk of getting rid of such a man. He's the cleverest of men. Just think, if the Tsar himself would actually take time off to spend as many as eighteen minutes with this man's wife . . . and you talk of getting rid of him." Another aid reported to Tolstoy that a sick peasant, who had been tended by the relief workers, kept declaring to visitors: "So you call these children of Antichrist—they are angels of God whom the Lord has sent to us."

The devotion of the peasants to Tolstoy was openly manifested when a government commission for aid in the famine halted at Begichevka. The rumour quickly spread that this imposing, uniformed group intended to arrest Tolstoy. A crowd of angry peasants immediately gathered about the Rayevski house, determined to prevent the arrest, and they were dispersed only with difficulty. When he left Begichevka at the beginning of the harvest, the touching farewell of the grateful peasants, many of whom accompanied him along the road, convinced him that they appreciated his efforts.

Yet stories about the peasant fears of Tolstoy as Antichrist crept into the newspapers, and friends engaged in relief work with him wrote an indignant letter to the press. But as though he were beyond the pale of Christian consideration, it is interesting to note that at the end of 1892, a circular from the Minister of Education requested members of learned societies connected with Moscow University not to read papers or articles on Tolstoy in their meetings.

## VI

The much publicized relief work added to the Tolstoy legend throughout Russia and abroad and brought many visitors to the "general staff headquarters" at Begichevka. More important, it brought offers of sorely needed volunteer help.

Among the volunteers were seasoned Tolstoyans, some of whom were rather disillusioned, for they had been members of colonies which for one reason or another had been failing at just this time. They now found an outlet for their zeal in relief work under the direction of the master himself, but for several of them it was not an entirely satisfactory substitute for the unconventional variety of soul-saving that they preferred. Like professional revolutionists,

they were never entirely happy unless they were practising the "dissidence of dissent."

In the evenings, when the varied daily tasks connected with the relief work had ended, the helpers who were living at the Rayevski home or near by gathered at the "general staff headquarters." They sat around a large table and shared their impressions of the day and planned the work for the following day. Tolstoy might play chess, tell anecdotes, or read aloud from the latest periodicals or from the manuscript he was writing at that time—*The Kingdom of God Is Within You*. Such readings often led to serious discussions in which all hung on the words of the master. Not infrequently, however, the young Tolstoyans pressed their teacher hard, for some of them, after the failure of the colonies, were already developing heretical ideas. Their souls ached for something more substantial than the master's advice on relief work. Two disciples, A. V. Alyokhin and M. A. Novoselov, now opposed to his teaching the need of a powerful organization with deeply rooted traditions that had a strong hold on the masses. To his horror, Tolstoy saw that they meant the Church. Then another follower, V. I. Skorokhodov, sharply questioned Tolstoy's advice that he return to his wife and children and work for them. Was he not abiding by the precepts of Christ in abandoning his home and following Him? No, Tolstoy objected, a man has no right to desert his family; he must bear his cross, even though it be a heavy one. Nevertheless, Skorokhodov, taking with him young M. V. Alyokhin (a brother of A. V. Alyokhin), soon set out on foot from Begichevka to search for what he called the "heavenly Jerusalem." The disciples were now accusing Tolstoy of conservatism. "Where do they wish to go?" he sadly asked. "We should be there where we are needed." Yet this same inner demand "to go away" had been troubling his own conscience. Only a few months after these disputes with his disciples, he wrote in his diary: "Not in a moment of irritation, but in a moment most calm, it became clear that I must and should go away from Yasnaya Polyana."

For the non-Tolstoyans among the relief workers, more interesting fare turned up at Begichevka than these dour, "dark people." Repin came to make sketches, and towards the end of January 1892, Tolstoy's wife arrived. Shocked at the dirt and disorderly condition of the "general staff headquarters," she at once took charge of things. She swept through the house, putting everything in order, brought the financial accounts of the relief work up to date,

and in her spare time made coats for the ragged village boys. At the end of ten days she swept out of the village, leaving everything spick-and-span and all the workers quite breathless over her incredible energy.

One day two nameless Americans arrived and pretended to be interested in the views of Tolstoy. He talked with them in English and to his infinite disgust quickly realized that they had no interest at all in his views. They had come all this distance, he declared, simply to be able to say that they had talked with Tolstoy. "It is just as though they had read about me in a Baedeker and had come to confirm it." The local gentry, however, were as zealous in their pursuit of the great as the two Americans. They sought Tolstoy out on every occasion and exaggerated the significance of the slightest attention he paid them. In one house the owner put on exhibition the chair that his guest had used and carved on it: "L. Tolstoy sat here." And another host even treasured in a special trunk the tablecover on which Tolstoy had spilled coffee.

Of the many foreign correspondents who sought him out at Begichevka, Tolstoy was impressed by a Swede, Jonas Stadling. He arrived in an outlandish Lapland costume, carrying a camera, and speaking no Russian, all of which convinced the peasants that this was really Antichrist who had come to set his fatal seal upon them. Stadling took a deep interest in the relief work and accompanied Tolstoy's son Leo to Samara, where he worked among the famine-stricken and eventually wrote a book about his experiences.

All the relief workers at Begichevka, however, agreed that the most extraordinary visitor was a Swedish Jew by the name of Avram von Bonde. Walking barefoot, he arrived in the village, a man of seventy, with long greyish-yellow hair and beard, clad in rags, and wearing a huge, broad-brimmed hat. As a young man he had given away all his money, having come to the conclusion that one should live according to the laws of nature. He slept on the ground, with his water bottle for a pillow, and was a strict vegetarian, even preferring his food uncooked. After having spent some thirty years in America, he had wandered all over the Far East whence, reading of Tolstoy's beliefs, he had journeyed to Russia to ask this spiritual brother for a bit of land where he could settle down and till the soil with his own hands, without the aid of animals, and thus obtain his sustenance.

Tolstoy could not fail to be touched by this frail old man who, in spiritual sympathy, had found his way to him after wandering

thousands of miles. Indeed, he experienced a sense of sinfulness upon discovering another seeker after truth who was able to live up to the letter of his principles, some of which they held in common.

And yet von Bonde must have struck Tolstoy as something of a caricature of his beliefs, for his behaviour caused him and the other workers many uneasy moments. Coming upon the group drinking tea around the samovar, he bluntly charged them with making an idol out of the samovar, before which they worshipped. And he insisted that the Chinese starve because they use their land for growing tea for foreign consumption instead of raising wheat. Tolstoy pitied the poor Chinese and for some time found it hard to drink tea. On another occasion von Bonde insisted upon making bread in his own fashion, pounding the unmilled kernels of wheat and mixing them with water. Tolstoy bravely sampled the finished product, and the next morning he was deathly sick. His daughter telegraphed for her mother. Sonya arrived, much agitated, to find the "naturalist" baker sound asleep on the floor, his bare legs and feet rather indecently displayed. When she learned what had happened, she forbade any further concoctions of this "dirty old man" to be fed to her husband.

Tolstoy attempted to persuade Chertkov to take von Bonde in charge. He called himself a practical philosopher, he wrote Chertkov, but "he is more than sincere, a fanatic in his ideas." Chertkov, keen as he was about spiritual oddities, declined, and Tolstoy took von Bonde to Yasnaya Polyana, where he remained for only a short time and then left the country.

## VII

In July 1892, Tolstoy prepared for the press what he hoped would be a final accounting of his relief efforts. In all he had set up 246 kitchens, feeding 13,000 people daily, and 124 kitchens for children, feeding 3,000 daily. Up to April of that year, the contributions that had come to him personally had amounted to 141,000 rubles. He returned to Yasnaya Polyana, feeling weary but curiously empty once he had relieved himself of the huge responsibilities he had shouldered.

But what Tolstoy had feared before he left Begichevka actually happened—a recurrence of the famine. The crops that summer had been very poor, and the stricken region during the past year had not fully recovered from its ordeal. The situation, however,



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was not so serious in the fall and winter of 1892-1893, although severely complicated by an epidemic of typhus. He felt it his duty to return to the work of relief. But he had not yet recovered from the strain of the previous effort, and besides Sonya's interest and that of the public at large had cooled off considerably. Yet he was about to take up the burden again when his trusted and highly competent disciple Biryukov offered to assume general charge of the work under his direction. Tolstoy gladly accepted. Biryukov worked at Begichevka throughout the winter, and Tolstoy visited a number of times to give his assistant the benefit of his advice. His last visit was at the end of May 1893, and in September he wrote a final report for the press on his famine activities.

This whole experience had morally wrenched Tolstoy. At the outset of his relief work he wrote to Granny that the months spent in feeding the hungry had been the happiest of his life. He liked this practical kind of work which, as he said, was cheering and attractive and provided him with a sense of positive accomplishment. All his helpers testified to his heartiness, good spirits, and wonderful enthusiasm as he directed their efforts.

But it was not in Tolstoy's nature to be satisfied with this kind of positive accomplishment. He was partly convinced that what he was doing was wrong, or perhaps it would be more correct to say that he disapproved of the way that circumstances obliged him to feed the hungry. Had he not long since taken a stand against private charity? And here he himself was distributing the vomit thrown up by the rich, as he expressed it, in order to save the starving. Had he not condemned charity as corroding and debasing the moral nature of the poor? The more you give them, the less they will work, and the less they work, the greater will be their need. With a genuine sense of guilt, he felt it necessary to write disciples and friends to explain that he knew what he was doing was morally wrong and actually harmful to the very peasants he desired to help. After all, he was not a saint, he declared. No, he was only a weak man. The discord between his words and acts might seem to the unthinking a lie or a hypocrisy, but in reality it was only a sign of weakness. What he was trying to be, he pleaded, was a good man, a worthy servant of God. And nearly always these letters of self-condemnation concluded with the firm statement that the starving must be fed, and he could not do otherwise than help. The cold theory that the only way famines could be ended forever was for the well-to-do to change their lives, draw nearer

to the common people, and return to them what they had taken from them, he confided to his articles; the hungry he fed by taking money from the well-to-do.

With all his doubts, Tolstoy could not deny his nature. He ended one of his published reports on the famine as follows:—

“What then? Will there again be a famine? Famine! Kitchens! Famine! Indeed, this is now ancient, and so ancient as to be boring.

“It is boring to you in Moscow, in Petersburg, and here, when from morn to night they stand under the windows or in the doorways, and it is not even possible to go on the streets without hearing the same old phrases: ‘We have not eaten for two days, we have killed our last sheep. Must we die?’ We are not even ashamed to confess out here that we are so weary of this that we look upon these petitioners as our enemies.

“I arise very early. It is a clear, frosty morning with a red sunrise; the snow crunches underfoot; I go out and hope that I will meet no one. In vain. I have barely opened the door and there are two of them standing: one is a tall, broad muzhik, in a short, ragged overcoat, in torn bast shoes, with an emaciated face and a bag slung over his shoulder (they all have emaciated faces, as though these faces were the special characteristic of muzhiks). With him is a boy of fourteen with no overcoat, wearing a torn jacket, also in bast shoes, and with a bag and a stick. I want to get by them. They begin with the usual bows and speeches. There’s nothing for me to do but turn back to the vestibule. They approach.

“‘What is it?’

“‘I’ve come to your honour.’

“‘What?’

“‘Have pity on us.’

“‘What do you want?’

“‘It’s about help.’

“‘What kind of help?’

“‘It’s from hunger. Help us to a bite.’

“‘Where are you from?’

“‘From Zatvornoye.’

“I know that this is an impoverished village where we have not yet succeeded in opening a kitchen. Scores of beggars come from there, and I at once size up this man as a professional beggar and I am vexed that they even lead children about with them and degrade them.

“‘Just what do you wish of me?’

“‘Only consider us somehow.’

“‘But how am I to give you consideration? We can’t do anything here.’

“‘We’ll go . . .’

“‘But he does not listen to me. And he again begins what I have heard hundreds of times, addressing me with hypocritical speeches:—

“‘There were no crops, there are eight children in the family, I’m the only worker; my old lady is dead; we ate our cow last summer, last Christmas the horse died. Well, let it go, but the kids beg for food; there’s no place to get it; for three days we haven’t eaten.’

“‘This is how it goes, always the same thing. I want to see if he will soon finish. But he keeps saying:—

“‘I thought I would try somehow, but the strength has gone out of me. I’ve never begged, now God has brought me to it.’

“‘Well, all right, we will go soon and see,’ I say and I try to go past him, but my glance by chance falls on the boy. The youngster looks at me pitifully, his beautiful brown eyes filled with tears and hope, and a single tear-drop rolled down his nose at that moment, and fell on the snow-trodden boarded floor of the vestibule. The boy’s sweet, worn face, with his flaxen hair curling in a crown round his head, twitched with suppressed sobs. For me the words of his father are an old, customary annoyance. But for him, this recital of the harsh times he has experienced with his father, a recital at just this solemn moment when at last they have made their way to me and to help, unnerves him, weakened as he is by hunger. To me, it is all wearisome, wearisome, and I think only of how to get away quickly for my walk.

“‘To me it is old, but to him terribly new.

“‘Yes, it has wearied us. But they still want to eat, to live, to be happy, to love, just as I see by the charming tear-filled eyes of this boy fixed on me that he also desires all this too, good, unhappy lad that he is, tortured by want and full of naïve self-pity.’”

## Chapter XXIX

### THE KINGDOM OF GOD

**F**AME, insatiable fame, that is what he has always striven for and what he will continue to strive for." This was a theme that Sonya frequently harped upon now in her more hostile moods towards her husband. Tolstoy would have frankly admitted to the temptation of fame, but it was a devil that he constantly guarded himself against. In letters to friends during the famine relief work, he decried the public praise accorded his efforts. Whether he liked it or not, however, he had become a public, in fact an international, celebrity. One after the other the books and articles forbidden by the censor appeared promptly in many foreign countries, both in Russian and in translation, and often the copies found their way back to his native land by illegal means. Admirers pointed to him as not only the conscience of Russia, but the conscience of the world.

In 1893 Tolstoy was elected an honorary member of the Russian-English Literary Society, a distinction that seemed to please him. A letter that he wrote at this time to commemorate the fifty years of literary activity of D. V. Grigorovich provoked such a demonstration when read to the audience that it appeared as though it were Tolstoy instead of Grigorovich who was being fêted. In general, he shunned crowds and meetings, and even on the street he hurried along, looking neither left nor right, as though fearing recognition. Yet he was often recognized, for his features had become widely known through published portraits and photographs. On trains he tried to preserve anonymity in order to draw out fellow passengers in conversation, but if recognized he could quickly become stiff and formal. Granny told of meeting him by chance on a train. While chatting she was bothered by a suspicious-looking man who fluttered about Tolstoy, interjecting a word here and there, trying desperately to start up a conversation. Granny asked who he was, and Tolstoy replied: "He is someone who

desires to prove to the public that he is intimate with me, so do not be surprised at the dry manner in which I answer him." At the end of their talk he asked her if she were not ashamed to be seen with him in public. "Such questions are called in English 'fishing for a compliment,'" she observed. "But surely, my dear, you must know that there are many women who would like to be in my place at this moment." And she concluded with the sarcastic comment: "My compliments were so rare that he was quite satisfied with this one."

At the beginning of January, 1894, the annual conference of Russian scientists took place in Moscow. Young Zinger, son of the distinguished mathematician, gave Tolstoy an interesting account of the learned papers that had been read, and he urged him to attend a session the next day when his father, a good friend of the family, would talk on geometry. "I would go," Tolstoy replied, "but I do not like this sort of parade, and I fear the public, especially when the Grand Duke [the Governor General of Moscow] is present." The next day, however, young Zinger got word to him that the Grand Duke would not be present and that he would arrange it so that the public would not disturb him. Tolstoy appeared at the meeting with his daughter Masha, and young Zinger ushered him through a side entrance to a room off the platform. Unable to hear the elder Zinger's speech clearly, he edged onto the platform. He was recognized at once and a murmur ran through the whole audience. Zinger concluded his address with much difficulty, and at the end the distinguished scientist and chairman of the conference, K. A. Timiryazev, conducted Tolstoy to a place beside him on the platform. There he sat in his characteristic peasant blouse among the learned gentlemen in their frock coats. Bedlam broke loose in the audience and the cry rose: "Hurrah for Tolstoy, hurrah!" The roar grew louder and louder, and at last, frowning and obviously embarrassed, he was obliged to stand and acknowledge the tribute.

"My God, what are doing to our old gentleman! Aren't you ashamed!" exclaimed Masha, standing at the end of the hall, shutting her eyes and holding her hands over her ears. "It's Leo Nikolayevich's own fault," shouted a friendly scientist at her side. "Why does he appear so rarely in public? Then you'll agree, Marya Lvovna, that there is something fine in all this. Is it not true?" She nodded agreement.

His shyness in public vanished in meetings with the many

strangers, seekers after truth, who visited him at Yasnaya Polyana or at the family's Moscow house. On these occasions he was always the genial, considerate host, ready to listen, but he soon took command of the conversation by virtue of his dominant personality. Such visitors were often puzzled by the striking contrast between the notion they had formed of Tolstoy through his writings of an ascetic, plain-living prophet and the first impression they received of his comfortable, well-appointed dwelling. One of these visitors rang the bell of the Moscow house in March 1894. A butler, dressed in a frock coat and wearing a white cravat and gloves, admitted him. To this show of luxury were added the fine furnishings of the entrance hall. The family was just finishing dinner, and Tolstoy soon appeared, straight, broad-shouldered, with grizzled hair, and bits of chopped cabbage still clinging to the vegetarian's long beard. His piercing, deep-set eyes twinkled as he cordially greeted the stranger and asked him to follow. Dashing up a flight of stairs, despite his sixty-six years, he led him through a narrow corridor to his study. This low-ceilinged room, sparsely and simply furnished, at once struck the guest as more in keeping with the man he had read about than the obvious "well-bred" appearance of the rest of the house. Quickly placed at his ease, he was amazed in the ensuing conversation at Tolstoy's memory, for he recalled in detail things that this visitor had written to him eight years previously, and which he himself had entirely forgotten.

At this time Tolstoy also got much pleasure out of visiting the headquarters of the *Intermediary*. Towards the end of 1893 Chertkov had decided to relinquish control of this publishing business. Although he had made a success of it, the problems of censorship had increased, and he wished now to devote more time to his own spiritual development. Further, he had become a kind of literary agent, for Tolstoy, managing the translation and publication of his forbidden works abroad. Biryukov agreed to take charge of the *Intermediary* and was assisted by Gorbunov-Posadov. The headquarters were moved from Chertkov's Voronezh estate to Moscow. Besides the huge volume of cheap editions for the masses, two new series were now pushed—various books designed for intellectuals, and a philosophical series. Chertkov offered his services to Biryukov as an occasional editor and translator, in the hope of earning sufficient money to enable him at last to surrender the unearned income from his estates. But this last effort to practise what he preached and live off "bread-labour" failed, for the

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salary the *Intermediary* could afford to offer him, he decided, was insufficient for his needs.

Tolstoy's interest in the firm under Biryukov's direction did not abate, and he continued to make suggestions for publication, to edit books, and to publish his own works, whenever the censor permitted, under this imprint. The firm also became a kind of refuge for those seekers after truth who appealed to Tolstoy for aid. He occasionally dropped in to the regular Thursday "at home" of the *Intermediary* workers. A special armchair was always ready for him, and these fervent, like-minded young men and women would sit at the master's feet, drinking tea and listening to him pronounce at length on terrorism, socialism, God, and universal love.

## II

Tolstoy's enjoyment of this close association with disciples working for the *Intermediary* was mingled with sadness over the persecution now being suffered by his followers. From 1893 both Church and government officials began to intensify their activities against Tolstoyans and others who had been only slightly influenced by his teachings. The refusal of army service was the chief offence in the eyes of the authorities, for this represented a potential danger to a great military power. But pretexts for persecution were not hard to find among government officials who, afraid of making a martyr out of the internationally famous teacher, tried to reach him through his obscure pupils. The police were content now to keep the master under strict surveillance. Tolstoy deliberately made a friend of one of the police spies sent to watch him during the summer of 1894 at Yasnaya Polyana, and his arguments soon reduced the agent to repentance and to abandoning his sleuthing.

Tolstoy and his closest disciples were shocked when they heard, toward the end of 1893, that the exiled Khilkov's two children had been taken from him by the command of the Emperor, baptized against the will of their parents, and put in charge of their grandmother. This action also had the blessing of the Church. All the mother's pleas that her children be returned to her were unavailing. In deep sorrow, Tolstoy wrote to Khilkov to urge him and his wife, whom he pitied most of all, not to abandon the moral and religious principles by which they lived because of this misfortune. And he also wrote to the grandmother in an effort to persuade her to surrender the children to their parents. When

this failed, he wrote to the Emperor (January 1894) to plead the cause of the Khilkovs, but his request was silently ignored. The children were never released to their father and mother, and in 1901 Chertkov, when he was safely in England, wrote up the whole story in a pamphlet: *The Kidnapping of the Khilkovs' Children*.

Shortly after this outrage, Tolstoy learned of another tragedy among his followers—the death in prison of his young disciple, E.N. Drozhzhin (January 27, 1894). Tolstoy wrote to a spiritual friend that “the passing of Drozhzhin and the separation of Khilkov’s children are two of the most important events which in themselves make great moral demands on all of us.” Drozhzhin, a humble village schoolmaster, had refused to take the soldier’s oath when called up in 1891, declaring that his religious convictions made it impossible for him to learn to slay his fellow men. He was promptly clapped into solitary confinement for a year and then sent to a disciplinary battalion. When the rigours of this treatment brought about consumption, he was declared unfit for service but sentenced to nine years’ imprisonment. Chertkov visited him in prison and reported to Tolstoy about his meekness, unflinching convictions, and cheerful spirits despite the vile treatment he received from his jailors. Finally his health broke down completely under the ordeal and he died. Drozhzhin’s fate deeply impressed Tolstoy, and with a feeling of consecration he provided a moving introduction to an account of his life, written by another follower, E.I. Popov. These publications concerning the persecution of Tolstoyans, which of course could only appear abroad, provided highly effective propaganda against Russian Church and State. The government tried to neutralize this effort in 1894 by forbidding Russian journalists to quote from anything appearing in foreign newspapers about Tolstoy’s life or works.

The persecutions mounted. In 1894 Tolstoy’s follower M.V. Bulygin was sent to prison, and the next year M.A. Sopotsko<sup>1</sup> and N.T. Izyumchenko; and the quarters of Biryukov and Popov were searched by the police in the hope of discovering incriminating literature. Tolstoy did what he could to aid these victims. Whenever possible, he visited them in prison, furnished them with material comforts, and wrote encouraging letters, urging them to abide by their convictions. He found himself wishing that he were in the place of these sufferers for the faith. “I understand you,” Sopotsko wrote him from his cell, “when you desire to suffer,

<sup>1</sup> Sopotsko later returned to Orthodoxy and became a violent critic of Tolstoy.



when you say that you envy me, as you said in the Tula prison." In his letters and diary at this time sounds a persistent note of regret over his freedom, a measure of self-reproach that he was not allowed to share the misery of his persecuted disciples. Apparently he felt humiliated in being a modern Christ without a cross to bear.

Then on a summer stroll he beheld a beautiful sunset and his sadness was dissipated by the eternal miracle of nature. He jotted down in his diary: "No, this world is not a joke, and not a vale of trials or a transition to a better, everlasting world, but this world here is one of the eternal worlds that is beautiful, joyous, which we can and must make more beautiful and more joyous for those living with us and for those who will live in it after us."

Another sorrow that Tolstoy found hard to bear in 1894 was the death of his old friend Ge (June 1). Their admiration for each other's art had been nurtured by a long spiritual partnership. Ge had become the great religious painter of Tolstoyism. He worshipped the master as though he were already canonized, and his ingenuous, transparent nature, filled with gentleness and humility—"a charming, talented, ancient child," as Tolstoy described him—endeared him to all. Several months before his death he had finished his last notable canvas—"The Crucifixion." It depicted Christ on the cross with merciless, almost repugnant, realism, but at the same time suggested something of His heavenly mission on earth. The picture was first hung privately in Moscow, and Ge took Tolstoy to see it.

Their agitation [wrote Biryukov, who was present] had risen to an extreme point when Leo Nikolayevich entered the studio and halted before the picture, fixing on it his penetrating glance. N. N. Ge, unable to stand the ordeal, ran out of the studio into an anteroom. At the end of several minutes, Leo Nikolayevich came out to him and found him humbly awaiting his judgment; he stretched out his hands to him and they threw themselves into each other's arms in an embrace. Soft, restrained sobs were audible. They both wept like children, and through his tears I heard Leo Nikolayevich say: "How could you have accomplished it!"

When the canvas was first exhibited publicly in Petersburg, the President of the Academy of Art, Grand Duke Vladimir Alexandrovich, turned away from the picture in disgust, exclaiming: "It is a shambles!" Such a comment from this lofty personage was sufficient to cause the removal of the canvas. Upon learning of it,

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Tolstoy wrote a comforting letter to Ge, in which he said in part: "The removal of your picture and what they said about it are fine and instructive. In particular the words: 'It is a shambles.' These words declare to all: in order to depict an execution, that very execution which is now produced, it has to be done so that they can look at it with pleasure as at some display of flowers. Such is the astonishing fate of Christianity!"

This disappointment, however, as in the case of his picture "What Is Truth?", disheartened Ge and no doubt contributed to his death a few months later. For weeks Tolstoy's letters and diary were full of his deep grief. He described him as "one of the greatest of artists, and one who had created an epoch in art." With Tretyakov, who did not have a very high opinion of Ge's work, Tolstoy got into an acrimonious correspondence at this time in an effort to prove to this connoisseur the immortality of his dead friend's art. And in spite of his own ideas about wealth, he was not above looking around for a "rich man" who would endow a museum for the sole purpose of exhibiting all of Ge's paintings.

Ge's son sent him a full account of the death and concluded: "I have written you all these details because I believe that, although they will pain you, you will want to know fully how your truly sincere and best friend died. Father loved you as I never saw anyone love another person. Every day he read your works many times, and one may even say that his every conversation inevitably hinged on you." Tolstoy replied to thank the son for his thoughtfulness and added: "I have hardly ever experienced such a great feeling of loss as I experience now. I cannot grow accustomed to it, and several times a day I recall it and for a moment do not believe it, and the next day I again experience a feeling of loss."

Another death in 1894 (October 20), that of Alexander III, left Tolstoy with a quite different feeling. He wrote his friend N. Ya. Grot that he was "very sorry" to hear of the passing of the Tsar, just as he would be for any "man suffering and dying with a soul so grievously burdened," but that this pity did not oblige him to change his opinion about "the deplorable deeds of his reign."

### III

The government's intensification of its persecution of Tolstoy's followers may be attributed in part to the publication of his highly significant book, *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*, which first

appeared in a Russian edition in Berlin at the beginning of January, 1894. He had started it four years before, intending to write merely an article, but as the work assumed greater importance in his eyes, it took on the proportions of a full-length book.

Tolstoy's prolonged activities during the famine considerably interrupted work on *The Kingdom of God*, and more urgent literary tasks, such as the famine articles and reports, interfered. In 1891 he also finished "The First Step," a powerful plea for vegetarianism. The novelist's art employed in the horribly realistic description of the slaughter-house and its victims, material that he gathered at first hand, makes his argument almost irresistible. To a collection published in 1891 to aid the famine sufferers, he offered his charming folk tale, "The Worker Emelyan and the Empty Drum," written in 1886, and which now proved acceptable to the censor after "Tsar" in the story had been changed to "chieftain"; and in 1892 he published, in a collection of tales and verse about mothers and children, his wonderful *First Recollections*, which though entirely autobiographical possesses the exquisite artistic charm of his first printed work of fiction, *Childhood*. At the beginning of the next year appeared "The Coffee-House of Surat," which he had adapted in 1887 from J. H. Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's tale. And during the famine period he continued to work at odd moments on *Father Sergei*, *Resurrection*, and other artistic designs.

But *The Kingdom of God* absorbed most of the time he felt free to devote to writing throughout these busy years. He wrote Chertkov: "Never has any work cost me so much effort, or so it has seemed. I want to finish it, and yet I shall be sorry to part with it." Of course there was no hope of its being published in Russia. Strakhov wrote Tolstoy that the censor of foreign books declared, when *The Kingdom of God* had been submitted to him in a French translation,<sup>1</sup> that "this is the most harmful of all books that he had ever had an occasion to ban."

In this remarkable work Tolstoy carried his Christian anarchism to its ultimate development. The core of the book dealt with his theory of nonresistance to evil, which he now applied to governments. He reached the conclusion that they were all essentially immoral and existed for the advantage of the rich and powerful, persecuting the masses of mankind through their use of force in maintaining prisons, and in collecting taxes.

<sup>1</sup> A French translation of the book had appeared in France in 1893, earlier than the first Russian edition in Berlin.

Tolstoy devoted much of the first part of the book to a consideration of the criticism of the doctrine of nonresistance to evil which he had first advocated in *What I Believe* in 1884, while at the same time he paid tribute to those who had preceded him in publicly professing this belief. Many of these criticisms came from foreign countries, but some belonged to native clerical and lay writers, although *What I Believe* had been officially banned in Russia. With some humour he pointed out that even the government encouraged the refutation of a book supposed to be unknown, and arguments against it were set as themes for theological essays in the academies. All the critics, he maintained, had ignored the approach of *What I Believe*—Christ's teaching as a philosophical, moral, and social doctrine—and had persisted in regarding Christ solely as the founder of a religion of worship and personal salvation. And further, Tolstoy declared, the critics accused him of preaching moral perfection, whereas he had made it clear that every condition, according to Christ's teaching, is merely a stage on the path towards unattainable inward and outward perfection and is therefore of no significance itself; blessedness lies only in progress towards perfection. He then condemned Christian churches of all denominations for perverting the true teaching of Christ in order to maintain their power over the masses upon whom their economic existence depended. Nor did he accept the conviction of many intellectuals of that time that the real import of Christ's teaching rested in its supposed advocacy of service to all humanity. Christian teaching, said Tolstoy, had nothing in common with socialists or communists or any preachers of the universal brotherhood of man which was based on the advantageousness of such a brotherhood. For true Christian teaching had a firm and clear basis in the individual human soul, while love of humanity was only a theoretical deduction from analogy.

Tolstoy also considered the contradictions that exist between our life and our Christian consciousness. He asserted that the chief reason for all the misunderstandings was the belief that Christ's teaching could be accepted without changing our life. But recognition of this error was becoming more and more general. "Humanity has outgrown its social and governmental stages and has entered upon a new one. It knows the doctrine that should be made the basis of life, but through inertia continues to keep to the old forms of life. From this discord between the new understanding of life and its practice, a series of contradictions and sufferings results, which poisons our life and demands its alteration."

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The remainder of the book was concerned with an examination of the powers and activities of governments that enable them to prevent the masses of mankind from resolving, in favour of Christ's teaching, the contradiction that exists between their present life and their Christian consciousness. Force or violence he singled out as the chief instrument that governments employ to maintain themselves in power and the people in subjection to the un-Christian life thrust upon them. Every manifestation of governmental force was treated, but most extensively military conscription and war. The result was one of the most scathing denunciations of war ever written.

Tolstoy did not accept revolution as a way out. The violence of revolution he abhorred, and history had taught him that in such forcible changes of government the masses are the sufferers and under the new government oppression in no way lessens but sometimes even increases. There is a further danger in revolution, he declared. The one sphere of human life on which governmental power does not encroach—the domestic, economic sphere—now, “thanks to the efforts of communists and socialists, is being gradually encroached upon, so that labour and recreation, housing, dress, and food will all (if the hopes of the reformers are fulfilled) gradually be prescribed and allotted by the governments.”

The only escape from the violence and oppression of governments, Tolstoy concluded, was for all mankind to live according to the true precepts of Christ. Man must understand that “his life does not belong to himself or his family or the State but to Him who sent him into the world, and that he must therefore fulfil not the law of his personality or family or State, but the infinite law of Him from Whom he has come—and he will feel himself absolutely free from all human authorities and will even cease to regard them as able to trammel anyone.”

Nor did Tolstoy hesitate to blueprint the way of salvation for the man aroused to an understanding of true Christianity. His first precept was to remember that the only guide for a Christian's actions is to be found in the divine principle that dwells within him, which in no sense can be checked or governed by anything else. Man must not suppose that the amelioration of life would come about, as the socialists preached, by some spontaneous, violent reconstruction of society. The freedom of all men could be brought about only by the liberation of individuals separately. Every man, hearkening to the dictates of his conscience and abiding by the teaching of Christ, must quietly refuse to serve the

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government in any way: he must refuse to take an oath, to pay taxes, or to serve in the army. If he was persecuted for thus violating the law, he must not oppose violence by force. In short, Tolstoy anticipated a growing movement of civil disobedience based on the principle of nonresistance to evil, which he was convinced would eventually undermine the whole structure of government. He believed that such a forward movement of humanity towards a more conscious assimilation of the Christian conception of life already existed. This moral progress, he felt, ultimately would influence public opinion, and once such an informed public opinion gained the ascendancy, it would transform all the activity of men and bring it into accord with Christian consciousness. Then truly would the Kingdom of God on earth be achieved by every man first realizing that the Kingdom was within himself.

It is impossible in a brief analysis to suggest the persuasiveness of Tolstoy's closely reasoned argument, running over almost five hundred pages, and there is also a danger of minimizing its effectiveness, for there is hardly any refutation of the many issues he raised that he himself did not anticipate. The fault he committed in all his didactic works, that of generalizing on the basis of special conditions that existed in Russia, is everywhere in evidence in this book. There was a manifest unfairness in his failure to give credit to the democratic progress of governments of Western Europe and America, although he bluntly declared that the only difference between a despotic government and the republics of France and America was that, in the former, power was concentrated in the hands of a small number of oppressors and the violence was cruder, whereas in the latter, power was divided among a larger number of oppressors and was expressed less crudely.<sup>1</sup>

In his arraignment of the abuses of modern governments—mere Genghis Khans with telegraph wires, he described them, using a phrase of Herzen—and in his condemnation of violence and the folly of war, he struck responsive chords all over the world and exercised a tremendous influence on various reform movements. He saw clearly that the whole history of the last two thousand years had consisted essentially of an alteration of relations between the moral development of the masses and the demoralization of

<sup>1</sup> The movement today among one or two of the most democratic governments to establish peacetime military conscription would have been regarded by Tolstoy as proof positive of his contention that they have no more essential regard for Christian conscience than the most autocratic governments.

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governments. He placed his faith in this moral development of the masses as a final answer to the universal oppression of the many by the few; progressive forces today tend to seek an answer in the organized political and material development of the masses. Tolstoy's critical thought directed against nineteenth-century political, economic, and social institutions was entirely in the tradition of progressive critical thought that came after him. His extreme views on the complete abolition of property, the outlawing of war, the establishment of universal peace, and the economic self-sufficiency of the masses have been reflected in the more temperate thinking later on the need of public ownership of utilities, international disarmament, world peace through a United Nations organization, and universal economic democracy.

### IV

The year 1894, which had brought death and persecution to his followers, had begun pleasantly enough for Tolstoy with a merry party at the family's Moscow house. While the grown-ups were seated around the tea table on the evening of New Year's Day the children suddenly dashed into the room to announce the arrival of masked visitors. Figures made up as Rubinstein, Repin, Solovyov, and other distinguished friends of the family filed in. One of the maskers, the actor Lopatin, perfectly represented Tolstoy, dressed in the dark grey blouse and striking the characteristic pose, with his hands stuck in his belt. When he approached Tolstoy, shaking hands with him and wishing him health, the delighted company roared with laughter, and Tolstoy louder than any.

He was always ready for a frolic of this sort. If only the family did not spend money so and occupy itself with the idle pleasures of the well-to-do—pleasures that any family on the same social level enjoyed. As usual the diary soon testified to his disgust with the "empty, sumptuous, deceitful Moscow life," and before January ended he went off with Tanya to visit the country homes of his sons, Ilya and Sergei. The "slave" labour that Ilya employed on his estate, however, revolted his father, who wrote bitterly about it to his son Leo, who was in France at that time for reasons of health.

At the urgent request of Chertkov, whose wife was severely ill, Tolstoy and his daughter Masha visited them at Rzhevsk during the last week in March. Biryukov also arrived for this occasion. Here was a holy gathering of the faithful. The presence of the

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master, like a miracle, seemed daily to improve the health of Chertkov's wife. In a radiant mood he wrote to Sonya: "I am very glad that I came; he, indeed they, are so sincerely glad, for we are so close spiritually, have so many interests in common, and see each other so rarely, that it is fine for both of us."

Back in Moscow Tolstoy received a letter, requesting him to express an opinion on Esperanto. He obliged at some length, perceiving in a universal language an instrument for more readily spreading the gospel of God. Whether Esperanto was the desired medium, he modestly declared his incompetence to say, but he did admit to learning to read the language in two hours, testimony that the Esperanto advocates fully exploited.

In the meantime, Tolstoy had resumed his literary activities. In 1893, shortly after concluding his extensive labours on *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*, he wrote an essay, "Non-Acting," inspired by the contrast between a speech delivered by Zola and a letter written to a French newspaper by Dumas. Zola counselled the young generation to put their faith in science. Dumas criticized the youth for their failings and urged them to apply to life the law of brotherly love. Naturally Tolstoy dismissed Zola's advice as dangerous and stupid (he never had any use for his novels either), and supported Dumas's advice by pleading with the young to organize their life in conformity with their consciences. Irritated by an unsatisfactory French rendering of this essay that appeared, he translated it into French himself, rearranging it in the process. He had an excellent command of French and a real feeling for the language.

Tolstoy's last completed work in 1893 had been a long and dry essay, "Religion and Morality," intended as an answer to two questions put to him by a German Ethical Culture Society: What did he understand by the word "religion"; and: Was it possible to have a morality independent of religion in the sense that he understood the word? After an extensive investigation of all aspects of the questions, he provided the following answers: "Religion is a certain relation established by man between his separate personality and the infinite universe or its Source. And morality is the ever-present guide to life which results from that relation." He wrote to his friend Charles A. Salomon, French industrialist and social thinker, who wished to publish a translation of this essay in the *Revue Chrétienne*, to ask him not to do so: "I fear everything that bears the name 'Christian.'" It is interesting



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to note also that since Tolstoy had publicly renounced the copyrights of his works written after 1881, certain foreign publishers took advantage of this fact to advertise themselves as having exclusive rights to his productions, and he asked Salomon at this time to insert in the French papers his original declaration on the copyrights, and to add that no firm had exclusive rights to his works.

During 1894 Tolstoy worked at a variety of compositions, but the most extensive and best known is a long essay, *Christianity and Patriotism*. In this he set down in condensed form the arguments he had elaborated in *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*. It lacks the spiritual intensity of the longer work, but begins with a keen and often amusing account of the manufactured patriotic enthusiasm that gripped Russia and France on the occasion of the visits of the respective fleets of these countries to Kronstadt and Toulon.

In answer to Baroness A. G. Rosen, who requested light on certain religious questions, Tolstoy wrote another epistolary article, "Reason and Religion." The whole purpose of this essay was to show that man had received direct from God only one instrument wherewith to know himself and his relation to the universe—reason, and that therefore it was entirely proper for man to exert the whole strength of his mind to elucidate for himself the religious foundations on which he rested. Here we have Tolstoy, the rationalist, protesting against mysticism or revelation of any sort, a protest that worried certain of his mystically minded disciples.

A brilliant piece of literary criticism that he completed in 1894 was an introductory essay to a translated collection of Guy de Maupassant's tales, which he had also helped to select. For some time now he had been interested in Maupassant and had translated two of his stories. It was an interest that surprised and even shocked some of his followers. For a time he stoutly defended his judgement, placing Maupassant next to Victor Hugo as one of the best writers of the age. Many judge him wrongly, he declared, for he perfectly understood and explained the whole negative side of the relations of the sexes. Although he admitted that Maupassant approached this theme incorrectly at first, Tolstoy maintained that in his later tales he described the sufferings and spiritual torment born of base relations with women as no other writer had done.

The longer Tolstoy worked at his task, however, the more disillusioned he became with the subject. To his son Leo, who had been joined in Paris by his sister Tanya, he wrote: "I am working over the introduction to Maupassant. The wretches have announced

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that whoever buys the second volume of Maupassant will have Tolstoy's article on Maupassant,<sup>1</sup> and now I must present the article or be scolded. But Maupassant's moral filth has become repugnant to me, and I have thrown away my first introduction and begun to write a new one, in which I wish to say what I think about art, but as yet I have not been able to express it."<sup>2</sup>

### V

The summer of 1894 at Yasnaya Polyana was crowded with activity. Tolstoy had scarcely got settled in the country when an American visitor arrived, Ernest H. Crosby. A few days before, he had turned up at the Moscow house, looking for him, and Sonya hurried off a letter to her husband to say: "How did you like Mr. Crosby? I was in raptures over him. Intelligent, refined, educated, and well-bred. Besides, he has a fine appearance and is very serious." This was the kind of disciple she could relish. Tolstoy replied rather dryly: "Crosby, like all Americans, is proper, not stupid, but all show."

As a man of means Crosby had successfully entered New York politics and subsequently had accepted an appointment as judge of the Mixed Courts in Egypt. A French translation of Tolstoy's *On Life* had fallen into his hands at Alexandria and filled him with utter dissatisfaction with his comfortable way of life. After writing Tolstoy, he came, like some prodigal son, seeking advice from the master on how to redeem his past and live in the future according to the teaching of Christ. Tolstoy, doubting his sincerity at first, urged him to support the work of Henry George upon his return to America. Somewhat to Tolstoy's surprise, Crosby followed his advice, lectured up and down America, founded the League for Social Reform, and wrote, among other things, three volumes of poetry dedicated to the Tolstoyan way of life. Tolstoy regretted Crosby's use of verse as a medium of expression, but he soon grew proud of his new disciple and saw to it that the *Intermediary* published his books in Russian translation.

Tolstoy's powerful, far-ranging mind provided family and guests with a liberal education. Since he had become a world figure the

<sup>1</sup> The publisher had advertised this fact in the first volume of the tales.

<sup>2</sup> In 1894 Tolstoy also wrote an introduction to the translation of A. F. Amiel's *Journal intime*, and he translated Mazzini's *Letter on Immortality* and a Buddhist tale, *Karma*, to which he wrote a foreword; and he also wrote an introduction for the tales of the peasant writer, S. T. Semyonov.

press of the world came to his house, and although he had lost none of his contempt for journalism, he now read a large variety of newspapers. Guests requested his opinions on all manner of daily happenings reported in the press, from a local murder to Chicago labour troubles, and rarely did they find him uninformed. There was never anything hackneyed about his judgements of what he read, but what struck his listeners most was his extraordinary ability to illustrate his points by endless references to scenes and characters in the works and by extensive quotations. He was a born teacher, and the instinct was so strong in him that his replies to questions seemed naturally to take the form of lectures. Though sometimes long, they were never dull, for his intellect moved over the material like a lambent flame, always illuminating the dark corners with original thought. Apparently he made a practice, if he were interested in a writer, of reading and even rereading everything he ever wrote: He had recently reread all of Rousseau and had gone through the whole forty-two volumes of Goethe, whom he did not particularly like.

Often, it seems, his antipathy to running with the herd led him to make quixotic and extravagant statements. He had a horror of conventional judgements, and at times one can detect deliberate wrongheadedness instead of the wisdom of genius in his opinions. In a discussion with Strakhov, who visited that summer, on the poetry of Fet, Tolstoy declared: "I do not understand or like poetry; it is a kind of riddle for which elucidation is always required." In a conversation with the young tutor V. F. Lazurski, he maintained, contrary to all generally accepted opinion, that the Russian poet Tyutchev was greater than Pushkin. The strength of Pushkin, he said, "is in his lyrics and principally in his prose. His longer poems are trash and worth nothing." Perhaps this preference for prose led him to declare to the tutor that "he could not endure" Shakespeare, though he admitted that the English poet had the saving grace of "flying high," and Carlyle he did not like because he knew in advance what he was going to say.

In social and scientific judgements he also startled his guests. He flatly told a couple of medical students who visited him that the newfangled notions about heredity were all nonsense, and he declared that he had compiled statistical tables to prove that inoculation for rabies was not a preventative. Such opinions he formulated a priori. He reasoned thus: "If the fathers sinned, does it therefore follow that the children will pay for them? Obviously,

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no. Accordingly, it is unreasonable to affirm that the descendants of drunkards will be epileptics, etc.”

One evening, while joking with the young ladies about marriage, Tolstoy mildly reproved them for the casualness with which they talked about this subject, although he insisted that he did not condemn the modern girl for her frankness. “But the young people trouble me,” he added. “Take even my own sons. When I was a youth, I was in all respects more brilliant than they, but it seemed to me that not a single woman would want to marry me. But my sons so conduct themselves that they have merely to crook a finger and all the women run after them.”

In July, Charles E. Turner, lecturer in the English language at the University of Petersburg, visited Tolstoy to talk about translating *Christianity and Patriotism* into English. Besides translating his works, he had lectured in England on Tolstoy as an artist and thinker. He told Lazurski: “Tolstoy has done more to popularize Russian literature among the English than all your writers put together. In his works there is a purposefulness and a religious interest that the English like.” A quite different visitor that summer was an American rabbi, Joseph Krauskopf, bearing a letter of recommendation from the American ambassador to Russia, Andrew D. White. He hoped to obtain Tolstoy’s aid in establishing a Jewish agricultural colony. As Krauskopf wrote later, after he returned to America, he felt ashamed of his fashionable attire in the presence of this great man dressed so plainly and whom he saw working in the fields like any peasant. (Perhaps with his tongue in his cheek, Tolstoy invited the elegantly attired rabbi to lend a hand with the mowing.) Although Krauskopf sympathized with many of Tolstoy’s views, he made it clear that he thought teaching nonresistance to evil a bit unreasonable.

In August, another visitor from America, the widow of a journalist, brought Tolstoy regards from Henry George and a collection of his books and articles. Tolstoy was delighted and eagerly began to read these new works of George.<sup>1</sup> “Once again,” he wrote in his diary, “I have become keenly conscious of the sin of possessing land.” And the time had come, he noted, to write a new *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* on land slavery. A little later he wrote the American woman who had brought him this literary feast to convey his thanks to Henry George who “has laid a durable foundation

<sup>1</sup> He read at this time George’s *The Perplexed Philosopher*, *The Land Question*, and *Free Trade*.

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for the building of a future economic structure," and whose name "humanity will always remember with gratefulness and esteem."

Tolstoy saw clearly that the land hunger of the peasants was a festering sore in the economic body of Russia. The time will come, he told Lazurski that summer, when "there will be no private property in land." He never regarded Henry George's system of a single tax on land as anything other than a compromise. It found favour in his eyes because it involved no seizure by violence. He entertained the hope that the Tsar by proclamation, as in the case of the emancipation of the serfs, might make the land common property. He wrote to Crosby this year, shortly after the death of Alexander III: "If the new tsar should ask me what I would advise him to do, I would say to him: 'Use your unlimited power to abolish private property in land in Russia and establish a system of single tax, and then renounce your power and give the people freedom to govern themselves.'" One thing that worried him, however, was that the single tax on the land, according to Henry George, would have to be collected by the government, and the government was based on violence. But Tolstoy was willing to accept this ill on the theory that there was no other way out in the existing circumstances, and that in the end the greater good of the greater number would be served.

It is interesting to observe that a small experiment in applying Henry George's solution was tried by Tolstoy. During this summer his daughter Tanya received the first income from the property at Ovsyannikovo that had fallen to her lot in the recent family division. As she watched one of her peasant tenants untie her soiled knotted handkerchief and with gnarled fingers count out the rubles and kopeks, she felt deeply distressed, no doubt under the influence of her father's teaching, at taking this money earned by heavy toil on land that belonged to her. She could not conceal her feelings from her father, and she was much relieved when he proposed to her that the land should be given to the peasants for their use, for which they would agree to pay a nominal rent or tax. This rent should then go into a general fund that the peasants would use for communal purposes on the basis of decisions made at meetings of the commune. Tolstoy and his daughter went to near-by Ovsyannikovo, and he explained the whole proposal to the peasants.<sup>1</sup> The peasants were much pleased with the arrangement and, as Tanya expressed

<sup>1</sup> Tolstoy's conversation with the peasants about Henry George on this occasion served as material for Nekhlyudov's conversation with the peasants in *Resurrection*.

it, a burden fell from her soul. Things went well for several years, but in the end, when the peasants assured themselves that she was not going to demand the former full rent for the land and did not even attempt to control the sums they paid into the communal fund, they ceased to pay anything and even began to speculate in the land, obtaining it for nothing and leasing it to their neighbours. This experiment ought to have convinced Tolstoy that some form of strict control, governmental or otherwise, was necessary to assure the success of any such reform.

One of the significant changes in life at Yasnaya Polyana during the summer of 1894 was the fact that the Chertkovs had hired a house in the near-by village of Dyomenka. Chertkov had written Tolstoy that spring that he would very much like to be near him during the summer and asked him to locate a desirable place. Tolstoy was delighted, but when Sonya learned of the plan she objected: she feared the competition for her husband's leisure time if Chertkov were close by. Tolstoy frankly wrote him: "If you ask me: does she want you to come, I must say, no; but if you ask: do I think you ought to come, then I think, yes. As I told her and now tell you: if there is any ill-feeling between you, then you both ought to try with all your strength to replace it with love."

Chertkov decided to come, and, as Sonya feared, her husband made frequent trips to the little village, less than four miles away, where his spiritual brother was living. Perhaps Sonya was secretly pleased when Chertkov decided in August that, owing to ill-health, the air of his native province of Voronezh would be more salutary, and he left. After the departure Tolstoy noted in his diary that he was "lonely" without the Chertkovs: "I love them, and him especially, very much."

The "dark" brethren poisoned the air for Sonya that summer. She wrote to her sister who had come to Yasnaya Polyana for only a few days: "Without you, the only visitors, as might have been foreseen, are the 'dark' ones. They are so repulsive to me that at times I want to use a pistol on them or feed them arsenic. Pharisees, cheats, dissimulators with harmful ideas, nothing more!" One of the "pharisees" was Gorbunov-Posadov who proposed that a manuscript periodical be issued, composed of the best things bearing on the new faith to be found in the many letters, articles, and books sent to Tolstoy. And twelve issues of this typed periodical, known as the *Archives of Leo Nikolayevich Tolstoy*, appeared between 1894 and 1896.

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A new and important convert who came in August was Dr. Dushan Makovitski, a Slovak. He had read Tolstoy's religious and moral works while still a medical student in Prague, and had become a convinced follower. Tolstoy was pleased to learn from him that members of the Nazarene sect in Austria, believing in nonviolence, refused to serve in the army and were undergoing persecution. A subdued, soft, gentle person, Makovitski endeared himself to Tolstoy.

After the death of Alexander III, Tolstoy shared the hopes of millions in Russia that the new Tsar, Nicholas II, would give the country a constitution, or at least bring about some badly needed reforms. The manifesto he issued upon his accession to the throne, however, reaffirmed all the reactionary traditions of autocracy. Tolstoy indignantly said to Sonya: "In general, in the change of reigns the same old hypocrisy that has existed is still more in evidence; it is painful and terrible to see. The manifesto, however, is exceptionally indecent: 'Mighty Russia is infinitely devoted to us.'" Sonya took alarm and in her next letter begged him not to write anything "for the English, American, or other foreign newspapers concerning the new reign." The Russian press, of course, would have taken nothing critical from him on this subject. Perhaps the only answer he cared to give to this was a note in his diary, written shortly after returning to Moscow for the winter: "What insanity and baseness on the occasion of the death of the old and the accession of the new tsar."

## VI

At the conclusion of the famine relief work there also ended the happy and reconciling feeling in husband and wife that had resulted from their mutual efforts in this cause. During 1894 nothing occurred to divert the tense undercurrent of unpleasant relations. Every so often, when this undercurrent would come to the surface, the whole family would suffer. Sonya lived in the fast-fading happiness of their early married life, her husband in the present family existence that prevented him from serving God as he wished. With masculine unfairness he posed the problem to himself in his diary; he wrote that if the views of husband and wife on the world and life did not agree, then it was necessary for the "one who thought less to submit to the one who thought more. How happy I would be to submit to Sonya, but this is really as impossible as for a goose to climb back into its own egg. She ought

to submit, but she does not want to—there is no intelligence, no humility, and no love.”

About this time Tolstoy began to make Sonya's unhappy mistake of confiding his domestic troubles to outsiders, although he never became as indiscriminate as his wife in this respect. For some time, of course, he had made a confidant of Chertkov, but now the “dark people” were often witnesses of family quarrels, for their very visits provoked Sonya's anger. In August 1894, Tolstoy sent Khilkov in exile a letter that must have been inspired by suffering and great exasperation. “My God!” he wrote. “I say to myself how many times have I thought how glad I would be to submit in order to escape this hell of dissension, and to free the children from it. I am ready for everything, for every torment, humiliation—anything is better than this hell.”

An entry in Sonya's diary perhaps reflects the quarrel that provoked Tolstoy's letter. She wrote: “My husband, long since having drifted away from me and having thrown on my shoulders everything, everything without exception: children, the estate, business affairs, the house and books, yet he continues to despise me with his egotistical and critical indifference.” She blamed him both for his lack of interest in the children and for the influence of his ideas on them. At times she positively hated Masha, who had completely accepted her father's Christian way of life. And now she began to complain that he and his followers were “tearing” Tanya away from her.

Family cares and her unhappy relations with her husband were severely taxing Sonya's strength. Her diary and letters showed increasing evidence of extravagant grief and a kind of unreasoning excitation that bordered on hysteria, failings that had been latent since youth. And to these difficulties were now added the psychic disturbances that come with a woman's change of life. During the last three years, she had been complaining of what she called a “periodic madness,” an abnormal mental and physical condition that occurred every autumn. Towards the end of the summer, 1894, she wrote her sister Tanya: “About myself I can only say that I feel as though a stone pressed on my breast, and this continues day and night. I simply have no strength. I was alone this evening (indeed, Lyovochka is never around; he is either writing, sleeping, walking, or visiting the Chertkovs in the evening), and I was filled with such anguish that I at once remembered you and merely wanted to cry out: “Tanya, Tanya!””



## Chapter XXX

### THE DEATH OF VANICHKA

**I**N JANUARY 1895, Tolstoy accepted Prince D. L. Shakhovskoi's invitation to attend a private gathering of Moscow liberals, led by P. N. Milyukov. The purpose was to protest the recent speech of the new Tsar before representatives of the nobility and county councils, in which he had frankly dismissed as "senseless dreams" their hopes for reforms, and at the same time he declared his intention of preserving the autocratic rule of Russia as firmly and uncompromisingly as his father had done. At the meeting, Tolstoy shared the indignation of the liberals, but he hesitated to take part in any organized protest, for he was convinced that his Christian-anarchist views would undermine the effectiveness of such an appeal to the public if his name were attached to it.

In his diary, however, Tolstoy recorded his fear that the Tsar's "arrogant speech" might well hold serious consequences for him. Abroad, the publication of *The Kingdom of God* had already begun to exercise some influence. He heard at this time from Makovitski that another disciple, A. Shkarvan, a Slovak army doctor, had been imprisoned in Hungary for refusing to serve and that the case had aroused much public feeling against the authorities. Tolstoy wrote Makovitski that whenever he learned of such cases, "then I always experience a very powerful mixed feeling of fear, triumph, compassion, and joy." At about the same time he received from America a notification that he had been elected an honorary vice-president of the International Society of Writers; he must have wondered at such a reward to one whose exercise of authorship seemed to be contributing largely to the persecution of people.

While visiting the Olsufyevs in January, Tolstoy finished a story, "Master and Man," which he had begun the previous year. It struck him as a significant event, for he had not managed to complete a purely artistic work now for some time. He sent the manuscript

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to Strakhov for his opinion, and asked him, if he found the story satisfactory, to submit it to the periodical, *Northern Messenger*. "It is so long since I have written anything artistic," he declared in the accompanying letter, "that I truly do not know whether it ought to be printed. I wrote it with great satisfaction, but as to its printing—I do not know." Soon Strakhov sent him corrected proofs and a letter in which he wrote: "My God! how splendid, priceless it is, Leo Nikolayevich!" Then followed detailed praise of certain features and some minor criticism. Tolstoy returned the proofs to him so reworked as to be almost unreadable and requested a second set. "In your appreciation," he wrote, "I observe a note of disapproval. Please write more sharply everything you have to say about this tale, just as though you were saying it to someone else. I am interested to know whether or not my powers are slipping. And if they are, then I will not be much afflicted, no more so than I would be to discover that I am unable to run as fast now as I could 40 years ago."

Tolstoy's artistic powers had in no sense diminished, for "Master and Man" is written with his old superb command over his chosen medium. It is a story of the victory of unselfishness over death: The master and his servant are overtaken by a snowstorm and lose their way. Well-clad and fed, the master lies on the almost frozen body of the servant and saves his life. When they are dug out of a snowdrift the next morning, it is the master who is found dead, his last moments gladdened by unselfish sacrifice. "Master and Man" appeared in the March number of the *Northern Messenger*, but its publication caused such a family quarrel that Tolstoy regretted ever having written it.

## II

The year 1895 had begun badly with a domestic quarrel over a photograph. Chertkov, while visiting the family in Moscow, persuaded Tolstoy to be photographed with himself and four more close disciples.<sup>1</sup> Sonya was infuriated. "School groups, picnic parties, institutions, etc., have their pictures taken," she wrote in her diary. "So now the Tolstoyans have become an *institution*. The public would lap it up and rush to buy *Tolstoy with His Disciples*. What a joke it would be! But I won't have Leo Nikolayevich dragged from his pedestal into the mud like this." She

<sup>1</sup> P. I. Biryukov, E. I. Popov, I. M. Tregubov, and I. I. Gorbunov-Posadov.

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procured the negatives from the photographer, tried unsuccessfully to cut out her husband's face with a diamond earring, and then destroyed the plates.

The disciples were deeply hurt, and insult was added to injury when they learned that Tanya and Masha, whom they regarded almost as spiritual sisters, had supported their mother's protest. The clear implication was that Tolstoy's followers were unworthy of being photographed with the master. Chertkov felt the wound most keenly. Tolstoy entered in his diary: "The story of the photograph is very sad. They are all offended." He tried to make his daughters see their offence, and he wrote Chertkov a humble letter to apologize for the attitude of his family. But that rigidly righteous disciple long remained in an unforgiving mood, especially towards Tolstoy's daughters, although they both tried to make amends. Such a trifling incident, however, served to widen the chasm between the family and the "dark people" and increased the daily anguish of Tolstoy in his search for spiritual harmony.

Sonya had just complaints to make of some of the dark brethren. One of them, P. G. Khokhlov, always shabby and covered with lice, had designs on Tanya and took to rousing the household at four o'clock in the morning to urge his proposal of marriage. Fortunately for all concerned, his pursuit soon ended, for he was committed to an insane asylum. This madman's behaviour prompted the following entry in Sonya's diary: "It is strange! Only people morbidly wrenched from ordinary life—weak and stupid people—throw themselves into Leo Nikolayevich's teaching, and they are doomed to perish one way or another. I fear that whenever I begin to write my diary, I fall into the habit of condemning Leo Nikolayevich. But I cannot help complaining, because all the things he preaches for the happiness of people complicate life so much that it becomes more and more difficult for me to live. His vegetarianism means having to cook a double dinner, which causes more expense and more work for people. His sermons on love and the good have resulted in indifference to his family and the intrusion of all kinds of rabble into our circle. His repudiation (verbal) of worldly goods is responsible for this condemnation and criticism."

Throughout January and most of February of 1895 similar criticisms of her husband appeared in Sonya's diary with increasing frequency, obviously leading up to another of her hysterical outbursts. With a curiosity born of morbid jealousy, she read over

again the love letters that he had written to Valerya Arsenev almost forty years ago. But among her criticisms are interspersed occasional notes of felicity and love. "My relations with Lyovochka are fine and *passionate*." He brought her "two lovely apples" when she was ill. A feeling of "tenderness and stupid sentimentality" came over her. "I planted the pips to commemorate his unusual kindness to me," she jotted down in her diary. "Will I ever see the pips sprout?" Then the outburst came.

The immediate cause of it all was the publication of "Master and Man." Three years before the attractive editor of the *Northern Messenger*, Lyubov Gurevich—"that scheming, half-Jewess," as Sonya called her—had visited Tolstoy at Yasnaya Polyana. He had liked her and agreed to give her something for her magazine. When he finished "Master and Man," he instructed Strakhov to submit it to the *Northern Messenger* for publication, of course not taking any money for the story. Sonya wanted it for a supplement to the thirteenth volume of her edition. Tolstoy agreed to give her the story, and he also intended to give it to the *Intermediary* for separate publication. But her haste to obtain a copy of the manuscript so that she might publish it before or at least simultaneously with the others angered him.

One evening harsh words were exchanged on this subject, and in a fury Tolstoy ran up to his room, declaring that he would leave the house forever. The thought flashed through Sonya's mind that he wanted to abandon her for Lyubov Gurevich. Determined to leave the house before him, she dashed out into the snow-covered street, although she was clad only in slippers and a dressing-gown. With a dressing-gown thrown over his drawers and waistcoat, Tolstoy ran after her, begging her to return. She kept screaming: "Let them take me to the police station or a lunatic asylum!" He finally managed to drag her back home.

The next day the quarrel broke out again, and she left the house, determined to lose herself in the woods or in the Sparrow Hills outside of Moscow and freeze to death, like the master in the story that had caused all this anguish. Masha followed and succeeded in persuading her to return. Another attempt two days later to run away was frustrated by the children. The immediate result of these adventures in the freezing, snowy streets was a severe cold. As she lay ill in her room, weeping bitterly, her husband entered, knelt down, and asked her forgiveness. "If only a drop of the love that was in him then could always remain, I might still be happy,"

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she wrote. Calm descended on the household once again, and "Master and Man" was given to Sonya for her edition. She ended the account of this whole painful incident in her diary by writing: "I'm correcting the proof with joy in my heart and perceive with emotion the artistic greatness of the work. At times my eyes fill with tears of happiness over it."

Two days later (February 23) Sonya set down the following brief entry: "My dear Vanichka died at 11 o'clock at night. My God! to think that I am still alive!" More than two years passed before she resumed her diary.

### III

Vanichka, the last child of the Tolstoys, died at the age of seven from scarlet fever. According to many accounts, he was an unusual youngster. Of all the children he looked most like his father: he had the same bright, pensive eyes and the same earnest spirit. His whole appearance conveyed the impression of transparency. The thin little body, pale face, and long curly hair were offset by a radiant nature. His extraordinary sensitivity recalled this quality in Tolstoy as a child. Vanichka was always anxious for everyone's happiness, and he expressed his joy by freely giving away his prized possessions. With an understanding exceptional for his tender years, he would surprise grown-ups by talking quite intelligently on abstract and spiritual themes. All who came in contact with him were charmed by his joyous nature, a fact reflected in the many tributes sent to the family at his death. He was obviously the apple of his parents' eye.

Sonya's grief over the death of this child of her old age drove her to the edge of madness. Her extreme devotion seemed psychologically unnatural in the light of the many children she had borne and raised. After quarrels with the older children or her husband, she took refuge in her affection for Vanichka, an affection that he always responded to with almost mature understanding and sympathy. There had hardly been an entry in her diary or a letter to her husband over the last few years in which her endless concern for Vanichka had not been expressed. And time and again she sounded a note of foreboding that he would be taken from her, not simply because of his uncertain health, but because of a superstitious fear she nourished that so exceptional a child must inevitably die young. In her more despondent moods, Vanichka seemed to be the only reason for continuing to live. "I stagger from corner to corner

and weep like an insane person," she wrote her sister Tanya after the funeral. "Can one live for long with such suffering? Everything, everything has gone out of me, and what is more terrible is the fact that, though eight children still remain, I feel myself entirely alone with my grief and cannot enter into their existence, although they are very kind and affectionate to me. Life seems suddenly to have ended."

The boy's death affected his father in a different way. Tolstoy loved this child. "I somehow dreamed that Vanichka would continue after me the work of God," he told Sonya. And in the letter to her sister, she wrote: "Lyovochka has grown quite stooped and old; he wanders about with a sad look in his bright eyes, and it is clear that the last shining light of his old age has vanished. On the third day after Vanichka's death he sat sobbing and said: 'For the first time in my life I have utterly lost heart.' It was painful to look at him, simply terrible! This sorrow has crushed him." Sonya also described how, on the way to the funeral, he tried to comfort her by recalling that he used to go along this very road to Pokrovskoye to court her as a girl.

Sonya's extreme anguish intensified her husband's grief. But quite characteristically he soon came to accept the death of his favourite child as the will of God and therefore a good. Shortly after the funeral he wrote in his diary: "They have buried Vanichka. It is terrible. No, it is not terrible, it is a great spiritual event. I thank Thee, Father. I thank Thee." He wrote Chertkov and Strakhov that the loss of one so dear to him was compensated by the spiritual ecstasy he experienced, and he compared his reaction to that which he had undergone at the death of his beloved brother Nikolai many years ago. More important for him: he cherished the hope that this family tragedy would reveal the path of truth to his wife and at last unite them spiritually in their declining years.

Their relations became warm and close after Vanichka's death. Like a spiritual father he watched tenderly over Sonya to detect the slightest religious change in her, and he joyously announced these symptoms and his hopes to disciples. "Especially during the first few days," he wrote to Chertkov, "I was blinded by the beauty of her soul revealed as a consequence of this loss." And in his diary he wrote: "The pain of bereavement at once freed her from all that darkened her spirit. It was as if the doors had been rent asunder and laid bare that divine essence of love that exists in our souls."

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Shortly after Vanichka's death, Tolstoy wrote a touching letter to Granny about their loss and his wife's grief. He said in part: "Sonya's physical illness, it seems, is not dangerous or severe, but her spiritual illness is very grievous, although it seems to me not only not dangerous, but salutary and happy, as childbirth, or as the resurrection of her spiritual life. Her grief is overwhelming. She had been saved from everything painful, incomprehensible, vaguely disquieting to her in this passionate and reciprocated love for a child whose mind was really endowed with more than ordinary gifts. He was one of those children God sends into this world too early, a world not yet ready to receive them, like swallows that come too soon and are frozen. And now he has been taken from her, and despite her motherhood, nothing seems left to her in this world. In spite of herself, she has to ascend into another and spiritual world where she never lived before. And it is amazing how motherhood has served to keep her pure and receptive to spiritual truth. I am much impressed by her spiritual purity, especially by her humility." And he concluded his letter: "We never before felt so near to each other as now, and never before, neither in Sonya nor in myself, have I felt such a need for love and such a revulsion for every element of disunion and evil. I never loved Sonya as I do now."

### IV

Despite his eagerness to leave the city for the country when spring came, Tolstoy remained in Moscow longer than usual in 1895 out of consideration for his grieving wife, who was repelled by the thought of Yasnaya Polyana, with every nook and cranny of the place associated with memories of Vanichka. At one point he considered taking Sonya abroad, but there was reason to suppose that the government might not allow him to return to Russia and hence the idea was abandoned. She obtained a brief change of scene in April, however, by going to Kiev with her sister.

Tolstoy idled away the time in Moscow. He listed in his diary no less than nine separate artistic works that he had actually begun or outlined over the last few years and which he now wished to finish, but he was unable to concentrate his efforts on any of them in the city. Was he growing old, he wondered? It is significant that at this time (March 27) he drafted a will in his diary, in which he asked that he be buried in an inexpensive coffin without flowers, speeches,

or the presence of priests; that nothing be printed in the newspapers about his death; that his manuscripts be turned over to his wife, Chertkov, and Strakhov, with instructions to select from them and print only those things which would prove useful to people; and finally, he expressed the wish that his heirs should renounce their rights to all his works.

To Chertkov, Tolstoy wrote that he felt he was undergoing a change in life. "Vanichka helps me much, very much in this, and his influence, thank God, has not yet been effaced." And in the same letter he remarked that he was learning to ride a bicycle, a practice in which he became quite proficient.

Tolstoy had hoped that the urge to write would return at Yasnaya Polyana, and he did manage to complete the first draft of *Resurrection*, on which he had been working, off and on, for seven years, but he was thoroughly dissatisfied with it. He found time to write one of his epistolary articles, this one to a Pole, in which he refused to accept his correspondent's contention that the patriotism of an oppressed people was justifiable and laudable, although he sympathized with the cause of Poland. At the end of the summer he also wrote a kind of homily in the form of a long letter to his sixteen-year-old son, Mikhail, whose behaviour worried him. In it he pointed out the temptations of youth and tried to lead him into the path of Christian goodness.

Many interruptions that summer interfered with Tolstoy's literary efforts. His eldest son, Sergei, married,<sup>1</sup> a union that he regarded with fear and joy. Of the various visitors, the most distinguished was Chekhov, who met Tolstoy for the first time in August at Yasnaya Polyana. His tales had already made an impression on Tolstoy, and he wrote to his son Leo of the visit: "Chekhov was with us and I liked him very much. He is very talented and he must have a good heart, but so far he has given no evidence of possessing a definite point of view."

The event that now thoroughly stirred Tolstoy and the "dark people" was news of the persecution of the Dukhobors. This sect, like a number of small peasant sects of ancient Russia, had long subscribed to precepts that resembled those of Tolstoy's teaching. Since 1844 the Dukhobors had been settled in the Caucasus. For some time they had paid only lip service to their pure Christian principles and had also developed a theocratic despotism

<sup>1</sup> He married (July 10, 1895) Marya Konstantinovna Rachinski, who died in 1900.



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which had resulted in a schism—facts which were not well understood by Tolstoy and his followers at this time. The sect had split over the claim to leadership of Peter Verigin, whom his adherents believed to be the incarnation of the Deity. When these simple people called in government authorities to settle the dispute, they decided in favour of the opponents of Verigin and exiled him to a small town in the province of Archangel in 1887.

While in exile Verigin learned of Tolstoy's teaching and read his writings. Perceiving the similarity of this teaching to the early Dukhobor doctrines, and perhaps seeing that he had a weapon here to use against the government that persecuted him, he instructed his followers, through secret emissaries among them who kept in constant touch with him, to practise non-resistance to violence, to share all things in common, to preserve chastity, to refuse to serve in the army, to abstain from intoxicants, and to become vegetarians. For the Dukhobors who believed in him, this was a command from God, and thousands literally attempted to obey, although many fell by the wayside.

A clash with the authorities was inevitable. This was not the case of an occasional Tolstoyan opposing military conscription, but of whole communities refusing to serve in the army. The government grew alarmed. The Dukhobors even dramatically challenged the government. On the name day of Peter Verigin (June 29, 1895) three communities of Dukhobors, following the instructions of their exiled leader, ceremoniously burned their weapons as a protest against violence, accompanying the act with much psalm-singing. This was regarded as open rebellion by the authorities. A force of Cossacks descended upon the Dukhobors, beat them cruelly, killed four, imprisoned their chief men, and scattered four thousand of them in remote mountain villages.

Tolstoy soon learned of the persecution of the Dukhobors from his exiled disciple in the Caucasus, Khilkov, and he was deeply shocked. Not knowing much about the sect or its recent trials, he encouraged Biryukov that summer to go to the Caucasus and investigate on the spot. Upon his return he wrote a detailed report, which Tolstoy reworked and to which he added an introduction and a conclusion. The article was at once dispatched to England and appeared (October 23) in the London *Times*, under the title "The Persecution of Christians in Russia in 1895." In it the pure Christian practices of the Dukhobors were emphasized and the cruelty with which they had been treated by the government was exposed.

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When the article came to the attention of Church and government officials in Russia, they were vastly annoyed. What they hoped might remain a local Caucasian disturbance had suddenly been given international publicity, and the brutal actions of the Tsar's troops against a peaceful peasant sect had been held up to world censure. Worse still, they saw the hand of Tolstoy in all this and knew that he would not be likely to let the matter rest with a single article. Pobedonostsev at once sent a report on the matter to Nicholas II. It was decided to remove Verigin to Obdorsk in Northern Siberia, a more inaccessible spot, for the authorities discovered that the recent disturbances among the Dukhobors were somehow connected with their contacts with Verigin.

Shortly after Tolstoy's return to Moscow in November, he wrote the first of his long letters to Verigin. Of course Tolstoy was gratified to discover in Russia a religious sect trying to live according to the principles of Christian anarchy that he himself had been preaching. Tolstoyan colonies had seemed somehow to feed on dissension rather than radiate sweet reasonableness. Yet here in the Caucasus was a whole community of simple people germinating the seed sown by Christ 1800 years ago! It was almost as though a miracle had occurred.

Peter Verigin had an earthy, peasant cunning, real courage, and an authoritarian nature that would not permit him to follow whenever he could lead. Although he had perceived the advantage of making use of Tolstoy's name and influence, he had no intention of subordinating his following to any other leader or movement. Nor did he hesitate to push doctrine to absurdity if he felt that by so doing he would better secure his position as the Moses of his fanatical people. Such a case in point prompted Tolstoy's first letter to him. Verigin had written to one of Tolstoy's disciples that books and the printed word in general were unnecessary. Tolstoy, who had already expressed his own ideas about the futility of certain types of literature, candidly replied to Verigin that the right kind of books could do an immense amount of good, and that since there were so many harmful books in the world, a real service could be rendered by writing better books to counteract this evil.

The winter of 1895-1896 in Moscow left Tolstoy rather weak in health and sad in mind. At the end of 1895 he wrote a short

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piece, "Shame!" a scathing denunciation of the flogging of peasants, an old punishment recently reintroduced by the courts.<sup>1</sup> With bitter irony he flayed the "legal" distinction between peasants and the upper classes that the authorities had invented.

Tolstoy was surprised that Nicholas II had certified his moving drama, *The Power of Darkness*, for performance on the stage, a step that Alexander III had refused to take eight years ago. At its first performance in Petersburg (October 16, 1895) a capacity audience acclaimed Tolstoy, and realizing the triumph he had won over the censors demanded that a congratulatory telegram be sent to the author. A little more than a month later the play was performed with equal success at the Maly Theatre in Moscow. At the conclusion, a crowd of students paraded to his house to pay tribute to him. He listened to the eulogy of the spokesman of the students, and, filled with embarrassment, he was unable for a few moments to say a word in reply.

At the end of 1895 Tolstoy received a visit from an earnest English Methodist minister with whom he had been having some interesting correspondence—J. C. Kenworthy. This man had accepted Tolstoy's views on life and had started a Brotherhood Church at Croydon with an appendage, a Brotherhood Publishing Company, for the publication of his own and other works that subscribed to the new faith. At the request of Chertkov, who had a particular weakness for English disciples, Tolstoy gave Kenworthy the right to publish the first English translation of any of his new works. This move proved to be another contribution to the general confusion arising in connection with foreign editions of Tolstoy's writings since he repudiated his copyrights. And in this particular case the confusion became worse confounded, for Kenworthy soon went out of his mind.

January 1896 brought its toll of deaths, a toll that saddened Tolstoy as the grim Reaper, passing him by, laid low those who were dear to him. The first to go was Gasha, the eighty-three-year-old servant of his long-deceased aunt, Pelageya, and the friend of his childhood, a being who seemed so inseparable a part of Yasnaya Polyana and as deeply rooted there as the ancient gnarled oaks in the park. Then the death of Strakhov, his kind, unwavering friend of years and a most sympathetic critic of his writings and teaching, filled him with a feeling of irreparable loss.

<sup>1</sup> The only other work he completed in 1895, apart from those already mentioned, was "Three Parables."

ys new and full of meaning is death," he entered in his at this time. He could not help dwelling on his own old age on the thought that his turn might soon come. He wrote Sonya in Nikolskoye, where he had again gone in February to his good friends the Olsufyevs to escape the city: "I do not want to admit that I am growing old and am finished, but it has to be. I try to accustom myself to this and not to strain or spoil myself." She replied: "You yourself have said that there was no old age and that you would not give in to it, as though it did not exist." And she implied that the way to forget all this and achieve a proper religious frame of mind was to fast and attend church as she was doing.

Tolstoy's low spirits were not unconnected with the persecution of his followers. A young artist and friend of the family, L. A. Sulerzhitski, was banished to Central Asia for declaring that his Christian conscience would not permit him to serve in the army. Because of his parents' grief, he soon recanted, a weakness considered unforgivable by some of the Tolstoyans. The strait-laced Chertkov condemned such backsliding and roundly scolded Tolstoy, who had expressed sympathy and understanding for his young disciple's lack of fortitude. It was God's will, he replied to the angry Chertkov. He had no right to advise a man to suffer in the struggle with temptation, unless he himself was suffering in this same struggle. If a soldier leaves the trench to storm the enemy, he wrote, "and has returned to the trench in which I sit and fixes on me a timid, questioning look, I know that I can hardly fail to speak words of comfort to him. . . . If I sat in solitary confinement or if they flogged me and led me to execution, then I could express my grief over the fact that he (Sulerzhitski) did not remain firm, but as long as I indulge myself in all the goods of fleshly existence, I must conceal my grief." Such wisdom and humility of common sense were beyond the tight-minded, spiritually truncated Chertkov.

Refusal to serve in the army was not the only offence that brought the law down on the heads of Tolstoy's followers. For example, a Tula woman physician was promptly arrested for giving a worker a copy of Tolstoy's *What I Believe*. In this instance the victim was not really a disciple and had passed on the illegal book at the request of one of Tolstoy's daughters when her father had been unable to supply the worker with a copy. Nevertheless the woman was tried and sentenced to exile in Orenburg.

This double injustice provoked Tolstoy to write identical letters to the Minister of Justice and the Minister of the Interior. After

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explaining all the circumstances and insisting upon the woman's innocence, he declared: "I write these books and letters, and through verbal intercourse I disseminate these thoughts which the government regards as evil, and hence if the government wishes to prevent the diffusion of this evil, it ought to turn against me all the measures it takes against occasional individuals whose only fault is that they have an interest in forbidden books and give them to their acquaintances to read. The government ought to do as I request, and all the more so since I not only do not conceal this activity of mine, but, on the contrary, I deliberately declare in this letter that I have written and distributed the very books considered harmful by the government, and I shall continue to write and distribute in books, letters and through conversation the very same thoughts that I have expressed in previous books." There then followed a long and defiant lesson on the beliefs which the government condemned as "evil," and he concluded his letter with a naïve—though possibly ironic—plea to the authorities not to fear to persecute him because of any popularity or social position he might hold. "I not only do not think this, but I am convinced that if the government acted resolutely against me, exiled, imprisoned, or took even sterner measures against me, it would not encounter any special difficulty, and public opinion would not only fail to be agitated by this, but the majority of people would thoroughly applaud such action and would say that it ought to have been done long ago."

The government was too canny to comply with Tolstoy's notion of justice or to crown him with the martyrdom that he perhaps sought. His letters went unanswered. But he was left in no doubt as to the attitude of the authorities. For the Minister of Justice, after receiving the letter, told Tolstoy's close friend, N. V. Davydov, who relayed it to him, that "the government is unable to persecute Leo Nikolayevich himself, but that persecution of people who distribute his works serves as punishment for Leo Nikolayevich."

## VI

During the summer of 1896 the large manor house at Yasnaya Polyana was treated to an unusual feast of music. The distinguished pianist and composer, S. I. Taneyev, had taken up residence in one of the wings.<sup>1</sup> The excellent pianist A. B. Goldenweizer,

<sup>1</sup> Sonya had rented quarters to Taneyev at Yasnaya Polyana during the previous summer.

who had become acquainted with the family in January, also made lengthy visits. There were solo concerts by both artists and four-hand concerts on two grand pianos. Sometimes Tolstoy played with Taneyev. And now Sonya was taking lessons, for since the death of Vanichka she found relief from her sorrow in a passionate devotion to music. Beethoven and Chopin, she wrote her sister, charmed away her grief, and she just lived from concert to concert.

Sonya's interest in music was tied up closely with her personal interest in the composer Taneyev. Her friendship with him, which dates from this period, grew into a fascination which helped distract her from her grief and her family worries. Tolstoy, as we shall see later, was disturbed by Sonya's feeling for Taneyev, but he did not openly protest.

The Chertkovs, who had again rented a house at Dyomenka, were frequent guests during the summer of 1896. Jane Addams arrived to tell the interested Tolstoy all about Hull House. Two very polite Japanese visitors threw the company into gales of laughter by their weird native singing. So would they have laughed, Tolstoy noted in his diary, if we had sung or played Beethoven to them. The incident led him to speculate that the ideal of art is its accessibility to all. A visit was also expected from Henry George, a meeting that Tolstoy looked forward to with the greatest anticipation, but unfortunately the American's death ended this hope.

The married children and their wives gathered at Yasnaya Polyana. Only young Leo was away in Sweden, where he married that summer.<sup>1</sup> Goldenweizer related how Tolstoy enjoyed luring his guests on walks in the woods. He loved to lead them to short cuts along charming leafy paths, but the "short cut," Goldenweizer added with the ruefulness of a victim, always ended in an extensive hike, in which the sixty-eight-year-old host wore down his companions. To Goldenweizer's amazement, Tolstoy, after watching his young son Mikhail trying to perform a difficult gymnastic exercise, executed the same stunt with more expertness than his son. From his conversations with Tolstoy on this visit, Goldenweizer recalled two statements: "The ego is the temporary thing that limits our immortal essence. Belief in personal immortality," he said, "always seemed to me a kind of misunderstanding"; and "Materialism is the most mystical of all teachings:

<sup>1</sup> He married Dora Westerlund (May 15, 1896), the daughter of a Swedish physician.

fundamentally it places its whole faith in a mythical substance which creates everything out of itself, the foundation of everything. This is even more stupid than belief in the Trinity!"

Neither music nor guests were allowed to interfere with the long hours Tolstoy spent in his study. His reading this summer ranged from the works of the English social thinker Edward Carpenter, whom he admired, *Thinking and Reality* of the philosopher A. A. Spier,<sup>1</sup> whose attack on materialism he applauded, to "a charming book of Hindu philosophy" by Swami Vivekananda,<sup>2</sup> and six books on prostitution, which he needed for his work on *Resurrection*. Tolstoy continued to be dissatisfied with this large novel, and put it aside for other writing. He read many literary works that summer, and his diary was filled with observations on aesthetics, for he had at last begun in real earnest the famous work that was to become *What Is Art?*

On July 18 Tolstoy made an unusual note in his diary: "Yesterday I walked along a fallow, reploughed field of black earth. As far as the eye could reach, there was nothing but black earth,—not one green blade of grass; and there on the edge of the dusty grey road grew a bush of burdock. Of three shoots, one was broken, and its white soiled flower hung down; another was broken, bespattered with black dirt and its stem bent and soiled; the third shoot stuck out from the side, also smeared with black dirt, but still alive and red in the centre. It reminded me of Hadji Murad.<sup>3</sup> I want to write. Life asserts itself to the very end, and here in the midst of this whole field it has somehow asserted itself."

This observation, starting a train of associations and ideas in Tolstoy's mind, inspired his remarkable story, *Hadji Murad*. Less than a month later, while visiting his sister at the Shamardino Convent, he made a rough sketch of the tale, but he did not finish it until 1904.<sup>4</sup>

Although Tolstoy was irresistibly drawn to the creation of artistic works, conscience and duty demanded that they be subordinated to his moral and religious writing, and of this much was accomplished in 1896. For some time he had been attempting to

<sup>1</sup> Though Russian born, Spier lived for many years in Germany and wrote his works in German.

<sup>2</sup> Ioga's Philosophy.

<sup>3</sup> The leader of the Caucasian mountaineers who fought the Russians in the 1840's. Tolstoy heard much about him during his army service in the Caucasus.

<sup>4</sup> Two other artistic works that he planned in 1896 were the drama, *The Light Shineth in Darkness*, and the curiously autobiographical tale, "Notes of a Madman."

set down his understanding of Christ's teaching in a form simple enough to be comprehended even by children. He worked long and hard on this project but remained dissatisfied with both the form and the substance and abandoned it in the autumn of 1896. It was first published in this incomplete form in England in 1898 under the title *Christian Doctrine*. Another religious work was a brief article, "How to Read the Gospels," in which Tolstoy explained his own method of arriving at a correct understanding of the words of Christ.

During 1896 Tolstoy also wrote a series of epistolary articles. He had developed this favourite form to a high degree of literary effectiveness, for it enabled him to combine a personal appeal with skilful argumentation. Further, by one means or another these long letters got into print abroad and achieved wide circulation. One of the best of the epistolary articles in 1896 was addressed to Tolstoy's American disciple, Ernest H. Crosby, on the subject of nonresistance. Crosby had written of the sympathetic reception accorded his efforts to preach Tolstoy's understanding of Christ's teaching in America. The principal objection was the usual one, he reported, that it was impossible to practise such a faith in the modern world, and he quoted the reactions of important American thinkers. Tolstoy's reply is a succinct, tempered restatement of his faith, with particular attention paid to that most contentious of doctrines—nonresistance to violence. To the old argument of whether one should prevent a robber from killing a child, he offered his classic answer, and concluded: "None of us has ever yet met the imaginary robber with the imaginary child, but all the horrors which fill the annals of history of our own times came and come from one thing—that people will believe that they can foresee the results of hypothetical future actions." He faced squarely the fact that so-called Christians honestly believe that there are cases when they have a moral right to deviate from Christ's doctrine not to use violence, such as to defend one's life or the lives of others, to defend one's country, and to save society from lunatics or criminals. There are no moral or practical exceptions, he declared, and the result of making exceptions is that Christ's teaching on the subject of not resisting evil by violence has been completely annulled. "People know it is wrong to use violence, but they are so anxious to continue to live a life secured by 'the strong arm of the law' that—instead of devoting their intellects to the elucidation of the evils which have flowed and are still flowing from admitting that



man has a right to use violence to his fellow men—they prefer to exert their mental powers in defence of that error. Do what's right, come what may."

On a different but allied subject is the epistolary article, "Patriotism or Peace," addressed to the English journalist John Manson; it treats the threatened collision between the United States and England over the boundaries of Venezuela. Tolstoy entered the arena of international politics again at this time with a denunciatory article, which he never finished, on the attempted Italian rape of Abyssinia. And not unconnected with political action was an unusual epistolary article—"A Letter to Liberals." This letter was a reply to one from Alexandra Kalmykov, who asked Tolstoy to lend his name to a protest against the government for abolishing the Literature Committee, a voluntary organization of liberal-minded people who were endeavouring to bring good books in cheap editions to the masses. Tolstoy refused to support the protest because he believed it futile, but he used the occasion to administer a verbal spanking to liberals, and at the same time to suggest to them a plan of action which he thought better than their own. After asserting that the government's strength lay in the ignorance of the people, and that therefore it would always oppose true enlightenment, he pointed out that there have been two ways in Russia of opposing the repression of an autocratic government. The first has been the way of violent revolution, the second the way of the liberals, which consisted of carrying on the struggle without violence and within the limits of the law in an effort to gain constitutional rights bit by bit. Revolution has failed, he wrote, and even if it should succeed, history has taught that the advantages gained are lost or perverted by the new power. Further, violence bred violence and was immoral. As for the second method, its failure was evident on every side. Ruthlessly he tore away the veil covering the activities of liberals, and pointed out that with the best intentions they unconsciously played into the hands of an autocratic government. As Alexander II had said, he did not fear liberals because he knew they could all be bought—if not with money, then with honours. The few who stood their ground were suppressed.

No, said Tolstoy, only the people who have something which they would under no circumstances yield could resist a government and curb it. The way out was that which he advised in *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*—passive, civil disobedience to all

those demands of government which violated the conscience of man. For only thus would public opinion, the sole power that could subdue governments, be aroused. And only men who lived according to their conscience could exert influence on people, and only activity that accorded with one's conscience could be useful.<sup>1</sup>

A not unimportant part of Tolstoy's literary expression during 1896 is to be found in the full pages of his diary. Apart from numerous observations on art and aesthetics, there are entries of some length and significance on the philosophic definition of time and space, the problem of error, the use of reason, and the meaning of life. The question of social action occupied him more and more, and hence it is not surprising to find a diary comment on Marx. He wrote: "No undertaking is profitable with a small amount of capital. The more capital the more profits, and the expenses are less. But from this it does not follow, according to Marx, that capitalism will lead to socialism. Perhaps it will lead to it, but to socialism by force. The workers will be compelled to work together, and they will work less and the pay will be more, but there will be the same slavery. It is necessary that people work freely together and that they should learn to work for each other, but capitalism does not teach them that; on the contrary, it teaches them envy, greed, selfishness. Therefore, through a forced uniting brought about by capitalism, the material conditions of the workers can be improved, but their contentment can in no sense be achieved. Contentment can only be achieved through a free union of workers. And for this they must learn how to unite, to perfect themselves morally, to serve others willingly, and not to be offended when they meet with no return. And this cannot be learned under a competitive capitalistic system, but under an entirely different one."

Many of Tolstoy's diary entries over this year, however, are concerned with a searching analysis of his spiritual development or the lack of it. In moments of exaltation, when he achieved a moral victory over some temptation, he experienced a kind of spiritual voluptuousness. More often he felt spiritually debased, and these periods were usually the result of depressing inner conflicts connected with his domestic difficulties.

<sup>1</sup> Other epistolary articles written in 1896 were addressed to M. A. Sopotsko on the deception of the Church; to the German, Eugen Schmidt, on government and Christianity; to Peter Verigin, again on his objections to printing; and to the Irkutsk and Ekaterinograd commanders of disciplinary battalions on behalf of two persecuted objectors to military service.

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### VII

As the months wore on, Tolstoy's hope of a spiritual transformation in his wife after Vanichka's death gradually waned. Sonya's grief was not the kind that finds its outlet or compensation in a profound religious experience; a mother's grief for a lost child rarely does. His first realization that the period of spiritual closeness with Sonya had vanished was recorded in Tolstoy's diary less than a month after Vanichka's death: "She suffers and especially because the object of her love has left her, and it seems to her that her goodness was in this object and not in the love itself. She cannot separate one from the other; she cannot regard life in general or herself from a religious point of view." A little later, in a letter to Strakhov not long before his death, he wrote about Sonya: "Of everything spiritually beautiful that revealed itself immediately after Vanichka's death, and from the manifestation and growth of which I expected so much, there has remained only despondency and egotistical grief."

However deeply Tolstoy regretted the loss of this last hope of real spiritual unity with his wife, it did not lessen his love for her or his concern over her emotional and physical suffering. For her grief continued in an extreme form for months. Five months after her loss, she wrote her sister: "Nothing concerns me, nothing agitates me except one living, burning feeling of anguish, of hopeless grief without Vanichka."

When his grieving wife complained at this time that certain passages in his diaries about her were offensive, he read over all his diaries and dutifully eliminated these statements, for which she lovingly thanked him. "I have never felt myself so guilty and exposed," he wrote at the conclusion of this task. "Oh, if this would only draw us still closer together. If she would only free herself from belief in trifles and would believe in her own soul, in her reason. In going over the diaries I found places—there were several—in which I repudiated *these evil words that I wrote about her. These words were written in moments of irritation. Now I repeat it once again for the benefit of all into whose hands these diaries may fall.* I often grew irritated with her because of her hasty temper, but, as Fet said, for every husband there is one wife who is the right one for him. I already perceived that she was the right wife for me. She was an ideal wife in the pagan sense—in the sense of fidelity, domesticity, self-denial, family love—and in the very pagan in her

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lies the possibility of a Christian friend. I saw this after Vanichka's death. Will it develop in her? May the Lord help. The events now are joyful to me. She saw and will see the power of love—the power of her love over me.”

Relations between husband and wife under the shadow of their mutual sorrow continued to be warm and affectionate. At the end of 1895, when she was returning to Moscow from Yasnaya Polyana, he took the long ride to the train with her, for he was worried over her health. Shortly after he wrote in his diary: “She was sitting in the carriage and I became terribly sorry for her, not because she was departing, but sorry for her, for her soul. I'm sorry now and I hold my tears back with difficulty. I'm sorry because it is so hard for her, because she is so sad and so alone. She has no one but me, no one else to cling to, and in the depths of her soul she is afraid that I do not love her, do not love her as I can love with all my soul, and that the reason for this is our different views on life. And she thinks that I do not love her because she did not come to me. Do not think this. I love you still more, I understand all, and I know that you could not, *could not* come to me, and for that reason you have remained alone. But you are not alone; I am with you, I love you just as you are, and will love you to the very end as hard as it is possible to love.”

Tolstoy hastened to convey his exaltation in a letter to Sonya. He explained it as “an entirely new love.” “It is such a holy, fine feeling, that I ought not to speak about it, but I know you will be glad to hear it, and I know from the very fact that I express it that it will not change.”

Sonya was grateful. She wrote of her joy over his letter, and she expressed her conviction that their quarrels had not been serious. “The very basis of our relations—an inner feeling for each other—remains serious, firm, and harmonious. We both know what is good and bad, and we both love each other. Thank God for this. And we are both looking in the same direction, towards the exit-door of life, and we don't fear it.”

## Chapter XXXI

### WHAT IS ART?

**E**ARLY in 1897 disaster overtook the inner circle of Tolstoyans. Information had reached them at the end of the previous year that persecution of the Dukhobors, whose fate they were closely following, had reached an intolerable degree. One of the sect had been beaten to death in a disciplinary battalion; numerous families, dispersed among unfriendly villages of Caucasian hill tribes, were perishing from hunger and cold. Of the 4000 exiled in 1896, 400 had already died from various privations. Horror gripped Tolstoy and he at once sent the sufferers a thousand rubles out of his "charity fund."<sup>1</sup>

Chertkov and Biryukov, later joined by the disciple Tregubov, decided on an appeal to the authorities and the public on behalf of the persecuted Dukhobors. Tolstoy encouraged them and associated himself with the project by writing an epilogue. This appeal, entitled "Help!" was sent to many leading citizens, government officials, and the Tsar. The participants fully realized the risk they ran and were prepared to accept the consequences.

They did not have long to wait for repercussions. Shortly after the appeal was circulated, Chertkov and Biryukov were arrested, exiled for five years, and placed under constant police surveillance. Chertkov was allowed to select England as his place of exile; Biryukov was sent to Bausk in Courland. Three months later the police arrested Tregubov in Tiflis and also exiled him to Courland for five years.

Tolstoy, as usual, escaped direct punishment. He and Sonya were visiting the Olsufyevs at the beginning of February, when the news reached them. They hurried to Petersburg to bid farewell to

<sup>1</sup> The fund consisted of royalties from Tolstoy's plays performed by the state theatres. He did not wish to accept this income, after renouncing all financial rights to his works, although these royalties would have reverted to the government, of which he also disapproved. Upon the suggestion of his wife, who managed the affair, he finally agreed to accept money from this source and to use it solely for charitable purposes.

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Chertkov and Biryukov. An exalted feeling of martyrdom well earned suffused the exiles, who gathered with a little band of the faithful at Chertkov's quarters each evening to hear the master's final words of wisdom. "So radiant, joyous and simple were they," Tolstoy later wrote to Khilkov, "that they did not stir up any apparent feeling of regret."

Fifteen years had passed since Tolstoy had last been in Petersburg, and he made the most of this opportunity to visit old friends. His movements were carefully watched by the police. The report of the slow-witted detective assigned to trail him was a masterpiece of elaborate, patient dullness and inept sleuthing. Every change of clothing was faithfully recorded with an attention to details that would have done justice to a society reporter describing the apparel of the town's latest bride and groom. On February 7, wrote the sleuth, "Count Tolstoy was dressed in an unfinished tan sheepskin coat with several patches, girdled with a grey belt, wore dark-coloured trousers outside his boots, and on his head was a dark-grey knitted cap, and a cane in his hand." Each shop Tolstoy went into and what he bought were noted, and every person he stopped to talk with on the street was sketched. A tremor of excitement crept into this dull account only when the sleuth observed that some students, recognizing Tolstoy in a horsecar, engaged him in conversation and eagerly begged him to visit their university. When he agreed, one of the students kissed his hand.

Tolstoy enjoyed pleasant visits with old friends, such as the artist Repin, the librarian Stasov, who for years had diligently fulfilled his endless requests for books, the ageing writer Grigorovich, and the famous liberal-minded jurist and member of the Imperial Council, Koni, who was amazed that Tolstoy uttered not a word of bitterness or indignation over the exile of his disciples. He produced on Koni the impression of one of those early Christians who were able to face a terrible death without shrinking and conquered the world with their meekness.

There was little of the early Christian and less of meekness displayed in Tolstoy's visit with Granny, and this was all the more unfortunate since it proved to be the last meeting of these old friends. The armed neutrality that had existed between them ever since he had adopted his new faith now ended in open warfare. Despite his genuine affection for Granny, he could not dissociate from the lady-in-waiting to the Empress the religious hypocrisy that existed in her aristocratic circle, which blandly countenanced

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cruel persecution of all those who did not subscribe to the Orthodox faith. And undoubtedly this feeling was uppermost in his mind now in the face of the persecution of the honest, hard-working Dukhobors and the exile of his disciples for trying to aid them.

In a gathering of friends, at which Granny was present, Tolstoy rather belligerently declared that a thinking person could achieve his own salvation without the aid of anyone. She understood this "anyone" to mean God, and no doubt he had intended it in this sense for her benefit—that is, a superstitious belief in and dependence on the Christian God she worshipped were superfluous. The next morning when he came to say farewell, she could not resist an allusion to his statement of the previous day, which had shocked her.

He jumped from his seat, his face quivering with anger, and all his meekness vanished. "Permit me to tell you that I know all this a million times better than you! I have studied all these questions and not in a trifling manner, and I have sacrificed my life, happiness, and everything to my conviction, and you think that you can teach me something." When he left, she sadly wondered whether or not his conscience troubled him over this outburst.

If Granny could have looked over Tolstoy's shoulder at the letter he wrote to Chertkov a few days later, she would have understood better the state of his conscience and the real cause of his anger. "Petersburg," he wrote, "gave me a most happy impression. Of course, the high points were the meetings at your house. The unhappiest impression was my conversation with A.A. Tolstoy. The terrible thing was not only the coldness, but the cruelty and forcing a way into your soul, that very thing which has estranged us. What an evil faith is that which makes people so cruel and consequently so insensible to the spiritual condition of others. 'Believe word for word as I do, otherwise if you are not exactly my enemy, still you are a stranger.'"

## II

The exile of Chertkov and Biryukov, the two most active of Tolstoy's disciples, caused a stir in various circles. The government's arrows of misfortune were striking closer to the master. Tolstoy's agitation and that of the public were intensified by a sensational event that took place about this time. An attractive, fun-loving girl, Marya Vetrov, who had once visited Tolstoy, had been confined to the dismal Peter-Paul Fortress for alleged revolutionary

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activity. After being offensively questioned by her jailers and—so it was rumoured—violated by them, she poured kerosene over herself in her cell and burned herself to death. The funeral of the girl turned into a public demonstration against the government. Tolstoy wrote to Koni for advice on what he could most effectively do to protest this outrage, but the well-known jurist had nothing to offer on a matter so disturbing to the authorities.

Tolstoy also wrote about the Vetrov case to Chertkov. In fact, he maintained a steady correspondence with his two recently exiled followers, giving them words of advice and comfort, and encouraging them to continue their work in the faith. Exchanges of letters were not always easy because of the vigilance of the police, and various subterfuges were employed. A nostalgic longing to share the fate of his disciples crept into these letters. It seemed to him at times that they had gone out into the world of light and left him sitting in sorrow and alone. "I am not in exile," he concluded one of his letters to Biryukov, "but truly I am now sadder than you. Farewell, my dear, I kiss you."

The private war between Tolstoy and the Russian government and Church was a matter of general public interest. Whatever the issues involved, there was something magnificent in the figure of this old, grey-bearded prophet standing alone against the whole organized force of a reactionary Church and State. At times his was the only voice that spoke aloud and unafraid for the cause of justice in a vast country shackled by an absolute autocratic despotism. His most powerful weapon was moral suasion acting upon Russian public opinion and—what was more feared by the government—on international public opinion. Perhaps as a proof of his effectiveness, causes to fight for were now being laid at his feet in abundance by persecuted individuals and organizations, and if he could see the justice of them in terms of his own religious convictions, he rarely refused to help.

While his defence of the Dukhobors still continued, another sect, the Molokans, appealed to him for aid. At the beginning of summer, two Samara Molokans visited him at Yasnaya Polyana and told him a pathetic tale. In their village, the police, acting on orders from above, had compelled the parents of several Molokan families to surrender their young children. The charge was that the children were not being brought up in the Orthodox faith, and they were ruthlessly carried off to monasteries and convents, put under the care of the Church, and allowed no contact with their parents, who



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were for a time kept in ignorance of their whereabouts. The parents were finally told that they could see their children in church. When they arrived, however, they found only some other Molokans who were being converted to the Orthodox faith. The Father Superior, unabashed by this cheap and heartless trick, embraced the distracted parents and said: "You are filled with sadness because your children have forsaken you; but so also is the Mother Church because you have forsaken her."

The indignant Tolstoy required no pleas for aid from the Molokans after hearing their story and seeing documentary testimony of the actions of the police. He wrote a detailed and outspoken letter to the Tsar. After stating in full the case of the sectarians, he declared: "Surely this is frightful. Such things were done only at the time of the Inquisition. Nowhere, not even in Turkey, is such a thing possible, and no one in Europe would believe that this could happen in a Christian country in 1897." And he skilfully seized this occasion to plead the cause of the "thousands upon thousands of Russian people" who were persecuted in the name of the Tsar because their religious faith differed from that of the Church or their political convictions from those of the government.

The Molokans were directed to take this letter to Petersburg, and Tolstoy gave them notes to influential friends who were asked to see that the letter got into the hands of the Tsar. In the city, however, the simple sectarians were easily persuaded by an acquaintance that all these letters were dangerous, and they promptly destroyed them and returned to Tolstoy. Disappointed but not discouraged, he again wrote to the Tsar, and this time asked his disciple, P. A. Boulanger, who was soon exiled from Russia for propagating Tolstoy's ideas, to take it to the city with instructions on how it might be conveyed to the Tsar.

The letter reached Nicholas II, but after months had passed and no action was taken, the Molokans again appealed to Tolstoy. His sympathy for their plight in no sense diminished, he returned to the charge with still a third letter to the Tsar. And he followed this up by a letter on the case to the newspaper, *Russian News*, which refused to print it, but on a second try the *Petersburg News* bravely published it. Still the children were not returned to their parents. At the beginning of 1898 he asked Koni to use his influence. "It is impossible to remain calm," he wrote him, "when such evil actions are committed before your eyes. I am ashamed to belong to a people that stands for such things."

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Tolstoy's daughter Tanya was visiting Petersburg at this time and he telegraphed her to do everything she could to aid the Molokans. Against the advice of friends who had stuffy ideas on the proper channels for such a petition, she went directly to the all-powerful Pobedonostsev and stated her case. This irreconcilable enemy of her father received the daughter politely, and after a brief interview promised to rectify the wrong, a promise that he soon fulfilled. Perhaps it was his way of showing his power to the great Tolstoy, who had ignored him in his appeals to the Tsar, newspapers, and highly placed friends, or perhaps it was a none too subtle gesture of amity to a man who seemed outside his all-inclusive sphere of both influence and direct persecution. This sorry incident exemplifies at once the sweeping power of Pobedonostsev and the maddening bureaucracy that oppressed people in Russia. For actually, according to the law, parents who were christened in the Orthodox faith and brought up their children in another belief, as was true of the Molokans, could be legally deprived of their children. Yet Pobedonostsev, the lay head of the Church, could set aside the law of the land on his own responsibility.

### III

During the summer of 1897 when Tolstoy was at Yasnaya Polyana, there was no Chertkov at neighbouring Dyomenka to consult with daily on the spiritual empire they were building. Tolstoy also missed the frequent visits of the industrious and gentle "Posha" (Biryukov). Even Sonya had a fleeting moment of regret over Chertkov's exile, for he was pleasant company when he forgot his holier-than-thou pose. Yet she resented her husband's going all the way to Tula to send the worried Chertkov a reassuring wire about his feelings towards him. "Leo Nikolayevich simply loves him!" she noted in her diary.

Masha's marriage (June 2) increased her father's sense of loneliness that summer. Pale-faced and sickly as she was, but with a slender and graceful figure, Masha's high forehead, deep, attentive grey eyes, and concentrated expression recalled her father's features. An earnestness and curious inner beauty compensated for a physically unattractive face. She was the only one of his children up to this time to accept unquestioningly his way of life, and she suffered in this large family, particularly from her mother, for this devotion to her father. Masha translated her convictions into service for

others. She was tireless in work in the fields, in teaching the village children, caring for the sick, and performing endless tasks for her father. The bond between them went deeper than the love of parent and daughter; it was a spiritual bond.

A handsome young cousin, Prince Nikolai Obolenski, came to stay at the Moscow house of the Tolstoys while he attended the university. He and Masha fell in love and though he was objectionable to both parents as a son-in-law, they married. It was a difficult step for Masha to take. Since her husband had no income and seemed uninterested in a career, she was now obliged to ask for that part of the family estate which had fallen to her lot in the division and which she had renounced according to her convictions. And she knew that her marriage must inevitably weaken if not sever the spiritual bond with her father. For her, it seemed like repudiating holy vows. For her father, Masha's marriage and departure were a severe wrench. Always alone in the family save for Masha, now he was entirely alone.

Despite the absence of dear and familiar faces, summer life at Yasnaya Polyana continued, on the surface at least, as of old, with its hordes of visitors, games, tennis, walks, music, and literary evenings. New disciples made the pilgrimage. Aylmer Maude, ultimately to become the best known English Tolstoyan, translator, and biographer of Tolstoy, arrived, and was promptly set down in Sonya's diary as "ponderous and dull." At the end of a long business career in Russia he accepted Tolstoy's teaching unreservedly for a time and supported the Tolstoyan agricultural colony at Purleigh in Essex. Soon he was to take a leading role in aiding the persecuted Dukhobors. Another Englishman, Arthur St. John, arrived with money from the Quakers to be expended on the Dukhobors. He decided to push on to the Caucasus to investigate these sectarians on the spot, and for his trouble he was arrested and deported.

The usual assortment of accomplished artists—musicians, painters, and sculptors—turned up. Hardly a day passed that twenty or more people—family and guests—did not sit down at the long table for dinner. And nearly all these visitors, as was so often the case, felt their contact with the great Tolstoy worth commemorating in letters, articles, or memoirs which were subsequently published. A peasant from the Caucasus arrived to ask and receive Tolstoy's aid for his fellow Dukhobors; a rich American travelled all the way to Yasnaya Polyana to seek advice on how he

might best aid the poor; a friend, a former soldier, anxiously desired to discuss religious questions and to show him a kind of religious catechism he had drawn up; an Englishman wrote to ask how he should educate his children; and a Japanese sent him his book on religion and solicited his opinion. And Tolstoy frequently gathered with poor peasants under the huge oak tree near the house to give them advice or material assistance in their affairs. To no sincere request did he turn a deaf ear.

While Tolstoy posed for a new bust for the sculptor Ginsburg, a servant announced that three girls from Tula had arrived to "look at" the famous writer. "Oh how boring this is," he sadly remarked. "There's no help for it; ask them in. Now you'll see these curiosity seekers. It is terrible how they bother me. Nothing else is essential to them except to look at me." Three awe-struck young ladies were introduced and silently stared. With little success Tolstoy tried to get them to talk, and then sent them on their way, with instructions to the servant to give them copies of his writings.

The incident reminded Tolstoy of an amusing occurrence which he told to Ginsburg. He once received a long telegram from a stranger requesting an interview. Being busy at the time, he refused. One day, several months later, a handsome troika drove up to the Moscow Tolstoy house. A foppishly dressed man jumped out and entered. Tolstoy quickly learned that it was the same person who had sent him the long telegram. The visitor cheerfully announced:

"I represent the firm of Odol. My principal specialty is advertising. The business is enormous."

"But what do you want from me?" Tolstoy asked.

"Only to meet you, for it is shameful that I, who have met everybody of consequence, have not yet become acquainted with Tolstoy."

Tolstoy brusquely dismissed the man on the score that he was busy. Upon leaving, the visitor presented him with two handsome packages of Odol as a gift for him and his wife. It was a dentifrice.

"Why for me?" Tolstoy asked. "I have no teeth and hence no need to clean them," and he returned the gift. Yet, after this enterprising salesman had left, the two packages of dentifrice were found on the hall table downstairs.

In August of that summer, Tolstoy entered in his diary: "Lombroso was here—a limited, naïve little old man." This was the distinguished Italian anthropologist and psychiatrist—Cesare Lombroso. While attending a medical conference in Moscow, he had

expressed a desire to visit Tolstoy. The head of the police suggested that this would be disagreeable to the government, and, making small circles with his finger near his temple, indicated that Tolstoy was not entirely right in his mind. Seizing this lead, the quick-witted Lombroso said that it was precisely in his capacity as a psychiatrist that he wished to see and study Tolstoy. Mollified by such a scientific purpose, the head of the police, with a knowing look, smilingly approved of the visit.

Lombroso had preconceived notions about literary geniuses and their habits of work, but these were all contradicted by this meeting with Tolstoy. On the day of his arrival he watched the sixty-nine-year-old genius play tennis for two hours with his daughter. Tolstoy then invited his guest to go swimming in the Yasnaya Polyana pond and offered to race him. Lombroso almost drowned trying to keep up the pace, and Tolstoy was obliged to help him to the shore. "When I expressed surprise at his strength and endurance," Lombroso related, "he stretched out his hand and lifted me right off the ground, just as easily as though I were a little dog." Later, in one of their discussions, Tolstoy impatiently listened to Lombroso's exposition of his favourite theory concerning innate criminal types and the necessity of protecting society from them. "He remained silent throughout all my arguments," Lombroso wrote, "and finally, knitting his terrifying brow, he turned on me a threatening glance from his deeply sunken eyes and declared: 'All this is nonsense. Every punishment is criminal.'" Despite their disagreement, Lombroso formed a high opinion of the simplicity of Tolstoy's life and his unflinching kindness towards the scores of petitioners who daily sought his aid.

When Lombroso returned to Moscow, the head of the police asked him how he found Tolstoy. "It seems to me," he answered, "that this madman is infinitely cleverer than many of the stupid people here who possess power."

Late in September, a Tula priest, with the permission—and perhaps at the command—of his bishop, visited Tolstoy in the naïve hope of guiding him back to the Orthodox faith. He was treated very politely but firmly, and the only positive impression he made was on Sonya, who worried whether such a visit, actually sponsored by a bishop, did not mean that her husband was regarded as a dangerous heretic.

That summer Tolstoy made a bold bid to obtain international publicity for the plight of the Dukhobors. Learning that candidates

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for the Nobel Peace Prize were being considered (it was rumoured that he was one of them), he hurriedly wrote an article and had it translated into Swedish. In it he made out a strong case for the Dukhobors as the recipients of this large financial award. After pouring scorn on all the would-be claimants who pay only lip service to the cause of peace, he described in detail the terrible sufferings that the Dukhobors had undergone at the hands of the Russian government because, sincerely believing in peace, they had refused to bear arms. People serving the cause of peace, he asserted, serve it only because they serve God. And here were thousands of Dukhobors who said: "We are Christians and therefore we cannot agree to be murderers. You may kill or torture us, but we nevertheless will not be murderers, for this is contrary to the very Christianity that you profess." Tolstoy then eloquently concluded his article by declaring "that no one with greater justice could be more worthy of the money that Nobel desired to give to people who best serve the cause of peace than these Dukhobor families."

Sonya became frightened at the outspoken criticism of the government in this article and had visions of deportation. Tolstoy finally gave in to her weeping and threats to leave the house and softened the criticism, but even in the final version of the article that he sent off to a Stockholm newspaper his attack on the Russian government was still sufficiently harsh to cause his exile if the authorities had been so disposed. Perhaps the Swedish editor thought so too, for he refused to publish the article.

Tolstoy lingered on at Yasnaya Polyana even later than usual that year, until December, and before he left he received a visit from his Slovak disciple, Dr. Dushan Makovitski. It prompted Tolstoy to make in his diary a statement that clarified his attitude towards his followers and their propagation of his beliefs: "I had a talk with Dushan. He said that since he had involuntarily become my representative in Hungary, then how was he to act? I was glad of the occasion to tell him and to clarify it for myself, namely that it is a great and gross mistake to speak about Tolstoyism or to seek my guidance or to ask my decisions on problems. There is no Tolstoyism or any teaching of mine, and there never has been; there is only one eternal, general, and universal teaching of the truth, which for me, for us, is especially clearly expressed in the Gospels. This teaching calls man to a recognition of his filiality to God and therefore of his freedom or his slavery (call it what you wish); of his

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freedom from the influence of the world, of his slavery to God, to His will. And as soon as man understands this teaching, he enters freely into direct communication with God, and then he has nothing and no one to ask. . . . People who submit themselves to a guide, who have a faith in him and listen to him, undoubtedly wander in the dark together with their guide."

### IV

Art is modest, Tolstoy once said, but his theorizing on the subject in *What Is Art?* is perhaps the most immodest contribution to the study of aesthetics that has ever been written. He finished this famous work in 1897 and it marks the culmination point of fifteen years of thought and study, a fact unknown or disregarded by captious critics who treated *What Is Art?* as something that had leaped full-born from Tolstoy's brain at a dyspeptic moment when he had arbitrarily concluded that there shall be no more cakes and ale for the artists of the world.

At the end of the 1870's when Tolstoy took a full reckoning of himself and of his relations to culture, he came to the conclusion that the art he had served for years was a temptation that seduced people from good and led them into evil, and hence he decided to forsake art. Although subsequently he never found it necessary to surrender his fundamental negative position towards other "deceits of culture"—government, law, science, technical progress, and so on—he soon began to doubt his negative attitude towards art. Art was so innate a part of his being that he could not turn his back on it.

However, with his radically new outlook on life, Tolstoy could not be satisfied with the theory of art that he had formerly accepted, and this dissatisfaction inspired his prolonged study of the subject. His main endeavour was to erect a system of aesthetics that would accord with his new understanding of man and his relation to the world. In a real sense, *What Is Art?* may be regarded as the aesthetics of his whole moral philosophy of life. Yet he knew that any system he might set up must be comprehensive enough to justify all sincere works of art.

The problem turned out to be much more complicated than he had anticipated. His first effort in this direction, in 1882, left him entirely unconvinced. And over the next fifteen years, during various periods of time, he struggled with the subject, defining

and redefining his position. In the course of this time he read a great many books on aesthetics, philosophy, and many works of belles-letters, and he studied music, painting, sculpture, attended the theatre, and heard opera, always with his projected essay in mind. Apart from a quantity of miscellaneous notes, there exist eight separate articles, fragments of articles, and drafts,<sup>1</sup> which in printed form are almost as extensive as his final effort.

In all his theorizing, however, one can detect a growing emphasis upon the ethical principle as the immanent organizing factor in the artistic process. And this view ultimately became the starting point for the aesthetic theory that he finally elaborated in *What Is Art?* The growing popularity of such movements as Decadence and Symbolism during the last decade of the nineteenth century offended both his artistic and his moral sense and provided him with a new impetus to finish his book on art. He worked almost exclusively on it throughout most of 1897 and finished it in December. It appeared in Russia the next year but was so mutilated, by both the editor and the censor, that Tolstoy disowned this version. At the same time it was published in England in a translation made by Aylmer Maude and supervised by Tolstoy, who declared this English translation to be the first complete and correct edition of *What Is Art?*

In this book, Tolstoy approached the subject as he approached the study of every human endeavour: art is a human activity and hence it must have a clear purpose and aim, discernible by the aid of reason and conscience. And as a human activity, he declared, art cannot exist for its own sake and therefore its value must be weighed in proportion as art is serviceable or harmful to mankind. Again and again in his researches he was confronted with that unholy trinity of the aestheticians—beauty, truth, and goodness, and of these the greatest was beauty. For he found that the commonest definition, repeated in various forms, was that art is an activity that produces beauty. But just what was meant by beauty, no two theorists seemed to agree. The word was used subjectively and according to the variable tastes of the persons who employed it. In general, Tolstoy's study of aesthetics led him to conclude that there was no such science, because it failed to define the qualities and laws of art which in turn could be applied to artistic productions by way of accepting or rejecting them. This chaos has

<sup>1</sup> This material has only recently been published in Russian in complete form in *Literary Heritage: L. N. Tolstoy*, No. 37-38 (Moscow, 1939), Vol. II.



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resulted, he maintained, because the conception of art has been erroneously based on the conception of beauty.

Tolstoy, then, propounded his own definition of art:

To evoke in oneself a feeling one has once experienced and having evoked it in oneself then by means of movements, lines, colours, sounds, or forms expressed in words, so to transmit that feeling that others experience the same feeling—this is the activity of art.

Art is a human activity consisting in this, that one man consciously by means of certain external signs, hands on to others feelings he has lived through, and that others are infected by these feelings and also experience them.

Art [he declared] is not, as the metaphysicians say, the manifestation of some mysterious Idea of beauty or God; it is not, as the aesthetic physiologists say, a game in which man lets off his excess of stored-up energy; it is not the expression of man's emotions by external signs; it is not the production of pleasing objects; and, above all, it is not pleasure; but it is a means of union among men joining them together in the same feelings, and indispensable for the life and progress towards well-being of individuals and of humanity."

Before Tolstoy applied his definition as a kind of touchstone of true art, he felt it necessary to distinguish between the subject matter and the form of art, for he realized that upon this distinction rested the solution of what was for him the fundamental problem—the relation of art to morality. First he took art apart from its subject matter and pointed out that what distinguished real art from its counterfeit—and much that passed for art he condemned as counterfeit—was the infectiousness of art. If a person who is subjected to an artist's work experiences a mental condition which unites him with the artist and with other people who also partake of that work of art, then the object evoking that condition is a work of art. And the stronger the infection, the better is the art as art. From this point of view, he declared, art has nothing to do with morality, for the feelings transmitted may be good or bad feelings. But the one great quality that makes a work of art truly contagious is its sincerity.

Up to this point Tolstoy had been concerned with an internal test in appraising art. Next he applied an external test in an effort to determine whether a work of art is refined or genteel (the art of the few, the upper classes) or universal (the art of the people). People who admire exclusive art, which is so often considered

the only art, do so because they have trained themselves to admire it and not because it is necessarily great art. He pointed out that the majority of the productions of art of the upper classes which were admired by them when first produced were never understood or valued by the great masses of mankind. This refined art is intended only for the pleasure of genteel people and is incomprehensible as a pleasure to the working man. For almost the only feelings, with their offshoots, that formed the subject matter of the art of his own class, he said, were three insignificant and simple ones—the feeling of pride, the feeling of sexual desire, and the feeling of weariness of life.

Tolstoy next made the point that as soon as the art of the upper classes separated itself from universal art, a conviction arose that art may be art and yet be incomprehensible to the masses. But all great works of art, he insisted, are great because they are accessible and comprehensible to everyone. The majority of people have always had the taste to esteem the highest works of universal art, such as the Epic of Genesis, the Gospel parables, and folk legends, songs, and tales, because they invoke the simple feelings of common life, accessible to everyone, and yet they do not hinder progress towards well-being. Art of this kind, he said, makes us realize to what extent we already are members of the human race and share the feelings of one common human nature.

In applying the touchstone of feeling to art, it is essential to differentiate what are the best feelings and what are evil. Only in this distinction, Tolstoy maintained, will the intimate and inevitable connection between morality and art become apparent. For if art unites men, the better the feelings in which it unites them the better it will be for humanity. He candidly admitted that the definition of the best and highest feelings will differ from age to age. Each age, he pointed out, has possessed a dominant view of life which may be described as its "religious perception." And the true religious perception of the Christian age, he insisted, is Christ's teaching, which permeates the whole life of man today, and if we accept this religious perception, it must inevitably influence our approval or disapproval of the various feelings transmitted by art. The best and highest feelings of art, then, are those which invoke the precepts of Christ—love for God and one's neighbour. When this religious perception is consciously acknowledged by all, said Tolstoy, then the division of art into art for the lower and art for the upper classes will disappear, for art which transmits feelings

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incompatible with the religious perceptions of our time will be rejected.<sup>1</sup>

Of course, Tolstoy did not limit the subject matter of art to these highest and religious feelings, as some of his critics supposed. There is another division of art, the universal, that he had already described, which conveys feelings of common life accessible to everyone—such as feelings of merriment, of pity, of cheerfulness, of tranquillity, and so forth.<sup>2</sup> The scope of the artist must in no sense be restricted.

The whole world of feelings, Tolstoy wrote, must be the artist's sphere of activity. Yet he did insist that a folk tale, a little song, or a lullaby that delights millions of children or adults is incomparably more important than a novel or symphony that will divert some few members of the wealthy class for a short time and then be forever forgotten. Almost untouched, he said, is this region of art in which the simple feelings are made accessible to all, and this region, like the highest religious art, tends to unite all mankind. He wrote:

Sometimes people who are together, if not hostile to one another, are at least estranged in mood and feeling, till perhaps a story, a performance, a picture, or even a building, but oftenest of all music, unites them all as by an electric flash, and in place of their former isolation or even enmity they are conscious of union and mutual love. Each is glad that another feels what he feels; glad of the communion established not only between him and all present, but also with all now living who will yet share the same impression; and, more than that, he feels the mysterious gladness of a communion which, reaching beyond the grave, unites us with all men of the past who have been moved by the same feelings and with all men of the future who will yet be touched by them. And this effect is produced both by religious art which transmits feelings of love of God and one's neighbour, and by universal art transmitting the very simplest feelings common to all men.

<sup>1</sup> As examples of this highest art "flowing from love of God and man (both of the higher, positive, and of the lower, negative kind) in literature," Tolstoy mentioned: Schiller's *The Robbers*; Hugo's *Les Misérables* and *Les Pauvres Gens*; Dickens's *Tale of Two Cities*, *A Christmas Carol*, and *The Chimes*; *Uncle Tom's Cabin*; Dostoyevsky's works, especially *The House of the Dead*; and George Eliot's *Adam Bede*.

<sup>2</sup> With qualifications, and only because of their inner content, Tolstoy cited as examples of good universal art produced by the upper classes: *Don Quixote*; Molière's comedies; *David Copperfield* and *Pickwick Papers*; and the tales of Gogol and Pushkin.

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The book is rich in learning and in examples drawn from literature and life, and there is not a little fun, however unintentional and ponderous it may have been, at the expense of Wagner's *Ring of the Nibelung* and the opaque poetic effusions of the Decadents and Symbolists. For sheer organization and persuasive argumentation, he never surpassed this achievement in any of his controversial works.

Tolstoy, the great author of *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*, whimsically remarked in one place in the book that he knew that his theory of art would be considered an irrational paradox at which one could only be amazed. Nor did he understate the case. The critics quickly belaboured it into an undeserved oblivion, although a few reviewers praised it highly, and George Bernard Shaw, with an aesthetic fissure in his brain as deep and wide as that of Tolstoy, hailed the work with delight. Critics might be pardoned for a certain degree of asperity in the face of the sympathy that Tolstoy expressed in his book for the truculent judgement that "critics are the stupid who discuss the wise." For the most part, the critics evaded his altogether excellent definition of art and concentrated their shafts on his withering application of it to certain generally accepted great works of art. For with his stubborn intellectual honesty, he did not shrink from the most extreme consequences of his reasoning. In his selection of examples of good and bad art, he did not claim for himself absolute authority. He humbly admitted that his own taste was probably perverted by false training. And he specifically asserted that he attached no special importance to his selection of examples. His only purpose in mentioning them, he said, was to make his meaning clearer.

With breath-taking execution he consigned all his own artistic productions to the category of bad art, with the exception of two stories, "God Sees the Truth but Waits" and "A Prisoner of the Caucasus." And when he placed Shakespeare's *Hamlet* or Beethoven's Ninth Symphony in this same category of bad art, he did not imply that all the works of these artists are bad. We know from other sources that he ranked some of their works as great art.

Tolstoy never remained satisfied with *What Is Art?* He felt it to be weak in various places, and he returned to the subject often in his diary and in letters. There lurked in his mind a feeling that something in the "mysterious and important" matter of art had never found its proper place in his aesthetic theory. But in this book, as in so many of his controversial works, the current of his

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thought joined the stream of nineteenth-century liberalism that has flowed down to our own day. He clearly saw and condemned many of the abuses of art that were later condemned by progressive minds, and his blistering attack on the middle-class cult of unintelligibility in art has been echoed many times since.<sup>1</sup>

### v

Now, whenever artists gathered in the Tolstoy home, which was often, they were put through the wringer of *What Is Art?* and usually came out very flat and white. For Tolstoy was formidable in argument, though in his old age he quickly grew impatient with opposition, and, like Dr. Johnson, if he failed to bring his opponent down with a well-aimed shot, he would hit him over the head with the butt end of the gun. At the very beginning of 1898 a group of distinguished artists sat on after dinner. Rimski-Korsakov and his wife were among them. They had come to Moscow to attend a performance of the famous composer's opera, *Sadko*. A discussion on art soon raged. Tolstoy kept thundering away at beauty and its futility as a fundamental touchstone of art. Rimski-Korsakov warmly opposed him. The dispute ended with Tolstoy condemning all the musical views of Rimski-Korsakov. When the frayed and irritated guests finally departed, Tolstoy pointedly and loudly replied to the usual polite amenities of leave-taking uttered by the composer's wife: "No, you've not at all wearied or disturbed me, but today I'm glad that I have seen *obscurity* with my own eyes." The next day, like a repentant drunkard, he jotted down in his diary: "When will I remember that *much talk is much bother*."

Art had to give way to a more pressing practical matter—the Dukhobors. For through the intercession of the Tsar's mother, to whom they had appealed, the government had granted their request to migrate abroad, provided they agreed never to return. This seemed to be the only solution for the persecuted sect, but it raised difficult problems. Permission had to be obtained from a foreign government to accept some twelve thousand Russian peasants and allot them suitable land, and at the same time allow them to live according to their rather extreme convictions. If this

<sup>1</sup> Tolstoy's faith in the innate artistic instincts of people, uniting them in a community of feeling making for the brotherhood of man, was a conviction shared by Lenin, who was a deep student of Tolstoy.

problem could be solved, then there was the further one of raising a very large sum of money to finance the mass migration.

During most of 1898, Tolstoy threw himself into this work with his usual ardour, and he also inspired his disciples to render assistance of the utmost importance. Even members of the family caught his enthusiasm and helped, though Sonya grew more and more annoyed with this cause and feared it would all end with their so offending the government that the family would be deported along with the Dukhobors.

The financial campaign was initiated by Tolstoy, who wrote a strong appeal for funds and sent it to English and American newspapers, which were not loath to handle a document that so frankly exposed the harsh treatment meted out to a "harmless" religious sect in darkest Russia. He also wrote a quantity of letters to wealthy fellow countrymen, and the magic of his name and the fervour of his appeal resulted in a rain of rubles, though a few friends, such as Tretyakov, the art collector, coldly refused to make donations. The English Quakers, who never failed to answer the call of oppressed humanity, interested themselves in this cause both financially and in finding a refuge for the Dukhobors.

A place of refuge was the chief difficulty. Initial suggestions, such as the island of Cyprus, Manchuria, Chinese Turkestan, and Texas, were all ruled out for one reason or another, though eventually a small group of Dukhobors went to Cyprus. Tolstoy turned the problem over to his disciples in England. There the thriving Brotherhood Colony had been joined by the exiled Chertkov—or it would be more correct to say that he lived in majestic isolation near by, lending his advice and criticism to the colonists. Maude attached himself to the colony at this time, and Biryukov, who had been allowed to leave Courland, also turned up at Purleigh.

This nest of faithful grappled with the problem of a land of milk and honey for the Dukhobors. They soon quarrelled, as was so often the case with Tolstoyans when obliged to cope with a purely practical matter. Chertkov sagely remarked over this disagreement that the disciples had to be convinced by experience that having the same point of view is far from being of one mind. Yet he was one of the chief offenders in this respect. The trusted lieutenant of Tolstoy, he made free and sometimes improper use of the master's name and influence. He possessed authority from Tolstoy to arrange for all first appearances abroad of his works in Russian and in translation, and in 1898 he organized the Free Age Press partly

for this purpose. By printing the words "No Rights Reserved" on his editions, he hoped to set a moral example to the publishing world, which seemed rather silly since Tolstoy had already renounced all rights to his works in the original or in translation. He now fully accepted Tolstoy's faith in doctrinal matters, but he lacked his wisdom and common sense in spreading the gospel. Impressive in appearance, highly intelligent, and often charming in manner, he made friends and helpers easily, but he just as easily lost them because of his spiritual arrogance and domineering ways. He quarrelled with Maude,<sup>1</sup> who had his own peccadilloes both as a man and as a Tolstoyan, and with other disciples over their mutual efforts to aid the Dukhobors. The news of the disagreements reached Tolstoy and saddened him, though Sonya appeared to derive some comfort from it.

Finally the Canadian government agreed to accept the Dukhobors, and Maude and Khilkov, who had been released from his exile in the Caucasus and had joined the English colony, went to Canada to investigate conditions and help with arrangements for the migration. Their report was very favourable. Canada as a refuge was most acceptable to the leaders of the Dukhobors, but Tolstoy had grave doubts and wrote Chertkov that he foresaw clashes between the sect and the Canadian authorities.

Meanwhile, the Russian authorities, however pleased at getting rid of these industrious but recalcitrant citizens, who had so dismally failed to appreciate the patriotic privilege of serving in the army, did nothing to speed their departure and particularly resented the aid of Tolstoy and his followers in the matter. The Minister of the Interior wrote a confidential memorandum to the civil head in the Caucasus to advise him to prevent any "Tolstoyan agitators" from having dealings with the Dukhobors. And the liberal *Russian News*, which appealed for funds through its columns to aid the Dukhobor migration, was suspended for two months because it had turned over the money to Tolstoy. The government even had an unknown ally in its harassment of Tolstoy. He had

<sup>1</sup> Almost twenty years later Chertkov, still nursing his dislike for Maude, commented on his excellent though excessively subjective biography of Tolstoy as follows: "Unfortunately this most detailed biography of Leo Nikolayevich in English contains, among other things, the most perverted information about Leo Nikolayevich and an entirely incorrect interpretation of his views. Leo Nikolayevich himself, before his death, learning of the contents of certain of these chapters which were sent to Yasnaya Polyana in manuscript, found the account of the relation among people near to him so incorrect that he wrote to Maude about it." (*Diary of Leo Nikolayevich Tolstoy, 1895-1899*), ed. V. G. Chertkov (Moscow, 1916), p. 214.

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received an anonymous letter, no doubt partly inspired by his championing the cause of the Dukhobors, from what purported to be an underground society that called itself the "Second Crusaders." The senders threatened, if he did not reform, to murder him on April 3, 1898, because he was the "legislator" of sects, had offended "our Lord Jesus Christ," and was an "enemy of the Tsar and fatherland." "I was both uneasy and pleased," Tolstoy wrote in his diary, but Sonya took the threat more seriously. His close friend Dunayev insisted upon remaining with him during the whole of April 3, adopting a clenched-fist pose of defence in preparation for the onslaught. The day passed and the "Second Crusaders" left him in peace and totally unreformed.

At last all arrangements for the migration were made, in which Tolstoy's son Sergei greatly assisted, making long trips to the Caucasus, England, and Canada. Before 1898 had ended, more than seven thousand Dukhobors had sailed for the new world. The largest of these crossings was excellently supervised by L. A. Sulerzhitski, that young disciple whom Chertkov had scorned for failing to abide by his decision not to serve in the army. The life of the Dukhobors in their new home is another story and not always a happy one. But whatever the wisdom of this mass migration of a religious sect from Russia, Tolstoy, as the leading spirit in the undertaking, had acquitted himself magnificently in an extremely difficult task.

## VI

Tolstoy's efforts on behalf of the Dukhobors did not exhaust his capacity for service to others during 1898. After he had heard from his son Ilya that a famine threatened his neighbourhood, he left in April for the village of Grinyovka. With Ilya he rode on horseback throughout the district to observe conditions at first hand. The inspection took them near Spasskoye, Turgenev's former estate, and Tolstoy pushed on to it for he wished to see again this place that he had visited often in the past. He talked with the peasants and eagerly picked up any scraps of information they had to offer about their dead master. Filled with pleasant memories, he wrote the poet, Polonski, who had spent a memorable evening with him and Turgenev many years ago at Spasskoye, to describe his visit and to regret that their old friend no longer lived. Only a month before, he had written a letter to this same Polonski, who had become a bitter critic of his views on religion and art, to



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plead with him that they remain friends, for it pained him to inspire enmity in any man.

After thoroughly inspecting a number of villages in the district of Mtsensk and then Chern, Tolstoy concluded that a real famine did not yet exist, but conditions were so bad that unless help were forthcoming a famine might set in. With the same zeal and practical wisdom he had shown in the famine six years before, he began raising money, attracting helpers, and organizing free food kitchens in the various afflicted villages. The everlasting suspicious authorities provided the usual opposition. "What would you have me do?" complained one local constable rather shamefacedly, after obstructing the opening of a badly needed kitchen. Did he not have to obey orders from above? "It's very simple," answered Tolstoy, "don't work in a service where you can be made to act against your conscience." His efforts were private charity, Tolstoy argued, and there was no law against that. But not until he had fought the issue right up to the Minister of the Interior were the district minions of the law called off, and even then he was requested not to open any new kitchens. Despite many obstacles, the work was satisfying and highly successful. It undermined his health, however, and after suffering a severe attack of dysentery on the road, he was forced to retire to Yasnaya Polyana to recuperate.

Tolstoy wrote an article on this second attempt to feed the hungry. It is entitled "Famine or No Famine," and in it he described with consummate realism the misery he had encountered among the peasants. In an effort to arouse the conscience of the country he pointed out that their suffering and impoverishment would continue to get worse, no matter what aid was provided in times of crisis. Their poverty, he declared, was not only material, it was spiritual; they had lost all hope. And they must have hope, he asserted; they must be made to realize that life was worth living. One did not have to esteem them. Simply cease to scorn them, he wrote, stop treating them as animals, and give them freedom to learn and to travel. It was reported that even the young Tsar was moved by this eloquent appeal, but when the editor of the *Petersburg News*, to whom Tolstoy had sent the article, asked Nicholas II for permission to print it, he refused. Later it came out in a badly mangled form in a less popular publication.

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### VII

While Tolstoy was resting at Yasnaya Polyana, he received a cable from the *New York World* (August 19) which congratulated him on the results of his struggle for world peace as evidenced by the recent statement of the Tsar's government, and it requested a reply. A week before, the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs had sent a proposal to all governments for a conference to consider the limitation of armaments in an effort to preserve peace. At that time, international power politics were particularly threatening: America was at war with Spain, Germany was feverishly building up its navy, and a colonial struggle was going on between England and France. Obviously, the American newspaper was merely seeking copy, for it could hardly have been serious in attributing the Russian Minister's proposal for a peace conference to any influence that Tolstoy's ideas may have had on the Tsar, though this naïve possibility exists.

Tolstoy obliged with a characteristic answer which he cabled: "The consequences of the proposal will be words. Universal peace may be achieved only by manifesting self-respect and disobedience to governments that demand taxes and army service for organized violence and murder."

Had the American newspaper been seriously interested in the relations between the Russian government and Tolstoy, it might have received an answer from him that would have made headline copy. Why, for example, were a group of students that summer, who had travelled all the way to Yasnaya Polyana to present Tolstoy with a pitiful gift of a hundred rubles collected among themselves for the poor, prevented by the authorities from spending the money, at his suggestion, on food for starving peasants? Or why, on the occasion of Tolstoy's seventieth birthday that August, did the government send a confidential memorandum to all organs of the press, forbidding them to print any notices or accounts of this event connected with Russia's first citizen?

The celebration took place quietly at Yasnaya Polyana. Nearly all the family gathered and a few close friends. One of the guests made the mistake of toasting Tolstoy, the teetotaler, in wine, but in the ominous silence that followed the offender quickly saved the situation by switching his toast to Sonya, and the general merriment was recaptured. At sunset the whole company, including the children, went for a walk. In the evening the accomplished singer,

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Marya Muromtseva-Klimentov, sang poorly, according to Sonya, and the brilliant pianist Goldenweizer played very badly. Tolstoy received about a hundred congratulatory telegrams.

On November 28, a "Tolstoy Evening" was organized in his honour at the Moscow Korsh Theatre. Tolstoy was not present, but Sonya, who attended, wrote him that it was a failure: "The reading of the fragments in a flat voice was terribly boring. Pravdin, with his German accent, read well 'The Story of Karl Ivanovich.'<sup>1</sup> Klimentov sang badly. The tableaux were repulsive, really shameful in their bareness and lack of taste. Natasha<sup>2</sup> with her hair tousled, all frizzled, and dressed in a cheap riding habit of calico, had a mug that might have been that of an actress or of a chambermaid. And the rest consisted of soldier tableaux: they shot Karatayev<sup>3</sup> (this was a bit better); the Abreks<sup>4</sup> shot. They gave a tremendous ovation to Mikhailovski.<sup>5</sup> Why? Then they recollected and began to shout for Tolstoy. A gentleman appeared and said that he was not in Moscow. They screamed: 'A telegram!' Then they roared: 'Read it!' It was read and you will receive it."

## VIII

If it had not been for the Dukhobors and their troubles, Tolstoy might never have finished *Resurrection*, the theme of which he had first thought of ten years ago. In the course of his efforts to raise money for their mass migration he went over his portfolio of unfinished literary works and decided that he would try to complete *Hadji Murad*, *Father Sergei*, and *Resurrection*, sell them to Russian and foreign publishers, and give the proceeds to the Dukhobor fund. After a few unsuccessful attempts to continue the first two works, he put them aside and concentrated on *Resurrection*.

Once he got fairly into the composition of the novel, it absorbed him so completely that distractions of any kind, such as the copious letter-writing on behalf of the Dukhobors, became almost painful. Since *War and Peace*, he told his wife, he had never been so powerfully gripped by the creative urge. He collected information

<sup>1</sup> O. A. Pravdin, an actor in the Maly Theatre: "The Story of Karl Ivanovich" in Tolstoy's *Boyhood*.

<sup>2</sup> Natasha in *War and Peace*.

<sup>3</sup> A scene from *War and Peace*.

<sup>4</sup> Chechenian tribesmen in Tolstoy's *The Cossacks*.

<sup>5</sup> N. K. Mikhailovski who helped to organize the affair.

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from experts on legal procedure, visited prisons, and talked with prisoners. In fact, the police feared that he was trying to propagandize the prisoners.

Tolstoy early made an arrangement with a publisher to take an advance of twelve thousand rubles on the novel which lent a special urgency to completing the task as soon as possible. With an almost guilty feeling he wrote Chertkov that the novel, though it did not conform to his present ideas of art, especially in form, would not be harmful and might even be useful. Besides, he suggested, the end in this case would surely justify the means—the money would go to the oppressed and unhappy Dukhobors.

Sonya, who wore her eyes out copying his labyrinthine manuscript, cared little about the means, but the end seemed a deliberate affront to her. She was running a private publishing business of her own, getting out editions of her husband's works. Her success rested upon her title to his productions written before 1881, but with those after this date she had to take her chances with all the other publishers, since Tolstoy had renounced his copyrights to these. Her closeness to the source of supply, as it were, gave her a special time advantage, for she could sometimes bring out new works before other publishers, which increased the sale of her editions or the separate supplementary volumes of new works that she published. That her husband loathed all this activity, which was so contrary to his public repudiation of any desire for financial gain from his writings, made no difference to Sonya. For she averaged about twenty thousand rubles a year on her publications, which constituted the largest part of the family income.

Now Tolstoy, without even consulting his wife, had sold the initial publishing rights of a new full-length novel, the first since *Anna Karenina*. Had she been able to bring out *Resurrection* first, she would have reaped a small fortune, but now she must wait until another publisher had skimmed the cream from the initial sale of the book. It was a cruel blow, and it was in no sense softened by the fact that the income from the novel would go to swell the fund that was being raised to send the Dukhobors to Canada. There were his son and daughter, Ilya and Masha, virtually poverty-stricken, she bitterly complained, so why not help them with the money? Who were the Dukhobors anyway, just "proud revolutionists" who refused to serve in the army and thus obliged others to take their places. He mildly replied that it grieved him

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that they were not in complete harmony in all things. "I have worn myself out with suffering over this disharmony," she wrote in her diary. "But the *whole* life of Leo Nikolayevich has been given over to people and aims alien to me, and *all* my life has been for the family. Neither my heart nor head can accept the fact that Leo Nikolayevich, after renouncing his author's rights and printing it in the newspapers, now finds it necessary to sell this novel for an enormous price to Marx's *Niva*<sup>1</sup> and give the money not to his grandchildren, who have no white bread, and not to his poverty-stricken children,<sup>2</sup> but to the entirely strange Dukhobors whom I can in no sense love more than my own children. But because of this the part that Tolstoy played in aiding the Dukhobors will be known to the whole world, and both the newspapers and history will write about it. Yet his grandchildren and children will eat black bread!"

Sonya's anger over the disposal of *Resurrection* appears to have soured her reactions to the novel itself. She decided that the position of the hero and heroine was extremely false, and one scene in particular deeply offended her. After hearing Tolstoy read a part of the work, she wrote in her diary: "I torment myself over the fact that Leo Nikolayevich, a seventy-year-old man, with the peculiar relish of a gastronome eating something tasty, describes the scene of fornication between the serving girl and the officer. I know, because he himself told me about this in detail, that in this scene Leo Nikolayevich is describing his own intimate relations with the serving girl of his sister at Pirogovo. At that time I saw this very Gasha, now an almost seventy-year-old woman; he pointed her out to me to my deep distress and disgust. I'm tormented over the fact that I see in the hero, Nekhlyudov, portrayed as progressing from his downfall to his moral resurrection, Leo Nikolayevich himself, who thinks this very thing about himself; he has described all these resurrections in books very well, yet he has never practised them in life. And while describing and relating to people all his fine feelings and becoming sentimental about himself, he has lived as always, loving sweet food, a bicycle, horseback riding, and lust." In the end, however, Sonya did not exclude *Resurrection* from the praise she accorded nearly all her husband's imaginative works in contrast to her dislike for his

<sup>1</sup> The magazine *Niva*, edited by A. F. Marx.

<sup>2</sup> Neither Tolstoy's children nor his grandchildren were in any sense "poverty-stricken" at this time.

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controversial writings.<sup>1</sup> Although Tolstoy kept doggedly at work on the novel, he was unable to finish it by the end of 1898.

### IX

In 1898, as during the previous year, Tolstoy was unusually faithful to his diary, and in it is revealed the richness of his inner spiritual life, as well as the record of literary plans that never reached fruition. In the face of the many volumes he actually produced, it is remarkable that his teeming brain conceived designs for literally scores of novels, plays, stories, and articles, many of which he roughly sketched or even began and then thrust aside. One of the works that he was contemplating at this time, and to which there are many references in the diary, is "The Appeal." It was to be an attack on the existing social order, in which the position of the working class would come in for extensive treatment. For a number of observations in the diary concern the problem of poverty and the panaceas, such as socialism. In one place he noted that there is no sense in the poor man's trying to shame or convince the rich man to share with him, for the latter sees that the poor man wants exactly what the rich man has. Only when the poor man ceases to seek what the rich man also seeks will the latter yield to him.

In another entry Tolstoy wrote: "Socialists will never destroy poverty and the injustice of the inequality of capacities. The strongest and more intelligent will always make use of the weaker and the more stupid. Justice and equality in the good things of life will never be achieved by anything less than Christianity, i.e., by negating oneself and recognizing the meaning of one's life in service to others." And he returned to Marx, whose theories seemed to be much on his mind, in contemplating "An Appeal." "Even if that should happen which Marx predicted," he wrote, "then the only thing that will happen is that despotism will be passed on. Now the capitalists are ruling, but then the directors of the working class will rule." The mistake of the Marxists and of the whole materialistic school, he insisted, was in believing that an economic cause was at the root of all problems, whereas the life of humanity was moved by the growth of consciousness and

<sup>1</sup> During 1898 Tolstoy also finished two articles, "Carthago Delenda Est" and "Two Wars," devoted to the subject of war and military service; and an introduction to a translation of Edward Carpenter's *Modern Science*.

religion. Marx is in error, he concluded, "in the supposition that capital will pass from the hands of private people into the hands of the government, and from the government, representing the people, into the hands of the workers."

Tolstoy confessed in the diary that the intentional or unintentional misunderstandings of his opinions irritated him. People said that he denied God, whereas he had consistently maintained that God is alone the unattainable good, the beginning of everything. Then some accused him of preaching that it was unnecessary to fight evil, but all he had said was that one ought not to resist evil by violence. Nor had he denied marriage or preached the destruction of the human race, as many charged. All he had said, he wrote, was that "one ought to strive towards chastity, and that on this road the highest grade will be virginity, the second a pure marriage, and the third not a pure marriage, i.e., not a monogamous marriage." Finally, he declared that people accused him of saying that art must be tendentious, whereas what he had written was that art is an infectious activity and that the more infectious art is, the better it is. But whether this activity be good or bad does not depend on how much it satisfies the demands of art, that is, its infectiousness, but rather on how much it satisfies the demands of morality and conscience.

There is much on spirituality and morality in the diary during 1898. In his striving to get nearer to God, Tolstoy seemed able at brief moments to forget his material self and exist in a state of pure spiritual ecstasy. In these rarefied moments he saw the connection between cause and effect only in the spiritual world. The trouble with the materialists, he pointed out, is that they take as a guide for their acts the physical causal connection which one can never fully know, because every effect is an effect of an effect. On the other hand, he condemned those who live for spiritual ends alone, just as he would those who live solely for worldly ends. "There is peace only," he wrote in the diary, "when a man lives for the service of God among people." The tendency to replace moral progress by technical progress he regarded as one of the main calamities of modern life.

Relentlessly searching his daily thoughts and actions, Tolstoy set down meticulously in his diary any infractions of the spiritual life he was struggling to live. For admissions of guilt had their moral compensations. Nothing softens the heart, he remarked, as the consciousness of one's guilt, and nothing hardens it so much

as the consciousness of one's right. The fear of death he seemed to regard as a guilty feeling, and there are a number of observations on this subject in the diary during 1898. Illnesses were frequent this year, and he had at last accepted the fact that he was getting old and weak and must cease the physical exercise he loved. All this meant that he was getting closer to death. But he shunned any fear of it. Fear of death is a horrible superstition, he entered in the diary. For death is a joyous event standing at the end of each life. Whatever may have been his subconscious, unuttered feelings on the subject, he appears to have had no fear of death. Indeed, he now looked forward to it.

After returning from an inspection tour during his work in the famine region that summer, he wrote Sonya: "I rode back through the woods of Turgenev—Spaskoye; it was twilight: the fresh green of the forest under my feet, the stars in the heavens, the smell of the flowering osier, of the drooping birch leaves, the sounds of nightingales, the noise of cockchafers, cuckoos—the cuckoo and solitude—the pleasant, cheerful motion of the horse under me, and physical and spiritual health. And I thought, as I think constantly, about death. It became clear to me that it will be as fine on the other side where death is as it is on this side, but only different, and I then understood why the Hebrews have described paradise as a garden. The most pure joy—the joy of nature. It became clear to me that there it will be just as fine—even better."



## Chapter XXXII

### SOUPE PRINTANIÈRE AND FUGUES

**A**FTER Vanichka's death in 1895 Sonya had acquired a passion for music as a kind of escape from her grief. Even her husband hoped that this new interest would help her regain her emotional equilibrium. The distinguished pianist and composer S. I. Taneyev, who had rented a wing of Yasnaya Polyana during the summers of 1895-1896, also became a frequent visitor at the family's Moscow house. Sonya could not see enough of Taneyev, and her partiality soon became clear to everyone except Taneyev, who seemed unaware of the deep feeling behind Sonya's pursuit of him. In general the musician was indifferent to women.

With growing anxiety Tolstoy watched the unbelievable behaviour of his wife—her repeated invitations to Taneyev, the agitated way in which she pursued him with questions on the musical world, their frequent meetings at the homes of acquaintances and at concerts from which she would accompany him to his carriage. Her husband knew that this was an extreme manifestation of her hysteria, that it was simply the case of an ill woman transferring a love for music to a representative of the art. Yet at times he wondered, and then he could not suppress a feeling of jealousy. It was a mere whim, he comforted himself, and would soon pass.

The children also were distressed over their mother's actions; servants, friends, and even strangers were beginning to gossip. Rumour-mongers were maliciously whispering of the ironic fate of Tolstoy, placed in the terrible position of the betrayed hero of *The Kreutzer Sonata*, whose wife had fallen in love with a musician. But the hero in real life was sixty-eight and the heroine fifty-two, and they had been married thirty-four years! It all seemed like a monstrous practical joke.

This intimacy, which had first become noticeable during Taneyev's stay at Yasnaya Polyana in the summer of 1896, increased during the

next two years. Sonya defined her feeling as love. As far back as 1890, in a moment of boredom with life, but before her intimacy with Taneyev, she had written in her diary: "Would it not be better to have memories of love—of even a sinful love—than this present emptiness, this spotless conscience?" And not long after she wrote: "I'm tormented by sinful thoughts."

The bachelor Taneyev, carefully watched over by his old nurse, hardly looked or acted one of the masculine sides of an eternal love triangle, nor would one have imagined him capable of inspiring sinful thoughts in any woman. He was twelve years younger than Sonya. He was not attractive, having a small head with small eyes set in a red face trimmed with a small beard, the whole mounted on a fat body. And his thin piping laugh only served to accentuate a naturally cold and stiff personality. He no doubt valued his associations with the Tolstoys and this fact perhaps encouraged the attentions he paid Sonya, whose endless adulation he also relished.

Though there is no concrete evidence that Sonya possessed sinful thoughts about Taneyev, she continued to give every indication that she was in love with him. She had been complaining for some time of weariness and the approach of old age, and now she suddenly felt a new "zest for life." With evident satisfaction she recorded in her diary the surprised comments of people on her youthfulness. She walked more lightly, her body felt healthier, and she found a renewed joy in gay evening parties or in skating with one of Taneyev's pupils. She noted in her diary her annoyance at the presence of other people when Taneyev visited, and then with the poetic mystery of a young girl in love for the first time she added: "S. I. [Taneyev] and I had no chance to talk to each other, but we exchanged a few phrases comprehensible to ourselves alone." When Taneyev was absent, she was inconsolable, and she contrived every imaginable pretext to call on him. Her whole being was transformed when he played. "His playing made my heart bleed," she wrote in the diary. "As he came to the end of the Polonaise, my eyes filled with tears and I nearly burst out sobbing." Here was love transforming with its magic touch a woman of fifty-three into an irrational girl of eighteen.

"Even the purest love finally leads to the desire for intimacy and possession," Sonya once observed in her diary. But nowhere in the records of her attachment to Taneyev is there any clear indication that she nourished such a desire. Besides, Taneyev at

best was but a passive receptacle for her ardent feelings. Of the more than sixty letters that she wrote him, only one or two trespass the bounds of commonplace civilities of invitations or polite inquiries about his health. She never ventured to become more personal than to say: "How vexatious, Sergei Ivanovich, that we do not see each other! Will you not come tonight instead of taking your walk? I will be home and alone; I would be infinitely more gay with you than with myself. If possible, come, for I have a present for you—very fine photographs."

Despite a pathetic attempt to observe all the proprieties in an attachment that she wished to represent as a sincere friendship and nothing more, her older children saw something deeper and soon resented the frequent visits of Taneyev. Their outspoken criticism of their mother's behaviour pained and angered her. Even fourteen-year-old Sasha (Alexandra) sensed that there was something wrong in her mother's relations with Taneyev. Her pleasant feeling for him as a friend of the family quickly turned into one of positive dislike. She recalled that on shopping tours her mother would casually direct the driver of their carriage to stop at Taneyev's house, and turning to Sasha she would say: "We must see how Sergei Ivanovich's old nurse is getting along." Young Sasha would keep silent and set her teeth, for she knew it was not the old nurse whom her mother wished to see.

Perhaps Sonya's unrequited passion deserved pity and understanding from her family rather than censure and harsh words. Though undoubtedly she was emotionally and psychologically ill, her temperament and extreme actions, like the failings of many sick people, constantly irritated those who most wanted to aid her. Her love for Taneyev clearly helped to fill the gaping void left in her emotional life by the death of Vanichka, a void that her husband could not satisfactorily fill because of their spiritual disharmony. Taneyev and Vanichka morbidly fused in her mind. She related in her diary how she talked with her dead son and asked him if there was anything evil in her feelings for Taneyev. "Today Vanichka seemed to turn me away from him. He must have felt sorry for his father; but I know he does not blame me, for it is he who sent me Taneyev, and he will not wish to take him away from me." The two were coupled in her dreams—Vanichka and Taneyev stretching their arms out to her, and in another dream she saw her dear son sitting on Taneyev's knee. Years later, when her passion for Taneyev was only a memory, Sonya was able to write of it in

her autobiography<sup>1</sup> with a detachment that belied her actions, yet she did significantly recognize her exceptional emotional condition at that time. Relating what a soothing effect music had on her after the death of Vanichka, she added: "But the music that affected me more powerfully than any was that of Taneyev, who was the first to teach me by his own superb execution to listen to music and to love it. . . . At times I had only to meet Sergei Ivanovich, to hear his unimpassioned, quiet voice, and I grew calm. . . . My state of mind was abnormal. It coincided with my critical period. The personality of Taneyev had almost nothing to do with my condition. Externally he was uninteresting, always equable, extremely secretive, and to the end a man quite incomprehensible to me."

During the course of this abnormal relationship, Sonya could not resist comparing her husband and Taneyev. The fact that Tolstoy's jealousy interfered with her free intercourse with Taneyev unconsciously sharpened her asperity towards him and at the same time fed a feeling of guilt that she strongly resented. When Tolstoy was away during much of 1898, she cautiously refrained from mentioning in her letters the frequent visits of Taneyev, although she meticulously listed all the other callers. And of course she said nothing of her visits to the composer. Her diary during 1897-1898 is filled with cruel comments on her husband and rather shameless observations on the intimate side of their life together.

With a suggestion of elation, she noted in her diary on June 10, 1897: "I've knocked over Leo Nikolayevich as my idol." She was still devoted to him, yes, but he could no longer bring her "real happiness." Had he been displaced by another idol? She did not say, but she made it clear how keenly she was missing the company of Taneyev that summer. In her loneliness, her thoughts turned to suicide, and she almost wept over the letter she composed in her mind to explain her untimely end to friends: "I don't wish to suffer any longer," she exploded, "and I can't, I can't, I can't, I can't, I can't! I must either live without suffering, or die—and dying is the better course!" Then immediately following this outburst is a declaration that is pathetic in contrast. "And now I've got to write the menus again: *soupe printanière*—Oh, how I hate it! *Every* day for thirty-five years it has been *soupe printanière*! I don't want to hear any more of *soupe printanière*; I want to hear the most difficult fugue or symphony."

<sup>1</sup>This work is still unpublished.

Her husband's criticisms of her attachment provoked Sonya into making extravagant statements about him in her diary. She imagined *What Is Art?* to be a deliberate attack on Taneyev. Unconsciously she contrasted the composer's pure relations to her with the physical passion of her husband. Although she reproached Tolstoy for writing unkind things about her in his diary, she did not hesitate to record his failings in hers. His cheerfulness during the day merely forewarned her to expect a night of passion, and, obsessed with her own pure desires, she wrote: "It has an entirely different effect on me; I feel ashamed and sad, and I yearn for a poetic, spiritual, even a sentimental relationship with someone—only to get away from this eternal sex." Then in another entry she deliberately drew a comparison: "He needs me only at night, not during the daytime; I grow sad and cannot help longing for last year's dear and friendly companion [Taneyev]." Sonya's concentration on the subject of sex in her diary during this period was no doubt a manifestation of her abnormal condition.

Though criticism of her husband appeared frequently in Sonya's diary during these two years of her attachment to Taneyev, there were also many expressions of devotion to him. Never did she question the supreme position he occupied in her heart. Even though she had knocked him over as her idol, she still worshipped at his shrine. Between the extremes of condemnation and fervent devotion, her judgement on Tolstoy and her relations to him at this time may be summed up in the statement she entered in her diary on May 20, 1898: "I've had at times both a passionate lover and stern judge in the person of my husband, but I've never had a friend in him, and now less so than ever."

II

In Tolstoy's eyes marriage was a relationship that united people for life and in complete fidelity to each other. Accordingly Sonya's feeling for Taneyev seemed to him an expression of infidelity. He tried hard to regard the affair in its proper perspective and to accept it as an affliction that he must bear in accordance with the moral and spiritual philosophy he professed. At times Sonya was puzzled by his polite and considerate behaviour towards Taneyev, when she knew how intensely he disliked the composer. But she did not know the effort of will it had cost him to achieve this "love for one's enemies," an ineffable sweetness, he mentioned in his

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diary, "greater in proportion as the love is unattractive to you." Only once in the diary did he permit himself a direct criticism of Taneyev by name, and this occurred in the summer of 1895 before Sonya had evinced any partiality for him: "At home there were . . . Taneyev, who disgusts me with his self-satisfied moral and (though it seems ridiculous to say so) aesthetic (genuine, not superficial) stolidity, and his position of *coq de village* in our house."

Over these two years 1897-1898, Tolstoy's struggle against jealousy continued to find expression in his diary, but in guarded statements in which no names are mentioned. On January 12, 1897, he wrote: "Early morning. I cannot sleep for anguish. And neither choler nor selfishness nor sensuality is to blame, but this tormenting life. . . . Here there are nothing but pastimes of all kinds and guzzling and senile flirtation or still worse; it is abominable. I'm writing this down so that people may at least know after my death. Now it must not be said. Worse than those who are deaf are those who shout. She is sick, it is true, but it is the kind of sickness that is taken for health. She receives encouragement instead of treatment. What will come of it, how will it end? I pray without ceasing. I blame myself and pray. Help me as Thou alone knowest." He went on in this vein, listing the sacrifices he had made—giving up his life to God's service, distributing his estates, and separating from his family—in order that he might experience real spiritual love, but now he had to witness this "degrading madness." Then, ashamed of his outburst, he humbly added that this sorrow had been sent to him, that he must bear it, and that there had been too little of suffering in his life of service to God. Finally, he tore out this page of his diary and sent it to Chertkov to be read and destroyed.<sup>1</sup>

That no measures were being taken to "heal" the sick passion of Sonya deeply disturbed her husband. Shortly after he went to visit the Olsufyevs in January 1897, Sonya left for Petersburg, ostensibly to visit her sister. Tolstoy knew that her real reason was to attend a symphony concert in which Taneyev was to perform. He took this occasion to write her a letter on her feeling for Taneyev.<sup>2</sup> After confronting her with the fact that she had

<sup>1</sup> But before destroying it, Chertkov photographed it.

<sup>2</sup> In the edition of Tolstoy's letters to her, Sonya did not include this one. It was published for the first time in Russian in a valuable article by N. N. Gusev, whose discovery of hitherto unpublished material on the family tragedy of the Tolstoys has been of great service. See "On the History of the Family Tragedy of Tolstoy," *Literary Heritage*, No. 37-38 (Moscow, 1939), II, 675-697.

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misrepresented to him the real purpose of her trip, he wrote: "But you are doing this unintentionally. It is terribly painful and humiliating to think that a complete outsider, an unnecessary person, and in no sense of the word an interesting one, rules our lives. . . . It is humiliating and tormenting to think that one must find out where he is going, at what rehearsals he is playing, and when. It is frightfully, frightfully disgusting and shameful. And it is taking place just at the end of our life—a good life lived cleanly together—just at the time when we were coming closer and closer, in spite of all that might have divided us. This union of ours began long ago, before Vanichka's death, and grew closer and closer, especially of late. And now suddenly, instead of the natural, good, and cheerful conclusion of thirty-five years of life together, here is this vile abomination that leaves its horrible stamp on everything. I know that it is hard for you and that you too are suffering because you love me, and you want to be good, but up to now you have been unable to be, and I am terribly sorry for you, for I love you with the best love of all—not of the flesh and not of the mind, but of the soul."

During the remainder of the winter and spring of 1897, Tolstoy suffered intensely. Even the spiritual comfort on which he depended was failing him. Lilliputian hairs seemed to bind him, he wrote in his diary, and he felt "physically, intellectually and morally weak." While at Yasnaya Polyana, after receiving more news of Taneyev's visits to Sonya in Moscow, he entered in his diary on May 16: "Things are just the same, I didn't sleep all night. Never have my sufferings reached such a pitch." That same day he wrote to Chertkov. After informing him of his extreme unhappiness and vaguely hinting at the cause, without mentioning any names, he concluded: "I have tried everything: anger, prayers, expostulations, and lately, forbearance and kindness. Yet things get worse. I suffer from humiliation and cruelty, though I am ashamed to admit it." The letter struck him as too indiscreet and he did not send it. The next day he wrote in his diary: "My heart aches terribly. Tears rise in my throat." Finally, on the following day, he entered:<sup>1</sup> "It is just the same, my heart not ceasing to ache. For three nights I haven't slept, and I feel that I will not sleep tonight. I have, I think, come

<sup>1</sup> Apparently fearing to compromise his wife, Tolstoy tore out the pages containing the last four diary entries mentioned, and gave them, along with the unsent letter to Chertkov, to his trusted disciple, P. A. Boulanger, who was aware of Sonya's feeling for Taneyev, to read and destroy. Boulanger, however, preserved the documents and they have recently been uncovered and published.

to a decision. It will be hard to carry out, but I cannot and ought not to do otherwise."

The decision was to go away, the temptation that he had firmly resisted for a number of years. On the night of May 18, he wrote his wife a letter, but deciding that it was too harsh, he destroyed it and drafted another. "Your intimacy with T. disgusts me and I cannot tolerate it calmly. If I go on living with you on these terms, I shall only be shortening and poisoning my own life. For a year now I have not been living at all. You know this. I have told it to you in exasperation and with prayers. Lately I have tried silence. I have tried everything, and nothing is of any use: the intimacy goes on and I can see that it may well go on like this to the end. I cannot stand it any longer. It is obvious that you cannot give it up; only one thing remains—to part. I have firmly made up my mind to this. But I must consider the best way of doing it. I think the very best thing would be for me to go abroad. We shall think out what would be for the best. One thing is certain—we cannot go on like this."

Still dissatisfied, and apparently feeling that his decision to go away had been too rashly taken, Tolstoy wrote a third letter, much longer and more tempered.<sup>1</sup> Repeating the story of his suffering and its cause, he wrote that he had decided to go away, "but when I thought of you—not of how painful it would be for me to part with you, no matter how painful it would be—but of how it would grieve you, torment you, of how you would suffer, I realized that I could not do it, that I could not go away from you without your consent." Then he proposed several solutions. The first and best, he wrote, was to break off all relations with Taneyev at once; the second, difficult for him, but "a thousand times better for me than to continue the life we have been living this year," was for him to go abroad and part with her forever; a third was to break off intimacy with Taneyev and go abroad with her husband; the fourth, "the most dreadful course, of which I cannot think without horror and despair," was to go on as they had been living: "for you to go on seeking—without being actually aware of it—every opportunity for intimacy, and for me to look on, observe, conjecture, and be tormented, not with jealousy, although perhaps there is something of jealousy in it, jealousy is not the principal thing. The principal thing I feel, as I have told you, is shame; I am ashamed both of

<sup>1</sup> Both these letters were published by Gusev for the first time in the article mentioned above.



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you and of myself." He admitted there was a fifth course, which she had suggested: "to give up looking at this the way I do and wait for it to pass of itself." But he had tried and he simply could not accept this way. "Sonya, my love, you are a good, kind, fair-minded woman. Put yourself in my place and try to realize that I cannot feel otherwise than I do, that is, I cannot help but suffer tormenting pain and shame; try to think of the best way, love, not so much to relieve me of this as to relieve yourself of still worse sufferings which are bound to come in one form or another unless you change your attitude to all this and make an effort."

Expecting Sonya to arrive at Yasnaya Polyana the next day, he left both these letters for her, begging her to think the whole matter over calmly. Then, worn-out with mental anguish and sleepless nights, he left for Pirogovo to visit his brother.<sup>1</sup>

### III

Far from being deterred by his remonstrances, Sonya invited Taneyev to visit at Yasnaya Polyana only a couple of weeks after reading her husband's plea that she break off her relations with the composer. The visit resulted in another quarrel, although Tolstoy, to her surprise, behaved towards the guest with the utmost civility. Either misled by this or incapable of resisting the desire to see Taneyev, she invited him again about a month later. "I haven't told Leo Nikolayevich yet, in case it upsets him," she noted in her diary. "My God, will he be jealous again! . . . Wouldn't Sergei Ivanovich be surprised if he knew! But I can't help being delighted at the thought that there will be music and pleasant conversation with such a cheerful, decent man."

One of the children at dinner dropped a hint of Taneyev's impending arrival. Tolstoy's anger frightened Sonya, though there is just the suspicion, as she tried to calm him, that she secretly enjoyed what she interpreted as a jealous rage. On July 8 he wrote a letter in which he informed his wife that he was leaving her. But he did not give her the letter nor did he leave. "He has suddenly quieted down," she entered in her diary, "he has softened; he

<sup>1</sup> This may not have been the only correspondence that Tolstoy addressed to his wife on the theme of Taneyev. Sonya tells in her diary (June 21, 1899) how she came across a forgotten letter in one of her husband's books. On the envelope he had written that ". . . he had resolved to kill himself because he saw that I loved another. . . ." When she started to open the envelope to read the letter inside, Tolstoy snatched it from her and tore it into bits.

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went riding yesterday on his horse and on his bicycle, and he is not angry with me." Apparently he was able to conquer once again the impulse to go away in the belief that he must bear the shame and humiliation that God had sent him.

Tolstoy did not destroy this letter. He kept it, not among his papers, but hidden under the upholstery of one of the armchairs in his study. On the envelope he had written: "To be opened fifty years after my death." Several years later (May 1907) when he heard that Sonya was going to have the furniture newly upholstered, he rescued the letter, put it in another envelope, on which he wrote: "To be given to Sofya Andreyevna after my death," and he handed it over for safekeeping to his son-in-law. When the envelope was opened by Sonya after his death, there were two letters in it. After reading one of them, she remarked: "More foolishness and jealousy and reproaches," and she tore it into small bits. The other letter, dated July 8, 1897, she at once gave to the press. In order to save his wife from public censure over the real reason for his desire to leave her, Tolstoy had written two letters, one intended for his wife alone and the other for the world, if she cared to make it public.

In the letter that Sonya published, he wrote:

"I have long been tormented by the incongruity between my life and my beliefs. To oblige you to change your way of life, your habits, which I taught you myself, was impossible; to leave you has also been impossible up to this time, for I thought that I should be depriving the children, while they were still young, of the influence, however small, which I might have over them, and should be causing you pain. But to continue to live as I have been living these sixteen years, at one time struggling and harassing you, at another yielding to those influences and temptations to which I was accustomed and by which I was surrounded, has also been impossible for me at last; and I have now made up my mind to do what I have long wished to do, to go away; first, because with my advancing years this life grows more and more burdensome to me and I long more and more for solitude; and secondly, because the children have now grown up, and my influence is no longer necessary and all of you have livelier interests, which will make you notice my absence less.

"But the principal reason is, just as the Hindus when they near their sixties retire into the forest, as every religious old man desires to dedicate the last years of his life to God and not to jokes, puns, gossip, and lawn tennis, so I, who am now entering upon my

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seventieth year, yearn with all the strength of my spirit for that tranquillity and solitude and, though not perfect accord, still something better than this crying disharmony between my life and my beliefs and conscience.

“If I did this openly, I should be met with entreaties, reproaches, and arguments, and perhaps I should hesitate and fail to carry out my decision, and it has got to be carried out. Please forgive me then if this step that I am about to take causes you pain; and in your heart, Sonya, and above all, let me go of your own free will; do not seek for me, do not find fault with me, do not condemn me.

“My leaving does not mean that I am dissatisfied with you. I know that you could not, literally *could not*, and cannot, see and feel as I do, and hence you could not and cannot alter your life and make sacrifices for the sake of what you do not believe in. I do not find fault with you; on the contrary, I recall, with love and gratitude, the long thirty-five years of our life together, especially the first half of it, when, with maternal self-abnegation which is characteristic of you, you bore so zealously and patiently with what you thought was your appointed burden. You gave me and the world what you were able to give. You gave much maternal love and self-sacrifice, and I cannot fail to esteem you for that. But during the latter period of our life, during the last fifteen years, we have fallen away from each other. I can believe that I am to blame, because I know that I have changed, not for my own sake or for the sake of other people's opinion, but because I could not help it. And I cannot blame you for not having followed me, but I thank you and I lovingly recall and ever shall recall all that you have given me. Good-bye, dear Sonya.”

If Sonya had known the contents of this letter in July 1897, it is doubtful if she would have, or even could have, given up Taneyev. When she returned to Moscow at the beginning of the autumn, Tolstoy lingered on in the country until almost the end of the year. Dislike for city life and a desire for the quiet of Yasnaya Polyana to work on *What Is Art?* contributed to this decision, but he also loathed the thought of being subjected to the frequent visits of Taneyev at their Moscow home. Shortly before her departure Sonya wrote in her diary: “I shall soon go to Moscow, where I shall hire a piano and play; and I hope Taneyev will come and play to me. The very thought of it gives me a new lease of life.” He soon called and she was “terribly excited.” When he failed to turn up for a brief period because of illness, she impatiently scribbled:

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“Oh what a terrible, violent, hopeless desire to hear that man play again! Will I *never* hear him?”

As Tolstoy continued to delay his return to Moscow, Sonya grew more and more irritated and began to suspect his real reason for not coming. “Is writing one article more or less of greater consequence to you than the happiness of your wife?” she wrote. Then her daughter Tanya, who had arrived from Yasnaya Polyana, passed on her father’s remark that his life in Moscow was sheer suicide. With bitter scorn she wrote him at the end of November: “As you put the matter, you will come for my sake, for this would not be *self-murder*, which I suppose means that it is I who will then murder you, so I hasten to write you to say, for God’s sake do not come; your painful arrival will deprive us both of calm and freedom. You will imagine yourself always as being murdered, and I will regard myself as the murderess. What a fine life in the name of love!” And she pointedly concluded: “Well, good-bye, now I shall wait for you no longer. Every spiritual strain has become unendurable to me. I will spend the evenings at concerts as much as possible.”

The stage was being set for another quarrel, and the cause was already in the making. On December 17, Tolstoy wrote his disciple Dushan Makovitski: “Concerning the foreword to Carpenter, it has been the cause of great unpleasantness for me. And you were the unwitting reason for it. My wife suffers from some strange hatred and jealousy of Gurevich. It began at the time of the printing of ‘Master and Man.’ I thought it had passed, and I did not imagine that the foreword would produce such an effect, but I intended to tell her of this. It so happened that this information, received from you, had a terrible effect on her, so that I have had a bad time of it and have cancelled the article with the *Northern Messenger* and will not print the foreword at all.” And he cautiously added in a postscript: “Please do not answer me on this subject, for she reads my letters and every remembrance about this is a torment to her.”

The reference is to an introduction that Tolstoy had written for a translation of Edward Carpenter’s *Modern Science*, and he had sent the piece to the attractive editor, Lyubov Gurevich, of the *Northern Messenger*. When Sonya learned this bit of news from Makovitski, who visited her in Moscow, she became hysterical. “For a moment I wanted to take my life,” she wrote in her diary, “then to go somewhere, then I played the piano for five hours, ate nothing all day, and slept in the parlour as only those sleep who are

in great grief or agitation; I dropped down like a stone." That he should again send an article to Gurevich was a clear indication to her that he must be in love with the woman.

Sonya could think of no better way to express her grief than to leave home and go to the Trinity Monastery, a few miles from Moscow, a visit timed for the day when her husband had promised to return from Yasnaya Polyana. A telegram brought her back. "Leo Nikolayevich met me at the entrance with tears in his eyes," she wrote in her diary. "We threw ourselves into each other's arms. He agreed . . . not to print the article in the *Northern Messenger*, and I promised him quite sincerely, not intentionally to see Sergei Ivanovich, to serve Leo Nikolayevich, to take care of him, and to do everything for his happiness and peace of mind. We talked so pleasantly that it was easy for me to promise him everything, for I strongly and warmly loved him and am ready to love. But today he has written in his diary that I *recognized my fault* for the first time and that this is joyous! My God! Help me to endure this! Again, before future generations, he must make himself out to be the *martyr* and me the one who is *at fault*. But in what am I to blame?"

A few months later Sonya calmly announced to her husband that she did not mind if he published his introduction to Carpenter in the *Northern Messenger*, for she would also like to use his piece in the supplementary volume of her edition of his works.

IV

Sonya could not abide by her promise; she continued to see Taneyev, and "intentionally," through the early months of 1898. Nor could she resist the temptation to go all the way to Petersburg again to hear his music—she wanted to attend the Wagnerian operas there, she lied to her husband, a reason for her visit that was equally unintelligible to him. There were fewer of those veiled references to his sufferings in his diary this year. His grief and anger, however, were reflected in a series of sharp judgements on women, which were obviously inspired by his wife's behaviour. "Women do not use words to express their thoughts, but to attain their ends. . . ." When falling in love "breaks out in the life of people after marriage," he observed, "it is out of place and disgusting." And in another entry he wrote: "Woman—and so also runs the legend—is the tool of the devil. She is generally stupid, but the devil lends her brains

when she works for him. Then she accomplishes miracles of thinking, far-sightedness, constancy, in order to do something nasty." And again: "It is impossible to demand from a woman that she evaluate the feeling of her exclusive love on the basis of moral feeling. She cannot do it, because she does not possess real moral feeling, i. e., one that stands higher than everything."

Such harsh judgements give a distorted impression of Tolstoy's opinion on women; they are the passing observations of a man profoundly hurt and perplexed by the actions of one woman—his wife. Scattered through his literary works are portraits of the highest types of womanhood, and in his controversial writings and in conversation Tolstoy frequently paid tribute to women as the better half of the human race.

When the opportunity came in April to help the famine-stricken in the district of his son Ilya, Tolstoy eagerly seized it. His desire to use the experience he had accumulated in this kind of work was sincere enough, but he also guiltily confessed in his diary at this time: "I accepted money and undertook to use it simply to have a reason for going away from Moscow, and hence I acted badly." Sonya and Taneyev had again become too much for him.

Tolstoy's work among the hungry peasants left no time for his personal worries. But when he returned to Yasnaya Polyana that summer, ill and in need of a rest, he found his domestic situation unchanged. Much against his wishes, Sonya went off to visit her friends the Maslovs at their country estate Selishche on July 12. She knew that Taneyev would be staying there at the same time. Overwhelmed by this new overt act, Tolstoy once more thought of going away from home, for he wrote letters to his Finnish disciple, Arvid Järnfeldt, the well-known author, and to Chertkov, in which he suggested such a move. Apparently his plan was to go to Finland, but again he overcame the temptation of taking a step that might so easily prove to be irreparable.

Sonya returned by way of Kiev, stopped there with her sister Tanya, and finally persuaded her to come to Yasnaya Polyana for a brief visit. It had been a "pure delight" to listen to Taneyev's playing at Selishche, but now at home Sonya experienced a feeling of guilt, which was increased by her sister's unsparing criticism of her pursuit of the composer. A few days after her return, she entered in her diary: "I walked through the woods alone and bathed and wept. At night the same talk of jealousy began again; and again there were shouting, abuse, and reproaches. My nerves could not

stand it; something that kept the balance in my brain gave way and I lost my self-command. I had a terrible attack of nerves. I trembled all over, sobbed, raved, and kept starting up in fright. 'I do not well remember what happened to me, but it ended in a kind of numbness.' .

The conversation that brought about Sonya's violent attack of nerves that night was actually written down by Tolstoy in the form of a letter which he intended for her sister but never sent. He called it "A Dialogue." Tolstoy began by saying that he had gone to bed with his wife that night in a "good and pleasant frame of mind," consoled by what his sister-in-law had told him during the day and by her belief that all this unhappiness would soon end. As they lay in bed together, Sonya soon began to accuse him of talking about her and Taneyev to her sister. He begged her to drop the matter since he did not wish to discuss it and hoped that it would finally quiet down and be done with. Then he continued the dialogue:

"*She*: I cannot stop speaking of it, for it is difficult for me to live in constant fear and trembling. If he should happen to come here, it will start all over again. He did not say anything, but he may come.

"The news that he may come—as always it was put as if he 'should happen,' when in reality he was certain to come—upset me very much. Just as I was trying not to think of it, here was this annoying visit again. I said nothing, but I could not sleep and finally could hold out no longer.

"*I*: Just as I was hoping to get some peace you begin to prepare me again for a disagreeable happening.

"*She*: What am I to do? It may happen. He told Tanya. I didn't ask him. Perhaps he will come.

"*I*: It is of no importance whether he comes or doesn't come, and even your trip is of no importance; what is important, as I told you two years ago, is the attitude you take to your feeling for him. If you had acknowledged this feeling to be a bad one, then you would not have even troubled to mention whether he was coming or not.

"*She*: Well, what am I to do now?

"*I*: Repent of your feeling in your soul.

"*She*: I don't know how to repent and don't understand what it means.

"*I*: It means that you have to judge for yourself whether your feeling for this man is right or wrong.

"*She*: I haven't any feeling, either right or wrong.

"*I*: That is not true.

*She:* It is such an unimportant, insignificant feeling.

*I:* All feelings, and therefore even the least significant, are always either right or wrong in our own eyes, and hence you must decide whether this is a right or a wrong feeling.

*She:* There is nothing to decide. This feeling is so unimportant that it cannot be bad. And I am sure there is nothing bad in it.

*I:* No, the exceptional feeling of an old married woman for a strange man is a wrong feeling.

*She:* It is not a feeling for him as a man but as a human being.

*I:* But this human being is a man.

*She:* For me he is not a man. It is not an exceptional feeling. There is only this—that after all my grief I found consolation in his music, but I have no particular feeling for the man.

*I:* Why do you speak an untruth?

*She:* Oh, very well then. Let us leave it that way. I did wrong to go and it hurt you. But now it is all over with. I will do everything possible in order not to hurt your feelings.

*I:* You cannot do so, because the whole point is that whatever you do—go to him or not, receive him or not—the whole point lies in the attitude you take to this feeling of yours. You must decide for yourself whether it is a right feeling or a wrong one.

*She:* There isn't any at all.

*I:* That is not true, and this is what is bad for you. You want to hide this feeling, in order to keep it in check. But until you make up your mind whether it is a good or bad feeling and acknowledge it to be wrong, you will not be able to avoid hurting me. If you acknowledge, as you are doing, that this is a good feeling, you will never be strong enough not to wish to gratify it, that is, to see each other. And if you wish it, then you will certainly do everything you can to see him. And if you avoid seeing him, you will only be sad and always yearning to see him. So it follows that everything turns on your decision as to whether it is a good feeling or a bad one.

*She:* I have done nothing wrong. What I did wrong was to give you pain, and I am sincerely sorry for it.

*I:* That is just what is bad about it; you repent of your actions but not of the feeling that guided those actions.

*She:* I know that I have never loved anyone, nor do I love anyone more than I love you. I should like to know then what your conception of my feeling for you is? How could I love you if I loved someone else?



"I: This inner conflict is the result of your not having explained to yourself the meaning of your feeling. A drunkard or a gambler may love his wife dearly and yet be incapable of keeping away from cards or wine; and he never will be able to keep away from them as long as he does not decide in his heart whether his love of cards and wine is a right feeling or not. Only when this is decided will he be able to free himself."

The argument continued. Tolstoy kept insisting that she recognize her feeling for Taneyev for what it was, until Sonya, with some justification, exclaimed in desperation: "The same thing over and over again. It is simply torture!" All she wanted, she declared, was "that *he* should come once a month and sit awhile and play for me, as any good acquaintance might."

"Yes," he replied, "and by those words you are proving that you have a particular feeling for this man. There is, after all, no other person whose monthly visits could give you joy. If this one visit a month would be pleasant, how much pleasanter would be a weekly or a daily visit. You have confessed involuntarily to your particular feeling. And unless you settle the question of whether it is good or bad, nothing can be altered."

Recriminations followed over instances of her chasing after Taneyev, and Tolstoy scornfully described her "as one of those ladies who never miss a concert at the conservatory." This appeared to be the last straw for Sonya and she became hysterical.

A long silence ensued, and Tolstoy continued: "Then I remember God; I pray and think to myself: *she cannot renounce her feeling*, she cannot bring the influence of her mind to bear on her feeling. With her, as with all women, feeling dominates, and any change that takes place in her feeling will perhaps do so independently of her mind. Perhaps Tanya is right, and this will take place gradually in its own peculiar feminine way, incomprehensible to me. I ought to tell her this, I think to myself, and, full of pity and a desire to soothe her, I tell her that perhaps I am mistaken in putting the question in my own way. Perhaps she will arrive at the same thing after her own fashion, and that this is what I am hoping for."

At that moment, however, her irritation reached an extraordinary pitch and she poured out a torrent of harsh words and wild threats, ending in a fit of hysterics. He concluded: "Sobbing, laughing, and whispering meaningless, and alas, feigned protests, such as 'My head is ready to split . . . just here at the parting . . . cut a

vein in my neck. Oh, this is the one. . . .’ She tried to frighten me with this and a great deal more rubbish. I held her. I know that always helps. I kissed her brows. She could not get her breath for a long time. Then she began to yawn and sigh, and at last she fell asleep and is still sleeping.

“I do not know how this madness can end. I cannot see any way out. It is evident that she values this feeling as much as her life and does not want to acknowledge it as wrong. And without acknowledging it as wrong, she cannot get rid of it and will continue to do the things the feeling demands, things that are tormenting and shameless for the children to witness, if not for me.”

## v

Sonya’s feeling for Taneyev did change “gradually in its own peculiar feminine way,” but not through any effort of her own will or because she finally recognized it as a “bad feeling.” Taneyev put an end to the affair. For several more years she kept up the chase, attending concerts in order to sit with him, and making summer pilgrimages to Selishche to be near him. She observed that he began to avoid her, and she imagined that he had heard of her husband’s jealousy or that he had received a letter from him, but Tolstoy never once uttered a word to Taneyev about his wife’s attitude towards him. Finally came an affront too obvious for her to ignore: he left her box at a concert and went to sit in the gallery. This took place in April 1904. She wrote him to demand an explanation. He evaded the issue. She wept, grew melancholy, and could not sleep. Painful exchanges of letters took place, she hoping for a favourable explanation of his behaviour, he cautiously avoiding one. Eventually he offered her a silly explanation, which she gratefully accepted, that he had left her at the concert because his thoughts kept turning on her but he valued the music of Tchaikovsky more. But something had snapped in her feeling for him; her happiness was gone and only memories remained. The man who at one time seemed to her to possess all the possible virtues, she could now describe as “thick-skinned and gross, both in body and spirit.”

Through the concluding months of 1898 Tolstoy again shunned the city as long as he could, immersed in the business of the Dukhobors and in work on *Resurrection*. With him in the country and Sonya in Moscow, peaceful relations were more easily maintained. She wrote him less frequently than was her custom, for she

was extremely busy with music and concerts. But of these matters and of Taneyev she now made little mention. The debauchery of young Misha and the broken engagement of Andrei to a Georgian lady, who in despair shot herself, were the subjects of her letters. And she complained of her strange "autumn grief" and the "smell of a corpse," a hallucination that had obsessed her since Vanichka's death. Tolstoy wrote her sympathetic, loving replies. Chafing at his continued absence, she went to Yasnaya Polyana to spend a few days with him. So happy were they that she wept on parting. Though he failed to arrive in Moscow in time for their thirty-sixth wedding anniversary, she paid him an unusual tribute in her diary: "I do not complain, and it is fine that he cares about me, so jealously guards me, and is so afraid to lose me. But he need not. Whomever I might love, there is no one else in the world I would even *compare* with my husband. He has held too great a place in my whole life and in my heart."

## Chapter XXXIII

### RESURRECTION

ALL COPIED the manuscript of *Resurrection*—members of the family and their guests. Duplicate sets of corrected proof had to be prepared for translators. Anguished telegrams arrived from the editor of *Niva* to beg for final copy for the next weekly issue of the magazine. Cablegrams and letters from abroad offered huge sums for the first publication rights. Racing against time, but always the exacting artist, Tolstoy kept to his study for days on end, mangling successive sets of proof, repeatedly rewriting whole sections, and hurrying off last-minute changes to the editor in an instalment just about to go to press. He deserted the family, often took his meals alone at odd hours, and saw few visitors. The atmosphere of the household was tense and strained by the mighty effort. Finally, on December 18, 1899, he wrote in his diary: "Completed *Resurrection*. Not good, uncorrected, hurried, but it is done with and I am no longer interested."

Twelve years before, the eminent jurist, A. F. Koni, while visiting Yasnaya Polyana, had planted in Tolstoy's mind the seed of this novel by relating an incident connected with his law practice. One day an agitated young man had come to his office to ask aid in conveying a letter to a girl who had been sent to prison, for the jail official had refused to do this unless he were permitted to censor the letter. Koni agreed to help him and subsequently learned the details of the case. As an orphan child the girl had been taken in by a wealthy lady who owned the farm her dead parents had rented. Although given some education, she was eventually relegated to the position of a servant in the family. When she had reached the age of sixteen, a pretty, well-formed girl, a relative of her benefactor happened to visit the estate. This visitor, the same young man who had appealed to Koni, seduced the girl, and when her benefactor observed her pregnant condition, she drove her from the

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house. Abandoned by her seducer, she placed her newborn child in an asylum, and after a hopeless attempt to earn an honest livelihood, she became a prostitute and sank lower and lower. Detected in stealing a sum of money from one of her drunken "guests" in a brothel, she was arrested. On the jury that tried the case fate placed the young man who had seduced her. Their meeting in such circumstances produced a powerful impression on him and awakened his conscience to the injustice of his behaviour. He decided to marry the girl, who had been sentenced to four months in prison. Koni concluded the tale by relating that they were actually married, but shortly after her sentence expired the girl died from typhus.

The story deeply moved Tolstoy and he urged Koni, an extremely talented person, to write it for the *Intermediary*. Koni promised to do this. When a year had passed and he failed to fulfil his promise, Tolstoy asked to be allowed to make use of the story. For the next ten years he worked at it by fits and starts, but only when the need for money arose in 1898 to aid the Dukhobors to emigrate to Canada did he turn to the novel with renewed determination and zest.<sup>1</sup>

Koni's slender tale served as the foundation of a novel of some five hundred pages. As in Tolstoy's other long novels, the development of the story element was a protracted, tortuous process. There were several quite different beginnings, and again and again he deleted themes and introduced entirely new ones. Even small details such as the description of the external appearance of the heroine Katya Maslov exist in as many as twenty variants. There are six separate redactions of *Resurrection*, and before he had finished his laborious revision he had piled up enough rejected material to fill a volume almost as large as the novel itself.

Again as in Tolstoy's previous full-length novels, there is a great deal of autobiographical matter. The original hero, Valerian Yushkin, was inspired by Tolstoy's brother Sergei, but in later redactions the hero became Dmitri Nekhlyudov,<sup>2</sup> and now he curiously resembled Tolstoy himself and also Chertkov in some aspects of his spiritual development. Many of the characters are plainly modelled on people Tolstoy knew. Toporov, it is interesting

<sup>1</sup> Tolstoy worked on the novel, more or less consistently, during the following years: 1889-1890, 1895-1896, 1898-1899.

<sup>2</sup> Characters by the name of Nekhlyudov turn up persistently in previous fictional works of Tolstoy, in *Boyhood*, *Youth*, *A Landlord's Morning* and "Lucerne," and in the last two, Nekhlyudov is clearly autobiographical.

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to observe, is a thinly disguised and unflattering portrait of Pobedonostsev.

Before the serial publication of *Resurrection* had got well under way, Tolstoy began to regard his compact with *Niva* as one with the devil—he had sold his soul for that advance of twelve thousand rubles, even though the money went to the Dukhobor fund. This sole instance of violating his previous repudiation of all copyright privileges to the extent of accepting money for the initial publication of a novel caused him endless trouble. *Niva* at first attempted to run the novel in weekly instalments. With his painstaking correction of proof and the constant introduction of new matter, Tolstoy found it extremely difficult to keep up this pace. Finally his health broke down and he virtually decided to end the novel with Part II, omitting the brilliant third part. Only the willingness of the editor to forgo his demand for weekly instalments persuaded Tolstoy to continue. Then newspapers and magazines pirated the chapters as they came out, so that Tolstoy had to make a public request that *Niva* be permitted to publish the whole novel before others availed themselves of the right he had long since given them to produce his works free. On the whole, this request was observed in Russia.

Abroad, arrangements went forward, largely under Chertkov's direction, for the simultaneous publications of translations in England, France, Germany, and America. Foreign editors were eager to buy first rights, this money also going to the Dukhobor fund. As soon as Tolstoy finished a final batch of corrected proof in duplicate, a set was sent to Chertkov in England. It was not so easy to prevent foreign firms from pirating, a fact that caused Tolstoy much embarrassment. Twelve different translations appeared in Germany alone in 1900. In 1899 and 1900, fifteen editions were published in France. Obtaining faithful translations was difficult, a misfortune Tolstoy's works had nearly always suffered abroad. The extreme liberties taken with *Resurrection* were of the order of those in a German translation of *Anna Karenina*, in which the motto of that book, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay," was altered to "Revenge is sweet; I play the ace!" While the French version of *Resurrection* was appearing in the *Echo de Paris*, Parisian readers characteristically complained that the love scenes of the hero and heroine, which they relished, were too infrequent. The businesslike editor had no scruples about omitting the next regular instalment and substituting for it one in

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which the hero and heroine are again occupied with each other. In America, on the other hand, the editor of the *Cosmopolitan*, who had bought the first serial rights, did not hesitate to tone down or delete love passages that he thought might offend that magazine's respectable middle-class readers. Chertkov promptly broke this contract and a lawsuit was threatened which naturally added to Tolstoy's worries. In the end he was happy at the thought of reverting to his rule of taking no money for his writings, unwilling perhaps to realize that the rule itself had been the cause of all his troubles.

Not the least of Tolstoy's worries was the censor. This high executioner of words could hardly be expected to tolerate the author's blasphemous handling of the Church and religion or his exposure of the way prisoners were treated in Siberia. And much was struck out. Only 25 chapters of the 129 in *Resurrection* entirely escaped the censor's red pencil.<sup>1</sup> Tolstoy protested in some instances, but in general he shared the surprise of many people that the book was allowed to be published at all in Russia. It had always been thought that the Russian edition of *Resurrection* issued in England by Chertkov, and which subsequently became the source of many foreign translations, was entirely unexpurgated. However, in sending Chertkov the corrected proof sheets, Tolstoy inadvertently included a number of the censor's deletions and alterations. Not until 1936 was the complete and unaltered text of *Resurrection* published in Russia.<sup>2</sup>

Tolstoy was seventy-one when he finished *Resurrection*, the last of his great novels. At this age he had a right to expect some diminution of his creative powers, and it is clear that the work falls short of the artistic eminence of *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*. Further, the concluding parts suffered from obvious haste in composition. Though written in his former manner, *Resurrection* is unlike his previous novels in several respects. Although there is the same fresh and realistic treatment of his own gentry class, this kind of life, which he knew so well, is brilliantly contrasted with a new element—the life of the protesting, revolutionary intelligentsia. And the struggle between the moralist and the artist that had been reflected in its initial stages in the last pages of *Anna Karenina* is everywhere in evidence in *Resurrection*. Rarely does the moralizing element appear unadorned with the rich, variegated garments of

<sup>1</sup> It has been estimated that 497 separate deletions or alterations were made in the text of *Resurrection* by the censor.

<sup>2</sup> See the Jubilee Edition, Vols. XXXII-XXXIII.

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real life. The essence of all that Tolstoy had thought and suffered since his spiritual change is condensed in the pages of the book. It is unashamedly a purpose novel, but then so are nearly all great novels. The principal purpose of *Resurrection* is to reveal the evil consequences of the violence of government and the hypocrisy of the Church.

Tolstoy's own sins and passions, his manifold struggle with life, are reflected in the nature and actions of Nekhlyudov. And the hero is also imbued with his creator's instinct to discover the purpose of life. He found it, like Tolstoy, in the Sermon on the Mount. "From that night," the novel concludes, "there began for Nekhlyudov an entirely new life, not so much because he had entered into a new condition of life, but because everything that happened to him since then assumed a significance utterly different from that which he had formerly experienced. How this new period of his life ends, the future will show."

This struck many readers as a lame conclusion. Throughout the novel Nekhlyudov had been portrayed as a man of action, and this transformation into an intellectual Tolstoyan seemed false to his nature. The end of the book, however, hints at a sequel that will tell the story of Nekhlyudov in his new life. What form of activity that will take is suggested in Tolstoy's diary shortly after he had finished the novel: "I want terribly to write an artistic, not a dramatic, but an epic continuation of *Resurrection*: the peasant life of Nekhlyudov." Apparently in his new existence the hero was to play the part of a peasant, perhaps a successful Tolstoyan peasant, which would have been unique in either fiction or life.

Any appraisal of the novel according to the new standards that Tolstoy had announced in *What Is Art?* does not discredit him as an artist or as a theorist on art. To be sure, such an appraisal inevitably contains a large element of subjective judgement; but the popular judgement of time and posterity lends its increment of support. According to Tolstoy's principal criterion of real art—*infectiousness*—*Resurrection* holds up extraordinarily well. The novel deals with feelings profoundly experienced by the author and re-created so that they infect readers and cause them to share these feelings with him and with each other. And the novel also abundantly possesses those other aspects of real art which Tolstoy had listed in his treatise— *sincerity, individuality, and clarity*. Yet he would have been the first to admit, and perhaps sadly, that the book is not popular art, not art for the masses. It belongs to the exclusive art



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of the leisured and cultured classes. With this limitation, *Resurrection* is real art. But does it belong to the category of the best art, according to Tolstoy's definition? That is, do the feelings it conveys make for the highest perception attainable by man—positive feelings of love of God and of one's neighbour? In this respect, too, Tolstoy can claim a large measure of success. More than any of his novels, *Resurrection* evokes in us feelings of brotherly love and of the common purpose of the life of all humanity—a striving to achieve spiritual and moral perfection through service to others.

Curiously enough, it did not occur to critics to use Tolstoy's recently published artistic criteria in judging his novel. The book was enthusiastically received, and in England and America it enjoyed a larger sale than any other work of Tolstoy up to that time. Though a few conservative native critics shouted "Propaganda!" the more progressive showered praises, for they admired almost the only man in Russia who could so boldly and courageously expose in fiction the evils that beset their country. For Russia, the publication of *Resurrection* was an event transcending its artistic significance or the fact that Tolstoy was the author. Some of the widespread excitement aroused by the novel is conveyed in a letter from Stasov in Petersburg while the chapters were appearing in *Niva*: "Leo Nikolayevich, how all of us here rejoiced when we learned that the chapters of *Resurrection* will not be 60 or 80 but 100 or more. Without exception all are saying on every side: 'Ah, there will be more, more will be added! May God grant that there will be still more and more!' And not only the people here, but I think throughout all of Russia from one end to the other, they wait solely for that day, Friday morning, when the bell rings and the boy brings the latest *Niva*. Friday everywhere is turned into Sunday.<sup>1</sup> . . . Oh, what an amazing miracle is your *Resurrection*! How all of Russia now lives and is nourished by it."

## II

Tolstoy's absorption in *Resurrection* during 1899 left him little time to devote to his spiritual empire. At the beginning of the year, however, he dropped everything to turn his attention to a cause close to his heart. The *New York World*, dissatisfied with his answer of the previous year on the international conference for disarmament,

<sup>1</sup> A pun on the title of the novel, *Voskreseniye*, which means in Russian both "Resurrection" and "Sunday."

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again turned to him for his reactions, for it was now certain that a meeting would be held at The Hague that summer. This time his statement provided the kind of copy the American newspaper was eager to print. He wrote: "My answer to your question is that peace can never be achieved by conferences or be decided by people who not only jabber, but who themselves go to war. This question was decided 1900 years ago in the teaching of Christ as this teaching was understood by Him and not as it has been perverted by the churches. All conferences can be summed up in a single dictum: All people are sons of God and brothers, and therefore they ought to love and not kill each other. Forgive my sharpness, but all these conferences invoke in me a strong feeling of disgust over the hypocrisy that is so obvious in them."

Meanwhile, a group of distinguished Swedish intellectuals had sent Tolstoy an unusual proposal. In their letter they summarized the history of peoples and groups in various lands who had refused army service on religious grounds. They proposed that this matter be placed on the agenda of the forthcoming Hague Conference, and that citizens of all countries should be allowed to reject army service because of religious beliefs provided they agreed to accept service for an equivalent period of time in some peaceful and socially useful occupation for the State. The hope of the Swedish intellectuals was that if such a proposal were accepted by the nations at the Hague Conference, it would eventually prove a deathblow to the maintenance of large armies and would thus ensure world peace. And they respectfully requested Tolstoy to use his great influence to bring this proposal to the attention of the Tsar or his ministers and of the public.

Tolstoy replied in a letter (January 9, 1899) that he eventually elaborated in the form of an epistolary article which Chertkov published in England. He paid a sincere tribute to the good intentions of the Swedish intellectuals, but their proposal was "entirely irrelevant." "Such a proposal can have only one good consequence, namely, that it will evidently unmask the emptiness, idleness, and hypocrisy of the Conference. The Conference cannot refer itself other than negatively to such a proposal, for it will never permit people to go unpunished for refusing to accept military service, because such refusal undermines the foundations of governmental power and even the very reason for its existence."

Tolstoy's position was realistic: after two months of deliberation and diplomatic shuffling, the only tangible result of the Hague

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Conference of 1899 was a series of conventions on the more "humane" conduct of war. The question of total disarmament or the limitation of armaments, which had originally inspired this meeting of nations, did not interest the conferees at all. The representatives had barely had time to return to their several countries when one of the participants in the Conference, England, plunged into a bloody war with the Boers. Tolstoy wrote in his diary: "It is necessary to point out that the present state of affairs, especially the Hague Conference, has shown that nothing is to be expected from the higher powers, and that the resolution of this horribly destructive situation, if at all possible, will depend solely on the efforts of private individuals."

In general, Tolstoy had no faith in the customary organized efforts to achieve world peace. He rigidly adhered to his belief that only the widespread refusal of individuals to participate in violence of any kind could end wars. It was largely for this reason that he also refused an invitation in 1900 to serve on the committee of the Tenth International Peace Congress at Paris.

There was something positively indecent, as Tolstoy pointed out later, in the fact that the proposal for the Hague Conference should have come from the Russian government and at a time when it was secretly giving orders to increase the size of its army, and through oppressive measures was quelling every manifestation of liberal thought at home. Before its delegates left for The Hague, a nation-wide strike of college students took place, in February 1899. Students of Petersburg University, indignant over a brutal threat of reprisals by the authorities if any disorder occurred during one of their traditional holidays, decided not to attend classes. At an outdoor protest meeting the students were charged by Cossacks with swinging whips, and some of the ringleaders were arrested. They then organized and demanded redress of their wrongs and freedom from arbitrary persecution by the government. On a platform that included an agreement to commit no acts of violence, whatever the provocation, the movement quickly spread, and soon students and even some professors in higher institutions throughout the country went out on strike in sympathy with the Petersburg group.

The students sent a delegate to Tolstoy to persuade him to write an open letter in their defence. He had long been interested in student movements and had faith in the progressive thinking of these young men and women. On this occasion he expressed his

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sympathy for their cause, which the students made more than free use of in their publications, but he declined to write an open letter, probably because he felt it would do them more harm than good. The matter obviously worried him, for a couple of months later he began an article in which he considered the student strike, but he never finished it. He sent his material to Chertkov who used it for an article on the subject which he published in England. Tolstoy was pleased with the article and wrote Chertkov that he had expressed "the very thoughts that I have had on this theme."

### III

Tolstoy's preoccupation with *Resurrection* during 1899 did not deter visitors, though he saw less of them. Both in Moscow and at Yasnaya Polyana the family had for some time been leading a kind of public existence and gradually they had become conditioned to it. Mere curiosity-seekers annoyed them, but distinguished writers, musicians, painters, and sculptors turned the Tolstoy house into a palace of art. If Sonya was flattered by the attention of social lions, she grew exasperated with the many nonentities who sought out her husband. He, on the other hand, regarded it as a duty to meet and talk with all these nondescript people who timidly rang his bell hoping to enter the portals of truth. Many of them were deeply religious, but now they were citing Tolstoy's forbidden texts as they used to cite the Bible. And they yearned for nothing more than to be admitted to his sanctuary, where each sat patiently, like Moses, hearing the voice of God on Mt. Sinai. Some were already convinced Tolstoyans, but these green disciples often annoyed Tolstoy, for they were everlastingly asking him how they could change their lives when he believed that they should be doing their own work, provided it did not clash with their convictions. "He is a Tolstoyan," he remarked to Goldenweizer of one of his callers, "that is, a man with convictions utterly opposed to mine."

For obvious reasons the unknown, down-at-the-heel seekers after truth were not mixed with the social celebrities in the Tolstoy household. On this score a tacit understanding seemed to exist between husband and wife. Perhaps Sonya was a bit ashamed of exposing her aristocratic guests to these shabby seekers, who came furtively but often in a state of elation.

This double standard of hospitality is illustrated by the account Sofya Shil gives of her visit to the Tolstoys in Moscow on Easter

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Eve, 1899. A cultured person and a worker on the *Intermediary*, she was not regarded as one of the "dark people" and was not even a disciple of Tolstoy. She was ushered into the upstairs living-room by a lackey in white gloves and found it filled with guests and members of the family engaged in the usual polite conversation of society. While seated at a round table, one of the young hostesses pointed out to her that the cloth cover had been embroidered with the names of visitors. They wrote their names in chalk, and one of the girls in the family embroidered over the signatures. Sofya Shil noticed that many of the names were preceded by "Prince" or "Count." No one suggested that she sign her name. Obviously, this was a tablecloth for *comme il faut* people.

Soon Tolstoy entered with his brisk step and kindly greeted and chatted with each of the guests. Sofya Shil was surprised at his aged appearance. Deep furrows lined his bronzed, weather-beaten face. The skin lay about the back of his scrawny neck in folds, and she involuntarily thought of the coarse, baggy skin of a hippopotamus. But his eyes were bright and full of life. The black trousers and dark blue peasant blouse made of fine material seemed the natural attire for such a man. He was tired, he remarked, for he had just returned from the railroad station where he had been observing the departure of exiles to Siberia. As he vividly described these unhappy victims and expressed sympathy for them, he seemed to be formulating in his mind a new chapter for *Resurrection*, for he had gone to the station in order to obtain material for his novel.

Meanwhile guests continued to arrive and leave. The lackey passed visiting cards on a silver tray to Tolstoy. Presently two tall, refined, and distinguished-looking gentlemen entered. They were S. P. Dyagilev, editor of the well-known periodical, the *World of Art*, and future ballet producer, and D. V. Filosofov, his chief collaborator. Greetings were warm and gay. Conversation took on a new life—politics, art, the doings of important people in the government. Finally the two guests, who had come all the way from Petersburg, got around to the real purpose of their visit. They were organizing a celebration in honour of the hundredth anniversary of the birth of the great poet Pushkin. Would Tolstoy lend his aid by contributing an article to the issue of their magazine commemorating the event? The name of the poet was enough to set Tolstoy off on a brilliant exposition of what he admired and condemned of Pushkin's works. Though he felt deeply about some of these productions and praised generously, it was clear that he

did not share the reverential attitude of his two visitors towards Russia's illustrious poet. But the visitors brought him back to the point—would he aid in the celebration? Frowning and immediately dropping his agreeable manner, he flatly refused. With an intolerance that often took the form of paradox when his opposition was aroused, he brusquely declared that such celebrations were superfluous, that there were no immortals, and that each man lived for his own age alone. A writer, he said, is like a potato that is absorbed by the organism, digested, and then discarded. His contemporaries assimilate all that is of value in his creations, rework all that is precious in this spiritual food, and then when it is of no further use they cast it aside, consign it to complete oblivion. Sofya Shil wondered if the two visitors were not saying to themselves at this moment: "Well, what about yourself? Would you want to be gulped down like a potato and quickly discarded?" Dyagilev and Filosofov soon departed, plainly annoyed by Tolstoy's refusal to aid their project and offended by the manner in which he expressed his disagreement.

While the general conversation in the room continued on the subject of Pushkin, the ubiquitous lackey entered and whispered something in Tolstoy's ear. He immediately left the company. And Sofya Shil remarks at this point: "There were two entrances to the house. People who were *comme il faut* or those with some position in society entered by the front door. But there existed a rear flight of steps for those seekers after truth who came to Tolstoy the moralist. They went up directly to him without disturbing anyone."

The interruption on this occasion, however, was not caused by a seeker after truth. For Tolstoy soon returned carrying a palm branch and a note in his hand, and he laughingly explained to the guests that several theological students had just visited him, coming directly from vespers, and they had thrust in his hand the palm leaf and note and fled. The note was read aloud and it contained a naïve but sincerely written prayer expressing the hope that Tolstoy would return to the Orthodox Church.

Among the many young writers who came to burn incense, Chekhov and Gorky were regarded by Tolstoy as the most talented. Their fiction was taking the country by storm at the time *Resurrection* began to appear. As early as 1889 Gorky, utterly unknown then, had turned up at Yasnaya Polyana, looking much the worse for wear after a long tramp, only to discover that Tolstoy was in Moscow. He pushed on to the city and tried to see him there. But

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Sonya informed him that her husband was ill and could receive no one. (Tolstoy was not ill at the time of this visit. Sonya used this excuse to visitors she felt were undesirable.) She took him to the kitchen like some tramp and gave him a cup of coffee and a roll, and while he ate she made pointed remarks about the hordes of loafers who sought out her husband. Shortly after this unpleasant encounter, Gorky wrote a letter to Tolstoy, in which he solicited his aid in setting up an agricultural colony, but he received no answer.

Some ten years later (January 16, 1900) Gorky, now a famous writer, again visited Tolstoy and was made most welcome. In his account of this first meeting Gorky remarks that he was put through a kind of examination, for Tolstoy wanted to know all the facts in his life. Then he got around to Gorky's writings. Some he praised, others he severely criticized. *Foma Gordeyev* he simply could not finish—"everything in it was invented." Varenka Olesova in Gorky's story of that name Tolstoy condemned as not true to life. "If a girl is over fifteen and healthy," he admonished, "she likes to be embraced and touched. Her mind is fearful of what is unknown and of what she does not yet understand—that is what is called modesty and bashfulness. But her body is already aware that the unknown is inevitable and legitimate, and despite the mind, demands the fulfilment of its law. In your work you have described this Varenka Olesova as healthy, but she feels anæmically—which is not true to life." Next he turned on the heroine in the short story "Twenty-six and One," and spoke of her in such improper language that Gorky, who had spent much of his life with "creatures who once were men," felt embarrassed and a bit offended, though later he decided that Tolstoy used coarse words in this instance only because he found them more precise and pointed. All through the examination, however, Tolstoy was kind and full of attention. Embracing Gorky as he was about to leave, he declared, "You are a real muzhik! You will have a hard time among the writers, but fear nothing, and speak always as you feel no matter if it comes out coarsely. Wise people will understand." And in his diary on that day, he entered: "Gorky was here. We talked very well. I liked him. A real man of the people."

Gorky felt a bit like a wrung-out dishcloth after this first encounter. For a time he did not know whether to be pleased or hurt by the thorough inquisition and criticism he had been subjected to. In the end he decided that Tolstoy's intentions had been

sincere and good, and a few days after the visit he wrote him: "I thank you, warmly thank you, for all that you told me, Leo Nikolayevich! I am glad that I saw you and am very proud of this. In general, I knew that you treated people simply and sincerely, but I did not expect, I confess, that you would treat me quite so well." Tolstoy answered: "I was very, very glad to make your acquaintance, and I am glad that I have become fond of you. Aksakov said . . . that people were either better or worse than their books. I have liked your writings, but I found you better than your writings. I pay you this compliment, the worth of which consists chiefly in the fact that it is sincere."

Gorky obviously bore Tolstoy no malice because of the severe criticism of his writings, for he paid another visit that year (October 8), this time at Yasnaya Polyana. The young writer, whose works were being acclaimed in many circles, aroused considerable interest among the other guests. One of them thought that he looked more like a factory worker than a literary artist. In truth, there was a proletarian aspect about his appearance—very tall and thin, with an unhealthy face, a broad, turned-up nose, small blue eyes sunk deeply in his head, and long hair combed back. He was simply dressed in a black blouse with a broad leather belt. Nor did he make the slightest attempt to affect polite airs. At dinner he sprawled, put his elbows on the table, and maintained a stubborn silence. When Tolstoy offered to read to the guests an article that he had just finished, Gorky frankly declared that he did not like to hear things read aloud. And through most of the reading he sat noisily turning the pages of a book. Perhaps he was saved a scolding by the sudden entrance of Sonya, who interrupted the reading of her husband with comments about her children and with a surprising declaration that she very much wanted to write a book entitled "The History of a Mother." In summing up in his diary his impressions of the guests that day, Tolstoy wrote that Gorky was "less agreeable" than the others. Sonya showed her esteem for Gorky on this occasion by photographing him and her husband together.

Chekhov, whose literary star had risen earlier than Gorky's, had already endeared himself to Tolstoy, who took delight in reading favourite stories by him to the family and guests. If Tolstoy regretted Chekhov's lack of any real focus in life and art, he could not fail to appreciate his warm, sympathetic nature and artistic humility. Although Gorky at this time was forcing comparison with



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Chekhov among literary critics, there can be no question that Tolstoy preferred Chekhov's writing. "Gorky lacks a sense of proportion," he told Goldenweizer. "He has a familiar style which is unpleasant." But of Chekhov, all of whose stories he had recently reread, he declared: "His mastery is of the highest order."

Yet Tolstoy left Chekhov under no illusions about his opinion on his plays: he emphatically did not like them. He saw a performance of *Uncle Vanya* at the beginning of 1900 and it shocked him. Chekhov, in his own charming, guileless manner, related to a friend what Tolstoy had told him about his play: "You know, he does not like my dramas. He swears that I'm not a playwright. There is only one thing that comforts me. . . . He said to me: 'You know, I cannot abide Shakespeare, but your plays are even worse. Shakespeare, however, grabs the reader by the scruff of the neck and leads him to a definite objective, not permitting him to wander off the road. But where are you going with your heroines? From the divan where they lie to the closet and back.'" At this point in his account Chekhov laughed so hard that his pince-nez fell off his nose. "But, really, Leo Nikolayevich is serious," Chekhov continued. "He was ill. I sat with him at his bedside. When I began to get ready to leave, he took my hand, looked me in the eye, and said: 'Anton Pavlovich, you are a fine man.' Then, smiling, he let my hand go and added: 'But your plays are altogether vile.'"

Chekhov's self-effacement and his unflinching sense of humour would never have allowed him to be offended by this perverse yet thoroughly understandable reaction of Tolstoy to his dramas. Besides, he worshipped the man and sensed his true significance as few were able to in Russia. When Tolstoy became so dangerously ill at the end of 1899 that thousands of people anxiously read the newspaper bulletins on his condition, Chekhov wrote to a mutual friend:

His illness terrified me and held me in suspense. I fear the death of Tolstoy. If he should die, then a great gaping void would exist in my life. In the first place, I have never loved a man as I do him. I am an unbelieving person, but of all faiths I think his is the nearest to mine and most suitable for me. In the second place, when there is a Tolstoy in literature, then it is easy and pleasant to be a writer; even to recognize that one has not done or will not do anything is not so terrible, for Tolstoy does it for all. His achievement serves as a justification for those hopes and expectations that we possess in literature. In the third place, Tolstoy stands firm, his authority is enormous,

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and while he lives, bad taste in literature, every vulgarity, insolent or tearful, all crude, exasperating ambitions will be kept at a distance, deep in the shadow. His moral authority alone is capable of holding the so-called literary spirit and trends on a definite plane. Without him it would be like a shepherdless herd, or a muddle in which it would be difficult to discriminate.

Not only young Russian writers visited Tolstoy in 1899-1900. In April of both these years the German poet Rainer Maria Rilke made the pilgrimage to Tolstoy. Rilke was tremendously impressed by him on his first visit. When he returned to Germany, he enthusiastically studied Russian and read Tolstoy's works in the original. On his second visit a year later, he was delighted that he could understand his host in his own language. He sent Tolstoy a copy of his works along with some other books he had shown an interest in, and his accompanying letter was politely answered by Tolstoy. But it appears that Rilke produced no particular impression on him.

Another young artist whose star was just rising, Fyodor Chaliapin, visited Tolstoy in January 1900 and sang for his host with that magnificent voice which was just then electrifying Russian audiences. But Tolstoy was strangely unmoved, which Goldenweizer, who was present, charitably ascribed to the fact that he was in a bad mood.

## IV

The task of revising *Resurrection* and correcting proof during 1899 left Tolstoy little time for any other writing, but he felt called upon to send an epistolary article on the Boer War to G. M. Volkonski. The struggle in South Africa horrified him, and coming as it did so shortly after the Hague Conference he felt that it revealed all the cynicism of such organized efforts to maintain peace. The causes of war, he pointed out in his letter, were the unequal distribution of property, the existence of a military class, and false religious teaching. As long as we made use of privileged wealth while the mass of people were crushed by toil, he wrote, there would always be wars for markets and for gold mines, and the like, which we needed to maintain privileged wealth. Shortly after writing this letter, he remarked to Goldenweizer in the course of a discussion on the Boer War: "I always consider that moral motives are effective and decisive in the historical process. And

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now, when the universal dislike of the English is so clearly expressed, though I shall not live to see it, it seems to me that the power of England will be much shaken."

Several months before Tolstoy finished *Resurrection*, he wrote Biryukov that he wished to "free himself" from artistic work, for his "fingers fairly itched" to write articles. This struggle between the urge to create and the moral duty to reform society by his pen he had been waging for some years. In a sense, *Resurrection* represented a compromise between the two. When he finished the novel, he turned to purely "moral" writing again with a feeling of relief.

The first work Tolstoy undertook in 1900 was an article or pamphlet called "The Slavery of Our Times." An interesting incident inspired it. At the end of 1899 a peasant friend from a village near Yasnaya Polyana, who was then working as a weigher at the Moscow-Kazan railroad station, visited Tolstoy. In the general conversation about his occupation, he mentioned that the men who loaded and unloaded freight worked thirty-six hours at a stretch. Tolstoy was incredulous and decided to investigate. He spent several hours at the station talking with his friend and the peasant workers and in going into all the details connected with their jobs and living conditions. Not only did he learn that they worked thirty-six hours at a stretch, often hauling individual loads of three hundred pounds, but he also learned that they received a mere thirty rubles a month for this labour, bolted their wretched meals in the few minutes allowed them, and lived in filthy, overcrowded barracks.

This experience filled Tolstoy with mingled despair, hopelessness, and moral indignation. Beasts of burden, he said, were better protected by the State than these workers. It would seem, he wrote in his article, that members of the leisured classes who called themselves liberals and humanitarians, and who were sensitive to the sufferings not only of people, but of animals, could not remain silent for one moment in the face of this human slavery. The purpose of his article, he noted in his diary, was to show that the peasants, after their emancipation, had merely exchanged the chains of serfdom for those of industrial slavery. Supporting this evil, he maintained, was the systematic use of organized violence. The intention of the article was to show that progress in human well-being could only be achieved by relying more on reason and conscience and less on man-made laws; that we must be ready to

sacrifice even material progress rather than accept the injustice and inequality so flagrant in the case of these railroad workers and millions of others.

Though "non-resistance" had become Tolstoy's invariable answer to all such problems, this ideal anarchistic answer was not offered without a canny awareness of the real economic and political forces at work in the class struggle. He told Goldenweizer that he wanted to take for the motto of "The Slavery of Our Times" Marx's saying that since capitalists had made themselves the masters of the working class, European governments had lost all shame. And he was convinced that socialist ideas, such as that everyone should have the right to enjoy the fruits of his labour, had already become truisms. Yet he maintained that the slavery of the workers could not be alleviated by their own efforts or by the efforts of the socialists, whose doctrines had not dispensed with compulsion.

It is only when the privileged classes, guided by the true teaching of Christ, cease to exploit the working class that their slavery will end. It will cease, he declared to Goldenweizer, "when everyone is free to choose his work and the time needed for it." As for what the emancipated workers would do with their freedom, that did not concern him. Let them arrange things for themselves, was his answer. The authorities among the privileged class in Russia, however, were unwilling to see "The Slavery of Our Times" printed there, and threatened to suspend the magazine that requested permission to publish it. So Chertkov brought it out in England.

Much the same line of reasoning, though applied to a different problem, runs through Tolstoy's article "Patriotism and Government" (1900). The cynicism of the peaceful professions of the great powers shocked him in the face of such immediate conflicts as the Spanish-American War and the Boer War. As usual, his diagnosis of the factors that promote war is convincing, but the remedy he offers appears to defy the logic of civilization's development. To deliver mankind from the ever-increasing evils of armaments and war, he argued, neither congresses nor conferences nor courts of arbitration will do; simply destroy those instruments of violence which are called governments, from which humanity's greatest evils flow. And to eliminate the violence of governments, he insists, only one thing is needed: people should be made to realize that the feeling of patriotism, which alone supports this instrument of

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violence, is a bad feeling, and, above all, is immoral. It can be eradicated only when men are educated through Christ's teaching that it is wrong to kill.

Somewhat the same approach is employed in a shorter article in 1900, "Thou Shalt Not Kill," inspired by the assassination of King Humbert of Italy. Here Tolstoy's tone becomes shrill, and his customary moral earnestness gives way to harsh criticism of the mighty. Kaiser Wilhelm, who told his soldiers that they must be willing to kill their own fathers if he commanded them to, is in Tolstoy's eyes "a narrow-minded, ill-educated, vain man, with the ideals of a German *Junker*"; and Nicholas II of Russia, he wrote, can propose a "childish, silly, hypocritical project of universal peace" while he gives orders to increase his army and mercilessly insults and oppresses a whole nation, the Finns, and still the press and his people praise him. But there is no point in killing these rulers, as Humbert was murdered, Tolstoy argues. Such violence is not only terrible, it is also utterly unreasonable. The thing to do, he wrote, is to withdraw support from that order of society which places rulers in the position of arbiters over the lives of their fellow men. Naturally, this article could not appear in Russia, but it was widely printed abroad, though in Germany all copies were ordered destroyed because of the insult to the Kaiser.

Tolstoy wrote other articles and several epistolary articles and introductions to books during 1900,<sup>1</sup> but the only artistic work to his credit that year is the drama *The Live Corpse*. In 1897 his friend N. V. Davydov, head of the Moscow District Court, had related to him the details of a curious case. A married couple in the city had separated, for the husband was a weak individual and addicted to drink, and the wife was in love with another man. In order to enable his wife to marry her lover, and apparently with her connivance, the husband simulated suicide by leaving his clothes and identification papers on the bank of the Moscow River. He then disappeared and the wife married her lover. But later, through an indiscretion of the husband, the whole story came out and the couple were arrested and sentenced to a term of deportation.

<sup>1</sup> He wrote the articles: "Where Is the Outlet?" and "Is This Really Necessary?" (both drafted in 1897-1898, finished in 1900, and published that year by Chertkov in England); two epistolary articles, one to the Dukhobors in Canada, and a second to a retired German soldier; and introductions to the following books: Tentjara Macato, *Japanese Notions of European Political Economy*; J. C. Kenworthy, *Anatomy of Misery*; Wilhelm von Polenz, *Büttnerbauer* (to the Russian translation); and L. P. Nikiforov, *John Ruskin* (in Russian).

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Tolstoy used these facts in a very general way in *The Live Corpse*, though the protagonists have little in common with the real husband and wife, and the husband in the play actually commits suicide.

Tolstoy did not get to work on the subject until 1900 and he never entirely finished it to his own satisfaction. When the theatrical director V. I. Nemirovich-Danchenko eagerly requested permission to produce the play, he refused. Several reasons have been given for his not finishing this excellent drama. Maude related that Tolstoy told him that he did not wish the play to be produced while he lived, lest he should be drawn into expending time on revising it to the detriment of other tasks he considered more important. Another reason was that an account of *The Live Corpse* got into the press and was read by the real husband, N. S. Gimer, who appealed to Tolstoy not to publish the play since he feared to be compromised by it. Even the wife, through her son, is reported to have made a similar request, and Tolstoy willingly agreed, saying that "a human life is more precious than any piece of writing." It is known for certain that Gimer did visit Tolstoy, who aided him in obtaining work and exacted a promise from him never to touch liquor, which he kept. At any event, the play was never produced or published during Tolstoy's lifetime.

*The Live Corpse* is one of the most interesting of Tolstoy's dramas and has had considerable success on the stage. It was almost inevitable that he should turn this rather sordid court case into a criticism of the harm that law—government's organized instrument of violence—may do when it thrusts itself into the delicate relations of men and women. In the spirit of his theories in *What Is Art?* he quickly infects us with his feelings over the marital difficulties of Fedya and Lisa. With marvellous economy of effort, each of the characters is revealed in a few simple, psychologically searching lines. But in the end, though living, they lack warmth and fail to inspire deep human sympathy. They seem rather to infect us with their creator's cold moral interest in them.

In 1899 Tolstoy read S. G. Verus's book on the Gospels,<sup>1</sup> which denied the existence of Christ as a historical person. Such a conclusion did not dismay Tolstoy. "All this is very interesting and even valuable," he said, "for it makes it unnecessary to wrangle any further over refuting the authenticity of the Gospel stories about miracles, and it proves the teaching of the Gospels to be

<sup>1</sup> *Vergleichende Uebersicht der vier Evangelien* (Leipzig, 1897).

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the words of not one superman, but the sum of the wisdom of all the best moral teaching expressed by many peoples at various times.”

Tolstoy favoured this idea, for he preferred to think that his own moral and religious philosophy, for which he claimed no originality, had been the inevitable conclusion of all the great thinkers of the world. For example, during the next year, when he had more leisure, he steeped himself in the Chinese classics,<sup>1</sup> which he had begun years before, and also Buddhist writings. In this Eastern wisdom, he found his own moral convictions mirrored. Compared to Confucius, he wrote in his diary, “all the others seem insignificant.” He also re-read that year the favourite work, *Parerga und Paralipomena*, of his favourite German philosopher, Schopenhauer, and the *Also sprach Zarathustra* of Nietzsche, whom he considered half mad.

There were less formidable books on his reading list that year—works of George Eliot and Ruskin, both of whom he admired, and the *Annals of Toil* of J. Morrison Davidson, to whom he wrote to express agreement with his Marxian belief that “history must be the history of the working masses,” and to hope that this thought “will soon be recognized by all.” He read “The Man with the Hoe” and wrote Edward Markham a letter to tell him how much he liked the poem. Contemporary Russian writers he kept up with, as always, and he ironically praised their technical perfection. But what of their content? Where was the connecting inner link in their writing? “The most important thing in a work of art,” he told Goldenweizer on the subject of contemporary authors, “is that it should have a kind of focus, that is, some place where all the rays meet or from which they issue. And this focus ought not to be fully explicable in words. This indeed is one of the significant facts about a work of art—that its content in its entirety can be expressed only by itself”. Very few of the modern authors, he felt, were able to achieve this.

At the end of the nineteenth century there began a thin stream of productions in Western Europe and America on every conceivable phase of Tolstoy’s life and works, a stream that soon reached the proportions of a raging torrent of both valuable and misplaced human endeavour. In 1900 he had the privilege of reading one of these early efforts, P. Elzbacher’s *Der Anarchismus*. Tolstoy was one of the seven anarchists treated in the book. The work pleased

<sup>1</sup> He read them in the translations of James Legge.

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him, perhaps not so much because of the part he played in it, but because anarchism, so often crudely identified with bomb throwing, had at last achieved the dignity of scholarly investigation by a learned professor. He hastened to write the author to indicate his satisfaction at not having been treated as an anarchist in the sense of a political reformer, for in the index the word "force" had not been attributed to his doctrines, whereas the names of the six other anarchists had been listed under this hateful designation. "Is this not an indication," he triumphantly asked the author, "that the teaching you ascribe to me, but which is in very fact only the teaching of Christ, is not a political but a religious teaching?"

That same year (1900) Tolstoy was made an honorary member of the French Ethnographical Society, and in Breslau he received that final and most fatal accolade of the prophet—the founding of an International Tolstoy Society for the propagation of his doctrines.

### v

The family life of the Tolstoys continued to revolve in the customary domestic pattern of marriages, births, and deaths. Twenty-two-year-old Andrei, shortly after his miscue with the Georgian lady, married Chertkov's sister-in-law, Olga Konstantinovna Diterikhs, on January 8, 1899. The family gathered in Tula for the event. Sonya forebodingly wrote in her diary that she was sad and agitated. "Andryusha, as in a dream, is deeply moved but does not understand why he is marrying and what this will mean. I understand Olga still less. Marriage is always terrible, mysterious, and touching. I wanted all the time to weep."

A departure from the family circle that affected Tolstoy and his wife incomparably more than that of Andrei was Tanya's, who married ten months later (November 14, 1899). With her bright, artistic spirit, Tanya was the general favourite in the house. She was partial to her father's views, and after Masha's marriage he no doubt cherished the hope that Tanya would remain with him, a faithful and understanding helper in his work. After all, he had reason to hope, for she had reached the age of thirty-five without marriage, though she had had many suitors of whom he had been a bit jealous.

Then Tanya decided to marry Mikhail Sergeevich Sukhotin, a man much older than she and with six grown children left him by



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his first wife. No one in the household favoured the marriage. Sonya was deeply chagrined. She had entertained hopes of a brilliant match for Tanya. She wrote her sister after the wedding: "You cannot imagine how grief-stricken and sick at heart Lyovochka and I were while accompanying Tanya. . . . It was all so gloomy, just like a funeral and not a wedding. When Tanya came to say good-bye to Lyovochka, he wept so that it was painful to look at him." A few days later Tolstoy wrote in his diary with unaccustomed bitterness: "Tanya has departed with Sukhotin, and why? It is sad and offensive. For 70 years I have been lowering and lowering my opinion about women, and still it has to be lowered more. The woman question! How can there help being a woman question? But it bears no relation to the fact that women should begin to direct life, but to the fact that they should stop ruining it."

The large house that for so long had echoed loudly and merrily to the voices of children was now almost denuded of them. Only Alexandra and, as her exasperated mother called him, "wild Misha" remained. And less than two years later the troublesome Misha married a childhood sweetheart.<sup>1</sup> With the fledglings, all but one, grown and departed from the nest, their father could now look back, perhaps not without a twinge of remorse, on time and effort not well spent. They had received the customary education of children in their circle of society, but their father, after his spiritual change, distrusted and even scorned this worldly education. He continually cast a shadow over the social life they enjoyed. Pleasures that their companions took for granted would suddenly be poisoned for them by an instinctive feeling of guilt induced by the silent disapproval of their father. Tolstoy always hoped his children would perceive that there was another life, and he eagerly and constantly searched their behaviour for indications of any change. In this respect, his two older daughters had gladdened his heart, but their marriage, though it did not ultimately lessen his love for them, interposed a real obstacle in their future relations. No one of his sons took up the challenge of a new life for very long, and their actions often caused him grief and suffering. If he nourished a hope that any one of his sons would become his spiritual heir, that hope had died with little Vanichka.

Sonya did her best to control the unruly instincts of her younger boys. One of her misfortunes was an inability to bring to her

<sup>1</sup> He married Alexandra Vladimirovna Glebov on January 31, 1901.

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daily household cares a saving sense of humour, a lack in her nature that she herself recognized. "I do not like humour," she wrote in her diary, "I'm not able to laugh—this is a deficiency in me." She was everlastingly blaming her failure with the children on her husband's lack of interest in them. Yet he was deeply interested in them. His attitude was that an ounce of moral prevention was worth a pound of the conventional practical cure in these matters. When his wife once wrote him to deplore his absence from the city at a time when Andrei and Misha were misbehaving, he replied: "My presence in Moscow, as you very well know, will not prevent Andryusha or Misha from living evilly if they want to do this. The sternest father in the world cannot prevent people with sprouting beards from living in a manner that they think is good."

The implication was that the youthful waywardness of her sons was a result of the kind of social existence with which she surrounded them. They must feel in their hearts and conscience that this existence was wrong before they would be able to change it. Tolstoy tried in conversations and in long earnest letters to effect this moral transformation.

Such moral suasion had little success. None of the sons became a Tolstoyan. Andrei and Mikhail accepted their service in the army, and Leo, who at one time favoured his father's beliefs, weakened in the end and was ready to serve but was rejected by an army physician. As the father of a large family that had now grown to maturity, Tolstoy came to the rather pathetic conclusion, which he noted in his diary in 1900: "My position in the family is strange. They perhaps even love me, but they do not need me; rather I encumber them."

Sonya's diary during 1899–1900 reflects a marked improvement in her relations with her husband compared to the anguished trials of the preceding three years. She was mortally afraid of going down to posterity as the despised scold in her husband's life. "They always distort the private life of famous men in their biographies," she said to Goldenweizer. "I'm sure they will make me out a Xantippe. You must defend me, Alexander Borisovich." There was little scolding in her diary over this period, no hysterical outbursts, and her morbid concern with the subject of sex almost vanished. At times, she remarked, women like to play at romance in a sentimental fashion with their husbands. On such occasions she felt a "spiritual tenderness" for him. "But he is affectionate,"

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she sadly concluded, "only when in him tenderness awakens, and then, alas, it is not the same kind!"

Husband and wife were growing old together, perhaps not always gracefully, but with an apparently new determination to respect each other's domain of activity. Only the interjection of some external stress or strain into their intimate life could now disturb this equanimity. She tended to her book business and the cares of the household, he to his writing and spiritual world. And together they grieved over the death of a grandchild and the stillborn babies of their two daughters. He visited his brother and married children while she remained at home in Moscow or Yasnaya Polyana. But now she did not complain bitterly over these separations. Their letters on such occasions were friendly, even loving. She had begun to treat him like an old man; she begged him to eat the proper food, wear warm clothes, and she wanted to know whether she should send him his boots and the new goloshes he had forgotten to take, for his weak health worried her. He was just as anxious over her health, for she too had been sick, and he warned her not to overdo things and to watch out for her failing eyesight. If unmarried women live in the future, married ones often dwell in the past, but only rarely now did Sonya strike a nostalgic note over the happiness that she persisted in regarding as a memory. On their thirty-eighth wedding anniversary Tolstoy was in Yasnaya Polyana, Sonya in Moscow. She wrote him: "I just got up, and the first thing I wanted to do was to write you, dear Lyovochka, and to recall the day that united us through these many years of life together. I grew sad that we were not together today, but then I turned my heart to you and to the infinitely deeper, tenderer, and better memories of our life, and then I wanted to thank you for the former happiness you gave me and to regret that it did not continue so strongly, fully, and calmly throughout our whole life." And she concluded by saying that she hoped before the day was over to sit for a moment in the church where they had been married thirty-eight years ago.

## Chapter XXXIV

### EXCOMMUNICATION

THE YEAR 1901 was eventful for Leo Tolstoy. It began with two epistolary articles on faith and prayer in answer to the questions of an unknown worker who had renounced the Orthodox Church.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, the Church's patience with Tolstoy had run out. Such articles were disseminated throughout the country in hectograph copies and also in published form, for Chertkov saw to their printing in England from whence they found their way back to Russia through various illegal channels. Then, too, *Resurrection* had shocked and embittered ecclesiastic officialdom. The mutilating government censor of that novel had not hacked vigorously enough, for he had left a damning residue of ridicule of church ritual and of the Procurator of the Holy Synod, Pobedonostsev.

As early as 1888 action against Tolstoy had been discussed in Church circles. In November 1899, when *Resurrection* was appearing in the issues of *Niva*, the Kharkov Archbishop, Ambrosius, proposed to the Holy Synod that Tolstoy be excommunicated, but no action was taken. The next year the Metropolitan of Kiev suggested to the Synod that in the event of Tolstoy's death prayers for the repose of his soul be forbidden in all churches, unless he had previously repented of his heretical beliefs.

The Church was merely an arm of the government—Pobedonostsev, a lay figure and close to the throne, was the connecting link—and its hostility towards Tolstoy reflected in a real sense the attitude of secular authorities. The temper of dissatisfaction, which had been rising throughout the nation for a long time, had recently been accelerated by repressive measures. Tolstoy had become a national symbol of this popular dissatisfaction. As a contemporary figure put it, Russia had two

<sup>1</sup> These letters and one other were addressed to V. K. Zavolokin and were published by Chertkov in England in a single article under the title, "On Reason, Faith, and Prayer" (1901).

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tsars, Nicholas II and Leo Tolstoy, and in the public mind a struggle was being waged between them to see which of the two would prove the more powerful. It made little difference that Tolstoy had no sympathy with either the hopes of the liberals for legislative reforms or the violence of the revolutionists. All knew that he was an open, courageous, and irreconcilable critic of the whole political and social order. Unrest existed everywhere. Progressive-minded students were again on the march, but this time the government issued regulations that they should be sent to serve as soldiers if arrested for participating in disorders. And when a large number of Kiev students were actually sentenced to the ranks, a public clamour arose. Students in other cities went out on strike, and for the first time they won for their cause the active support of all layers of the population. Tolstoy again sympathized with the students. The situation in Moscow and Petersburg grew ominous.

It was at this juncture that the Church decided to act against Tolstoy, and unquestionably with government sanction. The blow they struck was no doubt intended to deflate his tremendous popularity, for the ecclesiastical hierarchy could reasonably suppose that in the sacred matter of religious faith the vast masses of the people would support their holy judgement. The Church could enter where the government feared to tread, and not only Russia, but the whole Christian world would condemn the sinner and iconoclast.

On the initiative of Anthony, Metropolitan of Kiev and Ladoga, the Holy Synod agreed to a formal announcement separating Tolstoy from the Church. Pobedonostsev drafted the edict, and it was published in the Synod's journal, the *Church Gazette*, on February 24, 1901, signed by seven of Russia's leading ecclesiastics. The edict began with a reminder that the efforts of heretics, false teachers, and all the powers of hell have never prevailed against the Holy Church. "But in our days," the document continued, "God has permitted a new false teacher to appear—Count Leo Tolstoy. Well known to the world as a writer, Russian by birth, Orthodox by baptism and education, Count Tolstoy, seduced by intellectual pride, has arrogantly risen against the Lord and His Christ and His holy heritage, and has plainly in the sight of all repudiated his Orthodox Mother Church which reared and educated him, and has dedicated his literary activity and the talent given to him by God to disseminating among the people teachings opposed

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to Christ and the Church, and to destroying in the minds and hearts of people their national faith, that Orthodox faith which has been confirmed by the universe and in which our forefathers lived and were saved, and to which Holy Russia till now has clung, and in which it has been strong. In his works and letters, distributed in great numbers by him and his followers throughout the whole world, and particularly within the borders of our dear land, he preaches with zealous fanaticism the overthrow of all the dogmas of the Orthodox Church and the very essence of the Christian faith." There then followed an itemized listing of his heresies: that he denied God worshipped in the Holy Trinity, Christ as a God-man who was raised from the dead, the immaculate conception of the Lord Christ, and the virginity of Mary; that he did not acknowledge a life and retribution beyond the grave; that he rejected all the Sacraments; and that in particular he subjected to derision the greatest of Sacraments, the Holy Eucharist. "Therefore," the edict concluded, "the Church does not reckon him as its member and cannot so reckon him until he repents and resumes his communion with her."

The edict is not in canonical language, whatever it may be in intent, a formal excommunication, for at the end it appears to leave the door open for reconciliation. But Tolstoy regarded it as a statement of excommunication, and so did the public. The day following its publication in the *Church Gazette*, it appeared in nearly every Russian newspaper, and the telegraph wires carried the astounding news to the four corners of the globe. The government, however, had first taken the precaution to forbid the Russian press to print any comment on the edict of the Holy Synod.

## II

The edict created a sensation, but not the kind the Synod had anticipated. To a people in a rebellious mood, the excommunication of one of their champions served only as another and greater indictment of oppressive authority. The day on which the edict first appeared was a Sunday. People swarmed the streets of Moscow, for the student unrest was at its height. Tolstoy had gone with his friend Dunayev to Lubyanskaya Square. A crowd of several thousand had assembled there. Sonya related in her diary that someone recognized Tolstoy and ironically shouted: "There goes the devil in human form!" All eyes were turned on him and a cheer

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roared from hundreds of throats: "Hurrah for Leo Nikolayevich! Long live Leo Nikolayevich! Hail to the great! Hurrah!" Only with the aid of mounted police did Tolstoy extricate himself from the turbulent, acclaiming crowd.

Quantities of sympathetic letters and telegrams poured in from people in Russia and abroad; many statements came expressing indignation over the action of the Synod, often bearing hundreds of signatures, and in one case over a thousand. Deputations, sometimes bearing flowers and gifts, waited on him to convey their regrets. Messages of protest, sent to both Tolstoy and the ecclesiastics who signed the edict, represented all groups, from aristocrats and intellectuals to simple factory workers. Before one of Repin's canvases of Tolstoy, hung at a Petersburg exhibition, demonstrations took place. Crowds gathered before the portrait, adorned it with garlands of flowers, and shouted, "Down with Pobedonostsev!" and "Hurrah for Leo Nikolayevich!" One of these gatherings dispatched a laudatory telegram, and then afraid that this would not reach him, for it soon became known that the authorities were intercepting such telegraphic messages, they also sent a letter, signed by 397 persons, which described the nature of the demonstration. The portrait became so persistent a focus for public manifestations of feeling on behalf of Tolstoy that the authorities had it withdrawn from the exhibit. This was the famous canvas, entitled "Tolstoy at Prayer," portraying him standing barefoot in the woods. He jokingly remarked to Goldenweizer: "Repin painted me décolleté, barefoot in a shirt! I have to thank him for not having taken off my trousers too. And he never even asked me if I liked it. But I have long since got used to being treated as if I were dead." Perhaps with no little personal satisfaction and a certain amount of cheerful irony, he finally sent a letter to the press "to thank all those people, from high officials to simple workers," for the sympathetic messages they had sent him because of the action of the Holy Synod.

The daily mail brought not only letters of sympathy or congratulation. There were anonymous threats of murder and angry epistles, scolding him as a heretic and praising the Synod's edict. Postal and telegraph officials did not interfere with these messages of condemnation. Such charges were relatively few, but in some conservative circles of rigid Orthodox believers the excommunication brought him abuse and persecution. His books were banned in a number of public libraries, sermons were preached against him

in churches, and perhaps the unkindest cut, with a comic touch about it, was his exclusion from the Moscow Temperance Society against the vigorous protests of some of its more enlightened members.

The excommunication shocked members of the Tolstoy family and aroused some of them to indignant protest. Although a nun, Tolstoy's sister Marya declared her exasperation with the Synod, for she knew that her brother "had God in his heart." Even young Alexandra, who had been strictly brought up in the Orthodox faith by her mother, wished to break away from the Church at this time. Tolstoy persuaded her to attend services in order to spare the feelings of her mother, who was inclined to blame him for influencing her daughter to abandon her faith. Alexandra tells in her account of the excommunication that she and young Misha Sukhotin, her sister's stepson, dropped their studies and devoted themselves to distributing forbidden literature by way of protest. They secretly procured a hectograph set and printed, among other things, copies of two satiric fables then going the rounds, "The Victorious Pigeons" and "The Lion and the Asses," which ridiculed the government and the Church. But this truly hazardous business was stopped when Sonya discovered their illegal activities.

The excommunication deeply disturbed Sonya, and she rushed to the defence of her husband with perhaps more indignation than judgement. She straightway dispatched identical letters to Pobedonostsev and the three Metropolitans, who had signed the edict. Asserting her own unalterable faith in the Church, she declared that this public separation of her husband from it had inexpressibly shocked her. She then rubbed it in a bit by describing the numerous expressions of sympathy and love from all over the world that this act had evoked. And she ended with a barbed statement that there were many outside the Church who led a more truly Christian life than certain high ecclesiastics "wearing diamonded mitres and stars."

Sonya was pleased with this effort and saw to it that copies got abroad. "No manuscript of Leo Nikolayevich," she wrote in her diary, "ever had such swift and wide dissemination as this letter. It has been translated into all the foreign languages. This rejoiced me, but I did not become proud, thank God! I wrote it at once, swiftly, ardently. God commanded me to do this and not my will." The Metropolitan Anthony eventually wrote a reply, which was published, along with Sonya's letter, in the *Church Gazette*. The



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answer, filled with pious platitudes and laboured evasions, left Sonya utterly cold. "It is entirely proper and entirely soulless," she noted in her diary. Tolstoy was perhaps more surprised than pleased by his wife's courageous defence of him, for he knew how stubbornly she adhered to her orthodox faith and what little tolerance she had for many of the people on whose side she now found herself in this cause. Rather puzzled, he wrote to his daughter Masha: "Your mother's letter has had a very good effect on her. It is impossible to foresee anything. With us men, thought influences action, but with women, especially feminine women, actions influence thought. She [Sonya] now judges otherwise, and she accepts many judgements differently."

### III

Tolstoy's first reaction was rather scornful, like that of the lady who sent him a piece of holy bread and a letter, in which she wrote that she had just received the Sacrament and had taken the Host for his benefit, and she concluded: "Eat it in health and pay no attention to these stupid priests." The numerous callers who came to see him he laughingly greeted at the door with the words that he positively declined to accept congratulations.

On the other hand, Tolstoy saw clearly that the excommunication was an attempt on the part of the Church and government to combat his influence among the people. In reality the Synod's act increased his influence, made his home in Moscow a centre of inspiration to the downtrodden and persecuted, and prompted him to intensify his agitation against the political, social, and religious abuses in a State run by police. Shortly after the excommunication, Cossacks beat the people in a street gathering in front of the Kazan Cathedral in Petersburg. The distinguished Prince L. D. Vyazemski, a member of the Council of State, was on the spot and tried to halt the brutality of the Cossacks. He was roughly handled for his efforts and later received a public reprimand from the Tsar and was banished from the capital. Defiantly Tolstoy wrote Vyazemski a letter, signed by a number of people, in which he informed him that his courageous and humane action at the time of the demonstration had aroused the esteem and gratitude of all. Since the letter could not be printed in Russia, he sent it to Chertkov in England for publication. And when the Minister of the Interior closed the Writers' Union because it protested the actions of the Cossacks,

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Tolstoy, among others, signed a letter commending the Union's leaders for their stand.

Some three weeks after his excommunication, Tolstoy returned good for evil. Disturbed by the news of various demonstrations aimed at the government, he wrote an article, "An Appeal to the Tsar and His Officials," which was delivered to them. With frankness and admirable clarity, he stated the case of the people against the government. Tranquillity would not be achieved, he said, by following the recent naive order of the Minister of the Interior to the police to disperse the crowds promptly, and to fire at them if they did not disperse. The time might well come, he warned, when soldiers and police would refuse to commit the terrible crime of fratricide. Thousands of people had been unjustly persecuted by a despotic regime which had for years not only stood still but receded and separated itself more and more from the people and their demands. What was needed, he declared, was not for the rulers to defend themselves against those who really did not wish to injure them, but to seek out the causes of social discontent and remove them. He then formulated the four principal demands of the people: To grant the peasants equal rights with all other citizens; to abolish special enactments that would permit the Common Law to be disregarded; to remove all barriers to education; and to abolish all limitations of religious liberty. After itemizing in some detail the various abuses perpetrated by the government and Church, he concluded by stating that the removal of the causes of complaint would pacify the majority of the people and free them from those terrible sufferings and (what was worse than sufferings) crimes which would inevitably be committed on both sides if the government continued to concern itself solely with the suppression of disturbances, leaving the causes of these disturbances untouched.

If Nicholas II had given heed to this simple bill of rights, he might have anticipated the revolt that took place four years later or even the 1917 Revolution that swept him and all his family into oblivion. The article is interesting from another point of view, for it illustrates Tolstoy's practical wisdom and good judgement. Clearly foreseeing a bloody revolt, he put aside his own maximum programme of Christian anarchism and offered to a government that he felt had no right to exist at all the minimum terms that might prevent its total destruction.

But the government of the Tsar could learn nothing, and it certainly could not forget that in Leo Tolstoy it had a subject

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more to be feared than to be accepted as a guide. He received no acknowledgement of his article, and no attempt was made to follow his advice. With no little chagrin the arch-villain in the piece, Pobedonostsev, confessed in a letter to the editor of the *Church Gazette*: "Indeed, what a heap of anger has already been aroused over the epistle" [the edict of excommunication].

Tolstoy finally decided to reply to the Synod's official statement separating him from the Church. His answer, dated April 4, 1901, was actually published by the *Church Gazette* and by two other unofficial Church periodicals, but with significant deletions which the censor found impossible to print "without offending the religious feelings of the faithful." Reprinting even this censored version was forbidden in Russia, and the answer was published in complete form at this time only in England.

Having made clear what he considered to be true and what untrue in the Synod's statement, he admitted that he did not believe in what the Church said it believed in, but insisted that he believed in much that the Church had attempted to persuade people that he did not believe. "I believe in this," he wrote. "I believe in God, whom I understand as Spirit, as love, as the Source of all. I believe that He is in me and I in Him. I believe that the will of God is most clearly and intelligibly expressed in the teaching of the man Jesus, whom to consider as God and pray to, I esteem the greatest blasphemy. I believe that man's true welfare lies in fulfilling God's will, and His will is that men should love one another and should consequently do to others as they wish others to do to them—of which it is said in the Gospels that in this is the law and the prophets. I believe therefore that the meaning of the life of every man is to be found only in increasing the love that is in him; that this increase of love leads man, even in this life, to ever greater and greater blessedness, and after death gives him the more blessedness the more love he has, and helps more than anything else towards the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth: that is, to the establishment of an order of life in which the discord, deception and violence that now rule will be replaced by free accord, by truth, and by the brotherly love of one for another."

After this confession of faith, Tolstoy rose to heights of noble sincerity in the conclusion of his answer to the Synod. "Whether or not these beliefs of mine offend, grieve, or prove a stumbling block to anyone, or hinder anything, or give displeasure to anybody, I can as little change them as I can change my body. I must

myself live my own life, and I must myself alone meet death (and that very soon), and therefore I cannot believe otherwise than as I—preparing to go to that God from whom I came—do believe. I do not believe my faith to be the one indubitable truth for all time, but I see no other that is plainer, clearer, or answers better to all the demands of my reason and my heart; should I find such a one I shall at once accept it; for God requires nothing but the truth. But I can no more return to that from which with such suffering I have escaped, than a flying bird can re-enter the eggshell from which it has emerged.”

## IV

Tolstoy left for Yasnaya Polyana early in May, 1901. Over the next couple of months he wrote three short articles. Two of them, “A Soldier’s Leaflet” and “An Officer’s Leaflet,” received wide distribution abroad and were well known in Russia in quantities of hectograph copies, largely put out by revolutionary organizations. These articles were on the familiar subject of the relation of Christians to military service and were inspired by the manuals for soldiers compiled by the War Department. Boulanger related that Tolstoy burned with indignation over the way these manuals would couple texts of the Gospels with cold-blooded instructions on how to kill. Tolstoy handed him one of the manuals, Boulanger wrote, and “with peculiar agitation and a characteristic spasm in his throat, as though sobbing, he said: ‘No, look at this! Is it possible to write and distribute it along with the appealing words of Christ about love and brotherhood? Read this passage’.” And Tolstoy pointed out a place in the soldier’s manual. “‘Always strike, never cease to strike. Having struck with the bayonet, club with the butt; if the butt won’t do, beat with the fists; if the fists fail, sink your teeth in.’ No, this is frightful,” he said. “This is too incredibly animal-like—‘sink your teeth in.’”

“The Only Means,” the third article, attempted to answer the question: What can free the labourers from their ills? The answer—faith in God and His law as expressed in the Gospels—adds nothing new to Tolstoy’s panacea for the world’s ills. His tendency to solve all social, political, and economic problems by the application of a simple moral formula had by now become characteristic. Persons of deep and abiding faith oversimplify life’s complexities and are often unwilling to accept the fact that many human problems do not admit of an absolute wrong or right solution but

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may be resolved with justice to all only through compromise. To be sure, such persons avoid the tragedy of the equivocators who drown themselves in a spoon of water in their efforts to get to the bottom, but they risk the greater tragedy of effortless infallibility.

Senator Andrew D. White, at one time American Minister to Russia, in an account of his visit to Tolstoy remarked that his host, like certain other Russian thinkers, having given birth to striking ideas, coddled and petted them, could see neither spot nor blemish in them, and at last virtually believed himself infallible. This observation was not without its point with reference to Tolstoy in his old age, though he might have been surprised at its coming from White. For after one of the latter's visits, Tolstoy asked the family if they knew how the United States was governed. They admitted their ignorance. "Well," he said, "each state elects its wisest and best men to govern it, but the two very wisest and very best men from each state are sent to Washington to make the laws for the whole country. I have had one of those men with me today. He has learned all the sciences, and knows all the languages, and has read all the books—the only pity is that he has not yet begun to think."

However, Tolstoy honestly tried to avoid the sin of intellectual pride. He observed in his diary that summer: "Those people are terrible who always want to be right. In order that they should be perfectly right, they are ready to blame the innocent, the holy, and God Himself." Becoming convinced that faith was entirely a matter between God and the individual, he tended more and more to discourage intermediaries or any organized effort to propagate his beliefs. He wasted little sympathy on the failure of the English colony at Purleigh, in which Chertkov and Maude were interested. And when Percy Redfern, head of the Manchester Tolstoy Society, wrote him at this time for support, he bluntly replied: "I have always been of the conviction—and it cannot be changed—that to be a member of the ancient society founded by God at the beginning of the conscious life of humanity is more productive for myself and mankind than to be a member of any restricted society organized by us for the achievement of those aims which we in substance recognize. . . . Apart from this, a man belonging to the great society of God fulfils also many other Christian actions which have been neither foreseen nor defined by Tolstoyan Societies nor by any others whatever they may be." In general, he now urged all who shared his faith to devote their time to ordering their own inner spiritual being rather than to promoting his beliefs.

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During this summer Tolstoy secretly asked his daughter Masha to make a copy of the will he had written in his diary in 1895, perhaps because he distrusted the intentions of his wife, who kept these old diaries under lock and key. He had obtained this particular diary from Sonya with difficulty and returned it at once. Masha visited Yasnaya Polyana towards the end of June, 1901. The next morning, surprised that her father did not appear, she entered his bedroom and found him ill. Sonya had left that morning for the estate of her son Sergei. Masha asked him why he had not told her mother of his condition. "He burst out with a flood of complaints, a thing very rare with him, and said that it was difficult for him to get along with mother, that there was no person in the world more alien and further from him than she, and how terrible this was since she was the one who stood closer to him than anyone. At this he pointed at their beds, standing side by side."

Masha comforted him and then presently asked why, if he felt that way about her mother, he had designated her as one of the executors of his writings. (Masha was referring to one of the conditions of his will which she had recently copied, namely, that Chertkov, Strakhov—now dead—and Sonya should take charge of all his papers. The other two important conditions were that he should not be buried by the Church and that his heirs should not attempt to profit financially from his literary works.) Tolstoy had actually forgotten that he had designated Sonya, and he asked Masha to bring him the copy of the will and said he would change this place and then sign it. She had left the copy at her home, but she promised to bring it to him soon.

On another visit, in August of that year, Masha gave her father the copy of the will to sign and reminded him of his expressed wish to change it. "You mean about mother?" he asked. "No, I shall not change it. It is unnecessary. Let it remain as it is. It was written at a time of good relations with her and it ought not to be changed." After he had signed the will, she asked if she should send the copy to Chertkov or give it to her mother. He directed her to keep it.

Though at first only Tolstoy, Masha, and her husband knew of this matter, it was revealed by chance in a family gathering a few weeks later. Sonya's wrath was colossal. It appears that the worst fears of Masha and her husband were justified, for Obolenski wrote to Chertkov about the whole incident and reported Sonya as saying that upon the death of her husband she intended to request the Tsar for permission to bury Tolstoy with full rites of the Church.

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And in her diary Sonya wrote of the will in Masha's possession: "It was extremely disagreeable to me when I learned about this by chance. To make the works of Leo Nikolayevich *common* property I regard as wrong and senseless. I love my own family and desire for it the best kind of prosperity, but by turning these works into public property, we shall only enrich the wealthy publishing houses. . . . I told Leo Nikolayevich that if he died before I did, I would not fulfil his desire and renounce my right to his works; and if I had regarded it as a good and just thing, I would have granted him this pleasure of renouncing the right during his lifetime<sup>1</sup>, but after his death this would have no meaning for him."

Sonya at once broke with Masha and her husband over this matter and they left Yasnaya Polyana, but the breach was healed later. She kept after her husband, demanding the signed copy of the will. Finally, in the autumn of 1902, Masha related that one evening her father came to her "and gently and shamefacedly asked me to give him this document. He said that mother tormented him with tales . . . that for the sake of the greatest good it was necessary to give her this will. . . ." Sonya got the will and preserved it with the following note: "This is not a *will*, and my husband never asked my daughter Masha to copy it; she did it at her own discretion and kept it secret from the whole family, and today my husband gave it to me to destroy at my desire. SOFYA TOLSTOY." This was only the beginning of the long battle of the will.

That summer at Yasnaya Polyana Tolstoy's health began seriously to decline. Towards the end of June he came down with a severe attack of malaria. Doctors were summoned from Tula and Moscow, and at one point it seemed that he had reached the end. Attentively watching his wife apply a compress to him, he wept. "'Thanks, Sonya. Don't think I'm not grateful and don't love you,'" she quoted him in her diary. And weeping herself, they embraced. "Now my Lyovochka sleeps," she jotted down later. "He's still alive, I can see and hear him and care for him. And later? My God, how unbearable my grief would be, how terrible my life without him. . . ."

Tolstoy recovered, but the reports of his closeness to death had been so persistent that even the cautious government sent confidential telegrams to the various proper authorities with instructions

<sup>1</sup> It will be recalled that Sonya had refused to agree to his desire to renounce the rights to all his works during his lifetime; she agreed only in the case of those written after 1881. This will of 1895 was not legally binding, for it had not been drawn up according to statutory requirements.

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that, in the event of his dying, care should be taken "to prevent any demonstrative speeches, activities, or public manifestations." Messages of sympathy and concern from all over Russia and abroad deluged Yasnaya Polyana, including one from the very literary Queen of Rumania. A member of the family was reading some of these letters to him while he was convalescing and he laughingly interrupted to remark: "Now, should I begin to die again, I really must bring it off; there can be no joking next time. All will swallow it, correspondents will come, letters and telegrams, and suddenly it will all turn out to be not so. No, this is impossible, it is simply indecent."

Another severe illness at the end of July convinced the doctors that the seventy-three-year-old Tolstoy could not stand the fall and winter climate of Yasnaya Polyana and Moscow in his weakened condition, and they advised him to go south. Hearing of this decision, the wealthy Petersburg Countess S. V. Panin generously placed at the disposal of the family her estate at Gaspra on the southern shore of the Crimea. On the night of September 5, Tolstoy, Sonya, Alexandra, and Masha and her husband set out from Yasnaya Polyana.

### v

P. A. Boulanger, Tolstoy's devoted friend and disciple, made the arrangements for the trip and accompanied the family. As a railway official, he persuaded his superiors to make available the luxurious private car of the director of the road. The twelve cold miles to the Tula station were made in a carriage drawn by a team through a sea of mud, the inky excuse for a road being illuminated by a groom riding on ahead with a torch. This painful drive brought on a sinking spell in the sick man, and for a moment the company considered taking Tolstoy back to Yasnaya Polyana. The decision to push on was eventually rewarded by the warm drawing room of the private car with its elegant upholstered furniture and piano, and its individual sleeping compartments.

The next morning the train passed through Kursk and the travellers could already feel the warm breath of the south which revived their spirits and even inspired Tolstoy to do a bit of writing. At the next stop, Kharkov, they hoped to have time to dine at the station restaurant. As the train pulled in Boulanger noticed that the platform was thronged with people, and some youths were even astride the crossbeams of the roof, peering with



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expectant faces at each car. There could be no doubt: the crowd was waiting the arrival of Tolstoy. Though government authorities had expressly forbidden the press to print any mention of his journey the news had already got to the public.

"Tolstoy! Tolstoy!" the cry went up, mostly from the students in the throng. A look of mingled fear and agitation came over the face of the sick man, and he ordered all the blinds to be drawn. The car was swallowed up in a crowd of some three thousand people. Students pressed forward, begging that Tolstoy receive their deputies. Sonya appeared to tell them that her husband was ill. The students pleaded and she finally let in a committee of them. Their ardour momentarily lost in embarrassment, they mumbled greeting and good wishes. The suffering Tolstoy mumbled a few words in reply and they withdrew, only to have their places taken by another delegation that had forced its way in. At last the third bell rang; the train started. A roar went up from the crowd and shouts for him to appear at the window. He did. Hundreds of voices yelled "Hurrah! Get well! Come back healthy! God protect you!" Handkerchiefs waved, hats were thrown in the air, but finally those running beside the train were left behind. The members of the family settled back quietly in their seats, but the excitement lingered. This spontaneous public demonstration in honour of the great writer touched them all, and even Tolstoy was visibly affected. Goldenweizer, determined not to be separated from his idol, had managed to join the party at Kharkov.

At Sevastopol another ovation took place. But because the exact time of arrival had been unknown, only a few of the more persistent of those who had been waiting for several days were on hand when the train pulled in. The party decided to remain in Sevastopol until the next day. They were all in good spirits and Tolstoy's condition improved.

Tolstoy and Boulanger went for a walk around the town. Forty-five years ago he had been one of thousands of Russian soldiers engaged in that bloody, heroic, but futile defence of this city. How it had changed! They went into a museum dedicated to the memory of the defenders. Excitedly Tolstoy inspected the various objects of the siege collected there and strained at his memory to recall the events with which they were associated. But suddenly he came upon a picture of himself which evoked different and unpleasant recollections and thought. They left the museum and on the way back to the hotel he said to Boulanger: "How sad it is. What sense

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is there in that expensive building, that elaborate collection of all those old buttons and shell fragments. All this horror ought to be forgotten. . . . It is terrible, terrible!"

The next morning the party set out for Gaspra in two carriages. As they left the environs of Sevastopol behind them, Tolstoy eagerly searched the topography for memorable sights of battlefields and earthworks, and especially for the celebrated Fourth Bastion where he had so often risked his life during the siege. But he could identify nothing and sadly kept commenting on how things had changed.

When they reached the famous Baidar Pass, they left the carriages and proceeded on foot till they suddenly came upon the breathtaking view of the towering cliffs and the vast expanse of the Black Sea sparkling in the sun away beneath them. At the next stop Tolstoy walked ahead with Boulanger while the horses were being changed. He turned at one point to a passing youth to ask for some details about the locality. Obviously a bit contemptuous of this poorly clad, peasant-looking old man, the youth answered his questions condescendingly and with reluctance. Presently the first carriage overtook them and Tolstoy, politely thanking the stranger, got in and drove off. As Boulanger waited for the second carriage the youth asked him if he knew the old man.

"He is Count Tolstoy," answered Boulanger.

"What!" exclaimed the youth. "The real Count Tolstoy, the writer?"

"The very one."

"Oh, my God, my God," the youth moaned, and tearing his hat from his head he flung it on the ground. "And I spoke to him in that way! I would have given all I possessed merely to see him, and now, like a fool, I spoke to him like that, thinking he was just some old man!"

Late that evening the party arrived at Gaspra and drove up to the imposing mansion of Countess Panin, whose servants came out to welcome them. All the evidence of wealth, luxury, and bad taste made a disagreeable impression on the Tolstoys—the cold, formal, high-ceilinged rooms, the marble work, and the heavy expensive furniture. But on closer inspection they were delighted with the spacious lower veranda screened by thick, grape-bearing vines and the upper veranda that looked right out to the open sea. Here they settled down, scarcely realizing at the time that they were to remain for almost a year.

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### VI

During these months at Gaspra death knocked more than once at the door of Tolstoy's sickroom. All members of the family gathered around on several occasions, prepared for the end. Doctors summoned from Yalta, Moscow, and Petersburg were in constant attendance, and at times their professionally grave faces signalled that hope was running out. But the wonderful constitution of Tolstoy, who as a youth had dreamed of being the strongest man in the world, triumphed over successive attacks of angina pectoris, inflammation of the lungs, and typhoid fever, complicated by rheumatism, liver complaints, and a weakened heart.

All these afflictions Tolstoy bore with patience and humble spiritual resignation. He cheerfully tried to obey the regimen prescribed by his physicians, despite his distrust of medicine, and he accepted the endless care of his family and devoted followers with a sense of embarrassment over the trouble he was causing them. His thoughts were fixed on death and any fear he may have had of it he had conquered. Spiritually he prepared himself for the end and calmly anticipated the moment when the spark of life in his pain-racked body would be extinguished. Sickness he regarded as a positive virtue. "One must suffer a severe illness," he dictated for his diary at this time, "in order to convince oneself of what life consists: the weaker the body, the stronger becomes one's spiritual development." And he also entered in his diary a few lines of a folk poem which had captured his fancy:

The dear old man has begun to groan,  
The dear old man has begun to cough,  
It's time for him to be under his shroud,  
Under his shroud and in his grave.

He liked to repeat these lines to his doctors and members of the family, and on one such occasion Sonya noticed tears in his eyes. "I'm crying," he explained, "not because I'm dying, but because of the artistic beauty of the thought." Upon recovering from this illness, he wearily entered in his diary: "It's boring to be alive again."

Both the Church and the government were almost as much concerned as the family, though for different reasons, with the course of Tolstoy's illness. The authorities kept informed of events at Gaspra through spies. Alexandra gives an amusing account of being trailed by one and then suddenly turning the tables and

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tracking the tracker so assiduously that in confusion and humiliation he was obliged to desert the field. There was real point in Tolstoy's observation at the time that the only sensible place of residence for a Christian in Russia was prison.

In January 1902, when it seemed that there was little chance for Tolstoy's recovery, the government took the most elaborate precautions. The telegraph company was forbidden to accept wires with requests about his health, and the press was instructed, "in the event of the death of Count Tolstoy," not to make any references to the excommunication of the Synod and in all reports of the event to observe "the necessary objectivity and circumspection." Confidential memoranda were even prepared by the Synod and the Ministry of the Interior, forbidding church services, public demonstrations, and detailing the formalities and conditions to be observed in transporting the body from the Crimea to Yasnaya Polyana.

At this same time Pobedonostsev fathered a plot that did credit to his reputation as the most reactionary and Machiavellian influence in the government. He secretly instructed the head of the local clergy, which had free access to the Panin estate because of the presence there of a private chapel, to have one of its members in the house when Tolstoy neared the end. As soon as he had died, the priest was to leave the house and at once declare to all that Tolstoy had recanted his beliefs and passed away a true son of the Orthodox faith. The government would then see to it that these glad tidings were immediately spread throughout the world. Members of the family got wind of this base business and were indignant. They planned to circumvent the plot by concealing the news of Tolstoy's death long enough to send telegrams to the press abroad with the message that he had died true to his convictions.

The Church was obviously interested in reclaiming Tolstoy either by fair or by foul means. For shortly after this incident, Sonya received a letter from Metropolitan Anthony, exhorting her to persuade her husband to return to the faith and die a Christian. "A quiet death under the influence of the rites of the Church," Tolstoy observed, "is like death under morphine." Though Sonya knew how hopeless it was, she told him of the Metropolitan's request. Write Anthony, he instructed her, that this is my last prayer: "From Thee I have come, and to Thee I shall return. Thy will be done." When she remonstrated about his attitude towards the Church, he continued: "Let there be no talk of reconciliation. I die without any enmity or evil. But what is the Church

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anyway? How can there be a reconciliation with such an indefinite thing?" And he ended by asking her not to answer the Metropolitan.

### VII

There were periods of convalescence between the various illnesses when the desire to live thrust aside thoughts of death. Kind attendants carefully swathed Tolstoy's feeble and emaciated body until he looked like a bearded Egyptian mummy, and carried him to a wheelchair which was pushed along the gravel paths. On one of these outings the cheery Boulanger suggested they take a sail. Tolstoy was carried to the deck of a Turkish felucca moored near by. The slender boat sped effortlessly over the smooth blue water and this new sensation filled the weak old man with a wonderful feeling of exhilaration. Only the thought of what his wife would say when she learned of this escapade dampened his high spirits.

When the weather was fine, Tolstoy held his little court on the broad lower veranda of the Panin house just as he had been accustomed to do on the terrace at Yasnaya Polyana. For almost as many visitors made their way to Gaspra to see and talk with Russia's first citizen. Revolutionists and sectarians, devoted followers such as Makovitski and Sulerzhitski, and local inhabitants called. One day, much to his surprise, he received a request from Grand Duke Nikolai Mikhailovich, first cousin once removed of the Tsar, asking permission to visit him. He had a huge estate near by. In the royal family Grand Duke Nikolai Mikhailovich had achieved some distinction for his intellectual interests as a historian, publishing a series of studies, especially on the period of Alexander I.

Tolstoy invited the Grand Duke to call. They conversed politely about inconsequential things, though it seems that the Grand Duke requested advice concerning his love for a certain lady. He asked if he could be of help in any way and entreated Tolstoy to make use of the heavily guarded grounds of his huge estate to stroll in. After he had left, Alexandra reports her father as saying: "Strange, what does he expect of me? He told me of his personal life and asked permission to come again. But he is a simple, unpretentious man and seems intelligent." To Chertkov he wrote less favourably of the Grand Duke's visit: "What does he want? I don't know. He is of little interest. A too familiar type."

Upon the Grand Duke's second visit, Tolstoy greeted him as follows: "I'm very glad to see you. As I awaited you my conscience

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tormented me and I wish to ask whether you considered what you were doing when you first called. For I'm in quarantine, like a person with scarlet fever; I'm excommunicated, people fear me, and here you come to see me. I repeat, I have scarlet fever. I'm contagious, and because of me you can experience misfortune; they will look on you with suspicion because you have visited a politically unreliable person."

Whether or not Tolstoy was joking—less important people had become suspect in the eyes of the authorities merely because they visited him—there is little doubt that the Grand Duke had carefully considered his visits. He was close to the Tsar, and it is not likely that he would have sought an acquaintanceship with Tolstoy without royal approval. It is even possible, in the light of their later relations, that the Grand Duke was acting on instructions to cultivate Tolstoy in the hope either of persuading him of the fallacy of his attitude towards Church and State, or at least of acting as an intermediary in making his peace with the Tsar. For a long correspondence developed between them in which Tolstoy, rather naïvely at first, attempted to persuade the Grand Duke to use his influence by way of getting the government to adopt Henry George's single-tax system. Since members of the royal family were among the largest landowners in Russia and stood to lose heavily by the adoption of such a system, the Grand Duke evaded the issue in his letters and gently suggested that Tolstoy was a bit of an idealist. In his reply, Tolstoy very firmly put the Grand Duke in his place and pointed out that he was hardly in a position to judge the efficacy of the plan, since he had obviously never read any of Henry George's works, which was true. After this Tolstoy soon grew cold towards his would-be royal patron.

Tolstoy felt much more at home with the literary visitors at Gaspra, among whom were new younger writers of distinction—Balmont, Korolenko, and Skitalits. The latter recalled the majesty and goodness impressed on the worn, ancient face of the sick man, and how he felt like a five-year-old child ready to burst into tears from shyness in the presence of the "great Leo." Balmont he greeted with the sentence of condemnation: "Aren't you the one who writes all those decadent verses?" He disliked the Symbolist poets and had pilloried them for their literary trifling and unintelligibility in *What Is Art?* When Goldenweizer had told him that Maeterlinck, another of the Symbolists he detested, had recently declared in print that Tolstoy's drama, *The Power of Darkness*, was one of

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the greatest of plays, he replied with mingled humour and scorn: "Then why doesn't he imitate it?" Tolstoy promptly asked Balmont to recite some of his verses. He recited one of his symbolic poems, "The Fragrance of the Sun." At the end, Balmont relates how Tolstoy rocked back and forth in his chair, laughing soundlessly, and then said: "Oh, what nonsense! Fragrance of the sun! Oh, what nonsense!" Apparently undiscouraged, the young author defended his verses and recited another poem. Tolstoy suddenly broke in with his customary question to newcomers: "Tell me, who are you?" Balmont then related his life history, and Tolstoy listened with rapt attention, occasionally interrupting to ask the most pointed questions. "Perhaps never in my life," wrote Balmont later, "has any man listened to me in that way. For this one capacity of an alien soul to enter so completely into another alien soul, one may endlessly love Leo Tolstoy, and I love him."

The literary visitors who gave Tolstoy most pleasure at Gaspra and with whom he now felt on entirely familiar terms were Chekhov and Gorky. Chekhov was living at near-by Yalta, having come to this warm climate in a vain effort to improve his tuberculous condition which in a few short years brought about his death. A slightly bent figure, carrying a cane, he resembled the conventional image of the absent-minded college professor with his pointed beard, spectacles, and shy, serious expression. Red, sunken cheeks and a constant muffled cough signalled his dread disease. He came several times to see Tolstoy at Gaspra. Their admiration for each other and sympathetic understanding had deepened, so much that one suspects Tolstoy keenly regretted Chekhov's failure to accept his moral and spiritual views. He loved Chekhov, Gorky said, and when he looked at him his eyes were tender.

Gorky, too, lived near Gaspra. He had recently been imprisoned for political activities, and was now under police surveillance, but the authorities had permitted him to come there for his health (he had weak lungs). On the occasion of his arrest, Tolstoy had written a warm defence of his character to the Minister of the Interior. Gorky was a frequent visitor to Tolstoy, who wrote to Chertkov at this time that he had grown much fonder of this strangely timid and somewhat uncouth young author. Perhaps Gorky was right in believing that Tolstoy's interest in him was ethnological, so to speak, as though he belonged to a species not familiar to him. On the other hand, Tolstoy fascinated Gorky not only as a man and an artist, but as the human material for psychological literary study.

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There was much about Tolstoy that baffled him and yet much that his keen insight into human nature penetrated and interpreted with remarkably clarity. It was during these visits at Gaspra that he wrote the often brilliant notes and observations that make up the larger part of his reminiscences of Tolstoy.

Gorky saw in Tolstoy a god, not a Jehovah or an Olympian, but a kind of Russian folk god who "is perhaps more cunning than all the other gods." At times he seemed to Gorky to be a man who knew everything, one who had settled every question. Gorky observed how continually the thought of God gnawed at Tolstoy, and he was inclined to attribute it to his "exquisite human pride." But his relations with God, said Gorky, were suspicious and sometimes reminded him of the relations of two bears in one den. He also noted that Tolstoy talked much of women and always with the coarseness of a Russian peasant. He quoted him as asking Chekhov one day: "You whored a great deal when you were young?" In embarrassment Chekhov muttered something inaudible. "I was an indefatigable . . ." And Gorky added: "He said this penitently, using at the end of the sentence a salty peasant word. And I noticed for the first time how simply he used these words, as though he knew no more fitting ones to use. Coming from his shaggy lips, they sounded simple and natural and lost their soldierly coarseness and filth."

## VIII

During his illness, Tolstoy's mind worked with all its accustomed vigour and clarity. Though reconciled to surrendering his body to death, he seemed determined to wring out of his brain the last thought, the last bit of writing. Perhaps force of habit kept him at these tasks, but there was also the conviction that what he had to say was of importance to posterity. One of the attending physicians related that when death was hovering over Tolstoy and he thought he was lying unconscious on the bed, the sick man suddenly opened his eyes and demanded pencil and paper. When the pencil fell from his trembling hand, he called for his daughter Masha and dictated to her corrections to an article he had been writing.

Thus thoughts for the diary and notebooks were entered and letters and articles were written through these months of alternating illness and convalescence. When too weak to write himself, he dictated to willing attendants. Death stood still while the seemingly



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endless process of literary composition continued. At the end of 1901 he wrote an article, "On Toleration,"<sup>1</sup> inspired by a speech delivered by his friend M. A. Stakhovich, at the Orel Missionary Congress. To the amazement of his religious audience, Stakhovich, a distinguished local official, condemned them roundly for never once mentioning in all their deliberations the old-fashioned words "freedom of conscience." Lack of this freedom in Russia he blamed on the civil authorities, and he urged the Church to demand the abolition of all legal punishments for those who leave the Orthodox faith for another. As official business of the Congress, the speech was published in the Church paper and created a stir. To have his own position in this matter so ably and publicly argued by another gladdened Tolstoy, and he hastened to write his article to support the stand of Stakhovich.

In February 1902, after partially recovering from a severe case of inflammation of the lungs, Tolstoy put the finishing touches on an extensive article that he had been writing for some time, *What Is Religion and Wherein Lies Its Essence?* No essentially new arguments on this old subject were advanced in the work, but it is his most succinct, persuasive, and best tempered treatment of religion. He approached the subject historically and arrived at the following definition: "True religion is a relation, accordant with reason and knowledge, which man establishes with the infinite life surrounding him, and it is such as binds his life to that infinity and guides his conduct." Whereas faith, he asserted, is neither hope nor credulity, but a special state of the soul that obliges man to do certain things.

In January 1902, feeling that he might die soon, Tolstoy decided to write the Tsar what he believed to be a final letter of advice on the fate that threatened the country if conditions were not radically altered. He wrote: "Dear Brother.—I consider this form of address most suitable, because in this letter I address you as a brotherman rather than as a Tsar, and also because, awaiting the approach of death, I write as it were from the other world. I should not wish to die without telling you what I think of your present activity, of what it might be, what good it might bring to millions of people and to yourself, and what evil it can bring to people and to yourself if it continues in the same direction as now."

Tolstoy then itemized the various abuses under which the whole country groaned. The land is run by an army of police and the

<sup>1</sup> This was published by Chertkov in England in 1902.

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people have been driven by the cruelties of both Church and government to a point of open rebellion. Do not imagine, he warned the Tsar, that popular expressions of enthusiasm in public places are sincere. These demonstrations are organized by the authorities.

“Autocracy,” he continued, “is an outmoded form of government which may suit the demands of a people somewhere in Central Africa, far removed from the world, but not the demands of the Russian people, who are becoming ever more enlightened through the common enlightenment of the whole world, and therefore that form of government and the Orthodoxy bound up with it can only be upheld, as is now being done, by means of every kind of violence. . . .”

Tolstoy next reviewed the specific acts of the Tsar’s reign which he felt contributed to the misery of the people and the shame of Russia abroad. “Measures of coercion make it possible to oppress a people but not to govern them. In our time the only means of governing a people is by placing oneself at the head of their movement from evil to good, from darkness to light, and by leading them to achieve the goals nearest to that end. In order to do that it is first of all necessary to let them express their wishes and needs, and once having heard them, to fulfil those which answer to the demands not of one class or section, but of the majority—the mass of the working people.” He finally listed the demands of the vast majority of the working people, which are similar to those he set down in his “Appeal to the Tsar and His Officials.”

Once again, as in his earlier appeal, Tolstoy put aside his own ultimate convictions to plead for what amounted to a compromise, for he saw the bloody handwriting on the wall if conditions were not soon remedied. He persuaded the Grand Duke Nikolai Mikhailovich to deliver this letter to the Tsar. And convinced of the harmful influence of government ministers, he asked the Grand Duke to convey his wish to the sovereign that the letter should not be revealed to them. Somehow he felt that if the Tsar were left to his own reasoning and conscience, he might react favourably. The letter was delivered and the only acknowledgement Tolstoy received from Nicholas II was the comically ironic message “that he should not worry for he would not show it to anybody.” When Tolstoy realized that this was all the answer he would get, he dictated to Boulanger the following note: “Every thinking person of our time cannot fail to see that there are only two ways out of

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the oppressive and menacing situation with which we are now confronted: one, though very difficult, is bloody revolution; the second is recognition by the governments of their obligation not to oppose the law of progress, not to defend the old or, as we have done, return to the past, but rather to understand the direction in which humanity is moving and to lead the people in that direction. I have tried to point out the way in my two letters to Nicholas II. . . . Up to now no hope has been given me that this attempt would achieve its purpose or even gain a hearing. Therefore, in view of the inevitability of the first way out, that is, revolution, I now offer these two documents for distribution<sup>1</sup> in the hope that the thoughts contained in them will lessen the fratricidal strife to which the government at present leads its people." Within three years Tolstoy's prophecy of bloody revolution was fulfilled.

### IX

Tolstoy's illness and closeness to death drew the children together and brought out their devotion to their father. The public concern of the world over his health impressed upon them the sacredness of their own obligations. On several occasions, when the end seemed near, they all hurried to Gaspra. The married daughters took turns nursing him, and young Alexandra, now seventeen, was a constant attendant and at this time even assumed the difficult task of copying his nearly illegible manuscripts. The sons too shared the duty of ministering to the sick man, especially Sergei and Ilya. Big, strong Sergei carried the wasted form of his father in his arms up and down stairs. Only his son Leo caused him distress. For Leo's novel was receiving a good deal of popular attention at this time because of its ridiculing of Tolstoyans, and the fact pained his father. Thinking he was about to die, he wrote a final touching letter to Leo, who angrily tore it up in the presence of the family. Tolstoy apparently discovered none of his own talent in Leo's literary efforts, which he described to his brother as "stupid, untalented, and tactless."

Sonya's position during her husband's prolonged illness became an extremely difficult one. In her diary she confessed annoyance with the ancient notion that geniuses are invariably misunderstood by their wives. "When between a wife and a genius there exists

<sup>1</sup> "An Appeal to the Tsar and His Officials" was published in England in 1901 and the "Letter to the Emperor" in 1904.

real love, as there did between Leo Nikolayevich and me, then the wife does not need a great mind to understand; all that is needed is the *instinct of the heart*, the scent of love, and all will be understandable and both will be happy as we were."

However onerous the fate of being the wife of a genius, Sonya tried hard to accept it dutifully and graciously. But the first principle of success in this situation—to love your genius husband without criticizing him—she could never accept. She thoroughly enjoyed the warmth of Tolstoy's reflected glory, and thoughts of his approaching death sometimes frightened her with the dreary expectation of a cold and cheerless future. During his long sickness she was indefatigable in her devotion, even to the extent of worrying him by her prodigies of nursing. And her task was not an easy one, for though he was unusually considerate to those who ministered to him, simply because she was his wife and closest to him Sonya bore the brunt of a sick man's impatience with pain and weariness of being ill.

At one point, when it seemed that Tolstoy could not possibly recover, she entered in her diary the following striking confession: "I do not know why I write, for this is a conversation between me and my soul. My Lyovochka is dying. And I understand now that my life cannot go on without him. I have lived with him for forty years. For everyone else he is a celebrity, for me he is all my being. Our lives were lived for each other, but, my God, how much blame and remorse . . . have accumulated! How much love and tenderness I gave him, but how much have my frailties grieved him! Lord, forgive me! My dear, dear, sweet husband, forgive me!"

Yet Sonya's frailties were not conquered even during her husband's severe illness at Gaspra. It seemed that everything about this spot on the Crimean coast annoyed her. But her complaints against the strange house, the people, the food, and the climate had another significance. She yearned for familiar scenes, friends, and pleasures. When her husband was still in a grave condition, she wrote in her diary: "Various advertisements of concerts, about the playing of certain compositions of S. I. [Taneyev], have agitated my tiny soul, and just as a famished person desires food, I suddenly and passionately want music, and the music of Taneyev, which with its depths acts so powerfully on me."

Apparently unable to resist this desire any longer, she left Gaspra for a visit to Yasnaya Polyana and Moscow in April 1902.

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She spent only a day in the country, and the rest of her trip she remained at Moscow seeing art exhibits, plays, and attending concerts. She gathered together her close friends for an evening of entertainment, and among them, of course, was Taneyev. In her diary she mentioned that he "played for me the slight things of Arenski, Schumann's sonata, and his own charming symphony, which more than anything else gave me satisfaction."

Contented, Sonya returned to Gaspra, only to find Tolstoy deathly ill again, this time with typhoid fever. He knew the real purpose of her leaving him, for he thoroughly understood the yearning that still troubled her soul. Gorky, after one of his talks with Tolstoy at Gaspra, set down in his notes: "Women, in my opinion, he regards with implacable hostility. . . ."

### X

This illness was the last that Tolstoy suffered at Gaspra, and considering all the sickness he had been through, his recovery was little short of miraculous. By the middle of May he was in a wheelchair, seeing guests and working away at his writing. And finally the doctors agreed, to the rejoicing of all the family, that he was strong enough to return to Yasnaya Polyana.

On June 25 the party left for Yalta where they boarded a boat for Sevastopol. At Yalta the young writer Alexander Kuprin met Tolstoy for the first time. He related how Tolstoy got out of a carriage, looking small and feeble, and wearing high boots, a short overcoat that fell in folds over his wasted body, and a bowler hat. In this array and with his long white beard, he created a laughable and pathetic impression, wrote Kuprin, like some old Jew selling rags. He boarded the boat and went up to the prow, his weak bowed form looking nothing like the Moses of Michelangelo that Kuprin had expected. A group of new acquaintances approached him and suddenly he became a changed man, his voice firm, his tired eyes bright, and his manner that of the worldly aristocrat. With vivid expressiveness he related to the newcomers an anecdote: "You know, some days ago I was ill. A certain deputation, apparently from Tambov Province, arrived, and since I could not receive them in my room, they were presented to me outside my window. Perhaps you remember in my *Fruits of Enlightenment* the stout lady? Maybe you have read it? Well, just such a lady comes up and says: 'Deeply esteemed Leo Nikolayevich, permit me to

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thank you for those immortal productions with which you have rejoiced Russian literature.' I saw by her eyes that she had read nothing of mine. I asked: 'What in particular have you liked?' At that point she was at a loss because obviously she had read nothing. Someone behind her whispered: '*War and Peace, Childhood and Boyhood.*' She grew red, her glance wandered in embarrassment, and finally in utter confusion she murmured: 'Oh, yes! *The Childhood of a Boy . . . Warlike Peace . . . and others.*'"

After listening to Tolstoy's conversation and observing the reverence with which he was regarded by all the passengers, Kuprin concluded his account: "When I went ashore, I met the captain of the steamer. I asked him 'Do you know whom you have for a passenger?' And I was surprised when his face at once lit up in a broad, happy smile, and swiftly taking my hand (since he was in a hurry), he shouted: 'Of course I do! Tolstoy!' This name was, it seemed, a kind of magic, unifying word, equally understandable to all throughout the length and breadth of the world."

At Sevastopol a special car awaited Tolstoy, which had been secured again through the efforts of Boulanger. As on his trip to Gaspra, he was once more, despite all police precautions, hailed by hundreds of people at the station stops. They brought him flowers and shouted congratulations on his recovery to health. At the Kursk station a particularly large crowd awaited his arrival, for at that time a congress of schoolteachers was meeting in the city. They appointed a group of delegates, headed by Prince P. D. Dolgorukov, to see Tolstoy at the station and convey their greetings. For his leading part in what the authorities considered an illegal "demonstration," Dolgorukov was summoned before the local police head. At the interrogation he fearlessly replied that the teachers were unable to regard Tolstoy "exclusively from the police point of view," and he admitted that they had waved their handkerchiefs to Tolstoy standing at the car window and had shouted "Hurrah!" If anybody was guilty of disturbing the peace, Dolgorukov angrily concluded, then it was the police themselves, who shoved the crowd about, shouting: "Who commanded you to yell 'Hurrah!' It is forbidden to shout 'Hurrah!' without an official order."

## Chapter XXXV

### SPIRIT *VERSUS* MATTER

**T**HE Angel of Death had been pursuing him again, Tolstoy wrote his daughter Masha in the summer of 1902, but God had found other business for His dread messenger. He continued to accept his poor health with cheerful resignation and laughingly told his friends that he had gained so much from sickness that for their own good he wished them all bad health. The newspapers, however, were a constant annoyance. If they would only cease treating him as a kind of subject for actuarial speculation. He finally wrote a letter to the press. Many people, he agreed, were no doubt much concerned, though for entirely different reasons, about his approaching demise, but he begged the editors to stop printing bulletins on the state of his health.

The doctors decided that Tolstoy should not risk another winter in Moscow. At last, precarious health and feeble old age had gained him that respite from living in the accursed city when all else had failed. Sonya this time offered no objections, for the alternative to Yasnaya Polyana was the Crimea, which she abominated. Nor did she oppose the decision on separate bedrooms. After forty years of sharing one, he was moved to two sunny rooms on the second floor of the large manor house, one for sleeping and the other for a study.

That summer, after Tolstoy's return from Gaspra, Marya came from her convent of Shamardino and Sergei from near-by Pirogovo to visit the brother they had thought never to see again. When Sergei arrived, he was not recognized by the servants so long had it been since his last visit to Yasnaya Polyana. Tolstoy had lost none of his affection for his older brother. Sergei, now a misanthropic old man, lived the life of a recluse with his socially unacceptable gypsy wife and three swarthy daughters, whose Tolstoyan views had been blamed for the unhappy marriages of

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two of them. At this unexpected meeting with his famous brother, Sergei's customary grimness gave way to restrained joy. The two old men, behaving towards each other with the fine aristocratic manners that came so naturally to them when together, sat in the study and talked of former days. Tolstoy spoke of his literary work but carefully avoided views that he knew his brother frowned upon. He was tenderly solicitous about Sergei's health and comfort, and he offered him apples, trying to pick the softer ones to suit his poor teeth. During lapses in the conversation loud prolonged yawns, as though someone were in dire pain, would come from the study, startling everybody in the house.

Some six weeks later an entirely different type of person visited Yasnaya Polyana for the first time—Peter Verigin, leader of the Dukhobors. He had been in exile for fifteen years and had at last received permission from the authorities to join his followers in Canada, where many of them at this time were making things extremely uncomfortable for their Canadian hosts by staging naked parades to protest what they considered infringements of their religious prerogatives. Tolstoy's correspondence with Verigin and the many stories he had heard about him made him eager to meet this leader of the sect he had done so much to help. In one respect he was not disappointed—the calm but strong personality of Verigin suggested the tremendous force and authority of a man born to lead. But in their conversation he was annoyed by Verigin's Messiah-like behaviour and by his exasperating habit of carrying Tolstoyan beliefs just one step further to logical absurdity. It is all right, Verigin would argue, to make boots for oneself, but one must not use metal tools in the process, since men had to slave in mines to obtain metal; or if men should not be enslaved, then why not free all living things, horses and cattle, from slavery? Why not cease to spoil the earth by tillage—that is, go about naked, live off fruit and nuts that ripen of themselves in warm climates—and thus man would be free to spend his time in contemplation? All this, solemnly argued, gave Tolstoy the unpleasant feeling of having his leg pulled and forced him into the awkward position of devil's advocate of his own beliefs. In the end he was obliged to conclude that Verigin, though an intelligent and highly moral person, had by some trick of fate become the leader of a religious community while being himself not yet religiously born.

Though Tolstoy was confined to his bed for much of the remainder of 1902, he managed to peck away at several writing tasks.



## SPIRIT VERSUS MATTER

One article he finished was "An Appeal to the Clergy" (published in England in 1903). The edict of excommunication was by no means the Church's last word against Tolstoy. Since their public denunciation of his heresy had, if anything, boomeranged, they continued to attack his beliefs in various articles, which were often sent to his wife, either with the naïve intention of supplying her with theological arguments to help her convert him anew, or to protect her own orthodoxy from his wicked convictions. With these attacks of the clergy in mind, he entered in his diary on August 8: "Why do they hate me? I must write lovingly to them." "An Appeal to the Clergy," however, is hardly suffused with a spirit of brotherly love. In fact, the piece is one of the most vigorous attacks ever written on the Church and organized religion. The essence of the reasoning and the flavour of the language of the article may be gauged by his resounding charge that the Christianity preached by the Church "is an inoculation of false Christianity resembling the inoculation for smallpox or diphtheria, and has the effect of making those who are inoculated immune to true Christianity." After this there could be no turning back, and the Church at last recognized that Tolstoy was a hopeless heretic everlastingly damned.

As a kind of illustration of his argument in "An Appeal to the Clergy," Tolstoy wrote at about the same time a semiliterary piece in the form of a legend, "The Destruction of Hell and its Restoration." With transparent symbolism the legend describes how hell (the kingdom of sin) is destroyed by Christ, revealing the truth to people, and is then restored by the devil after he has modified Christ's teaching so that it conveniently guides people who are bent on evil.<sup>1</sup> When Sonya heard Tolstoy read this aloud to a group, she flew into a rage over the obvious attack on the Church and its priests, and, to the horror of one of the visitors present, assailed him "in indelicate, unceremonious, and even vulgar" language.

In October, Tolstoy worked for the last time on his play, *The Light Shineth in Darkness*, but he still did not finish it. He had conceived this drama away back in the 1880's and obviously regarded it as a significant work. "It will contain my own experiences," he wrote to a friend, "my struggle, my faith, my sufferings—all that is close to my heart." In fact, the play reflects his personal experience more deliberately than any other creative

<sup>1</sup> This legend was published in England by Chertkov in 1903.

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effort of Tolstoy, and, quite fittingly as a piece of autobiography, he never wrote the last act.

The play reveals him in an unpleasant light, and perhaps for the curious reason that his artistic sincerity and conscience obliged him to portray things as they are and not as he wished and believed them to be. He attempted to dramatize the essential domestic tragedy of his life—to show how his wife, family, relations, friends, and social surroundings prevented him from really living according to his convictions. The hero, representing Tolstoy, is a kind of Pippa in reverse; he passes through the world and everything he touches he blights.

One cannot blame the "darkness" in the play for not comprehending, for the spiritual light that shines is hardly a blazing beacon but at best a dim flickering candle that sputters and goes out at the end. Though a dramatic failure, the play is a tribute to Tolstoy, for only a morally great man would employ the sincerity of his art to depict himself so unmercifully. He could not sympathetically dramatize his heroic spiritual struggle, but with devastating reality he did show the harmful effects of this struggle on those who surrounded him, to whom he often appeared in the play as a most aggravating husband and father.

In September 1902 the Russian periodical press celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of Tolstoy's literary activity, his first work, *Childhood*, having appeared in 1852. There were many laudatory articles, and a few not so flattering. He received a telegram signed by Nemirovich-Danchenko, Stanislavski, Chaliapin, Gorky, and Leonid Andreyev, hailing him as one of the "greatest men whose spirit will continue to direct human thought for centuries." Most of the articles stressed the millions of copies of his works distributed and the fact that he was not only a national, but an international celebrity of the utmost social significance. Whatever personal gratification he may have obtained from all this public praise, he characteristically ignored the whole celebration.

## II

Tolstoy's health improved during 1903, though he suffered periods of weakness and illness. With returning strength he resumed his practice of long walks and rides. On *Délire*, a spirited young horse that had belonged to his daughter Alexandra, he would ride along the narrow trails in the Zakaz woods that he knew so well,

and in the summer he brought back bouquets of wild flowers that he loved or a hatful of firm mushrooms with rose-tan stems, carefully placed on large fresh leaves.

Now that the decision had been taken to remain at Yasnaya Polyana, some phases of the customary Moscow winter life of the Tolstoys were transplanted to the country. The comparative remoteness of the estate and wretched travelling conditions did little to discourage the usual stream of petitioners and visitors who used to make their way to the city house. Like the Sistine Madonna or the winged Victory of Samothrace, the ancient grey-bearded Tolstoy had become Russia's most famous museum piece which foreign visitors felt they must inspect before leaving the country.

At the beginning of January two English youths, Tom Ferris and Bertie Rowe, turned up at Yasnaya Polyana bent on converting Tolstoy to spiritualism. They belonged to a "Non-Money Group," and had somehow made their way to Russia without a penny. Their proselyting only annoyed him, but their half-starved, ragged condition aroused his pity, and after having them fed and clothed, he bought them return tickets to Moscow and sent them packing.

Of a different order of queerness was A. M. Dobrolyubov, who visited Tolstoy in September. A decadent poet and religious thinker, he produced the impression of a saint on some people and a madman on most of those to whom he preached his strangely mystical and anarchistic beliefs. Though a man of education, he wandered over Russia, identifying himself with the peasantry in work and appearance. So thoroughly had he assimilated peasant ways that after two hours of conversation Tolstoy became convinced that he had been talking to a genuine peasant and refused to believe that he was one of the decadent poets whom he despised. Tolstoy had esteem for his Christian life and shared the basic position of his teaching but rejected its mystical direction.

An interesting sequel to the visit was a letter from Dobrolyubov, in which "in a spirit of love" he pointed out to Tolstoy his failure to abide by his convictions and leave his large estate and seek his livelihood by physical labour. Nor did this uncompromising taskmaster think that old age and poor health should prevent such a sacrifice. Now, as always, such charges, and they were frequent, preyed on Tolstoy's mind.

Less challenging and much more flattering was the visit of William Jennings Bryan, who arrived at Yasnaya Polyana in the

early hours of a December morning. He brought his son with him. Shortly before this visit Tolstoy had remarked to Goldenweizer that the materialism of the majority of Americans and their complete incapacity for understanding the true spiritual life shocked him. And he told of a certain American millionaire who "donated five million dollars to a university and at the same time increased the price of kerosene by one cent a kilogram and continued the increase until he had regained his five million." Apparently Tolstoy did not include the Great Commoner among the materialistic Americans. Bryan was charmed with his hospitality, and gave up an audience with Nicholas II the next day in order to remain longer at Yasnaya Polyana. Tolstoy questioned him closely in a long conversation, employing an interpreter only on the rare occasions when he was at a loss for a precise English word. After lunch they went off on horseback, the huge Bryan garbed in a stylish fur coat, girdled with a leather strap, and a cap with earmuffs, cutting an odd figure on his light bay mare whose back seemed to sag under the heavy load.

Tolstoy apparently found qualities in Bryan that he admired, for he wrote one of his disciples that he was "an intelligent and religious American." Bryan, on his part, asked Tolstoy pointed questions on his beliefs, such as why he valued physical labour so highly, and how he explained his strange doctrine of nonresistance to evil. At that time Tolstoy was writing a brief introduction to a condensed biography of William Lloyd Garrison.<sup>1</sup> In it he related how Bryan, "a remarkably wise and progressive American," with the obvious intention of pointing out to him wherein he erred, posed the stock argument of what he would do if he saw a bandit murdering or assaulting a child. And Tolstoy replied with his stock answer that in all his seventy-five years he had never met anywhere this fantastic brigand who would murder or outrage a child before his eyes, whereas in war millions of brigands kill with complete licence. "When I said this," Tolstoy concluded, "my dear companion, with his characteristically quick understanding, did not let me finish, laughed, and agreed that my argument was satisfactory."

It would have been most interesting if Tolstoy had confronted Bryan with a more pertinent question that he raised in this same essay—violence against Negroes: "The nature of this question has remained insoluble, and the same question, only in a new form, now stands before the people of the United States. Then [in Garrison's

<sup>1</sup> It was published in England in 1904.

time] the question was how to free the Negroes from the violence of slaveowners; now the question is how to free the Negroes from the violence of all the whites and the whites from the violence of all the blacks. And the solution of the question in its new forms consists not of lynching the Negroes and not of any of the dexterous or liberal measures of American politicians, but only of an application to life of those very principles which were advocated a half-century ago by Garrison." Perhaps he did not trouble to confront Bryan with this terrible problem of his own country because he realized that his answer would be that of the politician. He remarked to the company after the American had departed: "Bryan is a broad-minded, sensitive man. Strange that he can give his heart to political activity."

Violence was much on Tolstoy's mind. Some eight months before Bryan's visit a terrible pogrom against the Jews had occurred in Kishinyov. Horrified by this event, Tolstoy readily lent his name to a protest signed by a group of distinguished scholars. More clearly than most, he recognized that the pogrom was not simply the result of the traditional hatred of gentiles for the Jews, but had been deliberately fomented by reactionary police authorities in order to divert the public mind from the threatening activities of revolutionists. And with his characteristic courage, he did not hesitate to proclaim publicly the bloodguilt of the Russian government. For when the *North American Newspaper* cabled him for a statement that would place the blame for the frightful massacre, he answered: "The fault is that of the government, in the first place for excluding the Hebrews, as a separate caste, from the common law, and in the second place for forcefully inspiring the Russian people to substitute idolatry for Christianity." When the well-known Jewish writer, Sholom Aleikhem (the pseudonym of S. N. Rabinovich) requested him to contribute something to a literary collection to be published to aid the pogrom sufferers, Tolstoy willingly responded by writing three short tales.<sup>1</sup>

The endless stream of letters that poured into Yasnaya Polyana from all over the world was becoming a constant trial to Tolstoy and consumed a great deal of his time. Though his daughters and hired secretaries aided with the correspondence, he felt it a duty to devote his personal attention to the vast bulk of it, often writing

<sup>1</sup> The titles of these tales, translated into Yiddish by Sholom Aleikhem and first published in Warsaw in 1903, are "The Assyrian King Esarhaddon," "Three Questions," and "Toil, Death and Disease."

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as many as twenty-five letters in reply in a single day. The nearly illiterate letters of unknown peasants and workers asking his advice on problems ranging from intimate domestic difficulties to naïve matters of faith aroused his most sympathetic attention. And sometimes his answers turned into extensive efforts, taking the form of epistolary articles.

Always good newspaper copy, Tolstoy was continually receiving letters and telegrams from foreign journalists, who solicited his opinion on events in the news. Occasionally these requests were deftly baited or contrived to obtain the maximum sensation out of the anticipated unorthodox reaction of Tolstoy. Such was the letter of an English journalist in January 1903, concerning the scandalous behaviour of Louisa, Crown Princess of Saxony. She had deserted her husband and family and fled to Switzerland, where she openly lived with the former tutor of her children. In an interview with this English correspondent, Michael A. Morrison, she breezily asserted that her philosophy of life had been profoundly influenced by her reading of Tolstoy's works. And now Morrison, in his letter, wished to know if Tolstoy's teaching would justify Louisa's unconventional conduct which was being loudly condemned on all sides. Tolstoy promptly replied that not one word of his writings would justify such behaviour, which he deplored. Being dissatisfied with his answer, he intended to rewrite it or not send it at all, but unfortunately it got mixed up with letters that were going to the post that day and was dispatched. Morrison at once sent the letter to a correspondent of the *New York World* in which it was immediately printed and quickly picked up by the foreign and Russian press. Even before the letter was published, Tolstoy, perceiving his mistake, wrote a second time to Morrison, asking that his first letter should not be printed, and at the same time he wrote Chertkov in England, directing him to publish the present letter if his first one to Morrison should appear. And in this letter to Chertkov, after expressing regret for his hasty judgement, and explaining the reasons for it, he wrote: "I not only do not condemn her, but with all my soul I sympathize with her sufferings, and I wish that she may be delivered from the fallacy that has possessed her, and that she may achieve the calm that is always possible for believers in God and turn to Him for help."

Unhappily, it was too late to undo what he had done, and soon he was deluged with letters berating him as a believer in God's mercy for passing such cruel judgement on one of His erring children.

Wearily he answered these charges, frankly admitting his fault and trying to make amends for it. The incident sharpened his hostility towards the press, but it also indicates how easily he could revert to the puritanical morality of the end of *Anna Karenina* in a matter that touched the sacredness of marital relations, even though his new faith taught him that he was a sinning mortal and had no right to cast a stone.

On August 28 of this year Tolstoy reached his seventy-fifth milestone. Messages of congratulations arrived from all over the world, even from Manchuria. He was particularly touched by the greetings of peasants and of a group of Kharkov workers, who acclaimed him as a fighter against all prejudices, slavery, and inequality in human relations. A delegation from the *Intermediary* publishing firm presented him with the initial copy of *Thoughts of Wise People*, the first of several volumes of selected quotations drawn from his vast reading which he hoped would present to the world the fundamental unity of thought underlying the religious perceptions of the sages and teachers of East and West. He also received greetings from a Moscow group of Social Revolutionists, accompanied by a long and remarkable statement which he must have read with mixed feelings. It began:

On this day when the whole world honours the seventy-fifth year of life of the great humanist, the herald of universal brotherhood, permit us, Social Revolutionists, to unite our voices to those coming to you from the ends of the earth with greetings, and to express our profound and warm thanks for all that you have done for the triumph of the ideas of socialism. Though our paths have diverged in achieving this purpose, yet the purpose itself—establishing the “Kingdom of God” on earth . . . with its ideals of the happiest future, of love and brotherhood, this purpose we hold in common, and the efforts you have made with your mind and talent to bring about the realization of these ideals make you infinitely close and dear to us.

Tolstoy did not allow the festivities to interfere much with his customary day of labour in his study. And the only notice he took of the occasion in his diary is the rather acid observation: “The 28th passed wearily. The congratulations were truly grievous and unpleasant—insincerely the *Russian land*<sup>1</sup> and every stupidity. The tickling of my vanity, thank God, is unnecessary.”

<sup>1</sup> A reference to Turgenev's famous praise of Tolstoy as the “great writer of the Russian land” which was frequently quoted in the many laudatory greetings and articles that appeared in the press.

Biryukov, who was then working on his biography, asked Tolstoy to contribute reminiscences of his life. The suggestion both attracted and repelled him. "To write about all my nastiness, stupidity, depravity, and meanness," he told Biryukov, "entirely truthfully, even more truthfully than Rousseau, would make an alluring book or article. People would say: Behold the man whom many place on a lofty pedestal, but what a scoundrel he was. . . ." He began his reminiscences and intermittently worked on the manuscript till 1906, but he never reached the period of his youth and early manhood, the period of "nastiness, stupidity, depravity, and meanness." The fragment he left is an account of his childhood miraculously recovered from the deep well of memory and told with the wonderful charm and freshness of his early artistic works.

There is an autobiographical aspect in the fine story, "After the Ball," which he wrote in the summer of this year. In it he returns to his student days in Kazan, to a beautiful girl with whom he may have been in love, and to her devoted military father who the morning after a ball, in which he had gaily danced a mazurka with his daughter, unconcernedly officiated at the execution of a Tatar soldier who was brutally beaten to death in running the gauntlet.

A much longer artistic work, the last such extensive effort in Tolstoy's lifetime, was *Hadji Murad* which he did not finish until 1904 and left unpublished. At times the life of this colourful patriot-robber entirely absorbed his attention, and he read all the books he could lay his hands on concerning the Caucasus and the war that Samil and his mountaineers waged against the Russians. As was usual with him now, he felt that he was wasting time on a mere work of art, and he was by no means pleased with his efforts. When a guest at Yasnaya Polyana was reading parts of the novel to a group, Tolstoy kept popping in and out of the room to listen. Once he broke in to declare the work uninteresting, and finally, with some irritation, he asked the reader to stop bothering with such rubbish. "If that is so," one of the listeners demanded, "why did you write it?" "But it is not finished yet," he replied. "You came into my kitchen and no wonder it stinks with the smell of cooking."

*Hadji Murad* is anything but rubbish; it is a masterpiece of its kind, almost a perfect example of the "good universal art" that Tolstoy had acclaimed. It is the story of the mountaineer chieftain,



Hadji, who out of vengeance and personal ambition deserts his leader Shamil and goes over to the Russians. An irresistible desire to see his son, who is held as a hostage by Shamil, leads him to escape into the mountains where he is run down and killed. Hadji is vividly characterized—a shrewd, brave fighter, endowed with all the vices and virtues of his half-wild people. His story is simply told, revealing the tragic irony of misunderstanding between men of different orders of civilization. The last scene—the death of Hadji and his four followers at the hands of a horde of pursuers—rises to sublime heights.

One of Tolstoy's characteristically cross-grained efforts at literary criticism—"On Shakespeare and the Drama"—vied with this brilliant Caucasian story for his attention in 1903. This work at first was designed as a preface to *Shakespeare and the Working Classes*, an essay by his American disciple, Crosby. But it soon took the shape of a formal critique and assumed the proportions of a small book. Tolstoy seized upon this opportunity to feed fat an ancient grudge he had for the Bard of Avon. Even as a young man he had expressed his dislike for Shakespeare's dramas, and after his religious conversion this dislike was intensified by the new demands he made upon literature in matters of morality and art. He had always experienced feelings of repulsion, weariness, and bewilderment on reading these plays. "Now," he declared, "before writing this article, as an old man of seventy-five, wishing once more to check my conclusions, I have again read the whole of Shakespeare . . . and have experienced the same feelings still more strongly, no longer with perplexity but with a firm and unshakable conviction that the undisputed fame Shakespeare enjoys as a great genius—which makes writers of our time imitate him, and readers and spectators, distorting their aesthetic and ethical sense, seek non-existent qualities in him—is a great evil, as every falsehood is." He then frankly anticipated that the majority of people would not even admit the possibility of his views being correct, but he firmly declared that he would try as best he could "to show why I think Shakespeare cannot be admitted to be either a writer of great genius or even an average one."

To prove his point, Tolstoy elected, with perhaps some malice prepense, to make a detailed analysis of *King Lear*. Here he was able to prove to his own satisfaction that the play did not fulfil the most elementary and generally recognized demands of art; that the characters speak not a language of their own, but an unnatural,

affected Shakespearean language which no real people could ever have spoken anywhere; that the play lacks a sense of proportion; that its contents reflect a vulgar view of life which regards the external elevation of the great ones of the earth as a genuine superiority while despising the common man and repudiating not only religious, but even any humanitarian, efforts directed towards the alteration of the existing order of society; and finally, that the play lacks sincerity. Generalizing on these faults, he found them present more or less in most of Shakespeare's plays.

It appears that Tolstoy did not intend to publish this long article during his lifetime, and he did so in 1906 only upon the urging of Chertkov. The printing of it resulted in an interesting exchange of letters between George Bernard Shaw and Chertkov. Shaw, who was an admirer of Tolstoy, found himself in agreement with his condemnation of social and religious evils and with his conviction that civilization would not improve without an internal moral and intellectual change in man. Although they differed on the means of bringing about this change, it is not surprising that both men, in certain respects, had reached the same position on Shakespeare. Hence, when Chertkov was translating Tolstoy's article in England, he wrote Shaw for advice on some points and also gave him a general idea of the conclusions of the article. Shaw replied, enthusiastically embracing Tolstoy's views as Chertkov described them. He agreed that Shakespeare possessed no real philosophy of life, and that his plays revealed no religious, moral, or social thought worthy of consideration. "After the criticism of Tolstoy," he wrote, "Shakespeare as a *thinker* must be discarded, for under the scrutiny of such a gigantic, bold critic and realist as Tolstoy, he will in no sense pass the test."

Encouraged by Shaw's attitude, Chertkov finally sent him a complete translation of Tolstoy's article. Upon reading it he at once realized that he had far overshot the mark in identifying himself with Tolstoy's views on Shakespeare. He hastened to write Chertkov a long letter, soon followed by another, which contain a brilliant criticism of Tolstoy's article and, in passing, some of Shaw's best observations on Shakespeare and his plays.<sup>1</sup> Unlike Tolstoy, Shaw made a sharp distinction between Shakespeare the thinker and Shakespeare the artist. He could go along with Tolstoy in

<sup>1</sup>The three letters of Shaw to Chertkov (August 2, November 3 and 19, 1905) are to be found in the Chertkov Archives in Moscow. Citations from them are from Russian translations.

dismissing Shakespeare the thinker as inconsequential, but as an artist, he stoutly maintained, Shakespeare was irresistible. In his own criticism of the dramatist, Shaw wrote in one of the letters that "he had endeavoured in no small degree to open the eyes of Englishmen to the emptiness of Shakespeare's philosophy, to the superficiality and unoriginality of his moral views, to his weakness and confusion as a thinker, to his snobbery, to his vulgar prejudices, to his ignorance, to every aspect of his undeserved reputation as a great philosopher." But, he continued, "No one would listen to me if I took it into my head to support my protest by denying his humour, his gaiety, his capacity to create characters more real for us than actual living people, his tenderness, but chiefly his unusual power as a musician of words." The trouble, he said, was that Tolstoy attempted to judge Shakespeare from the point of view of abstract logic. "Life is not logical," he cautioned, "and it is not for Tolstoy, writing his productions as a poet, to condemn Shakespeare for not writing his as a jurist." In the end he asserted that Tolstoy's position on Shakespeare was to a certain extent a healthy one, but that the article as a whole was very bad.<sup>1</sup>

## IV

Throughout this year Tolstoy revealed in his diary and letters to close friends and adherents his continued efforts to achieve spiritual peace through a rational comprehension of the precise balance between matter and spirit, between the tribulations of this world and the promise of the next world. Many pages of his diary are filled with inconclusive speculations on the meaning of life as he struggled to arrive at a satisfactory definition. He seemed to be planning a philosophical work on this theme, but the subject stubbornly defied his persistent attempts at clarification.

Though Tolstoy clearly recognized the significance of the materialistic sphere of knowledge, he naturally tended to discount its contribution to the solution of the eternal problem of the meaning of life. He would not admit that the progress of humanity may be measured by its technical and scientific achievements, or that modern civilization in general was moving towards the greater good. Progress, he insisted, did not consist in an increase in knowledge or in the material improvement of life. "There is progress only in a

<sup>1</sup>The only other piece Tolstoy wrote for publication in 1903 was an article, "To Political Activists" (printed in England, 1903), which concerned the activities of the revolutionists.

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greater and greater understanding of the answers to the fundamental questions of life." A popular worship of scientific progress in a society still incapable of distinguishing between right and wrong represented a terrible danger to him. "When the life of people is unmoral," he entered in his diary at this time, "and their relations are not based on love, but on egoism, then all technical improvements, the increase of man's power over nature, steam, electricity, the telegraph, every machine, gunpowder, and dynamite produce the impression of dangerous toys placed in the hands of children."

There was never any danger that the spiritual life Tolstoy sought would remove him from the immediate, sentient, throbbing life around him. In fact, his problem was how to lead a spiritual life without ceasing to be a vital, active participant in the world's joys and sorrows. "The true spiritual life," he told Goldenweizer, "is liberated in a man when he neither rejoices in his own happiness, nor suffers from his own suffering, but suffers and rejoices with others and fuses with them into a common life."

What was beginning to distress Tolstoy more than anything else was the feeling expressed on many sides that he had reached his position of destructive criticism of modern civilization merely out of a wilful spirit of contradiction, out of a desire simply to be different. This charge was as offensive to him as the occasional glorification he received from adherents who hailed him as another Messiah. At the beginning of 1903 he wrote to one of his French critics: "All my critics, and it is with regret that I must say that you are not an exception, reproach me for my attacks on churches, or on science, or on art, or especially on all sorts of violence employed by governments. And some of them call this simply stupidity or madness, others inconsistency or mere exaggeration. I am given all kinds of flattering titles: genius, reformer, a great man, etc., and at the same time I am not accorded the simple commonsense of seeing that the churches, science, art, and governments are indispensable for societies in their present state. This strange contradiction proves only that my critics in judging me do not wish for the moment to abandon their point of view and put themselves in my position, which is really a very simple one. I am neither a reformer nor a philosopher, and least of all am I an apostle. I am only a man who, having lived a very bad life, has learned that the true life consists only in fulfilling the will of the One Who has put me in this world, a man who, after having found

in the Gospels the true principles of life, abandoned his life of illusion and has lived and lives only according to these principles. From this point of view it is clear that when I combat the churches, governments, science and art, it is not for the mere pleasure of combating them, or because I do not understand the importance that men attach to them, but precisely because, having found these things most often contrary to the accomplishment of the will of God, which is the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth, I cannot help but reject them. For those who judge these things objectively and according to observation and reason, the existence of churches, science, art, and especially governments, must appear to them indispensable and even inevitable. But for a person like myself, who recognizes an inner truth derived from a religious conscience, all these reasons and observations have not the least weight when they contradict the truth of a religious conscience. I am not a reformer or a philosopher or an apostle, but the least of the merits which may be attributed to me, and which I attribute to myself, is that of being logical and consistent."

## v

The family still remained an obstruction to Tolstoy's effort to liberate the true spiritual life in himself. He could not fuse his existence with theirs, because their joys and sorrows depended upon a worship of the material things of life which he was struggling to surrender. The apparent literary jealousy of his son Leo, and Andrei's desertion of his wife and two children, hurt him deeply but seemed also the inevitable price that must be exacted from people leading their kind of life. He was equally distressed by the constant pressure from his wife to give her first publication rights of new artistic productions for her collected edition of his works. These editions had been an ever-lasting torment to him, although he refused to have anything to do with the profits. He knew that he could not justify her activities, though her position was theoretically that of any other publisher who had free access to his uncopyrighted works. And now Sonya listened avidly to the offer of a million rubles for a permanent copyright of his writings and to one from another publisher of a hundred thousand rubles for a copyright limited to two years. Her efforts to persuade him resulted in a firm determination not to publish henceforth any new artistic works, and with minor exceptions he abided by this decision.

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The accusations of such people as Dobrolyubov and others that he was living in physical idleness and comparative luxury now cut Tolstoy more deeply than ever. He wrote to a disciple, M. S. Dudchenko: "However strange and bad it may seem that I, while living in luxury, permit myself to advise you to continue to live in want, I boldly do this because I cannot doubt for a moment that your life is a fine life before your conscience and God, and therefore very necessary and useful to people, but my activity, however useful it may seem to some, fails, not entirely, I hope, but surely in the greatest part of its significance, as a consequence of the unfulfilment of this chief token of the sincerity of what I profess."

The cross Tolstoy bore was perhaps a light one, and at times there might be a suspicion that the cross was bearing him. But if he considered it a moral duty to accept his life of comparative comfort as a cross which he had no right to abandon, his position was not made any easier by those who actually practised the beliefs he advocated and even suffered in their cause. Their example always inspired a kind of reverential admiration and his own failures an unsparing self-condemnation. Thus, he wrote to a disciple who had been exiled in 1903 for eighteen years for refusing to serve in the army: "When I learn of such people as you and about what has happened to you, I always experience a feeling of shame, envy, and a guilty conscience. I envy you because I have lived my life without ever once having succeeded or even dared to put my faith into deeds. I am ashamed of myself that at a time when you sit with so-called criminals in a foul prison, I live in sumptuous fashion with criminals not so-called, availing myself of the material comforts of life. I have a guilty conscience because through the works that I write, risking nothing, I may well have been the cause of your behaviour and its grievous material consequences. The most powerful feeling that I experience towards such as you is love and gratitude for all those millions of people who will be benefited by your act. I know how your situation is complicated and made more difficult because of family ties, but if you acted not for the sake of people, but for God and your conscience, I think that the burden you bear will grow lighter, that you will find a way out and triumph in the matter. May God help you."

And Tolstoy himself tried to continue his spiritual pilgrimage "for God," and not "for the sake of people," but the people in the form of most of his family stood athwart his path to Nirvana

and his wife kept them anchored there. Sonya herself was quite capable of accusing her husband of hypocrisy for his failure to abide by the precepts she scorned. Her concern for the external comforts of his existence grew excessive and seemed, psychologically, a compensation for the inner moral suffering she caused him. The inexhaustible energy that had formerly been largely expended on her young children now found an outlet in fleeting enthusiasms for photography, painting, and writing. She felt impelled to publish a long, naïvely critical letter in the press, protesting the filth and immorality in the stories of Andreyev, and she embarrassed Tolstoy by contrasting the beauties of "that great production *War and Peace*" with the improprieties in the works of the younger writer. For her pains she received many letters from readers who blamed her husband for beginning this tradition of "filthy literature" with such productions as *The Kreutzer Sonata* and *Resurrection*. Neither did Tolstoy relish the pornographical and sensationally macabre aspects of Andreyev's writings, but with a sense of humour which his wife never possessed, he amusingly dismissed the matter by recalling the story about a boy who, unable to pronounce the letter "r," said to his chum: "I went for a walk and suddenly I saw a wolf. . . . Are you fwightened? Are you fwightened?" "So Andreyev," continued Tolstoy, "also keeps on asking me: 'Are you fwightened?' And I am not in the least frightened."

Since neither husband nor wife had encouraged the pious practice of discreet dissimulation and the little white lies unconsciously designed to lessen the emotional wear and tear of marital discord, each suffered from a full knowledge of the other's private griefs and unspoken censure. Of late, however, Sonya had been falling into the habit of concealing things from her husband, especially in her relations with Taneyev.

After years of happy life at Yasnaya Polyana, Sonya began to complain that this existence among landed gentry and rural folk was unnatural. "We have nothing in common with these people," she wrote in her diary. "It is false not to try to be with the cultured class on our own level." Yet visitors from that cultured class were so numerous at Yasnaya Polyana that Sonya with some justice protested in a letter to her sister: "There is a constant commotion and mass of people here. The longer you live in the world, the more you accumulate various relations, obligations, acquaintances, and trials. I positively do not invite anybody, but there are guests

## LEO TOLSTOY

here all the time, guests without end, and sometimes I simply want to cry from weariness." Three months later, capriciously enough, Sonya was writing to Stasov to complain that she and her husband were all alone: "The quiet in the house is terrible."

Perhaps the real reason behind Sonya's inconsistent complaints at this time was that her duties at Yasnaya Polyana prevented her from making as many visits to Moscow as she would have liked in order to attend concerts and to see her own cultured set, especially Taneyev, who was now trying to end this strange intimacy. As it was, her trips to the city were frequent enough, and noticeably and painfully so to her husband. His illness occasionally interfered with her visits, and this annoyed her. "In general," she wrote in her diary, "I do not like men; they are always physically alien and offensive to me, and I have had to love in a man his soul and talent before he could become dear to me and attractive in every respect. In all my fifty-eight years of life, there have been only three such; and of course the chief one was my husband."

Though Sonya did not indicate who the other two were, Taneyev was certainly one of them, and she continued to contrast this pure relationship with the sensual one of her husband. On nearly every trip to Moscow from the second half of 1902 through the next year she contrived to be with Taneyev, to talk to him and listen to his music. Her agitation increased with the dawning knowledge that this precious musician was now politely trying to evade her, and her sense of guilt grew with the intensity of her pursuit. In a striking passage in her diary, Sonya related that, while correcting the proofs of a new edition of *Anna Karenina*, "I followed step by step the state of her soul and I understood myself and felt terribly. But people do not deprive themselves of life in order to *avenge themselves* on someone; no, they commit suicide because they *no longer have the strength to live*. At first a struggle, then prayer, then submissiveness, then despair and, at last, helplessness and death. And then I suddenly imagined Leo Nikolayevich weeping an old man's tears and saying that no one saw what had taken place in me and that no one had helped me. But what help is there? Let S. I. [Taneyev] come or invite him, and help me establish the friendly, calm relations of old age with him. So that the fault of my feeling should not weigh on me and should be *forgiven me*."

As perhaps never before in all this strange and confused passion for Taneyev, Sonya was compelled to confess to herself a kind of mental infidelity to her husband. She told in her diary how her joy



over his recovery from another sick spell "does not heal the illness of my heart. When I enter his room, that evil secret of the inner state of my soul again takes possession of me, and I want to weep and to see that man who is now the very central point of my madness, of my shameful, untimely madness, but let no one raise a hand against me, because I have grievously suffered and I fear for myself. I *must* live, take care of my husband and children; I must not betray and show my madness, and I must not see that man with whom I am morbidly in love."

Sonya, however, betrayed her madness at every turn, and her husband continued to watch its progress with dismay, hoping as always that it would eventually disappear. Only the most cryptic references in his diary still hinted of his moral anguish over Sonya's conduct. Angry thoughts were incompatible with the spiritual peace he sought, and he tried, though not always successfully, to maintain an attitude of love and kindness towards his guilt-obsessed wife. "Tonight," she noted in her diary, "when I had covered him up and bade him good night, he tenderly stroked my cheek, as though I were a child, and I rejoiced at his paternal love." She treasured this chaste love, and gloried now in her solitary room where she could dream "pure, maidenly dreams." But at times, contemplating their separateness and the curtain he had drawn between their intimate life and his retreat into his spiritual self, a sudden wave of mingled fear and sadness would come over her. She entered his bedroom at night and he asked her to massage his stomach. "His thin, ancient limbs look pitiful," she observed. And she reflected that never did she hear a word of comfort from him now. "There has come to pass that which I have foreseen," she wrote. "My *passionate* husband is dead, a husband-friend there never was. . . . Happy wives live to the end in friendship and sympathy with their husbands! But the unhappy, lonely wives of egoists, of great men, are the wives of whom posterity makes future Xantippes."

## Chapter XXXVI

### WAR AND REVOLUTION

**A**T THE beginning of 1904, Sonya wrote in her diary: "On January 8 three students from the Petersburg Institute of Mines arrived with a message. I talked a great deal with them; they are intelligent people, but as with all our youths nowadays, they do not know where to apply their strength."

The three visitors were a delegation on behalf of a circle of students who sat at the feet of the distinguished revolutionary author V. G. Korolenko, and they carried a message containing formal greetings and a request for information on several matters under discussion by the group. At Tula a talkative coachman, smelling a fare, boldly thrust himself forward as a "Tolstoyan" and offered to drive them cheaply to Yasnaya Polyana. On the way he cheerfully regaled his passengers with lies and legends about Tolstoy. Pausing for breath at one point, he drew a bottle of vodka from his coat and, throwing his head back, did not so much drink the fiery liquor as decant it from one vessel to another. One of the students twitted him, as a "Tolstoyan," on his fondness for vodka. The coachman slyly replied that Tolstoy, an educated man, did not demand the impossible from his adherents and hence had given him a special dispensation to drink.

Tolstoy received the awed students coldly, glanced through the message they presented to him, and at once launched forth on a dry, moral sermon. "In your letter," he declared, "you praise me, as is usual, for some revolutionary service or other. But there is no point to your praise. I'm not at all a revolutionist in the sense in which you understand this word. My political convictions are a consequence of and part of my religious convictions, which you probably do not know, and if you know them, you do not share them."

The old man continued his sermonizing, glancing severely at the

resentful students from beneath his bushy eyebrows. He spoke of the necessity of self-perfection and of educating the masses in the spirit of true Christianity. These are not new ideas, he declared, but the thoughts of the foremost minds throughout the ages. And he added that he had been collecting such wise sayings for a calendar of reading for every day. "Let us see what I've selected for today," he said, turning to the bookcase. Behind his back the crestfallen students exchanged glances that plainly said: "We're wasting our time here. Let's go."

Suddenly Tolstoy turned to them with an open book in his hand, his whole body and long beard shaking with noiseless laughter. "Oh how wonderful! How splendidly put!" he exclaimed, wiping the tears from his eyes with his fist like a child. "And most of all, how precisely it fits me! 'A man standing on his tiptoes, cannot stand long,' he read. How neat that is! I read this book every day and I always find something useful in it. I very much recommend it to you! Very much! One must stand on the earth—there you have it!" And still laughing, he stood firmly on the ground and crouched, as though ready to leap. Herding the visitors into a corner, he began nudging them in the back, gaily repeating: "Let's eat! Then we'll talk! Come on, you must be famished after your trip." The ice was broken. As he courteously showed them to the door leading to the dining-room, he blew through his moustache and made a face at the last one to enter, whispering: "Now, now, how angry you are! Were you offended by the old man!"

After the meal the students were turned over to Sonya while Tolstoy took his nap. With the air of a professional museum guide, she showed them through the house:

"Here you have Prince Volkonski's portrait. The grandfather of Leo Nikolayevich. Described by him in *War and Peace*.

"Leo Nikolayevich's writing table. Notice how low the chair is. This is to save Leo Nikolayevich from bending over. He's very near-sighted.

"The divan on which several generations of Tolstoys were born. I also gave birth to children on it.

"The bedroom of Leo Nikolayevich. Observe how simple everything is. Leo Nikolayevich doesn't like luxury.

"Leo Nikolayevich's washbasin. Leo Nikolayevich empties out his own slop pail."

The students soon grew bored with the tour and two of them escaped to play chess. Sonya carried off the third to her own room.

"You've probably heard various rumours about me," she began. "I imagine what horrible things people say. I have many enemies. And many envy me, which is natural, being the wife of Leo Tolstoy!" Then she poured forth a long series of complaints about her domestic lot and the difficulties of life with her husband. "If I were not religious," she concluded, "I would long since have killed myself. Do you want tea?" she asked without pausing.

The transition from suicide to tea was so sudden that the startled guest stumbled over the polite answer. Over the teacups Sonya continued her self-revelation on a less painful level. She spoke at first of her love for music and painting. Then boasting a bit and becoming coquettish, she announced: "I write! Not long ago I composed a little poem in prose, in the manner of Turgenev. When it is printed, read it. The title is 'Moans,' and my pseudonym is 'The Weary One.'" Pointing to her diary on the table, she significantly remarked: "When I die people will read this and learn that I also in my way was a 'lioness'!" After a good deal more of this sort of monologuing, she finally reverted to domestic quarrels, her son Andrei's separation from his wife, and the death of Vanichka, a memory that always drew tears from her. The bewildered student was eventually happy to be released to join the family at dinner.

With the meal out of the way, Tolstoy took the students aside for the conversation they had been eagerly anticipating. Leaning his elbows on the table, he thrust his gnarled fingers through his long beard up to his ears, and fixing the students with his piercing glance, he began: "Well, do you go to the girls in the brothel?"

Observing their shamefaced confusion, he laughingly continued: "Of course I know that you go. I myself, when young, went."

His joking tone swiftly turned serious.

"You regard yourselves as socialists, yet you make use of prostitution. It's bad! You agitate against the government, yet you prepare yourselves for the position of civil officials. You sit on your parents' neck, read books, emancipate snub-nosed girl students, think yourselves better than all, and that you have the right to direct not only people, but a whole government. But has any one of you worked with the peasants in the fields or with labourers in a factory? Do you know what the peasant thinks and wants? I mean the real peasant in bast shoes and shirt. This is not the peasant you read about in books. I'm sure that you do not know! Why, then, do you dare to speak and write in their name? To encourage them to strikes and

to murders? Who among you has sat in prison? Then what kind of revolutionists are you?"

With such arguments Tolstoy harried the idealistic beliefs of his young radical guests. Vividly he portrayed the bloody course of revolution. For the sake of the so-called "common good," thousands will be destroyed. A new order will be established. But what then? The form may be new, but the content will be the old one. The people will remain as formerly, as they did after the French Revolution. Yes, he agreed, it is necessary to change the whole structure of society. But it must be done by ideas, not by bombs. And the most destructive idea of all is the Christian idea of non-resistance to evil. Only stupid people call it a weak idea. For have not all the powerful oppressors of the earth feared this idea more than any revolution and persecuted its adherents as the most dangerous of enemies? "Revolutionists trim the branches of the tree, Christianity destroys the tree at its roots."

The students forgot their arguments in this flood of eloquence. They felt like Lilliputians at the mercy of a giant. But he was now a good-natured giant in his triumphant wisdom, and having beaten them over the head with his club of non-violence he mercifully dismissed them with a Christian socialist fillip: "I'm not for the government and not for the revolutionists—I'm for the people!"

When the students left that night, Tolstoy politely lighted their way to the outer door with a candle. They looked back to see him standing at the head of the stairs, majestic, like a statue, his huge lion-like head with its massive brow and silvery beard thrown into relief by the dim light. He cheerily called after them: "Thanks for the visit. Don't forget the old man. We've had a good talk together. My respects to your comrades and to Korolenko for the message. Only don't write anything for the newspapers. Will you? However, if anyone asks you, say: 'There's nothing to report. Tolstoy still lives!'"

## II

Yes, the old man still lived, but the shadow of death was remorselessly closing in on the intimate friends of his own generation. "We must prepare ourselves. A pleasant end soon awaits us," Tolstoy remarked to the eighty-one-year-old Stasov when he was visiting him at Yasnaya Polyana in 1904. "What end?" Stasov queried, still full of the joy of life in spite of his age.

"Death, of course. I'm sure that even you expect it."

"To hell with it!" Stasov exclaimed. "An abomination, a filthy thing to prepare oneself for! I often sleep badly and toss about in bed when I think that death will come."

"But don't you feel your old age and that the end is near?" asked Tolstoy.

"I feel nothing of the kind, nor do I deny myself anything as formerly, and I hope that you, Leo Nikolayevich, don't give up anything. You still ride horseback and play lawn tennis."

When the irrepressible Stasov was departing, however, he had a presentiment that it would be the last time he would see his revered hero, and this actually turned out to be the case. Now, in a flood of emotion, he seized Tolstoy's hand and kissed it as he said farewell. Less than two years later he died.

In April of this same year Tolstoy entered in his diary: "Alexandra Andreyevna has died. How simple and fine this is." Thus briefly did he chronicle the passing of Granny, the adored woman of his early manhood, his unfailing aristocratic friend at Court, and the ancient confidante and unyielding critic of his religious views. But death's visitations now came swiftly and often and won scant space in his record of passing phenomena. Their last quarrel during his visit to Petersburg in 1896 had soon been forgotten, for it saddened him to spoil a friendship. For her part, though Granny possessed little Christian humility, she was not lacking in a spirit of forgiveness. A year before her death he had asked her to send him certain information on Nicholas I that he needed in his writing. As always, she obliged, and in his letter of thanks, the last but one in their brilliant correspondence of more than forty years, he struck again the note of profound affection and esteem that had characterized their troubled but enduring relations. "The older I grow, the more I wish to turn to you with greater and greater tenderness. . . . It may be that we shall not see each other again in this world; if this pleases God, then it is well. Nor do I think that we shall meet in the other world, as we understand the meaning of 'meeting'; but I do think and am fully convinced that in the after-life all the kind, loving, and fine things that you have given me in this life will remain with me, and perhaps some crumbs that have come from me will stick with you. . . . Farewell, dear, dear friend; I give you a tender brotherly kiss and thank you for all your love."

A few months later (August 23, 1904) Tolstoy's brother Sergei died at Pirogovo, after a long, painful illness, of cancer of the tongue.

To the end Tolstoy had been solicitous, visiting him and trying to comfort him. The misanthropic Sergei had always been secretly proud of his famous brother, though he had little sympathy with his religious and social views. Tolstoy deplored his lack of faith and unwillingness to reconcile himself with death. Three days after the end, he cryptically wrote in his dairy: "Seryozha is dead. Quietly, without consciousness, without any pronounced consciousness that he was dying. That is the mystery. It is impossible to say whether it is better or worse this way. A real religious feeling was inaccessible to him. (Perhaps I deceive myself, but so it seemed.) But it was even good for him. Something new and better was revealed to him, just as for me. The road—an important measure of enlightenment. As for what it leads to in the endless circle—that is of no consequence."

Dmitri, Nikolai, and now Sergei. He was the last of the four Tolstoy brothers. The living go on dying, he reflected. But were the dead forever dead? An immortal something, the manifestation of God in man, lived on. Of that he was certain. As more and more of those near to him left this earth for the world of light, his own mind, curious but unafraid, embraced the concept of death with a new sense of urgency.

## III

For Tolstoy, however, these personal bereavements lost their significance in the face of the terrible impersonal deaths of thousands now being slain in battle. For in January 1904, the Russo-Japanese War had begun when units of Japan's fleet attacked Russian ships without warning in the outer harbour of Port Arthur.

The news shocked Tolstoy. At the outset he rode horseback all the way to Tula on four separate days to obtain the latest information on hostilities. The merits of the issue did not concern him, except as they substantiated his long-held and frequently expressed convictions concerning the moral bankruptcy of governments and the conspiracy of their rulers to send thousands of subjects to destruction for the sake of a bit of land, national honour, or the capture of world markets. What did concern him was that two peoples who professed religions that forbade killing were now slaying and maiming each other solely because they had been ordered to do so. Then there were the daily tragedies that came under his own observation in the village: peasants unwillingly torn from essential work by the draft, and the womenfolk of these

impoverished families appealing to him for aid. And his burden of sorrow was increased when his son Andrei decided to volunteer for the fighting in the Far East. That Andrei became an aide-de-camp gave his father some comfort, for in this position he would have no occasion to kill Japanese.

Tolstoy frankly admitted that the Japanese were incomprehensible and unknown to him. He had heard only of their wonderful capacity for adapting and surpassing in some respects the superficial side of European culture. That they could duplicate in a few decades what had taken a thousand years to build only served to support his negative regard for the accomplishments of European civilization. The government-sponsored hate-the-Japanese campaign, however, he condemned as opposed to all his instincts and convictions.

Though the world knew well Tolstoy's attitude towards war, the foreign press now hounded him to commit himself on a struggle in which his own country was immediately engaged. To a cable from the *North American Newspaper* as to whether he favoured Russia or Japan or neither, he replied with his usual courage: "I am neither for Russia nor Japan, but for the working people of both countries, who have been deceived by their governments and forced to go to war against their own good, their conscience, and their religion."

Despite his previous writings on the subject of war, Tolstoy felt it essential to speak out once more. His many followers expected it, and his moral conscience obliged him to state his position at length on the present conflict. This work, an extensive pamphlet, entitled *Bethink Yourselves!* was published in England by Chertkov in 1904. Two years later an attempt was made to print it in Russia, but the whole issue was confiscated. Translations appeared quickly in various European languages. Even the staid London *Times* opened its columns to a rendering.

As though weary of his own arguments on the subject, Tolstoy introduced the chapters of his pamphlet with quotations condemning war, drawn from the works of various distinguished writers and thinkers, which lent a suggestion of universal authority to his position. If he had little to offer on his own that was entirely new, the whole work gained in nobility, eloquence, and effectiveness by virtue of the fact that he had an immediate and horrible war to point his moral at every turn, and a war that was peculiarly purposeless and widely unpopular. With masterly polemical skill,



he supported his arguments by introducing the direct evidence of conscientious objectors and the nearly illiterate letter of a doubting Russian seaman at Port Arthur, who, after hearing a priest speak of the "Christ-loving army," naïvely implored Tolstoy to answer his question: "Is it true or not that God loves war?"

At such a perilous time in Russia, it took a great deal of personal fortitude to oppose his country's so-called patriotic war and to denounce—as Tolstoy did in the pamphlet—the Tsar and Aleksei Kuropatkin, commander-in-chief, for condemning thousands of peasants to futile slaughter. When the Grand Duke Nikolai Mikhailovich, whose persistent attempts at friendship Tolstoy now found unnatural, mentioned that he would like to visit Yasnaya Polyana, Tolstoy hastened to write him: "Though it would be agreeable for me to see you here, I think that I have become so disliked by the government, and especially now since my article on the war, that your visit to me might well have disagreeable consequences for you, and hence I feel it necessary to forewarn you of this." The Grand Duke decided to forgo his projected visit.

While Russian priests warned their congregations against the devil-inspired anti-war views of Tolstoy, the foreign press for the most part acclaimed his pamphlet, *Bethink Yourselves!* Some criticism appeared in English newspapers, especially in the *London Times*, but the general level of appreciation was reflected in the rapturous encomiums of the *Daily News*, which hailed the pamphlet in the following words: "Yesterday Tolstoy released one of those great messages to humanity which leads us back to the first fundamental truth and at the same time impresses us with its surprising simplicity." Such reactions irked the Russian government which had good reason to suspect England's manœuvrings in the war with Japan.

It is difficult to estimate the influence of *Bethink Yourself!* in Russia during the time of the war. Copies had to be smuggled from abroad, and the strict censorship prevented any mention of the pamphlet in the press. For various reasons the conflict was unpopular; wives and mothers at Kharkov lay across the rails to halt the trains taking their menfolk to the Far East. But if one may judge from the flood of mail Tolstoy received and from the testimony of the swelling number of conscientious objectors, his past and present anti-war agitation contributed in some measure to the popular discontent. To be sure, letters from patriotic intellectuals fiercely attacked him for betraying his country. One aristocratic Russian

lady, having heard the reading of a French translation of *Bethink Yourselves!* wrote him in flaming anger: "Everything that is sacred and precious to us, everything that has constituted and still constitutes the power of Russia—its Holy Church, love for the Tsar, and love for our native land—all this you tread under your feet and cover with filth!" Humbly he turned the other cheek in his answer, begging forgiveness if his work had revealed harsh indignation or an unchristian spirit, but still firmly insisting upon the sincerity and justice of his opposition to war.

Did Tolstoy hate the violence of war more than he loved his country? On a less abstract level: Had this former hero of Caucasian fighting and of the famous Fourth Bastion at Sevastopol entirely freed himself from the pride of patriotism in the glorious tradition of Russian arms? The answer is "No!" He excitedly followed the course of the struggle with the Japanese, and each victory of the enemy brought him chagrin and anguish. "I cannot get rid of a feeling of grief when I hear that the Russians are getting beaten," his daughter Alexandra reports him as saying. In our time, he proudly told his son-in-law Obolenski, the fall of such a fortress as Port Arthur, possessing sufficient stores and forty thousand men, would have been regarded as a shame and an impossibility. And he frankly confessed in his diary: "The surrender of Port Arthur distressed me; I felt badly. This is patriotism. I was brought up in it and am not free from it, just as I am not free from personal egoism, from a family and even an aristocratic egoism, and from patriotism. All these egoisms live in me, but also in me is a consciousness of a divine law, and this consciousness holds these egoisms in check so that I am free not to serve them. And little by little these egoisms become atrophied."

Later, after the crushing of the Russian fleet at Tsushima, Tolstoy adopted a curious attitude of rationalization towards his country's defeats. It is now clear, he wrote in his diary, that it could not be otherwise. In the past, Christian nations had prevailed in wars with non-Christian peoples solely because of their technical proficiency. When non-Christian nations, the highest ideals of which are love for the fatherland and heroism in war, catch up in technological skills, then Christian nations will never be a match for them in armed conflict. This was precisely the case with Japan, he argued, for the country had already equalled and even surpassed the technical progress of the West, a gloomy reflection on the so-called materialistic culture of Europe. The lesson we must learn

from this, he declared, was to forsake this culture and return to the true Christian life of purity, brotherhood, and love. However, he quickly added, "I do not say this to comfort myself for the defeats we have suffered from the Japanese. The shame and disgrace remain. And they remain not only because we have been beaten by the Japanese, but because we undertook to do something which we were unable to do well, and which was bad in itself." Of course the flaw in the argument was his ignorance of the fact that Russia lagged far behind the West and even somewhat behind Japan in the technical proficiency that contributes to successful modern warfare.

In the conflict, however, it was some small comfort to learn from a letter, addressed to him by Iso Abe, editor of a Japanese socialist magazine, that in Japan he had highly moral and religious friends and followers who opposed the present conflict. He hastened to grasp this straw in the wind, but in his reply he did not neglect to tell Iso Abe that he had no sympathy for his socialistic teaching. This teaching was now much on his mind. Fully aware that the unpopular war had increased the rising tide of social revolt in Russia, he feared the bloody consequences.

IV

The revolt that Tolstoy had warned the young Tsar would take place if social and political changes were not forthcoming broke out in 1904-1905. It required no prophet to foretell it. Though an unpopular and disastrous war hastened the outbreak, decades of reactionary rule and black oppression in a European time-scheme of relative progress had made an uprising of the Russian people inevitable. In so far as political parties existed at all, such as the Social Democrats, the Social Revolutionaries, and the Constitutional Democrats, they had to function underground. Each of these parties had its own specific panacea for solving the ills of the country, but they were obliged to work on an ineffective conspiratorial level. Despite their differing programmes and special appeals to the several social classes, they were all united in demanding the end of autocracy and the introduction of a representative government elected by universal ballot.

The fatal indecision of the Tsar to meet any of the demands resulted in a series of disturbances, ranging from bold political speeches by intellectuals to student riots, peasant uprisings, disaffection in the army, and the assassination by terrorists of Plehve,

Minister of the Interior. This first revolutionary wave reached its culmination on January 9, 1905, when an organization of Petersburg workers, led by the priest Gapon, made their way to the Winter Palace to appeal to Nicholas II. Though their intentions were clearly peaceful and their cause a just one, the troops were ordered to fire, and several hundred workers were killed or wounded. This "Bloody Sunday" marked a turning point in the history of the Russian revolutionary movement, for it resulted in an alliance of the socialist working-class parties and made of the workers a decisive force in bringing about political and economic changes.

Frightened by the roar of protest throughout the country, the government made a feeble concession—the calling of a national congress or Imperial Duma, which was to have solely a deliberative function. The workers' answer to this half-measure was a general strike. Electricity and the water supply of cities were cut off and railroads came to a standstill. At first, the core of this proletarian resistance was the Petersburg Soviet of Workers' Deputies, which was also to play a significant part in the later revolutionary events of 1917. Made up of representatives of the two socialist parties, it was actually under the control of the Mensheviks, the moderate right wing of the Social Democrats, and their leader Trotsky. Similar soviets of workers were formed in other cities, but before they could effectively combine in revolt, the government, upon the initiative of Count Witte, issued a manifesto (October 17, 1905) which promised the fundamental principles of civil liberty, a democratic franchise, and legislative powers to the Duma. And the liberal Count Witte became Prime Minister, with a mandate to form a coalition cabinet of the various opposition parties.

These concessions failed to stem the tide of revolt; the socialist parties insisted upon carrying through their revolutionary doctrines, maintaining that the government was not sincere in its promises. It was now the Bolsheviks, the radical left wing of the Social Democrats, with their leader Lenin, who became the powerful opponents of the government's conciliatory policy. The strikes went on and an insurrection broke out in Moscow in December. But the masses, impressed by the government's concessions, were not yet ready for the extreme measures of the Bolsheviks. Accordingly, the government was able to resume control of the situation. The soviets were forced to disband, riots were suppressed, and reactionary "Black Hundred" organizations, such as the so-called "Union of the Russian People," engaged in pogroms among

the Jews and in other diversionist activities, with the tacit consent of the Tsar's police. In the end, governmental measures partly succeeded in drawing the support of workers and peasants away from the opposition. Certain real gains were made over the hopelessly reactionary situation that had existed, but the revolutionary movement was crushed for the time being.

This violent national activity had its repercussions in isolated Yasnaya Polyana. Alarms ran through the village. In remote districts the houses of landowners had been burned down and their owners, in some cases, murdered by the peasants. Serious strikes occurred at near-by Tula. Fears swept through the Tolstoy household. English, American, French, Spanish, and Hungarian correspondents rushed to Yasnaya Polyana to obtain the reactions to these significant events of Russia's first citizen. He received them with gracious politeness, though not untinged with the suspicion that he felt for all journalists. More often than not they found themselves talking about God and immortality rather than about the burning political events in Russia. Instead of interviewing, they were themselves interviewed on their personal lives and the political and social customs of their countries. He told them frankly that he found it hard to understand why anyone would want to be a journalist. Meanwhile, intellectuals hoped he would head a petition to the Tsar for a constitutional government; others asked him to write an open letter to the Tsar's soldiers, pleading with them not to shoot down their brothers.

The acts of violence throughout Russia grieved him as deeply as the carnage of war in the Far East. After the shooting on "Bloody Sunday," he fulminated against the agitators: "Those who arouse the workers imagine that they will influence the government by such a course. But this is a mistake. . . . The Tsar is not free. He talks now to one now to another. He listens to his uncles, his mother, Pobedonostsev. He is a pitiful, insignificant, even an unkind person." In his diary he gloomily entered in October: "The revolution is in full swing. There will be killings on both sides."

When Tolstoy read the manifesto of Nicholas II, promising civil liberties and an elected Duma, he brusquely dismissed the move: "There is nothing in it for the people." In fact, the argument over whether or not a constitutional government was the answer to the problem facing the country became a matter of bitter controversy in the household, with Tolstoy firmly supporting the negative. With his son Sergei the argument ended in a quarrel. Tolstoy flatly

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declared that 90 per cent of the people did not want a constitutional government. Why change one form of violence for another, he asked? "A man living under a despotic government, such as Turkey or Russia," he wrote in his notebook, "may be more or less free, though he will be exposed to the violence of a rule in which he has no say, but a subject in a constitutional government, while always recognizing the lawfulness of the rule under which he finds himself, is always a slave."

It was characteristic of Tolstoy that at a time of great crisis in his country he refused to throw his tremendous influence on the side of any of the contending parties. He had repeatedly condemned the abuses of tsardom, and he had no less uncompromisingly denounced the extremes of the radicals. The proponents of the middle way—the constitutional reformers—had some reason to hope for his support in their efforts to establish a government based on the democratic franchise and public opinion. If for no other reason, however, his instinctive dislike for all organized effort to solve the ills of mankind obliged him to go his lonely way. When the *North American Newspaper* cabled him for his reaction to Zemstvo<sup>1</sup> agitation for representative government, he categorically replied that these efforts would only delay true social amelioration, which, he added, "can be attained only by the religious and moral perfection of all individuals."

This statement was reprinted, in the usual garbled form, in a Russian newspaper, and soon Tolstoy was receiving quantities of letters, some asking him for further information on his position, others berating him for his fence-sitting at such a time of national distress. It is all right for you to sit comfortably at Yasnaya Polyana perfecting yourself, wrote one correspondent, but how would you feel if the government starved you or threw you into prison? In the light of such criticism, Tolstoy believed it necessary to state his position on the issues of the day at some length in an article, "On the Social Movement in Russia."<sup>2</sup> Scornfully he turned on those who imagined they could achieve a kind of utopia by substituting a constitutional government for the present despotic rule. "In England, America, France, and Germany," he boldly asserted, "the perniciousness of government is so masked that these people,

<sup>1</sup> The Zemstvos, elected representatives of the counties, had provided, since their reform in 1864, almost the only progressive form of local self-government in Russia.

<sup>2</sup> This was published by Chertkov in England in 1905 and was printed in translation in various European countries.

pointing at the events in Russia, naïvely imagine that what takes place there could happen only in Russia, and that they possess complete freedom and do not require any improvement in their situation; that is, they find themselves in the most hopeless condition of slavery—the slavery of slaves who do not realize they are slaves, and they are proud to be slaves.”

At least, Tolstoy's position in this national crisis had the dubious virtue of consistency. For years he had warned his country of the danger of revolution, and on several occasions he had made direct appeals to the Tsar to correct what he considered to be the abuses that were leading to social revolt. He did this not because he had any love for autocracy, for he condemned all governments. But he was willing to compromise with his own ultimate ideals, for he feared the violence of revolution and what he believed to be the illusory hopes it offered the people more than he hated the abuses of autocracy. His warnings had been ignored, and now that revolution had come, he felt it necessary to revert to his original Christian anarchist position. In his eyes all governments were ultimately despotic, and he saw no point in changing one for another. He was willing to admit in private that if the Tsar asked his advice he would urge the adoption of constitutional rule, but he hastened to add that the majority of people—the peasants—did not understand it and did not want it. America, he scornfully declared, had reached an impasse. “In that country you will find trusts, multimillionaires, an army of 10,000, and, side by side with these, men and women without sufficient food and clothing, or a decent roof over their heads.” As for the English, they obeyed laws made by their representatives and all the time imagined they were free men. But in Russia, Tolstoy countered, I do not make the laws and consequently I am not bound to obey them—I am a free man. Nicholas II, he admitted, “can gore us to death, but that is just a matter of chance—whether one is killed by an ox or by a tile falling on one's head.” When one of his questioners pushed him to tell what he thought of parliamentary government, he answered: “To ask me what I think about parliamentary government is just like asking—I won't say the Pope—but some monk his opinion as to how prostitution ought to be regulated.”

With some justice Tolstoy's critics among the liberals charged him with evading the principal issue that the country had to face—autocratic rule or constitutional rule. In a period of emergency they considered the antithesis he set up between politics on the one hand

and individual religious and moral regeneration on the other as highly unrealistic. But he doggedly adhered to the one unchangeable conviction that he had been advocating for the last twenty years—non-resistance to evil by force. This was the axiom by which all political, social, and economic questions were to be solved. It made no difference to him what the motive for the use of physical force might be, or that constitutional governments might employ it in the interests of the good of the greater number. All governments owed their very existence to the use of physical force, therefore all governments were evil.

Baffled friends among the Social Revolutionaries pointed out to Tolstoy that individual self-perfection was a long and arduous process. In the meantime, the Russian masses were suffering from very real wrongs that required practical remedies. Yes, he knew, but the chief wrong could be corrected by a practical remedy that he had been advocating for years—the prohibition of private property in land. The land hunger of the peasants was driving them on to kill landowners. They did not care a fig about who governed them, provided they obtained as much land as they could work. So vital a factor did Tolstoy believe this to be in the present revolutionary disturbances that he wrote an article, "The Great Sin," in which he once more proposed the single-tax solution of Henry George. But the peasants of Yasnaya Polyana, who could not understand that he had deeded all his land to his family, wondered why their "squire," who told them of the evils of owning land, did not give his away to them. Worse still, they wondered why his daughter Alexandra actually bought and sold land contrary to her father's convictions. Whatever his own failings in the matter, Tolstoy was a true prophet. Twelve years later the slogan "All land to the peasants" virtually won a revolution.

Both radicals and liberals were disgusted with Tolstoy's stand. They understood little about his ideological consistency; they knew only that the doctrine of the moral self-perfection of man became ridiculously quixotic in a time of grave revolutionary crisis. In particular, the Marxian Social Democrats, who had wooed him for some time, because more effectively than any of their members he had widely exposed the evils of the Russian government, Church, and capitalism, now turned on him with fierce criticism. In his writings he had repeatedly made clear his objection to materialism as a philosophy of life. "Socialism," he once said, "is unconscious Christianity," and he frankly accepted the fact that some of the aims



of the socialists were his own. In a sense, he and the Marxian socialists might be said to have shared the same ultimate ideal—the withering away of the State. But for Tolstoy, this ideal could be realized only by man's moral self-perfection and not by an organized communistic process of material development. "Economic ideals," he wrote, "are not ideals."

In July 1905, Tolstoy entered in his diary: "Only that revolution which is impossible to stop is a fruitful revolution." That is, he was not opposed to revolution provided the process was a constant change through peaceful means in man's existence from something worse to something better. Even in the present revolution he could see something good, and he made a strikingly prophetic statement on it to Goldenweizer: "The present movement in Russia is a world movement, the importance of which is little understood. This movement, like the French Revolution formerly, may perhaps, through its ideas, provide an impetus for hundreds of years to come. The Russian people have in the highest degree a capacity for organization and self-government. They gave up their power to the government once and waited for the liberation of the land, as they formerly did for the liberation of the serfs. They have not been given the land, and they themselves will carry out that great reform. Our revolutionists do not all know the people and do not understand this movement. They might help it, but they only hamper it. In the Russian people, it seems to me, and I do not think I am biased, there is more of the Christian spirit than in other peoples." What Tolstoy criticized in the Marxian socialists, apart from their materialistic philosophy of life, was that they did not thoroughly understand the masses and their real needs; that their conception of revolution was change by violence; and that hence their leaders would be content to seize power, which they would retain by force and thus revert to the very oppression of the masses that they had set out to destroy.

From the Marxian point of view, perhaps the fairest and most understanding appraisal of Tolstoy's contribution to the Russian revolutionary movement was by Lenin himself in a series of seven articles. In his first article, "Leo Tolstoy as a Mirror of the Russian Revolution," written in 1908, he summed up the contradictions in his doctrines as follows: "On the one hand, an artist of genius, contributing not only incomparable pictures of Russian life, but literary productions of the first rank that belong to world literature. On the other hand, a landowner, wearing the martyr's crown in

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the name of Christ. On the one hand, an extraordinarily powerful, direct and sincere protest against social lies and hypocrisy; on the other, a Tolstoyan, that is, a worn-out, historical sniveller called the Russian intellectual, who, publicly beating his breast, cries: 'I am bad, I am vile, but I am striving after moral self-perfection; I no longer eat meat and now live on rice cutlets.' On the one hand, relentless criticism of capitalist exploitation, the exposure of governmental violence and of the comedy of justice and governmental administration, revelations of all the depths of contradictions between the growth of wealth and the achievements of civilization, and the growth of poverty, the brutalization and suffering of the working masses. On the other hand, weak-minded preaching of 'non-resistance to evil' by force. On the one hand the soberest realism, the tearing away of all masks of whatever kind. On the other hand, advocacy of one of the most corrupt things existing in the world, that is, religion—an attempt to replace the official state clergy with priests by moral conviction, that is, cultivating a clericalism of the most refined and hence most loathsome kind."

Lenin maintained that Tolstoy had thoroughly identified himself with the peasants, with their moods, hopes, and aspirations. In fact, he declared that Tolstoy's contradictory views were a veritable mirror of the contradictory conditions surrounding the historical activities of the peasantry in the revolutionary movement, which in turn accounted for their failure as a class in the 1905 Revolution. Tolstoy, like the peasants, concluded Lenin, was unable to realize that the old order which all abhorred could be destroyed only by a class-conscious socialist proletariat. While recognizing the great debt of the revolution to Tolstoy's writings, Lenin flatly declared that "Tolstoyan non-resistance to evil [was] the most serious cause of the defeat of the first revolutionary campaign."

Lenin, however, did not give sufficient weight to the significant part played in Tolstoy's thinking by his utter repudiation of violence in any form. It was the keystone of his whole doctrine. Had he been inclined to compromise with it, he might have met the radicals halfway on certain levels of activity. Many of his friends among the Social Democrats also detested violence, but they were inclined to forgive it if the motive in their opinion was a good one, such as the killing of those in power who opposed the revolution. When this proposition was put up to Tolstoy by one of his socialist-minded friends who asked: "Is there not a difference between the

killing that a revolutionist does and that which a policeman does?" Tolstoy answered: "There is as much difference as between cat-shit and dog-shit. But I don't like the smell of either one or the other."

## V

With the bloody events of 1904-1905, the power of Tolstoy's pen over the Russian people began to wane. Widespread violence seemed to break the magic spell of his doctrine of non-resistance, and thousands of the little people, whose hopes were lost in the ultimate failure of the rebellion, licked their wounds in no spirit of Tolstoyan Christian charity. They had learned from bitter experience the physical law that when two forces meet the greater will prevail. Next time the greater force would be on their side. Passive resistance in the face of bayonets or bullets took more moral courage than they possessed. As for peacefully waiting for change—well, time flies and death also waits. Tolstoyans quietly began to join the ranks of radical revolutionists. Even so fervent a disciple as Biryukov admitted to Tolstoy that his religious-philosophical works were being ignored by the people. Society will be attracted to such articles, he advised, only if you give it fresh artistic productions, and then the people will remember "that it is Tolstoy who speaks to them."

But Tolstoy was serving God, not the leaders of the revolution. He was passionately concerned with all the unfinished business of world thought—those insoluble questions about God, life, death, violence, and poverty which the leaders of mankind, like bored parliamentarians, always lay on the table for future consideration. He once related, by way of illustrating the fact that even geniuses err, a conversation he had had with the sceptical and pessimistic old butler of the Olsufyevs. It was in the country and he remarked to the servant, referring to the weather and the gathering of the harvest: "God knows what He does." To this the butler replied: "Yes, but He too makes mistakes!" Whatever God's failings, Tolstoy refused to admit any mistake in the doctrine he preached in His name. And in the midst of the turmoil of 1904-1905, he doggedly continued to belabour the public with his polemical articles, though they could reach the Russian people only in contraband copies.

Apart from the writings of this nature already mentioned, Tolstoy published two more lengthy pamphlets in 1905, *The One Thing*

*Needed and The End of an Age.*<sup>1</sup> The first was an arraignment of the whole institution of government, a kind of warning to both the constitutionalists and the socialists that any rule either might establish was doomed to end in the autocratic abuses they condemned. Apart from his argument from history, he had nothing new to offer in either the evils of government that he attacked or the remedy he offered. One detects a mounting critical asperity, however, and an impatience with those who will not see the light. Even Chertkov, when he first read the manuscript, expressed some dismay over the harsh epithets applied to Russian tsars, especially to the one still occupying the throne, and he persuaded Tolstoy to moderate his language a bit. Later Tolstoy regretfully remarked to a friend about this decision to soften various expressions in the work: "I only wish now that as many as possible had read them. One cannot write sharply enough about Nicholas and people like him. A saintly person, Nicholas! One would have to be a fool or a vile man or insane to do what he does."

In order to avoid quarrels with his wife, Tolstoy had decided not to publish any further purely artistic works,<sup>2</sup> but he continued to write them. Though seventy-seven, his head swarmed with literary designs, and at this chaotic time of war and revolution he actually revived his plan of some forty years ago—a huge novel on the Decembrists. "*Ars longa, vita brevis*," he now mournfully jotted down in his diary. "Sometimes I am sorry. There is so much I wish to say." The design for a last great novel had to be dropped, this time forever. It gave way to a long short story, "The False Coupon," which he had planned in the late 1880's and now finished. It is a brilliantly constructed tale, told in his new simple and rapid narrative manner, and it concerns a succession of evil deeds that grow out of an initial evil act—the counterfeiting of a ruble note—which in turn are contrasted to a series of good actions that lead to the salvation of all concerned.

"Alyosha Gorshok," another short story, in this case less than five pages in length, was written in 1905. It is a little masterpiece, a rare and perfect sublimation in artistic form of one of Tolstoy's spiritual convictions. The peasant boy Alyosha, who is everyone's drudge, achieves through his simplicity of soul and unquestioning submissiveness to all that harsh fate throws

<sup>1</sup> Both works were published by Chertkov in London in 1905 and appeared widely in translations shortly thereafter.

<sup>2</sup> Tolstoy published one other article during 1904, a foreword to an article of V. G. Chertkov, "On Revolution."

his way the inner light and perfect peace that his creator strove for in vain.<sup>1</sup>

During 1904 and part of 1905 the literary work that Tolstoy laboured on most, as did the whole household and any willing guests at Yasnaya Polyana, was the *Circle of Reading*. This production was an outgrowth of *Thoughts of Wise People for Every Day* (1903), and was continued in succeeding years in a modified form. Almost medieval in conception, the *Circle of Reading* was designed to reflect in a broad sense Tolstoy's religious philosophy through the medium of a great number of quotations drawn from numerous thinkers and partly from his own works. Thirty-one themes were decided upon, such as "Faith," "The Soul," "One Soul in All," "God," and "Love," one for each day of the month, and a series of quotations, bearing on each theme, was set down for each day throughout the whole twelve months. He made no pretence at faithfully translating the selections from the various foreign authors, for he often modified the sense to suit his own purpose.

Like an old man bored with his own wisdom, Tolstoy now sat among heaps of books, scanning their dusty pages for forgotten gems of thought. The work became a passion with him, and the more he dwelt with these famous authors of the past, the greater grew his disgust with those of the present and with people's ignorance of their heritage of wisdom. "During all this time," he wrote an admirer, "having read not only M<sup>arcus</sup> Aurelius, Epictetus, Xenophon, Socrates, and Brahmin, Chinese, and Buddhist wisdom, Seneca, Plutarch, Cicero, but also the later ones: Montaigne, Rousseau, Voltaire, Lessing, Kant, Lichtenberg, Schopenhauer, Emerson, Channing, Parker, Ruskin, Amiel, and others (for two months now I've stopped reading newspapers and magazines), I become more and more surprised and horrified at the ignorance, at the 'cultured' barbarism in which our society is steeped. In truth, enlightenment, education is the way we make use of and assimilate the cultural inheritance that our ancestors bequeathed to us, but we read the newspapers, Zola, Maeterlinck, Ibsen, Rozanov, etc."

While the family and guests sat around the big table, copying his manuscript or translating and transcribing selected quotations, he would dash from his study to try out on them another "beautiful"

<sup>1</sup> The only other artistic work finished in 1905 was "The Posthumous Notes of the Elder, Fyodor Kuzmich."

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thought he had just discovered in some ancient tome. The work enabled him to refresh his memory with favourite authors, and of these, Dickens gave him the purest delight. Time and again he read passages to the family from Dickens or retold his stories. He recalled having heard him at a literary evening in London during his visit there. "He read excellently, and with his serene, powerful figure he produced a vital impression. But I had no contact with him. At that time I was interested in educational problems." One of the guests on this occasion asked him if Dickens had influenced his literary work. He replied affirmatively, but added, "Stendhal's influence on me, as I have already said, has been greater than all."

In the tremendous amount of reviewing of imaginative literature that he did for the *Circle of Reading*, the zest and joy of the explorer in great art never deserted him. And always his test was that which he applied to his own writing, that the highest art should be clear, simple, and accessible to all. Despite his own enormous production, he could never regard writing as a profession. "One ought only to write," he told Goldenweizer at this time, "when one leaves a piece of one's flesh in the inkpot each time one dips one's pen in."

## VI

Almost the only widely applauded act of Nicholas II during these two years of strife was the amnesty he granted to many political prisoners and exiles in August 1904, on the occasion of his becoming father of an heir to the throne. The action gave Tolstoy special cause for rejoicing, for it permitted the return to Russia of one of the most faithful of exiled disciples—Biryukov. After eight years of separation the reunion was a happy event. Biryukov had hurried to Yasnaya Polyana at the end of 1904, and much to his surprise he found that Tolstoy was not the feeble old man he had expected to see after his long illness, but still the same cheerful, indefatigable worker.

Chertkov's release came later, and he did not arrive at Yasnaya Polyana until May of the next year. Tolstoy mentioned in his diary that the visit had been "very fine, even beyond expectation." For some time now Chertkov had assumed a proprietary interest in Tolstoy's writings. While in England he had been playing the part of critic-editor of the numerous articles Tolstoy sent him, and he had set up the Free Age Press to publish these. Besides, he arranged for various translations and was engaged in getting out an edition

of all of Tolstoy's works forbidden in Russia. In fact, he had apparently already begun to think of himself as future literary executor, for the year previous, while still in England, he had sent an emissary to Yasnaya Polyana to learn of Tolstoy's intentions concerning the rights to his productions after his death.

Sonya resented more and more Chertkov's privileged position, for she fully understood the tremendous financial possibilities of her husband's works after his death, and she naturally wished to protect them in the interests of herself and her family. She had long formed the practice of sending his manuscripts for safekeeping to the Moscow Rumyantsev Museum. In January 1904, she had all these manuscripts moved to the Historical Museum in Moscow. "It is necessary," she wrote in her diary at this time, "to save everything possible from senseless plundering by the children and grandchildren." She had in mind here principally her daughters, who worked closely with Chertkov on matters relating to their father's manuscripts.

A new force for peace and order in the family was the Slovak, Dr. Dushan Makovitski. After Tolstoy's illness in the Crimea, it was thought essential to have a physician attached permanently to the household. Several had already filled this position and left, but at the end of 1904 Makovitski was employed and remained until Tolstoy's death. One of the conditions was that he should also run a dispensary to take care of the village sick.

Though Makovitski left much to be desired as a physician, from nearly every other point of view his selection for this position was ideal. For some years now a devoted follower of Tolstoy, this pale, mousy, anæmic-looking, little bald-headed man had a profound reverence for him and a keen sense of his historical position among the world's great artists and moral thinkers. Meek, humble, and self-effacing, he unobtrusively went about his various duties like one consecrated. So gentle was his nature that he could not bear to hear people quarrelling. His medical care of Tolstoy was almost his least important service, but he became invaluable as a kind of secretary and literary assistant and won his master's complete devotion. When he took a month's vacation to visit his native land, Tolstoy complained to a friend: "But how am I to live without Dushan? . . . I'll tell you frankly, I don't need his medicine, but when I do not see his hat there for a day or two, I somehow or other feel lost. Holy Dushan!"

For Makovitski, as for many of Tolstoy's disciples, everything

the master said seemed worth preserving. He constantly carried in his coat pocket a tiny block of paper and short stubs of pencils, and daily copied Tolstoy's conversation in a shorthand system of his own without taking his hand out of his pocket so that his activity remained unnoticed. Every night, when all had gone to bed, he would sit up to the small hours of the morning transcribing these notes and adding accounts of the various happenings of the day. The result was a journal, with few interruptions, of daily life at Yasnaya Polyana from the end of 1904 to Tolstoy's death. Intimate friends of Tolstoy and members of the family agreed on the remarkable accuracy with which Makovitski reported Tolstoy's talk.<sup>1</sup>

Makovitski in his notes makes the interesting point that there were no secrets in the household. What Tolstoy could not say to all, he did not tell even to those most intimate with him. Sonya, he added, "told to everyone—servants, guests, and chance visitors—what she confided to her intimates." Obviously Makovitski sided with Tolstoy in the quarrels that still fitfully broke out between husband and wife. As a doctor, he often grew annoyed with Sonya's attempts to heal her husband when he was ill. She continually fussed over him, denying him the rest and quiet he needed. When it was better for him not to eat, she insisted on his partaking of dishes that she had specially prepared, and she often applied home-made nostrums that had no curative effect. Wearied with protesting against her ministrations, he would finally submit if for no reason other than to calm her agitation. Sonya said to her husband once that he did not know how to take care of himself. He replied "that if he followed her advice, he would have been dead long ago." Rather harshly Makovitski summed up his judgement on Sonya as follows: "[She] did not esteem Leo Nikolayevich, did not desire his advice and friendship, and only valued his life as a source of income (the editions of his works). She was entirely alien to his thoughts though she boasted of her husband's fame. On the whole, she loved him as she would have loved any husband and the father of her children."

Tolstoy once said that marriage was either paradise or hell, that there was no purgatory. However, his marriage, which had long ceased to be a paradise, now teetered on the edge of purgatory and would occasionally slip over into it when a quarrel flared up about money matters, the children, or the wasteful life at Yasnaya Polyana.

<sup>1</sup> Up to the present, only a very small part of this material has been published.



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And always there was present the latent danger that his marriage would plunge down to the lowermost circle of hell. But he was an old, old man for whom marriage had long since become a way of life that he was trying to slough off as an encumbrance in his search for God. "We sit outdoors and eat 10 dishes," he disgustedly entered in his diary in July 1905. "Ice cream, lackeys, silver service, and beggars pass, yet kind people continue quietly to eat ice cream. Amazing!!!!" Still he had lived this life for almost half a century. Could he turn his back on it now? Did he have a right to? "The struggle of light and darkness, of good and evil takes place in me, but I think, so it seems, that I am wrestling with it," he wrote in his diary. It was a struggle that had begun in his youth. When darkness and evil threatened to prevail, he often visited Marya Schmidt, the former schoolteacher, grown old and worn in devotion to his ideals, tending her cow, tilling the little plot of ground allotted to her at near-by Ovsyannikovo, and selflessly serving all who asked her aid. As he drew strength from the saintly Marya's example, he ruminated: "How easy it would be for all to live like this. Oh, if only to participate in it just a little!"

## Chapter XXXVII

### LIFE IS BEYOND SPACE AND TIME

**S**ONYA began 1906 by inviting Taneyev to Yasnaya Polyana, where he had not been for nine years. She had been contenting herself with meeting this musician during her trips to Moscow or, in summer, at the estate of their mutual friends, the Maslovs. Though for some time Taneyev's complete indifference had chilled her passion considerably, she had sublimated it in an irresistible desire to hear him play. So music was the professed reason for the invitation now, and as though to indicate her impartiality, she also invited Goldenweizer to lend his talents for the occasion. And much delightful music was played by these masters of the piano. As always, when Taneyev was a guest, Tolstoy conducted himself with precise hospitality. He entered into the spirit of the affair and even played a waltz he had composed in his youth. In his diary that day, however, he mysteriously jotted down: "There were several examinations." An "examination" was his word for a difficult situation in his personal life that called for careful scrutiny of his moral behaviour. Two weeks later Sonya was in Moscow, and she entered in her daily diary: "This morning I was at Sergei Ivanovich's [Taneyev's]; I gave him the album of photographs. We were both restrained and unnatural."

Actually, the lone position Tolstoy had taken in the bitter social and political struggle served to increase his loneliness in the family circle. The spirit of revolt against authority in the country in general seemed to have invaded the household. During the summer of 1906, for example, the wrangling became almost unbearable for him. Leo and Andrei gave their allegiance to the most reactionary political thought and treated their father's sincerest beliefs with scant respect; and Sonya insisted upon her property rights in utter disregard of her husband's feelings.

No doubt Tolstoy's agitation over the misery, assassinations, and executions throughout the country had increased his sensitivity

to the comfortable life at Yasnaya Polyana. One day that summer his secretary was walking with old Marya Schmidt near the tennis court where members of the family were playing and others watching. Suddenly Tolstoy appeared in the path, an expression of suffering on his face. "It's terrible, unbearable!" he said in a quiet but trembling voice. "Formerly, when people did not notice this, it may have been more endurable. But now, when this is plain to all of us, such an existence is unendurable! I must get out! it's beyond my strength." That evening the secretary entered Tolstoy's study and found him deep in thought. He abruptly declared, referring to his statement earlier in the day: "It's so patent to me that wherever I might go, within a couple of days Sofya Andreyevna would appear by my side again with servants and doctors, and everything would go on as before!"

Overt acts on the part of members of the family threw Tolstoy into deeper despair and drew from him tortured entries in his diary. "Today all my sons, and it is especially painful. There is a distressing unnaturalness in this conventional closeness to me and the greatest spiritual separation. At times, as today, I want to run away, to disappear." A letter arrived from a peasant youth, expressing Christian views close to his own. After tea, he began to read it to the family. Andrei noisily jumped up from the table and brusquely announced that he was not interested in the letter. And his brother Leo demonstratively arose and followed him out of the room.

While members of the family were sitting on the veranda, two of the younger sons complained about the laxity of the courts, that the masses had got entirely out of hand, and that the old traditions were being trampled upon.

"All these misfortunes are not so great that it is impossible to endure them," their father quietly observed. "Every generation has its terrible calamities. Our grandfathers had Napoleon, before that Pugachyov, or cholera, floods, earthquakes. Each generation has its own experiences which it must bear."

"Yes, it's fine for you to talk in this way," interrupted one of the sons. "You go off, shut yourself up in your study, and you know nothing."

"It's so fine for me," his father retorted with sudden agitation, "that I pack my suitcase every week! That is what I've borne up till now!" And he left the company.

These incidents were not casual quarrels. They mark an intensification in the development of the family tragedy, in which certain

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of the sons openly identified themselves with their mother's cause in the struggle with her husband. They were on the side of property; they aimed to protect their interests in the estate and to defend established law and order against their father's "anarchism." When he expressed his horror over the news that the Slavophiles in the Duma had advocated the death penalty, Andrei and Leo literally drove him to tears with their loud denunciations of his most hallowed doctrine of non-violence. And that summer these two sons sympathized with their mother's intention of having several peasants arrested for cutting oak trees in the forest of the estate. Stubbornly she refused to listen to the pleas of all to pardon the peasants as they stood guiltily before her, caps in hand, bowing and begging forgiveness for stealing trees which Tolstoy felt they had a perfect right to if they needed them.

Relations in the household were taxing the furthest limits of his spiritual resources. Gloomily he wrote to the one person in the family, his daughter Masha, who would be certain to understand and sympathize with his trials: "It has been very distressing. Now it has become better. It even went so far that two days ago I lost my temper because of a conversation with Andryusha and Lyova,<sup>1</sup> who argued with me that the death penalty is good. . . . I told them that they do not esteem me, that they hate me, and I left the room, slamming the door, and for two days I could not recover. Today, thanks to the prayer of Francis of Assisi and John: 'one not loving his brother does not know God,' I regained control of myself and resolved to tell them that I regard myself very much at fault . . . and ask their pardon. Andrei left for somewhere that night, so I could not tell him, but, meeting Leo, I told him that I had been to blame and asked his forgiveness. He did not answer and went off to read a newspaper and to argue gaily, accepting my words as a duty on my part. It is difficult. But the more difficult it is, the better for me."

## II

A danger affecting the existence of all members of the household suddenly cleared the atmosphere of strife. At the beginning of September, an illness that Sonya had been complaining of for some time took a critical turn. A physician from Tula and Dr. Makovitski diagnosed a tumour of the womb. An operation was essential. The distinguished surgeon V. F. Snegiryov was hurriedly

<sup>1</sup> His sons Andrei and Leo.

summoned and soon arrived with assistants, a nurse, and even an operating table.

Telegrams brought absent members of the family to Yasnaya Polyana. The house filled up and took on the aspect of a medical clinic. Tenseness gripped everyone. Father, sons, and daughters forgot their differences in the presence of imminent danger to a beloved wife and mother. Sonya's behaviour acted like an alembic, refining the feelings of all. She bore her agony uncomplainingly. In the face of death she seemed transformed, sloughing off all earthly dross, and humbly composing herself to meet the end. Believing that she would die, she said farewell to each member of the household, offering them the affection and spiritual comfort that they had intended to bring to her.

Tolstoy rejoiced over this sudden change in his wife, and there arose in him once again, as at the time of Vanichka's death, the hope that she was undergoing a spiritual rebirth. The fussing of the doctors, the thoughts of the operation, all these efforts to frustrate one of life's greatest experiences disgusted him. He entered in his diary on September 1: "I have not written for 6 days. Sonya's illness is still worse. Today I felt especially sorry. But she is touchingly sensible, truthful, and kind. I do not want to write of anything else. Three sons, Seryozha, Andryusha, and Misha, and two daughters, Masha and Sasha, are here. The house is full of doctors. This is distressing. Instead of devotion to the will of God and a solemn religious atmosphere, it is petty, unruly, and egotistical. My thoughts and feelings were good. I thank God. I am not living nor does the whole world live in time: an immutable universe in time, formerly unattainable to me, now unfolds itself. How much easier and more understandable this way! And from such a point of view how clearly is death not an end of something but its full unfolding."

"While dying," he noted in another entry, "Sonya unfolds herself to us," and he instinctively rebelled against any mundane interference with this spiritual process. Death was the great conciliator, he told himself, invoking love in all, and was not the evil that people believed. He did, however, consent to a priest's coming to confess Sonya. "There are people," he wrote, apropos of her request, "to whom a pure, abstract, spiritual relation to the principle of life is inaccessible. For them a crude form is necessary. But this form is also spiritual. And it is fine that it is so, even though in a crude form."

Although still another well-known physician had been summoned from Petersburg for the operation, Dr. Snegiryov decided not to wait any longer, for he feared that peritonitis might set in. He asked Tolstoy's permission saying that it was a matter of life or death. Tolstoy was reluctant to give his consent. If her time had come, then an operation seemed to him like an unholy interference with the will of God. In the end, he evaded the issue, declaring that the decision must rest with his wife and children. Preparations were made. Tolstoy went to Chepyzh, a forest adjoining the estate, to be alone and pray. He left directions to ring the big bell outside the house twice if the operation were successful, if not . . . well, he would come anyway.

The operating table was set up in the middle of the room; physicians in white coats talked in whispers and moved about softly; then Sonya, moaning in pain, was carried in and the door was shut. Soon all was silent. Only Dr. Snegiryov's loud voice could be heard, at first severe, then nervous and irritated. Suddenly Alexandra heard him burst into vile and indecent swearing. ". . . you German mug . . . son of a —, accursed German! . . ." The catgut which a German dealer had supplied for stitching the wound turned out to be poor in quality and tore in Snegiryov's hands. Finally, the door flew open and the doctor, hot and purple in the face, dashed out. Someone threw a wrap over him and led him downstairs, and someone else followed with a bottle of champagne for the exhausted physician. The operation was pronounced a success.

Alexandra ran off to Chepyzh to tell the glad news to her father. So did Ilya and Masha. They saw him at the edge of the woods.

"Successful! Successful!" they shouted.

"Good, go back, I'll come in a minute," he replied with suppressed emotion, and turned back into the woods again to pray.

Later, when he emerged from his wife's room, after she had recovered from the anaesthetic, Ilya recalled that he was choking with indignation and declared: "My God, what a horrible thing! A human being cannot even be left to die in peace! A woman lies with a slit stomach, tied to a bed, without pillows, and she groans more than before the operation. There's torture for you!"

When the shroud is entirely removed, then life ends, Tolstoy had thought as he watched over the agony of his wife. But Sonya's "unfolding" had ceased. She now lay convalescent, securely wrapped again in the shroud of life. Her recovery was rapid. She

wrote her sister of her feelings in the presence of death. All the vanity of people seemed so strange and insignificant to her then, and she wanted to advise everyone to abandon it. Even the children and all that she loved she was prepared to leave without any deep regret. "I felt sorry only when I said farewell to Lyovochka for the last time, as he began weeping and went to the door, his thin shoulders hunched with sobbing, crying and blowing his nose. But even then I only made the sign of the cross and did not weep."

These feelings and memories quickly vanished with the return of health. A little more than a month after the operation, Masha wrote of her mother's condition to a friend of the family: "Now her health is so good that she has begun to go about with a brisk step, talks in a loud voice, and again enters into things, and though one rejoices over this return to life, yet along with it goes a withdrawal from that serious, touching frame of mind, which exists at the moment of greatest physical weakness, and which appeared in mother when she was dying. I am sorry to part with this and to lose it."

Perhaps because he was expecting it, Tolstoy detected Sonya's reversion to type sooner than his daughter. Only two days after the operation he entered in his diary: "It's terribly sad. I'm sorry for her. Great sufferings and virtually in vain. I don't know. It's sad, sad, but very good." For him spiritual harmony had become more desirable than life itself. Perhaps his deepest yearning had been to find in this woman whom he had once so passionately loved the perfect spiritual mate of his old age. That hope now seemed lost forever.

And now, after Sonya's peculiarly delicate operation, her seventy-eight-year-old husband at last repudiated that sensual intimacy with her that had meant so much to him in the past. He told Makovitski: "I've been in love many times, but I can say that I never remember about love. . . . Perhaps this is not an important matter." And in his diary, before Sonya had fully recovered, he wrote the following passage which may well have come under her own eye: "What can be more vile than sexual intercourse. One need only describe this act with preciseness in order to invoke the most terrible repulsion. Therefore, among all people who have emerged from an animal condition and entered a spiritual life, shame has always manifested itself among its members in connection with the sexual act."

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Meanwhile, with Sonya's return to health and retreat from spiritual grace, the war on Tolstoy's beliefs was renewed, and existence in the household seemed more irreconcilable than ever with his dreams of spiritual peace. Angrily he wrote in his diary several weeks after the operation: "Our life is again very disgusting. They sport, doctor themselves, go hither and yon, take part in this or that, dispute, concern themselves with what is not their business, but they have no life because they have no obligations. It is frightful!!! I feel this more and more often."

### III

"Masha greatly alarms me. I love her very, very much," Tolstoy wrote in his diary on November 23, 1906. His favourite daughter had fallen ill with pneumonia. Confronted with this new danger, once again the family ranks closed.

Masha had achieved a singular position in the household. A "Tolstoyan" in the best sense of the word, she exerted a constructive influence on members of the family by her practical kind deeds and quiet, self-effacing efforts to live her beliefs, an influence denied her father with his dogmatic theorizing and spiritual self-concentration. Masha "served" in a practical sense. She soothed away family misunderstandings, tended the sick, defended those at fault, and won the affection and confidence of all, though her mother could never in her heart forgive her for espousing her father's beliefs. Not only the family, but most of the villagers, who were indebted to her for numerous kindnesses, loved Masha. Tolstoy early found in her a spiritual child, searching with him for the unattainable. Though their intimate communion had suffered because of her marriage, she had never lost her place as his chief confidant and comforter in the family. Awe before his genius had no place in her reverence for him. Her simple, sincere nature enveloped him in its affection and warmth as naturally as it did everyone. When he was troubled in mind and spirit, she would stroke his hand, caress him, say something endearing, and a happy smile would quickly brighten his face.

Now he sat in the sickroom, holding Masha's clammy hand as the dread disease took its course. He wept and kept murmuring to her: "Be patient." He kissed her hand and she drew it weakly to her breast and whispered, "I'm dying." Shortly after, she passed away (November 27, 1906).



Though the passing of no one in the family could have left Tolstoy with a greater sense of personal loss, Masha's going did not shake his conviction that death was an unfolding, the beginning of life. His attitude and comments about the event differ little from those at the time when he thought his wife was dying. "I did not experience either terror, or fear, or the consciousness that anything exceptional had taken place—not even pity or sorrow," he wrote in his diary the night that Masha died. "It seems that I rather felt it necessary to invoke in myself a particular feeling of tenderness and grief, and I did so; but in the depths of my heart, I was more serene than I would be if I were confronted by a bad or improper act of someone alien to me, not to speak of such an act of my own. Yes, this is an event in the bodily domain and therefore indifferent. I looked at her all the time that she was dying—surprisingly quietly. For me she was a being who had unfolded before my own unfolding. I watched this unfolding, and I rejoiced."

Obviously, Tolstoy's prolonged concentration on things of the spirit was making it difficult for him to contemplate life's deepest personal joys and sorrows in the ordinary terms of human experience. Nothing could provide a more striking contrast to his spiritualized reactions to Masha's death than those of Sonya in a letter to her sister about the event. After telling of the "polite notes of thanks" she had sent to friends who had aided, she launched forth on a long detailed description of her daughter's illness, death, and burial. There was no suggestion of the hysterical grief she had suffered at the time of Vanichka's death. She concluded prosaically: "Of all the children, Masha loved *him* [Tolstoy] more than all, and in her we lose that zealous supporter, who was always ready to help and to sympathize with everyone, and more so with that which concerned her father."

Death had lost all its terror for Tolstoy. It was natural and necessary, not an antithesis of life, but rather a continuation of it. What distressed him most was the transiency of people's feelings and their trivial, unthinking attitude before life's greatest mystery. He had continued the diary passage quoted above on Masha's death with much philosophizing on life and spiritual love, and then he ended: "In serious moments, as now, when there lies the still unburied body of a beloved person, how clearly apparent is the immorality, the fallibility, and burden of the life of the rich. The best remedy for grief is work. But they have no need to work; there is only gaiety. Yet gaiety is out of place and involuntarily takes on

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the aspect of false, sentimental twaddle. Just as I received some hypocritically sympathetic letters and telegrams, I met the idiot Kynya.<sup>1</sup> She knew Masha. I said:

“‘Have you heard of our affliction?’

“‘I’ve heard.’ And she immediately followed up with: ‘Give me a kopek.’ How much better and easier this is.”

### IV

The family griefs and quarrels of 1906 and also of 1907 must be viewed against the thunder-and-lightning background of national strife, for, as in the preceding two years, the tension that continued to exist everywhere was still reflected in the Tolstoy household. Though the revolution had been crushed, the government’s bungling attempts to introduce reforms merely succeeded in stirring up further social opposition without being able either to control or to satisfy it. The first Duma, elected in March 1906, was dissolved by the Tsar four months later, largely because he did not like its proposed solution of the agrarian problem. Disgruntled members of the defunct Duma showed their teeth to the government at this point by adopting a Tolstoyan policy, though from different motives: they issued an appeal to the people to resist the government by refusing to pay taxes or to submit to military conscription. Tolstoy would have predicted the utter failure that actually overtook this move, for the appeal was made on political, not on moral and religious grounds.

The life of the second Duma, which gathered in March 1907, was even shorter than that of the first. But now the new Prime Minister, P. A. Stolypin, had his own programme of agrarian reforms. It amounted to abolishing the age-old communal ownership of land and encouraging the peasants, with the aid of loans, to purchase individual farms. Stolypin’s hope was to set up a new class of small landowners to form the basis for a new state economy. The second Duma, with a larger left-wing element than the first, and one that was strongly influenced by Lenin’s political strategy, supported the agrarian bill introduced in the first Duma—the expropriation of nearly all the land in the interests of the peasants. The conflict between government and Duma became acute. Finally, on a trumped-up charge that a group of socialist deputies had organised a plot against the Tsar, the Duma was dissolved. The third Duma,

<sup>1</sup> A half-demented Yasnaya Polyana peasant.

elected in November 1907, on a modified electoral law that enabled the right wing to obtain a majority, gave Stolypin and the moderate parties complete control.

This struggle in high places had its counterpart in continued disturbances throughout the country, though there was little of the large-scale violence of the revolutionary years, 1905-1906. The peasants, who had been hard hit by the recently concluded Russo-Japanese War, were further impoverished by a severe drought in many regions. A famine condition existed in the Samara district. As in former years Tolstoy once again aided, this time by expending, through an agent, five thousand dollars placed at his disposal by the now thriving Dukhobors of Canada, who had not forgotten his help during their own sufferings. A widespread epidemic of thievery and thuggery broke out, and the revolutionists still kept up their activities with strikes and political assassinations. Stolypin's counter-measures were ruthless, and with a sinking heart Tolstoy daily read in the newspapers the mounting list of executions.

In various ways this misery and galloping unrest were brought home to him personally. Suspicious characters roamed about the neighbourhood of Yasnaya Polyana and robbery and several murders were committed. During his customary walks on the highroad, he talked with burning revolutionary zealots. One asked him for money to buy a revolver. Strange young men in workers' clothes sought him out and freely argued with him, using in hit-and-miss fashion such words as "proletariat," "exploitation of the masses," and "Social Democrat." To his earnest arguments one worker fearlessly replied: "Does the law of God say the proletariat is to be exploited? People used to think so, but now they know better, and it can't go on. . . ." In May 1907, he was shocked to learn that his engineer brother-in-law, V. A. Bers, had been murdered by terrorists in the course of a strike.

Each new levy of recruits for the army brought to Tolstoy reports of increasing numbers of conscientious objectors and sometimes personal pleas for aid in the often severe punishment meted out to these unfortunates. And he never failed them. In 1906 he wrote a supporting note, which was published, to a plea of his disciple, I. M. Tregubov, on behalf of those Christians who were persecuted by the government for refusing to serve in the army.<sup>1</sup> For a mere unknown youth, who had been denounced to the

<sup>1</sup>This piece, entitled "A Note to the Manifesto of I. M. Tregubov," was published in a Russian newspaper, 1906.

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authorities for calling the Tsar "a drunken fool," he drafted a petition requesting the monarch's pardon for the boy.

Such personal experiences and his observation of the state of affairs in the nation distressed Tolstoy more than the severer disturbances of the previous two years. He had hoped then that the flame of the revolution would consume all impurities in the Russian people and would light the way for a moral and spiritual rebirth. He recognized that there could be no life without sin, but he saw no logical reason why mankind should persist in sin. Even now the hope still persisted, for he wrote in English to his American disciple Crosby in April 1906:<sup>1</sup> "As to the disturbances that are going on now, they are only precursors of the great revolution which I hope will begin at once everywhere and will consist in the annihilation of state powers." In this spirit he had written a stirring article during the tortured years 1904-1905, with the added intention of directing the revolutionary forces towards the great good he championed.

Now, in retrospect, Tolstoy had begun to wonder whether he had not been wasting his time. The revolutionary flame was burning out and only the dross remained. He had no illusions about the power of his influence, for he was fully aware that many people regarded him as queer, as a strange kind of anarchist, and that it did little good to tell them that his anarchy consisted only in the application of true Christianity to the relations of people. And he was even less sanguine about how the future would regard him, for he prophetically wrote in his diary: "I know that these simple and clear truths about life which I now write will undoubtedly be defined by learned readers of the future as mysticism or even by some other title, thus enabling them, while not understanding these truths, to remain in their calm self-satisfied ignorance." In fact, he had once said in *War and Peace*, partly in jest, that the dissemination of books was the most powerful means of spreading ignorance, but now, on the basis of more extensive experience, he was coming to believe that it was a sad and terrible truth.

Radical intellectuals condemned Tolstoy's egoism in his recent writings. But he cared little for intellectuals and was ashamed to think that he was one of them. Tolstoy had faith in the common people of Russia, and it discouraged him to see how easily they succumbed to the blandishments of so-called reforms. Nearly

<sup>1</sup> Ernest Crosby died at the end of this year and Tolstoy paid him a glowing tribute.

everybody was talking about the Duma, and great things were expected from it. Tolstoy heard much about its activities from his son-in-law, M. S. Sukhotin, who was a delegate to the first Duma. Tolstoy's only regret was that the members were intelligent and educated. "It would be infinitely less of a sin if they had been stupid and illiterate." After all, the Duma was merely an imitation of Western European democratic institutions, and that would have been enough to damn it in his eyes. He was pleased to find this opinion shared by Morrison Davidson, an English social thinker with anarchist leanings whose books he had long admired. Davidson now wrote him of the faults of British and American parliamentary systems and added: "We, the people of Europe, expect from Russia at the present time not imitation, but guidance." Gratefully Tolstoy replied in English: "Your opinion of our Duma, is, I regret to say, quite true. I hope that the fallacy of all this will soon be clear to everybody, and that we Russians will travel another road." If the Russians were barbarians, as many in the West imagined, then they still had a future. But the people of the West, Tolstoy observed, were civilized barbarians and hence could expect no future.

Tolstoy told a correspondent that he found something comical about the Duma, as though the deputies were children playing at being grown-up. In their eagerness to copy European parliamentary practices, they took a naïve delight in speaking about their "lobbies" and "blocs." It all reminded him of provincial fashions in Russia. For when gowns and hats ceased to be worn in the capital, they were taken up by the provincial dames who imagined they were in the height of fashion. So the Duma, he said, was our provincial hat. The words of Herbert Spencer, he told the correspondent, applied precisely to the Russian deputies—all members of parliament stand lower than the average level of their own society; and yet they take upon themselves the problem of resolving the fate of a hundred million people. And in conclusion, he rapped out, the Duma was "abominable because of its coarseness, of the incorrectness of the motives it exhibited, because of its frightful bumptiousness, but chiefly because of its wrathfulness."

He realized that one of the most difficult things for man to do is to change his pattern of thought, especially when it has been sanctioned by time and experience. "It is a shame not to change it, because the very sense of life consists of a greater and greater understanding of oneself in the world." To this fact he attributed

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the unwillingness of people to contemplate the new idea that they could live without government, just as at one time people thought that they could not live without slaves. People in the government were always telling him how necessary and useful government was, just as the owners of pubs and keepers of brothels consider their establishments necessary.

In dismay Tolstoy watched while the revolution, instead of replacing a bad old idea with a good new one, strove merely to sugar-coat the old conception of governmental power with glittering promises. The reformers were beginning to loom in his eyes as a graver danger than the defenders of tsarist bureaucracy. Both sides justified the killing of each other in the struggle for power by the same argument—they killed for the common good. The fine-sounding words used by all the parties in opposition to the Tsar's rule—"freedom of the people," "democracy," and "constitution"—he set down as mere masks to conceal their own desire for power, and the consequence of such false intentions would be the struggle of all against all, the substitution of hatred for love, and the destruction of national morality.

### V

In the present struggle Tolstoy saw the dilemma of his country as an obligation to select one of two paths of social existence: either to limit the power of government by transferring more of it into the hands of the people, or to eliminate all power on the basis of the dominance of one religious-moral law in the hearts of people. His own choice was clear; it involved one of those new ideas which mankind found so difficult to accept in place of the old idea of rule that for centuries had dominated the mind. Though he was discouraged with his previous efforts, and somewhat sceptical of the value of the printed word, his conscience obliged him to continue to appeal to the people in another series of articles and pamphlets during 1906-1907. Perhaps he did this with greater hope now because of the partial relaxation of the censorship, a reform of the new government which was already making possible the printing of a number of his works hitherto banned in Russia. To be sure, one could never be certain to what extent these murderers of words would tolerate free expression, even under the new dispensation. In 1907 a publisher, N. E. Felten, was promptly jailed for printing Tolstoy's article "Do Not Kill,"

written in 1900. Indignant, Tolstoy retaliated by writing another article, "Do Not Kill Anyone," an elaboration of the same theme, but he managed to get it published only after the censors had considerably lacerated it.

During this period the three principal articles that deal in one form or another with Tolstoy's solution of the country's political dilemma are "A Letter to a Chinese"; "An Address to the Russian People: to the Government, to the Revolutionists, and to the Masses"; and "The Significance of the Russian Revolution."<sup>1</sup> The inspiration for the first article was two books sent to him by the Chinese writer Ku-Hung Ming.<sup>2</sup> Tolstoy's letter of acknowledgement turned into an epistolary article. He began by prophesying a great future for the peoples of the Eastern world, except the Japanese, whose imitation of Western civilization, he said, would bring about their undoing. "I think," he wrote, "that in our time a great revolution in the life of humanity will be accomplished, and in this revolution China ought to play a tremendous role at the head of the Eastern peoples." But he sternly warned them, in their reform movement, to avoid the present mistakes of Russia in trafficking with Western ideas of democracy as substitutes for despotic power. "Everything that the Western peoples do," he wrote, "can and ought to be an example for the peoples of the East, not as an example of what should be done, but of what ought not to be done in any circumstances. To pursue the path of the Western nations means to pursue a direct path of destruction." And he concluded by suggesting to the Chinese his own panacea of civil disobedience and non-violence in the spirit of their revered religious teachers, Confucius, Buddha, and Lao-Tse.

Tolstoy's "Address to the Russian People" contains nothing new, as he himself admitted. He had written it because he had felt "an obligation before God" to do so. It amounts again to calling down a plague on both the houses—the radical reformers and the constituted government—and to appealing to the masses to heed his own nostrums. The real interest of the article lies in the passages that he finally deleted. When he sent the first draft to Chertkov in England, this spiritual twin felt moved to reply with a sharp criticism, particularly of his handling of the revolutionary

<sup>1</sup> All three were written and published in Russia in 1906.

<sup>2</sup> The books were *The Moral Causes of the Russo-Japanese War* and *Papers from a Viceroy's Yamen*.

element. For some years Tolstoy had valued and often followed Chertkov's advice on his writings and frequently accepted his suggestions for changes. Now he stubbornly refused to delete offending passages, for his feeling about the violence of the revolutionists had reached a high pitch of indignation. He could not accept even the possibility that the motives of these men and women might be entirely selfless, and that they reluctantly engaged in violence in the sincere belief that it was the only means of achieving what they considered to be a lofty human goal.

It was not until Chertkov returned to Russia and talked the matter over with Tolstoy that he was able to persuade him to make the suggested changes, and in this revised form the article was finally published. But from all the variants which have recently appeared in print,<sup>1</sup> one can gather how severe had been the criticism of the revolutionists in the original article. He addressed the revolutionists in one of the variants as follows: "If you will only look within yourselves seriously and ask yourselves about the sincere inner motives that arouse you to this activity, you can hardly fail to see that these motives are either the most insignificant, trifling, vain, almost physiological—an idle life demands some display of activity—or they are the most low, disgusting motives: vanity, self-love, envy, even cupidity." And in another passage, questioning again the motives of the revolutionists, he wrote: "You say that you do all this for the sake of the masses. But truly you yourselves know that this is a lie, that your business is no concern of the masses. You do not know and do not love them." There is much more of this sort of harsh treatment in the variants, and enough of it was left in the printed version to arouse the revolutionists to furious anger against him.

"The Significance of the Russian Revolution," the most extensive of the three articles, is Tolstoy's last formal treatment of this theme, a final effort to point out clearly to mankind the two roads to the future from which it must choose—one leading to the destruction of civilization, the other to salvation on earth. Fully aware that despotism, like Russian autocracy, was bound sooner or later to give way before the progressive forces of the world, he now recognized as the principal danger to the world the democratic conception of government of Western Europe and America. Accordingly, much of the article is devoted to a destructive criticism of this form of government, in which he tried to prove

<sup>1</sup> See the Jubilee Edition, Vol. XXXVI.



that democracy would turn out to be more ruinous than Russian autocracy. Part of his argument was based on what he considered the fallacy of a concentration on industry and trade in the democracies at the expense of agriculture, which made these nations more and more dependent on outside sources for their chief means of subsistence. He next turned to his own people, whom he now, curiously enough, designated as "Eastern," and warned them of the pitfalls of Western democracy and of any form of governmental power. Stick to the land and avoid the industrial civilization of the West, he advised.

All this was to be accomplished by nonresistance to evil by force. In this article, however, Tolstoy attempted to meet the obvious practical objections to his doctrines. Will not the armed forces of the government kill people who passively resist it? Yes, some will suffer and die, he answered, but only a fraction compared to the millions killed in revolutions and wars. But if the protection of the government is removed, will there not be unbridled robbing and slaying? The government, with its courts, police, jails, and executions, does not restrain people from crime, he answered; rather, it increases crime by degrading the moral level of society. People by nature are good and law-abiding, and the moral consciousness of the majority expressed through social opinion will eventually prevent crime. Will all the advantages of civilization, industry, and science have to be abandoned if the nation becomes one primarily of agriculturalists? No, he answered, for all these advantages that are really essential and good for the people will be retained, but those that are harmful or superfluous will be abandoned. But if government is done away with, will there be no organization to take care of the common needs of any community? Nothing more, he replied, than would be necessary in taking care of the communal needs of a Russian village.

In conclusion, he pleaded with his readers not to imagine that he was offering them a utopia if they would only free themselves from the law of man. In life under the law of God, he wrote, people will not be "some new sort of beings—virtuous angels. People will remain exactly as they are now, with all their attributes, weaknesses, and passions; they will even sin, perhaps quarrel, commit adultery, walk off with property, and even murder, but all these things will be exceptions and not the rule as now. Their life will be entirely different by virtue of the one fact that they will not accept organized violence as a good and necessary condition of life; they will not be

brought up on the evil deeds of governments that are represented as good deeds."

## VI

The importance Tolstoy attached to agriculture as man's chief occupation and sacred duty is emphasized in "The Significance of the Russian Revolution." Now, when the Duma made the nation's agrarian problem its principal concern, he hastened to renew his appeal of previous years that Henry George's single-tax solution to the land question be seriously considered. At a newspaper interview in the summer of 1906, he gave the correspondent a brief prepared statement on the agrarian problem. This was subsequently published in the interview under the title, "The Only Possible Solution of the Land Question." And that year he wrote an introduction on the same theme for a Russian translation of Henry George's *Social Problems*.

Tolstoy, however, had little hope that the deputies of the Duma, these "children playing at being grown-up," would be influenced in any way by what he had printed on this vital problem. He boldly decided to appeal directly to the Prime Minister, whose father had been his comrade-in-arms at the siege of Sevastopol. On July 26, 1907, he wrote Stolypin a long letter, "not as the son of my friend, but as a brother, a human being. . . ." The direction of his appeal is interesting: he seemed to take the position of a person in the government confronted with the problem of how best to put an end to the violence of the revolution. "The reasons for these revolutionary horrors that are now taking place in Russia have very deep foundations, but one, the most pertinent of them, is the people's dissatisfaction with the unjust distribution of the land." He then went on to outline his proposal, suggesting that the Prime Minister acquaint himself with Henry George's works, and offering to send to him his friend, S. D. Nikolayev, foremost Russian expert on these matters, for consultation. Propose this solution to the Duma, he concluded, and the weight of your influence will carry it; "and thus the revolutionists will be deprived of one of their principal means for justly arousing the exasperation of the people."

Once again, Tolstoy was willing to compromise with the governmental power that he condemned in order to abolish private property in land and at the same time provide all the peasants with the possibility of cultivating as much land as they needed. The

Prime Minister did not answer. Tolstoy wrote again, this time to request Stolypin's aid on behalf of a man who had been imprisoned for distributing religious literature, but he took the occasion to express regret that his previous letter had gone unnoticed. When Stolypin did reply, it was a coldly polite refusal to accept the solution of Henry George. "Nature has placed in man certain innate instincts, such as the feeling of hunger, sex, etc., and one of the most powerful feelings of this kind is the feeling for property." And he hinted at his own solution of developing a class of small private landowners among the peasantry. Tolstoy answered, expressing his dismay over this solution which, he said, would destroy the village commune, the ancient basis of peasant life, and at the same time increase the element of violence that was rooted in private property in land. Stolypin's reaction was no more than he expected, he comforted himself, but in his heart he felt sad over this final failure to achieve a cherished ideal. His opinion of the Prime Minister's capacities had not been high; it now swiftly deteriorated, for he held him largely responsible for the many executions of the government's revolutionary enemies. Towards the end of his life Tolstoy was heard to remark in a private conversation: "That son-of-a-bitch Stolypin is in love with the gallows."

It never occurred to Tolstoy that in the realm of political and social thought life had outstripped him, and the wave of history had carried far beyond him. Politics, for example, which he loathed, and which his own generation mostly ignored, had become the passion of an aroused nation. It was a dirty but necessary business, in which the end justified the means. Born an aristocratic landowner, he had lived most of his life in a little village in the middle of Russia, isolated from the new developments and thoughts that were filling men's minds. His own class, and the peasantry among whom he lived, he understood from long experience, and with his rare powers of observation and psychological penetration he made scores of representatives of these classes live in his fiction with a wonderful truthfulness to life. And even in his controversial works, his arguments carry a convincing authenticity when based upon a knowledge of those layers of society with which he was entirely familiar.

But neither in his fiction nor in his controversial writings does Tolstoy evince any deep knowledge or understanding of the rising middle class and the proletariat which were beginning to dominate the future destiny of his country. Lenin put his finger on

precisely this fault in Tolstoy's relation to the revolutionary movement. How little he grasped the thought, temper, and desires of the young members of the proletariat who were to forge the successful revolution of 1917 is strikingly illustrated by an incident that took place in the summer of 1907. In a village near Yasnaya Polyana, he engaged in a discussion with several youths on the theme of how the workers might best free themselves. He first made the point that the workers had confirmed their own slavery by serving the rich and the government, and that they would free themselves only when they refused such servitude and lived according to the law of God, of love. Then he asked the lads:

"What do you think about the present position of Russia, that is, what we call the revolution? Do you expect success from it, and improvement in the situation of the people, and if you expect it, what will the improvement be?"

After some hesitation one of the youths answered:

"The eyes of all of us are fixed on the revolution and we expect success and improvement from it. This is the only way out. At least, such is my opinion."

Tolstoy objected that the violence of the revolutionists was no different from that of the government, to which the same lad replied:

"One must use a wedge to drive out a wedge."

Tolstoy maintained that such means would only serve to strengthen the government's hand, and that in the ensuing conflict many sins would be committed and much misery caused.

"Yes, but take the government, it doesn't own up to any sins," shot back one of the lads.

"The government is the most to blame," agreed Tolstoy, "because it accustoms the people to the idea that murder is possible. The people have learned from this: if the government murders, then we also may murder. The teachers are bad and the pupils do wrong to accept this kind of instruction."

"The people are taught by life, not by teachers," solemnly returned one of the youths, who seemed more revolutionary-minded. "Life's conditions force one to grab a revolver and shoot."

"No," objected Tolstoy, "people live together and unfailingly learn from the best, the wisest men who have bequeathed to us their precepts, and we must make use of them. What you call life is an animal existence. Human life is intelligent."

"The people will sooner accept revolutionary propaganda,"

replied the same youth, and with an ironical smile he added: "If I had money, then I would be one of your followers."

Restraining himself with an effort, Tolstoy quietly answered: "On the contrary, in the Gospel the opposite is said: the poor are blessed and the rich are unhappy."

"That's an old song!" the same youth protested with some heat. "The priests have been singing it to us for ages. We are being destroyed by pauperism and ignorance. Ignorance thrives on poverty."

An impasse had been reached. Tolstoy skilfully continued to emphasize the fallacy of believing that wealth has any connection with real happiness, and he tried to implant in the souls of these young men a sense of humility and a belief in service to others and in love for their neighbours. But they had experienced hunger, they had been kicked around, they had read revolutionary pamphlets, they knew what they wanted from life, and it had little relation to what Tolstoy wanted. Yet these were the youths who in ten short years would destroy the whole flimsy superstructure of the old Russia he knew and build on its foundations a new civilization. And they were fully aware then, in 1907, that you could not win a revolution on Tolstoy's slogan of "God's law, humility, and love," instead of *liberté, égalité, and fraternité*.

Like some sage whose wisdom is timeless, however, Tolstoy would have been no more convinced by the successes of the 1917 Russian Revolution than he had been by the accounts he had read of the French Revolution. He knew only that power corrupts and that this was just as true of a democracy or a socialist state as of an absolute monarchy. For him political progress could not be measured in terms of democratic or socialist progress, for he saw both the hypocrisy behind universal suffrage and the ever-present danger of power, even though held by the few elected by the many. His writings are full of prophecies of democratic and socialist states turning into monstrous dictatorships; of non-military democracies becoming powerful military states; of civilized countries championing fiendish theories of racial superiority; of all the wonderful advances of science being turned into frightful instruments of war to kill most expeditiously millions of peoples. All this, he foretold, will be achieved in the name of political, social, and scientific progress. And there will be no end of such "progress," he warned, while humanity continues to worship the law of man as higher than the law of God.

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There was strength in Tolstoy's unworldliness, for it enabled him to stand above the turmoil of everyday life and to reach beyond history, beyond time itself, to find a universal answer to the problem of living that would not be conditioned by materialistic factors of human existence. If this process had its limitations, he would have answered that God needs our limitations also. Towards the end of "The Significance of the Russian Revolution" he argued for his conception of progress:

Why presuppose that the progress, of which people are proud, will always be in increasing the population, in preserving life, and not in the moral perfecting of life; that it will always be in these pitiful mechanical inventions, thanks to which people will produce more and more unnecessary, harmful, and corrupting objects, and that it will not be in greater and greater unity of one another and in the subjugation of one's lusts which is so necessary for this unity; why not suppose that people will rejoice in and compete not for riches or luxury, but for simplicity, moderation, and kindness to one another? Why not think that people will see progress not in obtaining more and more, but in taking less and less from others and in giving more and more to others; not in increasing their own power, not in waging war more and more successfully, but in humbling themselves more and more and in living together more and more closely—people with people, nations with nations?

## VII

In 1906 Tolstoy remarked that he was becoming deaf and stupid from old age. That Easter he heard the bells of the village church, and he recalled that so he had heard them fifty years ago, only those who had rung them then were now old or dead. Youngsters had displaced them. Soon he too would be displaced. This year and next he had frequent periods of illness and he sadly observed that his memory was weakening. Old friends noticed an increasing gentleness and tenderness in his behaviour to all.

Despite his seventy-eight years, Tolstoy still began the day with a brief walk, and upon his return he met outside the house the usual petitioners, whose tales of woe always depressed him, and the beggars whom he could never pass without distributing copper coins. Usually, after going over his mail, he read the thoughts for that day set down in his *Circle of Reading*, and then retired to his study for work, during which time absolute quiet had to be preserved in the household. After lunch at two or three, he set out

for his long walk or ride on horseback. Sonya, now always fearful about his health, usually asked where he was going, a question that annoyed him since he never knew where he was going. He finally compromised by allowing a servant or secretary to follow some paces behind, for on these walks or rides he wished to be alone to concentrate on ideas, on characters and images for his writing. He carried in his pocket a notebook for such jottings. This daily routine, however, was frequently interrupted by visitors who now taxed his waning strength. They were particularly numerous over 1907, and he regretted, as he put it, that visiting him seemed to have become a fashion. They ranged from the Japanese writer Kenjiro Tokutomi and sundry Americans, including Stephen Bonsal of the *New York Times*, to throngs of Russians of all political and religious beliefs, of whom one was a mad student firmly convinced that he was Christ and Tolstoy God.

At the end of 1906 and during part of 1907 Tolstoy took up again an occupation that had absorbed him more than forty years before—the teaching of children. The practice began gradually, growing out of conversations on various matters with Dorik Sukhotin, the stepson of his daughter Tanya, and with little peasant boys from the village who came to borrow books or just to chat. Soon a class was formed, then two classes, according to age, and regular sessions were held in the library after dinner.

Though Tolstoy's ideas on how children should be taught had not changed much in all these years, he had a different conception of subject matter. The chief thing, he felt now, was not the three R's, but religious and moral education. "This is my university," he remarked about his classes to M. A. Stakhovich. "I simply expound to them, as I understand it, the law of God. And how difficult this is!" He took the teaching very seriously, prepared his lessons beforehand, and the reactions of his young students were always his chief criteria of success, which he duly noted in his diary. With the deft hand of an old master, he avoided dull theology and taught the story of Christ through simple appealing narratives that he made up. Nor did he restrict himself to the Bible. His aim was to teach these youngsters moral behaviour and the rules of right living, and he ransacked his mind and printed material for effective illustrations. He might retell the story of the temptation of Christ or how the former family servant Gasha showed her pity for dogs, cats, mice, and cockroaches.

The class of ten or twelve children would gather, their eyes

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merry, their laughing voices sounding gaily through the house. The kindly smiling face of the silvery-haired master of seventy-nine responded to their merriment. After the lesson was read, a warm discussion took place on the meaning of the story. Questions and answers flew back and forth, and when everybody got to talking at once the teacher beamed his satisfaction. When he failed to stimulate such general interest, he blamed himself. Out of these lessons came his work, *The Teaching of Christ Told for Children*.<sup>1</sup>

Tolstoy derived satisfaction from his teaching. He wrote in his diary at this time: "Only old people and children, free from sexual lusts, live a true life. The rest are only a factory of the continuation of animals. That is why debauchery is so repulsive in old people and children. Yet people think that all poetry may be found only in sexual life. All true poetry is always outside it." His wife, however, did not see things this way. She looked upon his teaching children as just another new hobby and crossly observed: "He drills some Christian truths into youngsters' heads. They repeat them by heart, like parrots, and he feels assured that something will remain in their heads." And on one occasion when he was delightedly commenting on the children's progress to members of the family, Sonya testily interrupted: "It won't make any difference, they will grow up drunkards and thieves anyway." Tolstoy fell silent.

On the whole, Tolstoy had grown used to schoolchildren. They came from far and near, many perhaps for no better reason than that of the girl, a gold-medal student, whose proud father had offered her the choice of a bicycle, a watch, or a trip to see Tolstoy. These shy young visitors, who came individually or in small groups, were a contrast to his own merry and familiar Yasnaya Polyana students. They stood around awkwardly, in embarrassed silence, and their gaping parents or teachers looked as though they expected their charges to be infected with wisdom before their very eyes by being exposed to the great man. In the summer of 1907 some 850 boys and girls from Tula, in the care of teachers, descended upon Yasnaya Polyana, an excursion that had received Tolstoy's permission. He and his family and guests greeted the children warmly. The boys were taken to bathe in the Voronka, while Tolstoy anxiously watched along the bank for fear of accident.

<sup>1</sup> Published in 1908. Other pieces written at this time, such as "Believe Yourself," "Conversations with Children on Moral Questions," and several tales are connected with Tolstoy's interest in teaching children.



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He helped the smallest with their dressing, showed them gymnastic exercises, and soon had them all at their ease. Later Sonya supervised the girls while they bathed. Refreshments were served, games were played, and upon departing the children lustily cheered their hosts.

Tolstoy's teaching and close association with children in 1907 prompted the idea of compiling a "Children's Cycle of Reading." Though he did much work for this, he finally decided to merge the material with a new edition of the *Circle of Reading*. Two volumes had appeared in 1906-1907. Apart from the other writings mentioned during this period, much of his time was spent on this compilation, for he had enlarged the design so that the selections would mirror his philosophy of life. Besides the more difficult task of choosing the great thoughts to conform to his new plan, he busied himself with writing brief introductions on many of the authors of the passages, and he also composed for it a number of moral tales illustrating the various themes.<sup>1</sup> The more he worked on this compilation the more significance it took on in his eyes, and he finally drafted a brief introduction for it, in which he tried to explain systematically his whole outlook on life. Over the next three years, according to his secretary, he recast this introduction more than a hundred times.

### VIII

The news that most excited Tolstoy in the summer of 1907 was that Chertkov planned to spend a couple of months in the neighbourhood of Yasnaya Polyana. Savé for two brief visits, Chertkov had remained in England to take care of his publishing and other business since receiving permission to return to Russia. He now felt it necessary to be close to his spiritual father for a longer period of time and made arrangements to rent a house for the summer near Yassenki, a village about three miles from Yasnaya Polyana.

Since his daughter Masha's death and the family's increased hostility to his views, Tolstoy, in his spiritual loneliness, tended to turn more and more to the masterful comfort of Chertkov. Though perhaps inevitable in the circumstances, it was a fatal

<sup>1</sup> Some of the better known tales that he included in this work, which finally appeared under the title, *For Every Day*, are "Divine and Human"; "Prayer"; "Kornei Vasilyev"; "Father Vasili"; "For What?" and "Strawberries."

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tendency for all concerned, except Chertkov. For this huge, handsome man with the suffering eyes of a saint and the iron will and temperament of a Savonarola had the habit of quarrelling with those whom he could not dominate and of absorbing utterly those who submitted to his powerful personality. Few were more capable of unintentional wrong in the name of righteousness. Friendship with Tolstoy had been his life's work, and Tolstoy was perhaps inclined to exaggerate in generous fashion the sacrifices Chertkov had made for his sake—a rich Court life, exile, and unstinting labour over the publication of his writings. In the long history of their relationship, one can observe the slow but steady growth of the influence of the pupil on the master in material matters if not in spiritual doctrine.

The previous year, for example, Tolstoy's Slovak disciple, Albert Shkarvan, had translated into German some new tales of Tolstoy. He promptly received a letter from Chertkov to the effect that he had no authority to publish the stories since he, Chertkov, had sold the first translation rights to the English firm, William Heinemann. Shkarvan appealed to Tolstoy, who regretfully but firmly informed him that he had given Chertkov exclusive permission to arrange these matters and hence he could not interfere. Chertkov apparently used the profits of such enterprises to finance his own publishing ventures, which enabled him to print Tolstoy's works free.

When Tolstoy received a telegram announcing the arrival of Chertkov, his wife and son, he was agitated to tears and rode horseback to Tula to meet them. They remained at Yasnaya Polyana until their own house was put in order.

It had been a long time since so much "Tolstoyan" atmosphere hung over the neighbourhood. Besides the Chertkovs, sympathizers or fervent followers such as Goldenweizer, Gorbunov-Posadov, director of the *Intermediary*, and the Henry George specialist Nikolayev settled down for the summer in houses near by. Visits were exchanged between Tolstoy and Chertkov nearly every day. There were long serious discussions on doctrine and publications. Tolstoy inspected the prodigious and still growing manuscript of the "Vault" of his thoughts that Chertkov had been compiling for years, and tears came to his eyes as he viewed this huge labour of love. The devoted friends had a spiritual feast, and frequent were the notations on "joyous meetings with Chertkov" in Tolstoy's diary.

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As was his custom, Chertkov gathered around him a following of young novices at Yassenki, and the master and his star pupil held forth to them on the faith. One of these youths, N. N. Gusev, who was to become a distinguished scholar on Tolstoy's life and works, was hardly a Tolstoyan novice. He had become a devoted follower several years before and had already met and recommended himself to the attention of Tolstoy. Before Chertkov departed that summer, he persuaded Tolstoy to accept Gusev's services as a secretary, which would also allow him to keep a doctrinal eye on the Yassenki peasants whom the zealous Chertkov had already proselyted. Tolstoy agreed, but the young secretary had hardly worked a month when he was arrested, having been denounced for his propaganda work among the peasants. The incident distressed Tolstoy, who felt himself to blame. He visited Gusev in prison, brought him warm clothes, food, and money, and after strenuous efforts with the authorities he procured his release. Gusev continued his task as secretary and proved an invaluable assistant and recorder of life at Yasnaya Polyana.

This wonderful summer of faithful followers and spiritual communion came to an end. Chertkov left on September 15 to return to England. Tolstoy's daughter Alexandra, his remaining sympathizer in the family circle, was also away at this time. He felt lonely. "I am very sad without Chertkov and Sasha," he wrote in his diary. But the next day his spirits rose. He had received a "joyous letter" from Chertkov, in which that careful man wrote of their "joyous communion" that summer, and signed himself, "loving you so that, if I could love everybody in this fashion, it would be a paradise on earth for me."

### IX

Yasnaya Polyana had been no "paradise on earth" for Sonya that summer. The "dark people" seemed to have taken over the estate and she resented them more than ever. She could not fail to notice her husband's changed disposition and new interest in life when surrounded by his followers, as though he had been starved for their kind of Tolstoyan affection and activity. Nor could she fail to notice and be jealous of these almost daily visits to Chertkov by a husband who seemed to have so little time to spare for her.

Sonya resented Chertkov's attitude toward her husband and his assumption of privileges, such as interrupting Tolstoy in his study,

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which not even members of the family dared to do. In fact, Chertkov's whole behaviour was arousing her suspicions of his ulterior motives. Their ancient quarrel over the publishing rights of her husband's works still smouldered, and she suspected that Chertkov was trying to procure for his own future private use all the manuscripts of Tolstoy that he could lay his hands on. In April of 1907 she wrote him a sharp note to ask if he did not have in his possession certain diaries of her husband that had disappeared from Yasnaya Polyana. This action irritated Tolstoy, who was finding it increasingly difficult to keep peace between Chertkov and Sonya.

Nor was this the only situation that now arose to disturb Tolstoy's peace of mind. The storm clouds of family dissension that had been dissipated by Masha's death gathered again during the latter half of 1907. In vain he recalled the excesses of his own youth in an effort to temper his severe judgement of those of his sons. Yet he now found it difficult to understand or accept the behaviour of Andrei, who, having abandoned his wife and two children, ran off with the wife of the governor of Tula, the mother of six children. The governor resigned and appealed to the agitated Tolstoy for his help. Though he pleaded with the lovers, Andrei persisted and finally married the woman. And now Leo culminated a long period of what Tolstoy frankly described as "envy of me, leading to hatred," by publishing an article, "Negation or Self-protection?" which fiercely attacked his father's views. Taking the position of defender of the monarchy and the social system under it, he condemned his father as an enemy of the government and organized society, a "baneful influence on Russia," and as the person largely responsible for the revolutionary fervour throughout the nation. Though Tolstoy called upon all his spiritual resources to quell the anger that stirred in him, he could not forbear applying to Leo the scathing epithet *chernosotenets*—that is, a man belonging to or sharing the reactionary views of the Black Hundred, the secret organizers of pogroms and repressions in the interests of the Tsar's government.

At the beginning of the fall the storm clouds broke in fury. For some time tension had been growing between the Yasnaya Polyana peasants and the stewards of the estate. In order to increase profits, the stewards had raised the peasants' rent, fined them heavily for spoiled crops, and impounded their animals for wandering in the estate gardens. One night in early September a caretaker surprised several peasants attempting to steal cabbages from the Tolstoy

garden. Some shots were fired, whether by the peasants or the caretaker was not definitely proved. This incident, along with other misdeeds of the peasants, prompted Sonya, with the support of Andrei, to appeal to the governor of Tula for protection. The authorities, only too happy to render such assistance in this particular instance, promptly arrived, investigated, arrested several peasants, and left two armed policemen on the estate to keep order.

A report of the affair got out to the public. Newspapers printed sensational accounts under such headlines as "Home of L. N. Tolstoy Attacked!" And conservative and religious periodicals ran articles, in which they maliciously pointed out that the great teacher of nonresistance to evil by force had cried to the police for help the moment his own skin was in danger.

Tolstoy cared little for the ridicule of the newspapers—he had long since got used to it—but he was profoundly disturbed over Sonya's action and the arrest of the peasants. Their parents pleaded with him to intercede. "They cannot admit," he wrote in his diary, "that I, especially since I live with her, am not the owner, and therefore all blame me. This is grievous, very much so, but also good, for by making it impossible for people to have a fine opinion about me, it will drive me into that region where the opinion of people carries no weight. These last couple of days I have been unable to overcome a bad feeling." He had moments, however, when he thought of leaving for the estate of his daughter Tanya.

In the end Tolstoy did take the part of the peasants and wrote the governor, requesting their release. That official refused, expressing surprise at such a request since he had the letter of Tolstoy's wife asking him to protect the estate from the depredations of the peasants. Unpleasant conversations with Sonya followed. He wanted her to have the police guard removed, for it distressed him to have armed men around, threatening the peasants and demanding passports from anyone who entered the grounds of the estate. When he protested to them because of their behaviour, they answered offensively and indicated that he was interfering with their duties. He replied: "It would be fine to die. No letters, no petitioners, no policemen." The guards stayed. And to make matters worse, shortly after this Sonya had several more peasants arrested for stealing lumber, a charge she could not prove.

In the family only Alexandra sympathized with his suffering over this situation. She argued with her mother and Andrei about

the guards. "Must papa be watched over by guards?" she demanded. "How distressing it is for him! If it were not for papa, I would leave right now."

The skirmishing that had been going on in the family for years on this question of property was now ended and the lines had been formed for the final battle. Tolstoy believed that property was the root of all evil, and it had now become the chief evil in his relations with his family. His position was anomalous. He had legally signed away all his rights to his estate to the family and had publicly renounced the copyrights of his works. Yet old Yasnaya Polyana peasants, whom he had known as boys, often took him to task for not giving away his land; disciples sometimes reproached him for continuing to live on a wealthy estate when he had repudiated property; and there was constant bickering going on over the rights to his books.

Tolstoy realized that his anomalous position had resulted from the compromises he had made with his own convictions. There were two reasons why he had remained on his estate. He had always nourished the hope that his family, and particularly his wife, would finally accept his views, divide the estate among the peasants, and live on it on equal terms with them. He had entirely failed in this. If anything, the family had become more hostile to his views as the years went on. This failure he blamed on himself for living the life of a Pharisee, as he expressed it, and not fulfilling his own teaching. The other reason was that, however severe the trials he had to endure from them, he considered it his duty to remain with his family. Anything else would be an evasion of this duty, an attempt to follow the line of least spiritual resistance.

When V. A. Sheerman, a man sympathetic to Tolstoy's beliefs, gave away his huge estate in 1906 to the peasants and offered to live on it simply as one of them, Tolstoy applauded his act. Yet when a Tolstoyan, who found life difficult in his own village, wished to leave it and join the fortunate peasants on Sheerman's estate, Tolstoy said to him: "It is very improper for me to speak about myself, but I will say it anyway. The life I lead is a hundred thousand times more offensive to me than yours is to you, but I cannot desert it." Gusev reports him as declaring at this time: "I ought to have gone into a monastery. In truth, if I had had no wife, I would have entered a monastery."

No doubt the accumulation of vexations, and the harassment of family quarrels over the question of property during 1907, prompted

Tolstoy to make a public statement. He wanted to put an end to the interminable requests he received from all over the world for gifts of money. Though he had publicly renounced all property and income, hardly a day passed that he was not asked for financial aid from mere pittance to amounts running into thousands of rubles. Behind his attempt to stop this practice was the larger purpose of restating to the public his personal position with reference to the whole question of property. He sent to the newspapers, where it was widely publicized, the following letter: "More than 20 years ago, because of certain personal considerations, I renounced the possession of property. Real estate belonging to me I transferred to my heirs, just as though I had died. I also renounced property rights in my productions, and those written after 1881 became public property." He then added that he sometimes received money from abroad and from people in Russia for charitable purposes, and this he distributed to the poor, as the need arose, to the best of his ability." And after requesting people not to turn to him for material aid, he concluded: "I less than anyone am able to fulfil such requests, for if I have really acted as I here testify, i.e., I have ceased to possess property, then I cannot help with money those who appeal to me. If, however, I am deceiving people in saying that I have repudiated property and really possess it, then it is even less likely that they should expect aid from such a person."

Public reaction to this attempt to clarify his position was hardly an anodyne to his painful feelings on the subject. He received malicious and ridiculing letters. From Moscow one person wrote: "Count, you write in the *Moscow Journal* that you have died, and like a corpse you have nothing. But when you print new productions do you receive an honorarium? You ought not to since you are dead; and how awkward it is for the Countess to fleece a corpse (she thoroughly flayed you when alive) of the money, which according to your will, should certainly go to the poor. This is the voice of very, very many." Newspaper reactions were equally scurrilous, playing largely on the theme: Was the great man being simply naïve or hypocritical? One newspaper ran a caricature under the description: "The honoured Tit Titych, having read L. N. Tolstoy's recent letter, immediately declared himself a Tolstoyan." The drawing depicts a fat muzhik with a face similar to Tolstoy's. He sits at a table and firmly grasps a bowl with fruit, various viands, and a bottle with a printed label: "Pigeon's Milk." On the

bowl, chair, table, and nearly every object in the drawing, is the sign: "Property of My Wife." And around the table press famished, skeleton-like creatures.

Tolstoy had made his point at the expense of public ridicule. In some respects the effort was intended as much for his wife and sons as for the public. In the diary where, as he said, he conversed with his soul, he wrote shortly before he sent this letter to the newspapers: "More and more I suffer almost physically from inequality—from the wealth and luxury of our life in the midst of beggary. And I cannot lessen this inequality. In this is the secret tragedy of my life."

Yet Sonya, when her husband had renounced his estate, had assumed all the responsibility for it in the interests of the family. But the more faithfully she tried to fulfil her duties in this respect, the wider grew the rift between her and her husband. What was she to do? Only that which duty obliged her to do—fulfil her responsibilities to herself and family. They had been the responsibilities of her whole married life. She had not changed. Only her husband had changed, and because of it she seemed to him always at fault. Yet every new resolute step she took to resolve the problems of the family's existence caused him moral suffering, undermined her own spiritual equilibrium, and served to aggravate her tendency to hysteria.



## Chapter XXXVIII

### THE JUBILEE YEAR

**T**HE COMPANY sat chatting around the tea table at Yasnaya Polyana. It was the evening of New Year's Day, 1908. Tolstoy finally got up to retire to his study. He lingered for a few more words of conversation. Guests and members of the family surrounded him in a half circle. A twinkle came into his eye.

"Well, let's have a song. What do you say?"

Andrei led off with a folk melody that delighted his father. All joined hands, united in the spirit of jollity and comradeship that Tolstoy naturally inspired. No consecration to a religious doctrine could destroy his love of life and people. If he now yearned, like some old Buddhist, for an ascetic existence in his declining years, it was a wish alien to his instinctive fondness for communion with people.

Yet in the ceaseless struggle between the spiritual and the earthly, between good and evil, Tolstoy was approaching the ideal of perfection which he knew could never be achieved. He dreamed that he had written a drama about Christ, and he imagined himself taking the various parts, including that of the Saviour—the absolutely good man. "For the first time, and with an unusual new clarity, I was conscious of my own spirituality," he wrote in his diary in January. He distinctly felt that the centre of gravity of his life was moving away from the corporeal into the region of the spirit. Though he wished to free himself from the body, as he philosophically expressed it, he did not hanker after the disembodied condition of the hero of a tale that he had read. So far removed from everything material had the hero become that he failed to recognize his wife and at moments was uncertain of his own earthly existence. Yet Tolstoy did tell his wife at this time that the first concern in life must be for the things of the soul, "and if household duties interfere with that, then damn household duties."

There was little likelihood that Sonya would slight her household duties for anything so insubstantial as "things of the soul." She did admit this year, however, that a remarkable change had come over her husband. "It is noticeable," she wrote in her diary, "that the spiritual life predominates" in him, and though he still likes to ride, enjoys tasty food and plays cards and chess, "yet his body lives a separate existence, and his spirit remains indifferent to earthly life, somewhere aloft, more independent of the body." And she sadly added that "something new, strange, and far away is being experienced by Leo Nikolayevich, and I'm often unbearably grieved and sorry over the loss of something in him, in his life, and in his relations to me and to everything surrounding him."

Emotionally hypersensitive, Tolstoy fought the anger that arose in him because of frequent daily annoyances. "Rejoice when they scold and revile you," he kept telling himself. If he did not exactly achieve perfection in this Christlike behaviour pattern, he had by now learned to turn the other cheek with extraordinary docility for a man of his temperament. Each such action he reckoned a victory for the spirit. "Though your Christianity is higher than that of the priests, yet it is a lie," screamed a blind peasant who made periodic trips to Yasnaya Polyana to roast Tolstoy. "Your disciples are bandits and you are the chief of the bandits. They are all scoundrels and you are the first among them!" Tolstoy stood in the rain, humbly, quietly trying to reason with him until Sonya ordered the offender to be off.

Such encounters were not uncommon, but always Tolstoy tried to preserve an attitude of loving humility towards those who abused or hated him. Even when passing some mild stricture on a person's behaviour, he usually prefaced it by declaring that he had no right to judge. When his old friend and former sympathizer, the writer M. O. Menshikov, published two scathing articles on Tolstoy, even going so far as to accuse him in print of hypocrisy, the infuriated Sonya wrote a stinging reply. Tolstoy answered with a letter of love, expressing the hope that it would inspire a similar feeling in Menshikov. To the scolding, often vituperative, letters he received—and there were many—he now replied in this same spirit of meekness. Those that most tried his patience were letters from religious people who fiercely condemned his beliefs with no apparent understanding of them. An enraged member of the Old Believers, a woman, wrote to curse his works and to express an

obviously sincere desire to shoot him and execute all his followers, if it were only in her power to do so. In his answer, he told of his "great delight" in hearing from her, for as a religious woman he felt that a spiritual communion between them was possible. But he ended with a mild rebuke: "You seem to think that you and those who taught you are the only people who know the truth and that all the rest are lost. I do not think I am the only person who knows the truth and that everyone else is in darkness. I am eighty years old and I am still searching for truth. Your teachers have led you into the sin of pride and condemnation. Every man in the depths of his soul has something he alone comprehends, namely his attitude towards God. And this sphere is sacred. We must not attempt to invade it or to imagine that we know all that lies hidden in its depths."

These remarks were characteristic of both Tolstoy's humility, achieved with so much difficulty, and his final attitude towards the religious beliefs of others. Turning the other cheek was not instinctive in a nature essentially proud and aristocratic, and in this practice he feared above all to appear either ridiculous or insincere. Out of the same wise humility came a still greater degree of tolerance for the religious convictions of others. He wrote in his diary in February: "One cannot suggest or convey to another a religious creed. Each has his own. If each did not have his own special kind, then there would be no reason for each person to exist. One can give only the materials out of which one's own conception of the world is formed, and the individual himself will take from these only what he needs." Nor did he escape moments of doubt in his convictions after all these years of striving for a faith he could accept, for we now find him freely confessing in his diary: "This morning while lying in bed I experienced what I have not experienced for a long time—a feeling of doubt in everything. But in the last analysis one thing however remains: good, love—that goodness which no one can take away."

In March Tolstoy had just finished translating a tale of Victor Hugo and was walking about the room when his secretary suddenly saw him slipping to the floor. After he revived, his memory completely failed him. All was jumbled in his mind—relatives, friends, the names of well-known places. Though this soon passed, leaving him simply in a weakened condition, his remarkable memory began to give evidence of slow deterioration. This was the first of recurring fainting spells.

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In his poor state of health, Tolstoy was now glad to avail himself, as a time-saver in the ever-increasing stream of correspondence, of a dictaphone, one of the marvels of that science he so often ridiculed for producing superfluous mechanisms. The previous year, Stephen Bonsal of the *New York Times* on his visit to Tolstoy had kindly offered to have a dictaphone sent to him. Thomas Edison, whom Tolstoy had once slightly referred to in an article because of a statement attributed to him that he would invent projectiles that would kill more people in an hour than Attila had slain in all his wars, willingly agreed to make him a present of one. It was perhaps good advertising. After all, Tolstoy probably had the largest personal mail of any man in the world.

The machine finally arrived at Yasnaya Polyana. Tolstoy hastened to try it out. At the end of the first letter he was in a state of exhaustion. "Oh, I'm so tired!" he told his daughter Alexandra. "I don't see how people can use this thing! It's all very well for the well-balanced Americans, perhaps, but for us Russians it's no good." Yet he soon learned to use it with comfort and appreciated the immense saving in time.

Some months after the arrival of the dictaphone, Tolstoy received a letter from Edison, containing a characteristic request of an American businessman. "Can I prevail upon you," Edison wrote in part, "to make for me one or two phonograph records in English or French, preferably both, of short messages not longer than four minutes in duration, conveying to the people of the world some thoughts that would tend to their moral and social advancement? My phonographs have now been distributed throughout all of the civilized countries, and in the United States alone upwards of one million are in use. Your fame is world-wide, and I am sure that a message from you would be eagerly received by millions of people who could not help from being impressed with the intimate personality of your own words, which through this medium would be preserved for all time."

The grateful Tolstoy willingly complied. For several days before the arrival of two Englishmen with a special recording apparatus, he was agitated over the anticipated performance. The French piece, which he composed specially for the occasion, went off well, but he stumbled over several words of the English reading—a selection from *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*.<sup>1</sup> On a second

<sup>1</sup> Another account describes the English piece as a selection from Tolstoy's work *On Life*.

try he succeeded to the satisfaction of all. He asked the technicians many questions about Edison and rejoiced to learn, so the account runs, that he had been a vegetarian for thirty years.<sup>1</sup>

So accustomed did Tolstoy become to the dictaphone that he began to use it in his literary work, which was a blessing for those who had had the task of copying the barely decipherable first drafts of his manuscripts. The well of creative literature, however, was at last drying up. Various designs for stories and dramas still continued to flash through his mind, but, with few exceptions, the urge to employ his pen in the interests of his religious and moral beliefs predominated. Nor did he see much hope in contemporary literature, either native or foreign. Its decadence, he declared, was a natural resultant of the decadence of modern civilization.

But a contemporary writer who proved a mixed blessing to Tolstoy at this time was George Bernard Shaw, who had sent him some of his works<sup>2</sup> and even marked the passages on which he desired his reactions. Shaw's previous criticism of Tolstoy's study of Shakespeare had revealed both similarities and the differences in the thinking of the two men. While he admired Shaw's great talents, Tolstoy decided, using a line from *Man and Superman*, that "he has got more brains than is good for him." He did not relish the serious business of life flavoured with the salt and pepper of Shavian wit, and he now wrote a letter to tell him, among other things: "Dear Mr. Shaw, life is a great and serious business, and all of us, in the brief interval allotted us, must try to find our own appointed destiny and to fulfil it as best we can. This applies to all people and especially to you with your great gift of original thought and your penetration into the essence of every question." In his diary, he was much less polite: "I read Shaw. His triviality is astounding. Not only is he devoid of a single thought of his own that elevates him above the banality of the city mob, but he does not understand a single great thought of the thinkers of the past. His whole attraction rests in the fact that he is able to express artistically the most stale trivialities in a most perverted modern way, as though he were saying something his own, something novel. His chief characteristic is this—a tremendous self-confidence equalled only by his complete philosophical ignorance."

<sup>1</sup> Later, through Chertkov, Tolstoy requested Edison to employ in his factory a young Russian who had been stranded in America and had appealed to him for aid.

<sup>2</sup> Among the works of Shaw that Tolstoy read were *Man and Superman*, *John Bull's Other Island*, *Major Barbara*, and *The Impossibilities of Anarchism*.

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A literary giant of the past, Tolstoy now looked back to the old writers with nostalgia whenever contemplating the new. He still fully agreed, he told Goldenweizer, with his own ideas about art that he had written years ago. Everywhere he saw the commercial instinct dominating modern writers. "He lives by literature," he severely said of one of them. "And this, in my opinion, is like prostitution."

### II

Tolstoy's efforts at spiritual concentration were somehow incompatible with the activities of the Russian government; the humility he felt towards his personal detractors he could not apply to the enemies of the people. By 1908 the Stolypin forces, apparently fully entrenched in power, felt safe in reverting to many of the repressive measures practised before the revolution. The civil liberties promised the people were now curtailed, and any infringement of law and order was punished, often with severity. Opposition was outlawed, and it seemed that the radicals' distrust of the liberal promises of the Tsar's government had been fully justified.

Tolstoy now became a special object of attack by reactionary authorities who once again felt secure in their power. Still afraid to strike a person of his international renown, they continued their old policy of wounding him by striking at his followers and all who deliberately or unwittingly furthered his beliefs. Those caught publishing, possessing, lending, or distributing his anti-government or anti-military works were prosecuted. As always, nothing could be calculated to wound him more deeply, and each such case threw him into a turmoil of moral agitation. He wrote again and again to government officials and influential friends to ask their assistance for these victims. Driven to extremes, he threatened, in the case of one of his disciples, V. A. Molochnikov, arrested for distributing his works, to attend the trial at Petersburg and plead the prisoner's cause. A legal friend advised against such a procedure. Then he wrote a public letter, followed by an article, in which he demanded that the authorities punish him instead, the real culprit, as the author of the works in question. Nothing availed; Molochnikov was sentenced to a year in jail. And others were similarly treated, despite all his protests.

Those final acts of violence—executions—distressed Tolstoy even more. With moral horror he continued to follow the brief accounts in the daily press. "Merely to think of what is now

happening throughout Russia!" he said to Goldenweizer with a sigh. "My God, my God, these executions, these prisons, these jails, these exiles! And they imagine that they will improve something or other!"

"Today, May 9," Tolstoy read in a newspaper, "on the Strebitski field at Kherson, twenty peasants<sup>1</sup> were executed by hanging for a bandit attack on the estate of a landowner in the Elizavetgrad district." He remarked in a shocked tone to his secretary Gusev: "There it is. Yes, how well we have arranged life. I would have been convinced that there did not exist in Russia a man so cruel as to kill 20 people. But here it is done unnoticed: one subscribes, another reads, this wretched executioner hangs."

This was more than Tolstoy could bear. The thoughtless revolutionists had been objectionable to him, he said, but they now seemed holy in comparison to these official government murderers. For some time he had been considering writing on the subject and had started collecting material; the hanging of the peasants now inspired him to immediate action. He began his famous article, *I Cannot Be Silent*. A weight fell from his shoulders as he set to work. The self-assurance and satisfaction of an effective participant in a noble cause took possession of him. He gathered information from legal friends and read accounts of executions, such as the recently published book, *Russian Women on the Scaffold*. As his stormy emotions took compelling shape on paper he became tearfully happy. Perhaps with his tongue in his cheek he remarked that if Sonya had been a revolutionist—no doubt he had in mind the account he had just read of Sofya Perovski, who had been executed for her part in the assassination of Alexander II—"she would have been a terrific revolutionist. For this business a certain narrowness and terrible energy are needed which women customarily direct into motherhood." In a little more than two weeks he finished *I Cannot Be Silent* and sent it off to Chertkov with the plea that it be published at once.

On July 3 several leading Russian newspapers dared to print selections from the article, and for weeks it continued to appear in fragmentary form in the provincial press. At Tula a complete version was issued by an illegal press. Owners of nearly all the newspapers that handled the article in any form were either fined or imprisoned. Abroad, it appeared in translation in hundreds of newspapers and periodicals in various countries.

<sup>1</sup> It later turned out that twelve were executed.

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The immediacy of the theme and the emotional intensity and high seriousness with which it was handled contributed to the tremendous success of *I Cannot Be Silent*. Tolstoy's great literary talent, his sense of drama, of vivid description, of human psychology, made doubly impressive this anguished outcry against man's inhumanity. He struck a note that won a response from all thinking people. The crimes of the revolutionists are terrible, he declared, but they do not compare with the criminality and stupidity of the legalized violence of the government. The delusion, however, is the same on both sides. And the excuse, he added, "is that an evil deed committed for the benefit of many, ceases to be immoral; and that therefore, without offending against the moral law, one may lie, rob, and kill whenever this tends to the realization of that supposed good condition for the many which we imagine that we know and can foresee, and which we wish to establish."

Since the government claimed that all these executions were done for the general welfare of the Russian people, then, as one of the people, Tolstoy insisted that he could not escape the feeling that he was an unconscious participator in these terrible deeds, that his personal safety and chattels were protected by the horrors being perpetrated by the government.

"And being conscious of this I can no longer endure it, but must free myself from this intolerable position!

"It is impossible to live so! I, at any rate, cannot and will not live so.

"That is why I write this and will circulate it by all means in my power both in Russia and abroad—that one of two things may happen: either that these inhuman deeds may be stopped, or that my connection with them may be snapped and I put in prison, where I may be clearly conscious that these horrors are not committed on my behalf; or still better (so good that I dare not even dream of such happiness) that they may put on me, as on those twelve or twenty peasants, a shroud and a cap and may push me also off a bench, so that by my own weight I may tighten the well-soaped noose around my old throat."

The article created an uproar. As the famous painter Repin put it, in a statement for the newspapers, Tolstoy voiced the things which had been boiling in the hearts of all Russians. A stream of letters poured in to Yasnaya Polyana, by far the majority of which acclaimed his courage and applauded his uncompromising condemnation of the government's executions. The sentiments of



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most of them are reflected in the words of one humble correspondent from Moscow who wrote: "You have removed a stone from our hearts, as it were, for you seem to speak as a symbol of faith and we repeat your words in our hearts, because we are unable to speak so and can only feel."

A few of the letters, most of them anonymous, abused Tolstoy and his article. A neat box arrived which contained, if not a "well-soaped noose," a stout coil of rope with an accompanying message: "Count. An answer to your article. Without troubling the government you may do it yourself; it is not difficult. In this way you will do good to both our country and our youth. A RUSSIAN MOTHER." He humbly replied, regretting any unhappiness he had caused, and beseeching her to write him and explain the cause of her unkind feeling towards him.<sup>1</sup>

### III

Preparations for celebrating Tolstoy's eightieth birthday on August 28 had already got under way as early as January 7, when an Initiating Committee was set up in Petersburg. The idea caught like wildfire and spread throughout the country. The progressive press responded enthusiastically and organized a large meeting with delegates from various newspapers and periodicals. A "colossal" and "super" celebration was planned, something far surpassing the celebration in honour of Pushkin in 1880. Tolstoy was not merely a national but an international figure, and members of the press waxed lyrical over the publicity possibilities. Soon there began to appear in the newspapers nearly every day, under such headings as "Tolstoy Jubilee," "A National Holiday," and "Grandiose Celebration," accounts of preliminary plans and interviews with celebrities on the significance of Tolstoy.

Meanwhile, at Yasnaya Polyana, these widely advertised plans for mammoth celebration were viewed with mixed feelings of alarm and elation. Sonya had already prepared a little statement to welcome the committee members on the day of the Jubilee. She intended to say: "All my life I have worshipped before the strength of talent and mind of Leo Nikolayevich, and I have tried to understand him. And if I have not succeeded in raising myself to his level, then at least I have tried to make his life easier with my love."

<sup>1</sup> During 1908 Tolstoy also wrote two other articles connected with the theme of violence and executions: "The Law of Violence and the Law of Love" and "Christianity and the Death Penalty."

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And she added that it would please her very much if the committee would present her with flowers and testimonies of their esteem.

On the other hand, Tolstoy wrote in his diary in March: "They have decided upon a celebration and this is doubly painful to me, in the first place because it is stupid and disagreeable flattery, and in the second place because I long ago fell into the habit of seeing in this not satisfaction but interest. It is offensive to me." One of his disciples, A.M. Bodyanski, who had been convicted for the crime of distributing Tolstoy's works, wrote to the newspapers that nothing would give Tolstoy more moral satisfaction than to be put in prison on the day of his Jubilee, in accordance with what is accepted as justice in Russia. The newspapers refused to print the statement, but Tolstoy was delighted with the suggestion and wrote Bodyanski: "Actually nothing would satisfy me so completely and give me such joy as to be in put a prison, in a real good stinking prison—cold and hungry."

This was a birthday present that Tolstoy would never receive; he early set about, however, to forestall those that were designed for him. In February, he wrote his close friend, M. A. Stakhovich, a member of the Initiating Committee, to do everything in his power to cancel the celebration and set him free. But the preparations went on. Committees to honour him on his eightieth birthday sprang up all over Russia, in most of the capitals in the West, in America, India, and Japan. The prospects grew terrifying to him.

In the meantime, bitter letters from faithful Orthodox believers began to appear in the press, and some were sent to Tolstoy, complaining of the extraordinary honour Russia was preparing for a man who had been excommunicated. And an acquaintance of the family wrote to Sonya to point out that every loyal member of the Church would be offended by the celebration. Such an argument left him no recourse. In March he published a letter in the press, in which he frankly explained his intense objections to the proposed celebration. Apart from his personal dislike for such an honour, he added, "it was stirring up among people—and quite justly—a feeling for him that was the very opposite of love. And this grieves me extremely." His whole desire, he said, was to gain the love of people and to inspire love in them, and that he would willingly forgo any praise or honour if by so doing he could prevent an unfriendly feeling in a single person. And he concluded: "I will not say that I quite sincerely do not regard myself as undeserving of these

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honours that are being prepared: that would take on the aspect of false coquetry. But I cannot fail to say what I think, namely, that I would be happy if people would abandon this business and would do nothing in this direction."

Confronted with this public request, the Initiating Committee had no alternative other than to desist. It did so in a long published statement that ruefully reviewed all the enormous preparations that were under way in Russia and abroad, and concluded:

The great artist puts an end not only to a most deserved but a most impressive honour, an undertaking delighting all. The greetings and adoration of the whole world do not comfort the great soul of the wise old man if they can arouse irritation, malice, and an offensive feeling in other people. He himself is his own highest tribunal. Every thoughtful person will reverently accept his decision, and the Initiating Committee and the Bureau of the Press regard it as their duty to abandon their activity.

In all this agitation the government had adopted, for it at least, a very correct attitude. The Minister of the Interior had circularized all police heads with a sheaf of instructions on how to behave in this "crisis": they were not to interfere with individuals or organizations that desired to honour Tolstoy as a famous artist, but they were to prevent any groups from attempting to exploit the occasion for demonstrations against the government. High officials of the Church were less discreet. The Holy Synod published a statement requesting the faithful "to refrain from participating in any honouring of Count L. N. Tolstoy" as "an unyielding opponent of the Orthodox belief." Less dignified was the printed address of Germogen, Bishop of Saratov, on "the morally unlawful undertaking of certain parts of the population . . . to celebrate the jubilee day of the anathematized atheist and anarchist revolutionist Leo Tolstoy." And he was described in this address as "an accursed and most disdained Russian Judas," as "a despicable debaucher and slayer" of youth, as "a damned blasphemer of God," and sundry other uncomplimentary things. Tolstoy replied in his humble manner, pointing out that only God could know which of them was right in their understanding of the teaching of Christ, but that if he had erred, then as a human being and brother of the bishop he merited his loving correction and not his contempt. And he signed himself: "Your loving brother, Leo Tolstoy."

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In July, Tolstoy developed an embolism of the veins in his leg and became seriously ill. For a time it seemed that he might be confined to his bed on his eightieth birthday. But the leg mended sufficiently for him to get around in a wheelchair. Though a formal celebration had been definitely abandoned, there were many indications that he would not escape the homage of a world eager to honour him. *I Cannot Be Silent*, which had just been published, had suddenly raised popular enthusiasm for him to a fever pitch.

On August 27, operators with a moving picture apparatus arrived at Yasnaya Polyana and persuaded Tolstoy to let them take some sequences of him sitting on the veranda, as well as scenes depicting life on the estate. Under the title of *The Eightieth Birthday of Count L. N. Tolstoy*, the film was soon shown in many Russian cities. He later manifested a lively interest in the cinema and thought of writing for it. Grasping the possibilities of this infant art, he remarked: "It is necessary that the cinema should represent Russian reality in its most varied manifestations. For this purpose Russian life ought to be reproduced as it is by the cinema; it is not necessary to go running after invented subjects." He little realized then how much of Russian life would be revealed to the world on the screen through the medium of his own great works of art.<sup>1</sup>

August 28 brought a flood of greetings from Russia and all over the world, and they continued to arrive for days. Some two thousand telegrams alone were received. They came from institutions and organizations, from all manner of individuals—titled nobility, great public figures, and even members of the Church, and convicts in prison. An Englishman presented in person a message of greetings and lofty praise signed by hundreds of his countrymen, including such figures as Meredith, Hardy, Wells, and Shaw. From America came a fulsome tribute and one from Australia, and from most of the countries of Western Europe. Ironically enough, his old Sevastopol battery sent congratulations to this man who now loathed war, and from the students of the University of Kazan came greetings to one of its dismal failures as a student but now its most illustrious alumnus. Then there were numerous greetings from factory workers and humble peasants; one of whom wrote simply: "Do not be silent, old man, inspired by God, and live for many years."

<sup>1</sup> In 1912 a film on the last years of Tolstoy's life was made in Russia, but it was never shown because of the objections of his wife.

Many gifts arrived: quantities of candy from an enterprising manufacturer who placed Tolstoy's picture on the boxes and wrapper; a magnificent album containing original paintings by famous Russian artists; twenty bottles of San Rafael wine, "the best friend of the stomach," from France; a handsome samovar from the waiters of a well-known Petersburg restaurant with a towel on which were embroidered the titles of Tolstoy's stories for the people; and a case of cigarettes from another advertising-minded but dull-witted manufacturer who placed Tolstoy's picture on the package. He promptly sent them back with a letter of warning on the harm of smoking. But one package was saved for Sonya's collection, for all messages and gifts received she gathered up for her collection of Tolstoyana at the Historical Museum.

It seemed as though the whole world had united in honouring this man, not simply as the author of universally loved novels, but as a great moral teacher, the articulate conscience of humanity, the symbol of mankind's ceaseless striving for moral improvement. The thousands of messages clearly indicated that those beliefs closest to his heart, which he had advocated untiringly for almost thirty years—the purifying of religion, non-resistance to evil by force, and the freeing of the soil from private ownership—had found a response in the hearts of people all over the world.

Tolstoy could not help but be affected, even to tears, as he read communication after communication expressing sympathy for his ideas and admiration and love for him. Unlike most great moral teachers, he had received visible evidence before his death that his teaching had won a world audience. He remarked to Goldenweizer: "I believe I am right in saying that I now have no vanity, but I cannot help being touched involuntarily. And yet, at my age, I live so far away from all this, and it is all so unnecessary and so humiliating. Only one thing is necessary, the inner life of the spirit." And on another occasion he said to him: "But one thing is pleasant: in nearly all these letters, congratulations, and addresses, the same thing is repeated—it has simply become a truism—that I have destroyed religious delusions and opened the way for the search after truth. If it is true, it is just what I have wanted and tried to do all my life, and this is very dear to me."

Since it was impossible to answer the tremendous number of messages, Tolstoy sent a letter to the newspapers in which he wrote: "I cordially thank all who congratulated me, and especially those

(the majority of those who addressed me) who quite unexpectedly and to my great joy expressed in their messages their complete agreement, not with me, but with those eternal truths that I have tried, as well as I could, to express in my writings. Among these persons, and this was especially gratifying, the greater number were peasants and workers."

The birthday party was restricted to the family, relatives, and close friends. But they made up a large enough gathering. There was much gaiety, with popping of champagne bottles and drinking of toasts. Only the birthday child seemed unhappy, but this was probably because of fatigue and his painful leg, which was propped up as he sat at a separate table. After dinner he was glad to retire to a quiet game of chess. Later he asked Goldenweizer to play, and the musician complied with several pieces, including Chopin, one of Tolstoy's favourite composers. Much moved by the music, Tolstoy left the company. Later Goldenweizer went to his room and found him lying on the bed. He pressed the pianist's hand and thanked him. There were tears in his eyes, Goldenweizer kissed his hand and left. That night, before she retired, Alexandra entered his room.

"Well, Sasha, how is everything?"

She looked hard at him, trying to guess what he was thinking.

"Depressing!" he said.

"What—the fun—the people?"

"Yes—rather the people. It's chiefly that there is so much insincerity and falseness."

Later, however, when Sonya entered, as was her custom, to tuck at his back a warm comforter made by her, he said apropos of the celebration: "How splendid! How fine everything was! If only along with all this there were no grief."

A few weeks after the celebration Tolstoy wrote in his diary: "Only now is there real work, only now, at 80 years of age does life begin. And this is not a joke if one understands that life is measured not by time."

## IV

Chertkov, having finally cleared up his affairs in England, settled near Yasnaya Polyana in June 1908, for what seemed a permanent stay. Sonya must have regarded this move with foreboding. He bought part of Alexandra's Telyatinki farm and set about building a large house that would accommodate

his numerous entourage. Tolstoy viewed the project with misgiving and the considerable expenditure of money with dissatisfaction. Wryly he remarked to his secretary: "Chertkov is building next to me, but my abode will soon be far away."

Chertkov now went into the business of Tolstoyism on a big scale. As heir apparent, he had to have his own little court. He made converts easily out of the local peasantry, for he paid quite well for their services, and few served him on the farm without finding it personally advantageous to adopt the outward aspect of the conventional Tolstoyan, however deficient they were in the spiritual observance of the doctrine. His household soon contained more than thirty people, from farm workers and domestics to typists and secretaries, who were always mysteriously busy with copying Tolstoy's manuscripts and working on the seemingly endless "Vault" of his thoughts, the usefulness of which the master was now beginning to doubt. His family and all these helpers—Chertkov called no one servant—ate together at a long table directly from huge pots, bowls, and frying pans. Tolstoyan equality and brotherhood were the rule, which lacked much, however, in the observance. For Chertkov sat at the head of the table, flanked by his semi-invalid wife and F. A. Strakhov, a devoted follower and "director" under Chertkov of the compilation of the "Vault." The middle section of the table was occupied by the skilled assistants, and the lower end by the common labourers. This social division was defined by the youngsters in the group, said Alexandra, who visited the Chertkovs, as "first, second, and third class." And she once overheard Tishka, a lively boy who watched the horses, exclaim to his companion:

"Look, look, Alyosha is trying to squeeze into the first class."

"Well, he likes rice cakes and jam and stewed fruit! I guess he's tired of boiled potatoes and sunflower oil."

The wellspring of all wisdom for Chertkov was only two miles from Telyatinki, and he felt the urge to imbibe almost daily, especially since Tolstoy's health at this time prevented him from visiting his friend. He is "virtually living in our house and hardly ever leaves Leo Nikolayevich alone," Sonya complained in her diary. Often he came shepherding a barefoot brigade of novices to meet the master. If Sonya happened to enter the room when her husband was talking to these converts, "he grew silent, looked at me questioningly, so that I, understanding his desire that I should not be present, felt it necessary to leave." Chertkov sometimes

brought an English photographer to snap Tolstoy in various aspects for his collection of pictures of the master.

Chertkov read every word from Tolstoy's pen, often suggesting changes with an unctuous insistence that forced compliance. And he followed him around with a notebook in hand, taking down any of his conversation that he thought significant. Visitors to Yasnaya Polyana, who did not evince commendable respect for Tolstoyan principles, would sometimes provoke his displeasure. Gusev tells of the visit of a neighbour, Mme. A. E. Zvegintsev, whose company Sonya enjoyed as one of her own social set. Because of the disturbances in the neighbourhood at this time, she came well protected by guards and carrying a small revolver, which she deposited on a shelf in the entrance hall. Chertkov, arriving after her, spied the revolver with horror.

"What effrontery to visit Leo Nikolayevich with a revolver!" he exclaimed to Gusev. "Have you a copy of 'Do Not Kill'? Bring it here, please." And he wrapped the pamphlet about the handle of the revolver, and copies of more forbidden literature of Tolstoy were stuck into the pockets of the unsuspecting lady's coat.

"What a limited creature is Chertkov and what a narrow point of view he has in everything!" Sonya wrote in her diary, after she had overheard him warn her husband that his habit of occasionally making the sign of the cross might lead people to think he had returned to the Orthodox faith. "All Chertkov has to do is to take notes, to collect, and to photograph, and that only."

With Chertkov as a permanent neighbour virtually living at Yasnaya Polyana, the customary life of the household was altered. The change was extremely distasteful to Sonya. In September she noted in her diary: "I have reached that time of age when two paths stretch out before me: either to elevate myself spiritually and travel the path to self-perfection or to find satisfaction in eating, in rest, in every kind of enjoyment, from music and books to the society of people. I fear the latter path." She knew the path that her husband wished her to follow. On it there were no resting places to satisfy her unfulfilled desire for achievement in art and music. Now even these desires were lessening. "And so all my life," she wrote, "unsatisfied passions and the stern fulfilment of duty.





Tolstoy and his daughter Alexandra



Count and Countess Tolstoy

*The last photograph of Tolstoy, taken six weeks before his death*

Now the passions grow calm; before me that wall has been lowered, the limit of human life, which checks these life-giving passions, this artistic agitation. . . . Only prayer remains, but even that grows cold before this weary, worldly, material life. Get rid of it, throw it all over. But to whom?"

Yes, to whom? There was no one to take up Sonya's burden. And a petrified sense of duty would not permit her to drop the burden anyway and lead her husband's life of prayer and self-perfecting. But this was all mere speculation. If she could see the tragic flaws in her existence, she lacked the strength to mend them. There was no hope of change. All that was left was to save what she could from the debacle of her life for herself and her family. Self-preservation seemed more logical to her than self-perfection. And her emotional instability, increased by the steady accumulation of adverse circumstances in the struggle, led her from one indiscretion to another.

Duty and necessity had governed Sonya's existence. Now with a mixed feeling of envy and criticism, she commented on her husband: "He always worked according to his own choice and not by necessity. He desired to, and he wrote, he wanted to plough and he ploughed. He took it into his head to stitch boots, and he stubbornly stitched them. He planned to teach the children and taught them. He grew bored and threw it up."

With the frequent presence of Chertkov and his novices in the house, Sonya felt as though she were being abandoned. "I am sad at heart and lonely," she wrote in the diary. "No one loves me. It is obvious that I am unworthy." The transition from such a state of mind to resentment and even to quarrelsomeness was natural and inevitable. And as might be expected, there was often not much point in her irritation save to hurt her husband. The charming sister of M. A. Stakhovich was reading poetry to the family group. She read excellently, and about one of her selections, Tyutchev's "Last Love," Tolstoy casually remarked:

"In it the very lowest feeling is represented as an elevated one."

"There he goes!" Sonya broke in, not raising her head from her sewing. "I always say that he doesn't understand love and never has loved anyone."

A heavy silence followed, and since no one of the company cared to rise to this fighting declaration, Sonya continued to worry the theme:

"No, really, how have I lived with him for forty-six years if he

imagines that love is a low feeling! Love is the best thing in life; if there had been no love, I would long ago have hanged myself from grief."

All this time Tolstoy had been silently turning the pages of Tyutchev, and at the conclusion of his wife's outburst he himself read a poem, "The Decembrists," and remarked that he did not like the first two strophes.

"A low feeling!" Sonya indignantly repeated.

"What is the matter with you?" Tolstoy finally felt obliged to ask.

"I'm referring to your statement that love is a low feeling. Take Chertkov, how does he love and protect his wife? For some time now she has not been his wife. Is that also a low feeling?"

"Really, I said nothing," he quietly replied. "There is nothing bad in it; it is only bad when people exalt it."

When Stakhovich's sister remarked at this point that there was some justice on Sonya's side, the latter triumphantly rapped out:

"This is a lack in Leo Nikolayevich. However, it's impossible for a man to have everything."

"They have sung the burial service for me here," Tolstoy laughingly admitted, and hurried out of the room in order to halt this embarrassing argument.

These verbal exchanges did not always end so peaceably. There were deeper reasons for quarrels than whether love was a low feeling. Most chronic was the rights to his literary productions, and in 1908, with Chertkov as a constant irritant in the matter, this old cause of strife took a serious turn. During his illness in August, Tolstoy, thinking that he might die, dictated several wishes to Gusev for his diary, among which was the hope that his heirs would make all his writings public property. If this wish were carried out, of course, it would mean that Sonya would have to surrender the rights he had given her to his works written before 1881. That all his productions should become public property had long been one of his fondest desires.

Sonya had no intention of doing anything of the kind. More than ever she jealously guarded her rights to the early works. When a family friend came to Yasnaya Polyana to discuss the possibility of publishing a children's anthology of tales taken from Tolstoy's early works, in honour of his eightieth birthday, Sonya roundly berated him and threatened to go to a lawyer and write to the newspapers. It was as if he stole her silver spoons, she hotly declared. Tolstoy, frowning, listened in silence to her tirade. Sonya actually

did write to the newspapers to threaten prosecution for anyone who published without her permission the material in her husband's early books for children. To his mortification Tolstoy received a letter from a friend, in which he regretted that these *Readers*, because of the monopoly of the family, were now priced too high for peasant children. "It is exactly the same," wrote the friend, "as though the heirs of Moses traded in the Bible or the heirs of the Apostles in the New Testament."

Now, with the death of her husband an ever-present possibility, Sonya began to press him for the rights to all his works after he died, or even to those which would remain unpublished. A fresh consideration drove her to hysterical outbursts in this demand. The assiduity with which Chertkov almost daily carried off in his mysterious little bag folders of manuscript or copies increased her old suspicion that he intended to defraud her of publishing rights. She knew he possessed copies of virtually everything her husband had written for years, including such highly saleable fiction as *Hadji Murad*, which Tolstoy had refused to print, along with other purely creative pieces, in order to avoid any controversy with his wife. Sonya wondered: Would not Chertkov publish these works after her husband's death and reap the profit for himself? The thought was maddening. Her position, she felt, was unassailable—she wanted only to protect the interest of her children and the increasing number of grandchildren.

The quarrels over this subject between husband and wife during 1908 were frequent and bitter in the extreme. Often all present were drawn in, including Chertkov, who customarily took out his little notebook and jotted down bits of the argument for his diary. He recorded one such quarrel on December 4: "Sofya Andreyevna, turning to Leo Nikolayevich, irately asserts that the property rights of all his written, unpublished works belong to the family. Leo Nikolayevich objects. She runs to her room and fetches a pocket diary written in her hand and reads her own record to the effect that Leo Nikolayevich had given as public property only those writings which had appeared after 1881, but not those which had not appeared in print during his lifetime. Leo Nikolayevich again begins to object. She shouts him down. Finally, in a resolute, authoritative tone, he obliges her to hear him. (She had just said that she was not concerned about herself, but that her children would assert their own claims.) Leo Nikolayevich: 'You imagine that our children are like rogues who want me to do something

opposed to that which is most dear to me.' Sofya Andreyevna: 'Well, as for being rogues, I do not know, but . . .' Leo Nikolayevich (firmly): 'No, let me finish speaking. According to you it appears that the children will play the dirtiest trick possible on me. And a dirtier trick it is impossible to play. You know the principles for which I've renounced these rights—the principles of my faith, and what do you wish, that these principles should be turned into hypocrisy? I gave you my fortune, I gave you my earlier writings, it now seems that I ought to give my own life—that for which I live. Yet I daily receive abusive letters, accusing me of hypocrisy. And now you desire that in very fact I should become a hypocrite and a scoundrel. It is astonishing how you torment yourself without any need.' And he left the room, firmly closing the door behind him."

## VI

Tolstoy closed the door firmly behind him many times in the course of this Jubilee Year. Besides the sore point of the rights to his works, there were the offensive guards with revolvers on their hips whom Sonya still retained in spite of his objections; there were further arrests of peasants for stealing timber; and there were the complaints about the "dark people" and about Chertkov on the score of his visits and persistent photographing and note-taking. Wistfully he wrote in his diary: "How strange and true is the saying that husband and wife (if they live spiritually) are not two, but a single being." And curiously enough now, at the age of eighty, he dwelt upon the memory of his mother, "who has remained for me a holy ideal," a woman who existed only in his imagination, since she had died when he was two years old. The women he really knew were something less than ideal and naked of ideas. Women bear children and not thoughts, he said. And he cynically wrote in his diary: "If men knew all women as husbands know their wives, they would never dispute with them or value their opinions." It is little wonder that he agreed with one of his young disciples that it was a mistake for men, believing as they did, to marry.

Beneath the exciting surface of events at Yasnaya Polyana this year, Tolstoy experienced such intense dissatisfaction with his private life that by July he was almost ready to make a radical change. It was at this time (July 2) that he began his "Secret Diary." For some years now Chertkov had obtained from Tolstoy a reluctant promise that he would have access to his diaries. Masha

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and later Alexandra had copied out for him passages that might be used for his compilation of Tolstoy's thoughts. These copyings had grown more and more extensive, and now, with Chertkov near by, having direct access to the diary, he made no scruples about copying all the entries. Tolstoy disliked this practice, for it hindered the free flow of his intimate thinking and writing. However, he felt that he could not deny this privilege to his closest friend and disciple. Now, in his anguished state of mind, when he wished to pour out his most heartfelt thoughts for himself alone, he began this Secret Diary which he intended should come under the eye of no one.<sup>1</sup>

The Secret Diary clearly reveals some of the causes of Tolstoy's extreme moral suffering at this time.

"*July 2, 1908.* If I had heard about myself, as about a man who lived in luxury with guards, squeezed what he could from the peasants and put them in prison, professed and preached Christianity while he gave away five-kopek pieces, and in all odious affairs concealed himself behind a dear wife, I would no doubt have called him a scoundrel! But I even need this very thing in order to free myself from personal glory and live for my soul.

"When I ask myself: What must I do? Go away from all this. Where? To God, to die. I criminally desire death.

"*July 6.* Painfully hard is the test or payment for lust. The reckoning is terribly hard. Chertkov just related a former conversation with her: 'He lives, avails himself of luxury and speaks . . . all pharisaism . . . etc. I, I sacrifice myself.'

"Help me, Lord. I again want to leave. I do not decide. But I do not reject it. The chief thing is: if I go, do I do it for myself? In remaining, I know I do not do it for myself.

"*July 7.* The evening was very painful, I reckoned the money and took thought how to go away. I cannot see her without ill feelings. Today it is better.

"How apparent in her is the whole horror of love of the body, of self-love conducing to the loss of spiritual obligations.

"*July 9.* I thought of writing her a letter. Thank God there is no unkind feeling. One thing is always more and more distressing: the falsehood of senseless luxury in the midst of the undeserved

<sup>1</sup> It is interesting that in August of this year, when he thought he might die, faithful to the end to Chertkov's desires he sent him the Secret Diary with instructions to copy what he felt would be useful and then to destroy the manuscript. Chertkov copied the entries entirely and destroyed the original manuscript.

poverty and want in which I live. It all grows worse and worse, more and more grievous. I cannot forget it or fail to see it.

"All are writing my biography, and in my whole biography there will be nothing about my connection with the 7th commandment. Nor will there be all the terrible filth of masturbation and worse, from my 13th, 14th year to the 15th, 16th (I do not remember when I began my debauchery in the brothels). And so up to my union with the peasant girl Aksinya—she is alive. Then marriage, in which once more, though I never betrayed my wife, there was lust in my relations with her—nasty and criminal lust. There will be none of this and there is none in the biographies of me. And this is very important, and all the more important, since at least of all the vices this is the one of which I am the most conscious, the vice which more than all others compels recovery.

"*July 18.* The bad feeling has ended."

This final entry in the Secret Diary indicates that the crisis which inspired it had passed. His relations with Sonya did improve, but only for a brief time. There was no balm for this disease. "My illness," he told Goldenweizer, "is Sofya Andreyevna." In truth, the knowledge of a domestic feud dividing members of the family had by now become common property among friends, disciples, and hangers-on. Sonya talked of her troubles with anyone who would listen. Tolstoy was now placed in the embarrassing position of receiving letters from followers who offered advice or censure in the matter. And since their remarks usually turned on the very solution—leaving Yasnaya Polyana—which had become an aching moral problem with him, he felt it necessary to explain and justify his failure to take this step.

To the letter of his disciple M. S. Dudchenko, he replied: "I can only say that the reasons restraining me from making the change in my life that you advise, the absence of which is torment for me, are that the reasons obstructing this change flow from that very foundation of love in the name of which this change is desired by you and me. It is most likely that I do not know, am not able to, or simply that I possess evil attributes which prevent me from doing what you advise. But what then am I to do? With all the strength of my mind and heart, I cannot take this course."

To the more truculent and critical advice of his follower E. I. Popov, Tolstoy answered: "I attentively read your letter and I entirely agree with you that I have not acted and do not act as I should like to, i.e., according to the ideal of perfection. Never-



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theless, with every desire to act according to what seem to be the highest demands, I cannot do this, and not because I desire tasty food, a soft bed, a saddle horse, and other things; I cannot cause grief and unhappiness or provoke exasperation and evil in a woman who in her own mind fulfils everything that falls to her lot as a wife, and as a consequence of her union with me fulfils entirely and well her obligations according to her own ideal. . . . You have told me directly what you think of me, and I am sincerely thankful to you, though I cannot, however I may wish to, profit from your guidance, because I have been a sinner and am a sinner, and if I wish to lessen my sins, I shall try to lessen them in my present existence, for I can on no account change my situation without committing new sins now."

Before the world Tolstoy would have it that his wife was more sinned against than sinning. All that mattered was the life of the spirit, and he had not yet fathomed its human limits.

## Chapter XXXIX

### CONSPIRACY

THE PUBLIC PROTEST evoked by *I Cannot Be Silent* had no effect on the government's harsh policy towards those who opposed its power. And Tolstoy's followers and those who published or distributed his banned works continued to suffer and be humiliated, for such persecutions mounted during 1909. The police, on directions from above, were obviously conducting a planned campaign against the spread of his influence. His letter to a judge trying the case of one of these publishers demanded that he be allowed to take the place of the accused, because the writings in question had been published at his request. The judge simply ruled that the petition be ignored, since Tolstoy lived in another legal district. In general, his protesting letters to the authorities were now left unanswered, and those to the victims offered the wholly sincere but cold comfort that he would like nothing better than to serve their term in prison. In connection with an article that he had recently finished, "The Death Penalty and Christianity," he noted in his diary: "Today I wrote just a small addition to the article . . . about the Tsar, with the secret purpose of provoking persecution of myself." The addition is a bitter denunciation of the Tsar as the chief accomplice in all these executions. But Nicholas II, like his father, had no intention of drawing down upon himself the indignation of the world by making a martyr of Leo Tolstoy. If His Majesty wished to manifest his displeasure in this matter, there were plenty of Tolstoyans to martyrize.

The Church, emboldened by the government's crusade against Tolstoy, intensified its own criticism of him. Though still an uncompromising opponent of the Church, he had long since ceased to think of religion in the narrow terms of Christian Orthodoxy, a fact that the ecclesiastics did not fully understand. Years of study of religious thinkers had convinced him that the simple truths of his

faith had guided all the great religions of the world. He merely believed that Christ had best formulated and expressed these universal truths. "Each of us," he now declared, "must find in his faith that which is common to all faiths, and while rejecting what is exceptional in his own, support what is common to all." This position inspired deep respect even among those members of the Church who, like his sister Marya, a nun, sincerely believed without demanding that others believe as she did. He saw in all Russians an instinct for religious faith, which had vanished in the West, he said, because of the influence of Catholicism, an opinion that he shared with Dostoyevsky. Even Russian socialism, he admitted, advocated the economic side of Christianity.

"Ah, Mashenka," he half jokingly exclaimed to his sister one day, "how I regret not being a member of the Orthodox Church!"

"But, why?" she asked in amazement.

"Because I could now go off to some monastery or other. How fine for the Buddhist when he grows old—he goes off to the desert."

"And what about the family?" Sonya broke in.

"Well, at such an age all obligations end."

In January, Parfeni, Bishop of Tula, visited Tolstoy. It was hardly a social call at a time when the clergy were attacking him as an atheist in the ecclesiastical press. He treated the bishop with kind caution. Brushing aside the charge that he corrupted people's faith, he went on to tell the clergyman that he inspired faith even in those who had none. And at the end of the visit he presented the bishop with an autographed copy of the *Circle of Reading*. When a notice of this meeting mysteriously appeared in the newspapers, Tolstoy, fearing some sort of ecclesiastical snare, hastened to grant an interview to a correspondent, in which he gave a full account of all that was said in their conversation, and this was published. His kindly feeling over the bishop's seeking him out turned into one of annoyance when he learned of the clergyman's talk with his wife. He wrote in his diary: "It was especially disagreeable that he asked Sonya to let him know when I die. It is as though they were planning something to convince people that I 'repented' before death. Therefore I declare that . . . anything they may say about my repentance and communion before death is a lie. . . . I repeat on this occasion also that I ask to be buried without divine services, and that my body be laid in the earth so that it won't stink."

At the beginning of March the police struck their hardest blow—Chertkov was given three days to clear out of the province of Tula. The vague charge of “pernicious activities” was lodged against him; it was also rumoured that a neighbouring landowner had complained to the authorities of his proselyting among the peasants of the district and of his urging them not to pay taxes. Any reason would have been sufficient for the police if they had decided that it was desirable to prevent the chief disciple from being so accessible to the master. It is perhaps significant that at about the same time the police raided the house of Biryukov, another of the principal followers of Tolstoy. Protests over the removal of Chertkov were made. Even Sonya, despite her dislike for this man, wrote a letter to the press. His mother, with influential contacts at Court, brought the case right up to the Tsar, but the only favour she received for her son was a short delay until his health—he was ailing at the time—should enable him to travel. So great was Tolstoy’s indignation that he actually refused to shake hands with the officer who came to arrange for Chertkov’s departure, for him an unforgivable act of impoliteness that made him groan at night when he woke up and recalled it. Chertkov and his numerous ménage moved to Kryokshino, the estate of his relatives, the Pashkovs, situated in the Moscow district.

## II

Among the visitors at Yasnaya Polyana that summer the most eminent was the Russian scientist I. I. Mechnikov, at that time Director of the Pasteur Institute at Paris. He had written a rather friendly article on Tolstoy, who in turn had been severely critical of several of Mechnikov’s scientific-philosophical works. Since Tolstoy’s opposition to science was widely known, though generally misunderstood, the press and photographers were on hand for this meeting of mighty opposites. But the anticipated verbal battle did not take place. Mechnikov turned out to be a kind, amiable man who preferred to talk—and he talked well—about literature and music. His scientific “prejudices” were revealed only in the dismay he evinced over the family’s eating uncooked vegetables and drinking unboiled water. Smilingly Tolstoy expressed the hope that God would allow this cautious pundit to live to be a hundred, and Mechnikov, no doubt placing his faith in science rather than God, solemnly volunteered that he might even live longer. Evidently science failed him since he died at seventy-one.

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Dissatisfied with his failure to draw Mechnikov out in company on spiritual questions, Tolstoy took him for a drive. The conversation did not begin auspiciously, for Tolstoy complained of those people who charged him with being hostile to science. "I highly value true science, that which interests itself in man, in his happiness and fate, but I'm an enemy of that false science which imagines that it has done something unusually important and useful when it has determined the weight of Saturn's satellites or something of this sort. True science is entirely in harmony with true religion." The discussion got nowhere. "I made an effort," Tolstoy told Goldenweizer later, "but he became silent. He believes in his own science as in some holy scriptures, but religious and moral questions resulting from a simply moral feeling are entirely alien to him." Mechnikov, the scientist, who liked to dabble in literature, valued Tolstoy more as a writer of great fiction than a moral and religious thinker. Coming as it did from a man of learning, it was the kind of evaluation that now particularly disgusted Tolstoy. It was as though someone said to Edison, he remarked of a similar admirer of *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*: "I deeply esteem you because you dance the mazurka so well." The trouble with these scientists, he complained, was their preoccupation with the nonessentials of life. "You wouldn't believe me," he announced to some guests, "but I became interested and looked it up in the encyclopedia. How many different kinds of flies do you think the scientists have already accounted for? Seven thousand! How can they find any time for spiritual problems!"

Mechnikov's visit helped to inspire the substance of an epistolary article, "On Science," in answer to the request of a peasant youth on whether or not science was harmful. Modern science, Tolstoy defined as "*knowledge of everything, of everything in the world, except that one thing which every man must know in order to live a good life.*" Hence modern science, he declared, was false science, for whatever its benefits to the few, it increased rather than lessened the human misery of the many. However much science had improved the material lot of mankind, he maintained, it had impoverished it spiritually. There is only one true science, he wrote: "*the knowledge of what every man must do in order that he may live out as well as possible in this world the brief span of life which has been allotted to him by God, fate, or the laws of nature. . . .*"

A less distinguished but perhaps a more welcome visitor that summer was the son of Henry George, who made his way from

America to Yasnaya Polyana, the unrealized "sacred dream" of his father. Tolstoy eagerly received him and exploited the occasion to give an interviewing reporter a brief article on Henry George's solution of the land question. His convictions on this score had somewhat weakened, but in the article he used George's single tax as a club to beat the Stolypin land reforms that he utterly detested. In fact, that very year he had, with no success, urged several members of the Duma, friends of his, to raise the question of adopting Henry George's solution.

When his guest was leaving, Tolstoy said, with an attitude of complacency about his death that had now become habitual:

"We shall not see each other again. What message do you give me for your father in the other world?"

"Tell him that I am continuing his work," replied the son.

Tolstoy could not restrain his tears at these words.

Early in June he set out to visit his daughter Tanya at Kochety, her husband's estate. He undertook this tiring trip of almost a hundred miles partly because with the coming of summer the domestic atmosphere at Yasnaya Polyana had again grown troubled. He went to escape this and to see Chertkov. For Kochety was on the edge of Tula Province, and by renting a hut just inside the boundary of the neighbouring Orlov Province, he was able to have two of those "joyous meetings" with his devoted disciple without breaking the law.

Tolstoy prolonged his stay at Kochety, much to Sonya's annoyance. She had accompanied him on his journey but returned alone, and now the big house seemed dismal and empty without him. All the glory and excitement had vanished. With this grim foretaste of what his death or going away would mean to her, she sadly wrote him: "Dear Lyovochka, we live without you at Yasnaya Polyana like a body without a soul." She now missed the many "tiresome" visitors, told him of her loneliness, and complained of burdensome household tasks, of Andrei's demands for money to pay his debts, and of Leo's angrily smashing to bits a bust of his father, who had not hurried back to pose for him—his artistic urges had led him from writing to sculpturing—and of his going off in a huff to Sweden, bemoaning his fate as the son of a great man. "I repeat my advice," Tolstoy coldly comforted her in his reply, "not to attach importance to household tasks, but rather to that about which you correctly write: to do good. This and this only is necessary."

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Tolstoy remained almost a month at Kochety. The change seemed to improve his health, but the conditions of life that he observed in the district, the peasants and workers he talked to, and the contrasting comfortable existence of his son-in-law's family depressed him spiritually. He wrote in his diary at this time: "The principal thing is the painful feeling of poverty—not poverty but the debasement, the oppression of the masses. The cruelty and insanity of the revolutionists are pardonable. Then after dinner . . . talking French, and tennis, and along with all this slaves, hungry, naked, and oppressed by drudgery. I cannot endure it and want to run away."

### III

With Tolstoy's return, life began again at Yasnaya Polyana—and so did the family bickering. The unpleasant feeling over the police guards, of whom two still remained, broke out in an open quarrel. One of them had caught a peasant fishing on the family side of the pond. Alexandra came upon them in the office just as the guard was cursing the apprehended peasant and seemed on the point of striking him. Calling him a "villain," she demanded that he release the peasant at once. The guard informed his superior that he had been insulted in the performance of his duty, and a complaint was prepared against Tolstoy's daughter. Her mother supported the guard, criticized Alexandra's behaviour, and wished to have the peasant arrested. When the district police officer appeared at the house with his complaint, Alexandra shouted at her mother: "If they had behaved so with my daughter, I would have put the officer out of the house! I'll pack my things at once and leave!" To all of which Sonya replied: "And good riddance!"

The next day Alexandra saw the Vice-Governor at Tula to make her own complaint about the guards, whose presence on the estate she knew deeply offended her father. To her demand that they be removed, he sardonically answered that since the disturbances growing out of the revolution Yasnaya Polyana was the only estate at which guards were still stationed; that he had wished to remove them but her mother had requested that they remain, and he cheerfully showed her the Countess's letter. Upset by this startling news in the face of her father's repeated requests that the guards be withdrawn, Alexandra returned to have another unpleasant

talk with her mother. The guards were soon removed. Sony expressed her fears that thefts on the estate would be renewed and hired a mounted Circassian to protect the property.

Whenever it was possible, Tolstoy kept out of such quarrels and brooded in silence. With misgivings he had noticed his wife's growing nervousness this year and her hypercritical attitude to much that went on in the house. While copying the manuscript of a story that he had just begun, all the ancient jealousy of her husband flared up in this woman of sixty-five as she read the description of one of the peasant characters. She at once wrote in her diary: "His delight in the *strong* body of a woman with the tanned legs of a girl that once so powerfully tempted him; it is that same *Aksinya* with the shining eyes who now quite unconsciously, in his eightieth year, emerges from the depths of his memories and sensations of former years. *Aksinya* was a *Yasnaya Polyana* wench, the last lover of Leo Nikolayevich before his marriage, and now still living in the village. All this invokes in me a painful feeling."

In one respect Sonya may have been correct, for during this year Tolstoy wrote a new ending for the tale, *The Devil*, which he had kept concealed from Sonya for years, no doubt because its autobiographical subject would have aroused her jealousy. The theme concerns his passion for this same village wench, *Aksinya*, and perhaps her image, becoming bright and fresh in his mind again from working over a long-forgotten tale, inspired the features of the new heroine of the unfinished story that Sonya copied. These forbidden but pleasurable "memories and sensations of former years" may well have provided the old man with fleeting moments of escape from a gloomy domestic situation.

This situation became still gloomier shortly after Tolstoy's return from Kochety at the beginning of July. He received an invitation to participate in the Eighteenth International Congress of Peace at Stockholm in August. Though he had always declined such offers in the past, he now felt it his duty to accept this opportunity to present his views on peace at a world forum. And with a feeling of elation he eagerly set to work on his speech.

It appears that the organizers of the Congress were more surprised than pleased by Tolstoy's acceptance. They had hardly expected a feeble old man of eighty to come all the way to Stockholm, for it seems that they desired his name and moral support more than his physical presence and spoken views, with which they



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were already too familiar. And their surprise turned into embarrassment when the news leaked to the press that he planned to attend and challenge the Congress to be honest for once and demand the abolition of all armies as the only sincere and effective means of achieving world peace. The news created a sensation in Russia and Europe. Mixed feelings of alarm and joy stirred interested groups in Stockholm. Elaborate preparations got under way to welcome the great Russian writer, and there were various rumours that he would receive the Nobel Peace Award. However, concern and even fear gripped officials of the Congress that Tolstoy's presence and speech might affect the customarily smooth-running sessions.

Meanwhile, Tolstoy's decision had caused almost as much agitation in his family as in Stockholm. When he first told Sonya of his intention, she at once strenuously opposed the trip and raised all sorts of objections, such as his extreme age, the dangers of a sea voyage, and the cholera in Petersburg through which he must travel. When he remained adamant she became hysterical, locked herself in her room, would admit no one, and threatened to poison herself.

Scenes such as this became daily occurrences. Tolstoy found it impossible to talk with Sonya about the proposed trip. On July 26 he wrote: "After dinner I discussed the journey to Sweden, and it provoked terrible hysterical exasperation. She wanted to poison herself with morphine; I snatched it out of her hand and threw it under the stairs. I struggled with myself. But when I lay down and quietly thought it all over, I decided to give up the trip. I went and told her. She was a sorry sight and I sincerely pitied her."

The reasons for Sonya's intense objections were no doubt mixed in her mind. With some justification, and particularly after the scenes she had caused, she may well have believed that he would use this opportunity to stay away for good. Though she was perhaps quite sincere in her worry over his health on such a long journey, she promptly forgot all these objections, for she finally agreed to the trip if he would allow her to accompany him. A few days after he had informed her that he would not go, he entered in his diary: "S. A. [Sonya] came in and declared that she would make the trip, but 'all this will unquestionably end in the death of one or the other of us and in innumerable difficulties.' Under such conditions I would not think of going." Three days later he wrote: "S. A. is preparing herself for Stockholm, and as soon as she speaks about it, she falls into despair. She pays no attention at all to my

proposal not to go. There is one salvation: to live in the present, and silence."

At one point Sonya seemed determined to go, even without her husband if necessary, and she actually offered to read his address at the session. He ironically remarked that at least they would not reply to her in an unmannerly fashion, "for to whom would they be more polite than to her, the wife?" Sonya said that "for this one occasion one must be well dressed." And that very night she sent a friend to Moscow to buy new clothes for the journey.

How this family tragicomedy would have ended it is hard to say; the last act was avoided by the news that a workers' strike in Sweden had caused the Congress to be postponed until the next year. Some newspapers flatly declared that the real reason was the fear that Tolstoy would actually appear and give his address, a reason that he himself was inclined to accept. A Berlin concert entrepreneur offered to arrange for ten readings of his speech at five thousand francs a reading, the proceeds to go to charity. Tolstoy, still anxious to get his views on peace before the public through the spoken word, agreed provided he could nominate the reader. The German police, however, intervened and refused to allow the readings to take place unless the speech was heavily censored. Tolstoy would not permit this and there the matter ended.

The trip to Stockholm was only a contributing factor to the wretched relations between husband and wife during this summer. The real cause was the old one of the rights to Tolstoy's works. Sonya, angered over the publication of an anthology that included certain of her husband's early writings, threatened to sue the publisher who had not bothered to ask her permission or to pay her for the pieces. The prospect of a suit on such a matter agitated Tolstoy. "Last night," he wrote in his diary, "was distressing because of a conversation with Sofya Andreyevna over the printing and prosecution. If she only knew and understood how she alone was poisoning the last hours, days, months of my life!" And he even talked over with Alexandra and Makovitski the possibility of depriving his wife of the power of attorney he had given her years ago if she brought suit against the publisher.

In this situation Sonya, taking advantage of the visit of a relative and a judge, I. V. Denisenko, showed him her power of attorney over her husband's estate, issued in 1883, and asked whether this document would permit her to sell Tolstoy's works without his consent and to prosecute those who infringed upon her rights in

this respect. Knowing full well Tolstoy's feelings in the matter, Denisenko was shocked and gave Sonya a negative answer. He even pointed out that her power of attorney did not actually give her legal title to the works published before 1881, as she had always believed and as the public in general had taken for granted. Frantic at the thought that she would have no control over his writings after his death, she appealed to Tolstoy to grant her this right, or at least to give her power of attorney to prosecute people who published his works without permission. He resolutely refused. She again threatened to kill herself and had a fit of hysterics.

This quarrel, aggravated by their violent differences over the trip to Stockholm, so frayed Tolstoy's nerves that he could not eat, sleep, or work. He wrote in his diary on July 21: "I'm tired and cannot stand it any more. I feel quite ill. I feel the impossibility of facing it all reasonably and lovingly, the complete impossibility. For the time being I wish only to get far away and take no part in anything. I can do nothing else, and I have already seriously thought of running away. Well, now show your Christianity. *C'est le moment ou jamais*. And yet I wish so much to go away. My presence here is hardly necessary to anyone in anything. A hard sacrifice and harmful to all. Help me, God, teach me. One thing I want—to do Thy will and not mine."

He even went so far as to confide this desire to leave Yasnaya Polyana to his faithful followers, Marya Schmidt and Makovitski. Could he go abroad without a passport, he asked the much travelled Makovitski. "You know how one can get across the border. I want remoteness, to get far away from worldly vanity as the old Buddhists do. I tell this only to you."

One thing Tolstoy decided in the course of these quarrels—to make his works public property after his death by drawing up a legal will. Whether this crucial idea was first proposed to him by one of his friends or disciples will never be known for certainty, though it appears likely. For as early as June 23 of this year he wrote to Chertkov, who had apparently already broached the idea, that it was repugnant to him, and that he would rather send all his writings to the devil if it would prevent any hard feelings. But shortly after this he appears to have come to the conclusion, because of the many discussions and quarrels on the subject, that he could not fully trust his heirs to carry out his wishes concerning the disposal of his literary property. Ordinarily he would have instinctively rebelled at calling to his aid the law, an arm of the

government. But he had compromised with the government before on issues that seemed to make for the greater good of the greater number, and insuring that his works would become public property after his death would appear to be such an issue. He would use the law not to protect private property but to safeguard his works as public property. At any rate on July 22 he approached the same Denisenko, whom Sonya had shocked by her legal queries, with the request to draw up a will, in which he would deed the rights to his works to the public and his land to the peasants, forgetting for the moment that he long ago had given the land to his family. This will was not executed, but a train of events had been set in motion that was to torment the last few months of his life.

The sorrows of this unhappy summer, however, had not yet ended. Now it was the government that on August 5 once again struck at Tolstoy. The family had just finished dinner. He and Goldenweizer had begun a game of chess. The bell rang. It was the local police who had received an order to arrest Gusev. The secretary was given only a few minutes to collect his belongings. Stunned members of the family went downstairs to say farewell to this man who had endeared himself to all of them. Tolstoy's sister Marya, who was visiting them, could not restrain her indignation which she expressed in good Russian fashion by spitting after the police as they carried off their prisoner. Tolstoy was silent and pale, and tears stood in his eyes.

Gusev had been arrested for distributing "revolutionary books," which could mean nothing other than Tolstoy's works. And since his arrest was by administrative order, he received no trial and was condemned to banishment for two years to the distant province of Perm. Tolstoy at once sent to the newspapers a flaming denunciation of this action, again claiming that he was the guilty one, and he even tried to persuade a member of the Duma to raise the matter there as an indefensible act of the government. But the government had no favours to offer Leo Tolstoy. He had lost a most valuable and devoted assistant who never saw him in life again.

## IV

At the height of the family strife that summer over the copyrights of Tolstoy's works, Alexandra had written her sister-in-law, Olga Tolstoy,<sup>1</sup> on July 24 that she hoped to visit Chertkov at

<sup>1</sup> The divorced wife of Andrei and sister of Chertkov's wife.

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Kryokshino to discuss her father's will. Tolstoy had come to the conclusion, though still with some misgiving, that a will should be legally drawn up, and his inner circle of followers were also urging it. And it is clear that their intention, for the time being at least, was to keep the matter a secret from Sonya.

It was partly with this purpose in mind that Tolstoy set out to visit Chertkov at Kryokshino on September 3. With him went Alexandra, Dr. Makovitski, and a family servant. Tolstoy, in excellent spirits, was as excited as a child over the trip, which would take him to Moscow for the first time in eight years. Persistent movie photographers pestered him at the station, and so did numerous people on the train who recognized him.

At the Moscow terminal Chertkov and a delegation from the *Intermediary* welcomed him. A murmur of "Tolstoy!" ran from person to person on the platform, and only with difficulty did the carriage make its way through the crowd shouting greetings to him. That night he stayed at the family's old Moscow house. The next morning, at Goldenweizer's suggestion, he went to Zimmerman's music store to see the latest in mechanical inventions—a player piano! On the way, the swarming streets and city din filled him with horror and confirmed his disgust for modern civilization.

At Zimmerman's the enterprising manager, who had been forewarned of the visit of the great writer and his party, was prepared with a bouquet of flowers for Alexandra and a photographer to immortalize the occasion. Tolstoy listened intently to the player piano and was delighted with the pieces rendered by Paderewski. The flattered manager ordered a mechanical piano to be sent to Kryokshino for as long as Tolstoy remained there.

On the way to the station Chertkov suggested that they inspect the recent monument of Gogol, whose hundredth anniversary was being celebrated. With certain reservations, Tolstoy admired Gogol, and in March of this year, at the request of a magazine editor, he had written a brief article on him. He also found something to admire in the statue, which was then the object of much criticism, but he remarked: "In general, I don't like monuments. It is something very difficult to do. The artist has to convey the man's soul, yet he must also model his behind." At the station, the party boarded a third-class carriage and was soon at Kryokshino, only some twenty miles distant.

A marked English influence was apparent in the attractive house and landscaping of the park with its pond at Kryokshino. Here the

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Chertkovs lived in the "Tolstoyan" fashion that had prevailed in their establishment at Telyatinki. A host of assistants, labourers, and servants dined with the family, a custom that much embarrassed the old Tolstoy retainer who kept leaping to his feet every time any of the gentlefolk came near his chair.

In this atmosphere, saturated with his own moral and religious influence, the low spirits that had depressed Tolstoy during recent months vanished. He was surrounded by loyal followers who accepted his every word as law and revered him as a living saint among sinning mankind. Visitors from near-by Moscow, who had learned of his presence there, were endless. He sometimes avoided them in long solitary walks through the countryside, though usually followed at a respectful distance by the devoted and devious Chertkov. During the evenings, there were concerts of live music by artists from Moscow or of the canned variety by Zimmerman's player piano, which had not yet lost its novelty for Tolstoy.

One day about forty schoolteachers arrived. In preparation for this visit Tolstoy had written a brief article<sup>1</sup> on the problems of the teacher, and after it was read he conducted a kind of seminar for the group. From his article and a complete transcript of the discussion that followed, one gathers that these village teachers were baffled by his extreme simplification of their problems. To his advice that they should ignore the required subjects if necessary in order to place all emphasis on moral problems and clean living, they objected that the authorities would not permit this. His only answer was to disobey the authorities and be willing to suffer for their moral convictions. Tolstoy's deference to Chertkov's occasional interruptions and explanations during the discussion left no doubt in the minds of his listeners that he regarded this chief disciple as the authoritative interpreter of his doctrine.

When Tolstoy had been at Kryokshino about ten days, Sonya arrived, having been delayed by an ailing leg. Her nervous presence introduced an alien element into the harmonious Tolstoyan atmosphere. Though everything was done to mollify her, an unpleasant scene took place. She insisted that they go home on the eighteenth and stay overnight in Moscow. Tolstoy wished to remain until the nineteenth and return directly to Yasnaya Polyana in order to avoid any possible demonstration that his appearance

<sup>1</sup> This article, "The Chief Problem of the Teacher," was subsequently published. During 1909 he also wrote "On Education" and published two other longer articles: "The Inevitable Revolution," and "The Sole Commandment."

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in the city might cause. A fit of hysteria on Sonya's part decided the matter.

Before he left, however, Tolstoy planned to finish up the business of the will, which he had discussed with Chertkov. He drafted the contents himself and a clean copy was made by Alexandra. In it he stated that all his published or unpublished works, written after January 1, 1881, and all unpublished works written before that date, "constitute, after my death, no person's private property, but to be freely publishable and republishable by all who may desire so to use them." He further requested that all his manuscripts and documents extant at the time of his death be handed over to Chertkov, "to the end that, after my decease, he may dispose of them as heretofore, and that they may be freely accessible to all who may desire to make use of them for publication." And he finally requested Chertkov to select a person or persons who, in the event of his own death, would carry out Tolstoy's behests.

The principal differences between this will and the informal one that he had drawn up in his diary in 1895, the substance of which he had repeated in various forms in his diary later, are striking. In the first will, apart from directions about his burial and the publication of his diary, he merely requested his heirs, though he did not bind them to it, to surrender to the community their property rights in his works published before 1881. He said nothing about his works written or published after 1881, apparently taking it for granted, since he had publicly renounced his rights to these, that his heirs would respect this fact. Now, in the second will, which he intended should be legal, he tacitly agreed that Sonya should retain the copyrights he had granted her on his works published before 1881, but he legally bequeathed to the public all those written after that date. Further, in the first will, he had named as literary executors his wife, Chertkov, and his old friend Strakhov, who had since died; in the second will Sonya is pointedly dropped in favour of Chertkov.

On the day of departure from Kryokshino, Tolstoy and the witnesses gathered in a small room. He was agitated, partly perhaps from a fear that Sonya would enter and surprise them at this business. He read over the text of the will, signed it, and so did three witnesses, friends and followers—A. B. Goldenweizer, A. V. Kalachev, and A. P. Sergeyenko. Tolstoy believed that he had executed a legal document.

The time had come for leaving. At the little station a small

crowd had gathered and several movie photographers. Sonya asked her husband to walk up and down the platform so that they might be photographed together, and he complied unwillingly. A larger crowd and more photographers awaited them on their arrival at Moscow. At home the telephone rang continually and utter strangers kept inquiring about Tolstoy, for this time the news had spread all over the city that he was there. In fact, the newspapers announced the time of departure of the party on the morrow. Old Moscow friends crowded the house. Tolstoy grew excited, talked brilliantly with some, joked with others. A. N. Dunayev tried to interest him in a new German booklet on Christ.

"You see, my dear Alexander Nikoforovich," Tolstoy countered, "I'm a bit afraid of these little books. Yesterday, for example, I went for a moment to the water closet. I pulled the chain but I really didn't pull it hard enough and the water kept running. Then I suspected that I had not pulled it far enough and when I did the water stopped. That's the way it is with these questions: you've either got to tell nothing at all or tell the whole truth."

That evening Tolstoy, feeling particularly gay, wanted to go to the theatre. Someone lightly suggested the ballet and added how surprised people would be to see him there. Why not go, he said, recalling some former male ballet acquaintances whom he had admired. But the ballet was not performing and the party went to a motion picture instead. The audience recognized him at once, twisted in their seats, and craned their necks. The picture was a stupid melodrama, and the monotonous music from a piano out of tune shredded his nerves. At the end of the first part he walked out, expressing his disgust at the prostitution of this new art and his wonderment that the public could enjoy such tripe.

The next morning, the day of departure, crowds began to gather outside the house, among them the ubiquitous motion-picture photographers. Tolstoy with Sonya, Alexandra, and Chertkov left in a carriage. People in the crowd bared their heads. Tolstoy kept bowing. One old woman ran up and begged for a word with him. The photographers in another carriage dashed ahead, grinding away on their mounted camera.

At the station a crowd had long since assembled and kept growing by the minute. All classes of the city's population were represented. As the carriage approached, the cry went up: "He's coming! He's coming!" Several hundred dashed forward and surrounded the carriage. All hats came off and a loud "Hurrah!" roared from



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thousands of voices of people who had jammed the square and station. Tolstoy took his hat off and bowed.

In making its way to the train the little party was in danger of being crushed by the press of people until someone shouted to form a chain by linking hands, and through this human corridor the group were able to proceed to the train. Tolstoy appeared at the window of his compartment as the throng seethed in front of it. Voices called for a speech and a hush at once fell over the multitude.

"I never expected such joy, such a manifestation of sympathy from all sides," he said in a halting voice from the open window. "Thanks. . . ." And tears prevented him from continuing.

"Thanks to you!" the crowd roared.

The third bell rang, and the train began slowly to move out. The throng moved with it.

"Thanks, friends, thanks!" Tolstoy said as the train gathered speed.

"Live to a hundred! Keep on helping us! Till we meet again!" hundreds of voices shouted.

"Till we meet again, if God grants it," were his last words which were answered by a final roaring "Hurrah!"

## v

The Moscow triumph almost proved fatal, for the excitement and strain on Tolstoy's feeble strength had been too much for him. Soon after the train pulled out he slipped into unconsciousness. They thought he was dying. When they got him home Dr. Makovitski and Alexandra worked frantically to bring him to, while Sonya hovered over him, begging him to tell her where the keys to his drawer were, for she feared he would die and the manuscripts would be stolen.

With his still remarkable recuperative powers, however, Tolstoy quickly recovered and again plunged into his literary labours, beginning several articles and a short story. Towards the end of September he wrote Chertkov: "A letter from a Transvaal Hindu moved me." The unknown correspondent was none other than M. K. Gandhi. He had been deeply impressed and influenced by Tolstoy's writings, especially *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*, and, in a subsequent letter to Tolstoy, he called himself "a humble follower of yours." His civil-disobedience campaign and passive-resistance doctrine owe much to Tolstoy, though the master would

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no doubt have disapproved of Gandhi's later political activities and dealings with the British government.

Tolstoy had long been interested in Indian philosophy and the lot of that country under English rule. In 1908 he had written an epistolary article, "A letter to a Hindu," addressed to Tarakuatta Das, in which he opposed Das's policy of violent resistance to aggression that had resulted, he said, in the extraordinary paradox of the enslavement of hundreds of millions of Indians by a handful of English. If the people of India are enslaved by violence, he wrote, it is only because they themselves live and have lived by violence and do not recognize the eternal law inherent in humanity.

This article was widely publicized and attracted Gandhi, who understood correctly its implicit message of civil disobedience and passive resistance. And when he first wrote Tolstoy, it was to inform him of the passive-resistance campaign that he was leading among the Hindus in the Transvaal, aimed against the discriminatory laws of the British. Tolstoy hastened to reply that the letter gave him great joy, and he encouraged Gandhi's activities. Several more letters were exchanged. Gandhi sent him his book, *Indian Home Rule*, which Tolstoy read and warmly praised. "This book is interesting in the highest degree," he told Makovitski. "It is a profound condemnation, from the point of view of a religious Hindu, of all European civilization." Obviously Tolstoy regarded Gandhi as one of his followers, and after his death Gandhi often referred to him as the "Russian titan" and "the highest moral authority."

The tense feeling in the household, however, was not conducive to the peace of mind Tolstoy required for his literary work. If anything, since his return from Kryokshino, the domestic situation had deteriorated. Sonya's nervous habits increased, her criticism of her husband and his disciples grew more bitter. Taking a visiting journalist, G. K. Gradovski, aside, she read her diary to him and poured out complaints about her life while he busily took notes. When her sons Andrei, Mikhail, and Leo visited, she tried to rally them to her side, to urge them to protect their inheritance, and they listened sympathetically. On October 21 Tolstoy noted in his diary: "I have just talked with Sasha. She told me of the avarice of the children,<sup>1</sup> and of their calculation of the sums from my writings that will come to them after my death, that is, they are counting

<sup>1</sup> Here Tolstoy has in mind the younger sons, for Sergei, Ilya, and his daughters were inclined to respect his wishes in the matter of their inheritance.

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upon my death. How sorry I am for them. During my life I have given them all my substance so that they should not be tempted to desire my death, and yet my death is wished for by them."

Now this question of inheritance rose once again to plague him. Before Alexandra left Moscow, on the return from Kryokshino, she had taken the precaution to submit the will drawn up at Chertkov's estate to a lawyer, N. K. Muravyov, to determine its legality. After examining the document, he decided that it would not be accepted by the courts for various reasons, but principally because, according to Russian law, you could not leave property to "no one"; it had to be left to some definite legal person who would dispose of it as Tolstoy wished. Subsequently several consultations were held in his office by Chertkov, his close friend and assistant, F. A. Strakhov, and Goldenweizer, and several drafts of a model will were drawn up by the lawyer to be submitted to Tolstoy. He was to be asked to select one or reject them all if they did not meet with his approval.

Strakhov arrived at Yasnaya Polyana on October 26 when, according to information he had received, he believed that Tolstoy's wife would be in Moscow. By chance, she was returning home on the same train that brought him there. He managed to fulfil his commission, however, without revealing to Sonya the purpose of his visit. Alone with Tolstoy, he explained in detail the legal objections to the previous will and presented the drafts of the model text.

Tolstoy read over the drafts, selected one, and wrote at the bottom that he agreed with this form. But after thinking a little, he said: "The whole affair is very painful to me. And it is all unnecessary—to secure the spread of my ideas by such measures. Now Christ—although it is strange that I should compare myself with him—did not trouble about anyone appropriating his ideas as his personal property, nor did he record his ideas in writing, but expressed them courageously and went on the cross for them. His ideas have not been lost. Indeed, no word can be completely lost, if it expresses the truth and if the person uttering it profoundly believes in its truth. But all these external measures for security come only from our non-belief in what we are uttering." And with this statement he left the room.

Strakhov was in a quandary. He felt that Tolstoy now wished to drop the whole matter of a will. Before he reported to Chertkov that his mission had been unsuccessful, he decided as a last resort

to present fully the views of the little group of friends on this subject. When he could get Tolstoy alone again, he brought up his previous statement. You mentioned Christ, he argued with him. He did not have to trouble about the dissemination of his ideas because he did not write and received no payment for his ideas. But you write, he continued, and now your family receives payment for your works. And if you do not secure the public use of your writings, you will be indirectly furthering the rights of private property in them on the part of your family. It has been painful to your friends, said Strakhov, to hear you blamed because you transferred your estate to your wife, in spite of your denial of private property. Now it will be even more painful to them to hear people say that in spite of his knowledge that the public repudiation of his copyright had no legal validity, Tolstoy took no steps to ensure that his wish would be carried out, and thus assisted the transference of his literary property to his family.

Tolstoy admitted the strength of Strakhov's arguments and asked for some time to think the matter over. After several hours he called Strakhov and Alexandra into his study and said to them: "I shall surprise you by my final decision. . . . I want, Sasha, to leave everything to you, understand, everything, not even excepting what I reserved in the declaration in the newspapers." Did this mean that his wife would have to forfeit the income from those works which she had been accustomed to regard as her own, the astonished Strakhov asked. Tolstoy hastily added: "All this Sasha will arrange for her (Sonya) during her lifetime in accordance with my desire, in short, arrange things so that my will does not bring about any change in relation to her."

Strakhov hurriedly telegraphed the triumphant news to Chertkov. The friends were delighted with this new decision. It meant that Tolstoy would leave all his works, not even excepting those published before 1881, which he had formerly assigned to his wife, to his daughter Alexandra, who, with Chertkov as a literary executor, would faithfully fulfil Tolstoy's determination to make all his writings the property of the public.

Muravyov drew up a new will with these specifications. On November 1 Strakhov and Goldenweizer went to Yasnaya Polyana with the document. All felt uneasy, even guilty, about the unsuspecting Sonya. Tolstoy carefully locked the two doors of his study, and after reading over the text signed it and the two witnesses signed.

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In a household where there had never been any secrecy, especially between husband and wife, there now existed a kind of conspiracy. Sonya quickly sensed this fact, even if she could not at first understand all its reasons and implications. And it completed her isolation in the family. She felt desperately lonely. Her husband was surrounded by devoted followers who now regarded her with open hostility, the wife who was "poisoning" the last days of her saintlike husband. With a pain in her heart, she saw how happy he was in their company, how gloomy in hers. When she entered the room the conversation stopped among these disciples, the cheerful expressions on their faces turned sour. Her pathetic attempts to bridge the gap that separated them were coldly received. She felt hopelessly alone in the family, for her younger sons were more of a hindrance than a help in her struggle against these followers of her husband, who, she believed, had designs on her property and that of her children. When she took complaints of this sort to her husband, he would grow furiously angry and threaten to shoot himself, and then she was terrified that he might do it. His own efforts to be kind and considerate—and there were some—were now fumbling and inadequate. Forty-seven years of married life seemed to her a dismal failure, yet her only comfort now was to dwell upon the happy early part of that union.

In these circumstances Sonya's behaviour grew more and more irrational as her nervous forces were exhausted by factors that she could neither control nor understand.

## Chapter XL

### ESCAPE

EVENTS of family life, like those of history, go on repeating themselves to the delight of the young and the boredom of the old. The traditional New Year's celebration at the beginning of 1910 at Yasnaya Polyana was a happy time for many of the "twenty-three grandchildren," a sweeping figure that Sonya was fond of repeating and in which were included her own children. There were a Christmas tree, a masquerade in which Sonya appeared dressed as an old witch, dancing for the youngsters, and cards for the grown-ups. Later a cinema expert came to take moving pictures of the family, and at night he showed a film of Tolstoy's recent trip to Kryokshino and Moscow.

Tolstoy thought the film dull and in general he felt sad in the midst of this merriment. So many of the guests were alien to him in thought and he could not enter into spiritual intercourse with them. Besides, all these servants slaving for members of the family while they played left a bad taste in his mouth. It was not that he had lost, at the age of eighty-one, his wonderful capacity for enjoying the simple pleasures of life. Music still moved him to tears. He could not resist the gypsy songs and balalaika playing organized by Alexandra and the young people who came to the house. He took two Japanese visitors, "savage people in a tender rapture over European civilization," to the new village library founded in his honour by the Moscow Committee on Literacy and treated them to peasant singing and dancing. His little granddaughter, Tanichka, sat round-eyed on his knee, fascinated by the tales he made up for her. And when Sonya devised a puppet show for her grandchildren, he attended, peering at the small figures with his nearsighted eyes through grotesquely large marine binoculars. Though this year he tried to give up cards as a waste of time and riding because he grew ashamed of appearing before the peasants on a fine horse like *Délire*, he soon slipped back into these habits. And despite his age

he still led family and close friends in the traditional spirit-reviving "Numidian cavalry" charge, boisterously dashing around the room when a boring guest had finally taken his leave.

But time and human energy were running out. Tolstoy's increasing feebleness and spiritual concentration led him to withdraw more and more within himself. The usual daily tasks now taxed his failing strength. Though conscience and duty demanded the last measure of attention, he sometimes grew more annoyed than formerly with the never-ending stream of petitioners, visitors, and letters. A feeling of dejection and hopelessness crept into his reactions to their unreasonable requests: a youth asked funds for a camera; a girl begged eighty rubles for a sewing machine; another lightly asked a hundred rubles for a trousseau; and scores of begging letters came from young people asking help in paying for their education. In despair he once again wrote out a statement to the newspapers on his inability to satisfy these demands. Worse were the heaps of manuscripts from budding authors, mostly poets, that he was asked to read and place with publishers. Nearly every problem in life, from incest to the chaste fears of puppy love, was offered for his solution by these many correspondents. Young people who could not forbear to communicate to him the eternal secrets of existence that they had unearthed asked his advice on their palpitating discoveries. Often they felt that their questions would be answered more fully if they appeared in person at Yasnaya Polyana, like the well-dressed young lady who wanted to share her views with him on education, and when these met with a cold reception was willing to leave contentedly if he would only give her a lock of his hair; or the half-mad peasant who insisted on making an incomprehensible speech into the dictaphone on the Apocalypse, the law of inertia, and electricity, ending with some resounding profanity on Tolstoy and Chertkov, and could only be silenced by the offer of a meal by the wise and gentle Dr. Makovitski. The spirit of God lives in everything, remarked Tolstoy about some of his silly petitioners, but so does the spirit of stupidity.

So numerous were the indigent who now came to Yasnaya Polyana that Chertkov made a public appeal for funds to build a hostel in the village to take care of them. Many, however, sought not alms but the truth, and to these Tolstoy talked earnestly and eagerly, and usually sent them away with a copy of one of his pamphlets dealing with the subject discussed. Most were impressed with his kindness and gentleness which became so marked

in his old age. He felt still more responsible for those disciples of his who languished in prison, and besides the long encouraging letters he sent, he often distributed small sums of money among them from his "charity fund." Of late, such direct efforts to aid followers and workers and peasants had grown considerably. On a bitter January day this year he went all the way to Tula to be present at the trial of several peasants whom he believed had been unjustly accused of robbing the post, and for whose defence he had arranged. They were acquitted, and the press agreed that his very presence in the courtroom had acted as a moral influence on the jurors. The political or religious beliefs of those who sought his aid made no difference provided he was convinced of their need and sincerity. A hairy-chested revolutionary sailor turned up at Yasnaya Polyana in February in the course of dodging the police. He needed money to get abroad. Though he shocked some of the visiting Tolstoyans, their master admired the sailor's frankness and collected the necessary funds from among the family.

The revolutionists on the other hand did not hesitate to return his good with evil, especially in the matter of political doctrine. One of them, S. I. Muntyanov, exiled to Siberia, wrote him in January, after having read one of his articles, that he "was obviously badly acquainted with the working class." Its enemies, he declared, must be wiped out "even though the whole world be bathed in blood. In short, kill until not a single one of the wretches remains, not even pitying their little children. I am sorry," he concluded, "that you, perhaps, will not live till then. Well, I wish you a happy death."

Much disturbed by this apostle of violence, Tolstoy wrote him of the futility and unmorality of his convictions, and supported his arguments by sending more of his printed pamphlets. But the only concession he could obtain from this revolutionist was stated in his answering letter: "It is difficult, Leo Nikolayevich, to remake me. This socialism is my faith and my god. Of course, you profess almost the same thing, but you use the tactic of 'love,' and we use that of 'violence,' as you express it."

This was a pithy summing up, in Marxian terminology, of the essential difference between the doctrine of Tolstoy and that of the revolutionists. Curiously enough, future history seemed to be on the side of both, for if the "tactic of violence" brought about a positive good in the 1917 Revolution, it resulted in a negative evil in the terrible Second World War that followed, which Tolstoy



prophesied in January 1910, when he wrote in his diary: "Anarchism is not the teaching by which I live. Rather it is the fulfilment of the eternal law, not permitting violence or participation in it. Will the consequences be either anarchism or, on the contrary, slavery under the yoke of the Japanese or the Germans?"

Violence creates violence and there is no end save universal destruction, and the only alternative to this, Tolstoy said, is the eternal law, the "tactic of love."

## II

Tolstoy wrote little in 1910 but considerable effort went into completing *For Every Day*, the compilation of quotations from great authors arranged so as to illustrate the development of his own philosophy of life, a task that he had worked on for three years. With true insight he now began to see "a certain pedantry and dogmatism" in this huge effort, but before he had even finished it he began to rework it in the form of a systematic exposition of his thought on the basis of separate subjects under individual titles. The result was still another compilation, entitled *The Path of Life*. Obviously these attempts were a poor substitute for the original systematic philosophy that he had long wished to write. But he derived a deep satisfaction in finding that his own convictions on many fundamental problems of life were shared by great thinkers of the past, and he daily read the appropriate passages from the *Circle of Reading* and *For Every Day* as though these books were his Bible.

No doubt such compilations were more congenial to an old man whose literary imagination and invention were flagging. He was now fond of applying to his literary work the expression of a servant who, when invited to bathe, replied: "No, I won't go. I've already bathed myself out." Tolstoy felt that he had written himself out. Occasionally vast themes for fiction would occur to him. He wanted to treat them in the spirit of the new demand that he made on art, which he now phrased: "As soon as art ceases to be art for all the people and becomes art for a small class of wealthy people, it ceases to be necessary and important and becomes an empty amusement." Instead of vast designs, however, there emerged during the early part of this year only slight unfinished sketches and a mediocre play, *The Cause of It All*, which he wrote for the amateur theatricals of Dima, Chertkov's son, and his

present lads at Telyatinki. After completing two brief bits in a series, "Three Days in the Country," revealing the miseries of peasant life, he wearily entered in his diary: "On the whole, I must stop writing and caring about writing."

Other more important matters were hunting his brain—approaching death and the spiritual calm with which he longed to live it. But existence at Yasnaya Polyana was daily becoming less compatible with the serenity he sought. His wife's nervous energy kept the household in a state of constant activity. Things often went badly with the management of the estate. Two of the sons, in financial difficulties, were pressing her for loans. "I'm terribly nervous, am short of breath, and keep wanting to cry. I've too many different things to do," Sonya pathetically noted in her diary in April. Yet she had now begun a new edition of her husband's works, the twelfth, and in twenty volumes, a huge task, but the income from this source had become a vital factor in the family budget. As always, this endeavour was hateful to Tolstoy, and more so now since he had just been pleading unsuccessfully with Sonya to lower the price of his early children's *Readers*, about which he had been receiving more complaints from teachers. In her free moments she busily wrote her memoirs, posted her diary, and copied her portrait in oils that had been painted by the artist V. A. Serov.

A strange calm, not unpleasing to Tolstoy, settled over the household on Sonya's periodic trips to Moscow on business, to see her friends and attend concerts. On a visit at the end of March she heard a lecture on her husband by the family friend, M. A. Stakhovich, at the Tolstoy Museum House. "He mentioned me with reference to my services," she wrote in her diary, "and when he pronounced my name the whole assembly in that literary-artistic society rose and unanimously applauded loud and long. I got up, bowed to the lecturer and then to the public, and felt terribly confused." Sonya liked this.

In April Alexandra fell ill and the doctors detected symptoms of tuberculosis. It was felt advisable to send her to the Crimea for a time, and a young student, V. F. Bulgakov, who had already taken Gusev's place as Tolstoy's secretary upon Chertkov's recommendation, now assumed Alexandra's tasks as her father's helper. The parting was hard for Tolstoy. Over the last couple of years they had grown very close. She was the one person in the family on whom he felt that he could implicitly depend. When she left he noted in his



The grave of Leo Tolstoy at the place of the "green stick"



diary: "She is sad. I had a good talk with her. We both burst into sobs."

Every small circumstance seemed to increase the old, gnawing dissatisfaction that Tolstoy felt over the disparity between the life around him and that which he wanted to lead. One day he came to tea, looking gloomy and muttering that life was a burden.

"Why is it a burden to you?" asked Sonya. "Everyone loves you."

"Yet, it is a burden," he replied. "Why should it not be a burden? Simply because the food here is fine?"

"Why no, I merely said that all love you."

"I imagine that everyone is thinking: 'The damned old fellow says one thing and does another; it is time for you to die before you become an utter Pharisee! And this is entirely just. I often receive such letters, even from my friends, who write me in this vein. And they are correct. Every day I go out on the road and there stand five tattered beggars, while I ride a horse and after me a coachman.'"

Frequent entries in the diary over the early months of 1910 testify to Tolstoy's acute moral suffering and shame over this problem. "I did not dine," he wrote on April 12. "Tormenting pangs from the consciousness of the vileness of my life in the midst of working people hardly able to keep themselves and their families from death by cold and starvation. Yesterday 15 persons gorged themselves on pancakes, while 5 or 6 servants with families of their own ran about scarcely able to prepare and serve up what we devoured. I'm tormented and terribly ashamed. Yesterday I rode past some stone-breakers and felt as if I were running the gauntlet."

The need of a change of scene and perhaps the added hope of seeing Chertkov led Tolstoy to visit his daughter Tanya at Kochety early in May. To his "great joy" Chertkov arrived a few days later. He had received special permission from the authorities to make the trip. This first meeting after some eight months was a happy occasion, and the two friends at once secluded themselves for a long conversation on many matters that intimately concerned them. Tolstoy was a little annoyed that Chertkov had brought along his English photographer, who persisted in snapping pictures of him even without asking permission. You see, Chertkov unctuously explained, posterity will treasure photographs of you. Tolstoy did not agree, but then he could not deny his friend this slight favour.

The friends had the field to themselves for only a short time, for soon Sonya and her son Andrei arrived. When she saw Chertkov, Sonya decided that he had been the reason why her husband had been "in such a hurry to leave home." Tolstoy chronicled their coming in his diary as follows: "The insanity of our life becomes clearer and clearer. Sonya arrived with Andrei. With Andrei I was not good—sharp. For the first time I expressed to Sonya part of what weighs on me. And then, in order to soften what I had said, I silently kissed her—she quite understands this language."

Despite the pleasant calm and well-ordered existence of Kochety, Tolstoy soon began to feel oppressed by the burden of the moderate luxury of the Sukhotins' estate and the idleness of their landowners' life. "Everyone is working except me," he complained. He departed on May 20, but before he left, Chertkov invited him to Meshcherskoye, where he had now moved in order to be closer to Tolstoy. Come, he said, "if it does not displease you to be away from Yasnaya Polyana so much." Tolstoy smiled bitterly at this sally and agreed to make the visit.

## III

Tolstoy returned to a houseful of summer visitors at Yasnaya Polyana. They gave him no peace and exhausted Sonya's incredible store of nervous energy. A few of the guests were pleasant and relaxing, like the brilliant sculptor Paoli Trubetskoi, who executed an equestrian statue of him. He enjoyed this vegetarian artist with his long, horselike face and strong hands who bluntly replied to Sonya's question as to whether he had read *War and Peace*: "I never read anything." Tolstoy roared and envied the original mind of a man like this, unpolluted by the printed word. But he did not approve of the naked bathing in the Voronka of Trubetskoi and his wife.

There were few such congenial guests, however, and added to the strain of many visitors was an unpleasant domestic situation. Peasants protested to Tolstoy that the sullen Circassian whom Sonya had hired to protect her wooded land took his duties so literally that he drove them off the estate grounds on their way to work, forcing them to take a much longer route. He pleaded with Sonya to remedy the situation and she promised. In turn she complained to him of her hard lot and said that she could no longer continue to manage the estate.

"I don't understand you, Sonya," he answered. "Who forces you to do this? Give it up."

"But what will become of me?"

"Go off somewhere."

"Where?"

"Wherever you wish. To Odoyev,<sup>1</sup> to . . ."

"You are driving me away; you want to get rid of me!"

A hysterical scene followed and Sonya left the house. When she did not return, the agitated Tolstoy sent out searchers and they found her sitting in a ditch and brought her home.

He tried to make amends and treated her with extra kindness and consideration. But shortly after this incident he was returning from a ride and met the Circassian roughly handling a peasant who had been one of his pupils years ago. The guard had caught him carting off part of a tree. "I felt terribly depressed," Tolstoy wrote in his diary, "and at once wanted to get away from here." There were further scenes and bitter words over the Circassian and the distraught life at Yasnaya Polyana, all of which no doubt contributed to another of Tolstoy's fainting spells followed by extreme debility and temporary loss of memory. Sonya set it all down to his liver and unfeelingly wondered why the activity of this organ could not be controlled by Christian ideas.

Alexandra had recently returned from the Crimea quite cured. Worried over her father's illness and its probable causes, she wrote a detailed letter to her sister Tanya, who was already partly aware of the situation, since she had been at Yasnaya Polyana on a brief visit that summer. Devoted to both her parents and thoroughly aware of the nature of the struggle going on between them, Tanya sent her mother a frank letter. She pointed out to her that in spite of her advancing age she still refused to relinquish any of her many tasks and even needlessly added to them while always complaining that she was an overworked jade. Tanya advised her, in her old age, to take life more simply, thoughtfully, and calmly, and cease surrounding her husband with the turmoil and worries of insignificant household cares. "You say," she wrote, "that he is very contented and that he demands only his horse, Ilya Vasilyevich,<sup>2</sup> and Dushan.<sup>3</sup> However, why do you not ask him what is dearer to him: all the external good things of life, or your nearness to his soul and your aid in saving him from suffering and witnessing

<sup>1</sup> A small provincial town.

<sup>3</sup> Dr. Makovitski.

<sup>2</sup> A servant in the household.

various acts of violence of no use to anybody? There is no point in your ascribing his sufferings to his stomach, his liver, or in general to any external causes. Standing on the threshold of death, he finds it more and more burdensome to live under conditions that allow a strange savage young Circassian to hunt down an old acquaintance of papa's, a muzhik dear to him, simply because he has carted away a limb of a tree without asking permission. Principally, papa, loving you, suffers because you are able to do such things and allow them to take place before his eyes. You suffer when he eats badly; you try to save him from boring and difficult visitors; you sew blouses for him; in short, you surround his material life with every possible care, but that which is dearer than all to him you somehow lose sight of. How touched he would be and how he would return a hundredfold your efforts if you had as much concern for his inner life."

But the wise Tanya had made her appeal too late. Her unfortunate mother had drifted beyond the reach of rational argument.

Though obviously against Sonya's wishes, Tolstoy decided to escape again from his trying existence at Yasnaya Polyana and visit Chertkov. He left June 12, accompanied by Alexandra, his secretary Bulgakov, and Dr. Makovitski, and he represented the visit to his anxious wife as a brief one. However much he yearned to leave permanently, he could not take this step. That year an earnest Kiev student and disciple had enthusiastically written him: "Abandon your estate, give your property to your relations and the poor, leave yourself without a kopek, and as a mendicant go from town to town." Tolstoy answered: "Your letter has profoundly moved me. What you advise me has been my sacred dream, but up to this time I have been unable to do it. There are many reasons . . . but the chief reason is that my doing this must not affect others." And he wrote one of his followers in jail at this time: "I'm not in prison, unfortunately, but my prison without bars sometimes seems to me, in weak moments, worse than yours."

## IV

As at Kryokshino, Tolstoy's spirits rose as he settled into the pleasantly familiar atmosphere of Chertkov's household at Meshcherskoye. Here was the calm and discriminating solicitude he needed for spiritual concentration, and that prayerful expectancy of great thoughts aborning that naturally encouraged his writing.



He could even overlook the unique annoyance perpetrated by Chertkov's semi-invalid wife: a ladder from Tolstoy's second-story window to the ground which had to be used by his visitors during the invalid's rest hours for fear of disturbing her by going up and down the stairs. In fact, despite his age, he longed to try the ladder himself. His recovered gaiety served to remind the severe sectarians surrounding the host that they ought not to live by Tolstoyism alone. He soon had them laughing at his sallies and singing cheerful songs of an evening, led by Bulgakov's strong tenor and to the accompaniment of Alexandra.

In the immediate neighbourhood was a large hospital centre accommodating mostly mental cases. Long keenly interested in insanity, Tolstoy paid several visits to the hospitals and talked with a number of patients. The more he observed the more convinced he became that all people were abnormal and that it was only a question of degree between those in and outside asylums. He was impressed by one mad patient who fiercely insisted that he had not stolen but merely taken things. Tolstoy talked with him about death, and he solemnly replied: "Why die? Live!" Upon taking his leave Tolstoy politely remarked that he hoped they would see each other again in this world. "Why this world?" asked the puzzled madman. "There is only one world." Tolstoy saw more logic than insanity in this reply.

Inspired by the many fresh impressions he had received, and enjoying ideal conditions for writing, Tolstoy happily plunged into work at Meshcherskoye. He worked at *For Every Day* and *The Path of Life* and on a couple of articles.<sup>1</sup> Even the urge to attempt fiction took hold of him again, and he wrote two short pieces.<sup>2</sup>

With the recent flare-ups at Yasnaya Polyana in mind, Tolstoy's sunny disposition was occasionally shadowed by sad thoughts of Sonya. She had been invited to come to Meshcherskoye, and her refusal no doubt made him suspicious. As though to disarm her anger over his absence, he wrote her chatty and kind letters. He was living as at Yasnaya Polyana, he cautiously remarked in the first one, except that there were no visitors and petitioners, which was very pleasant. Then he told her all about the lunatic asylum and his observations there. And at the end he pointedly wrote: "However fine it is to visit, home is better. And I shall return as I

<sup>1</sup> These were an epistolary article to the Slav Congress at Sofia, and an article entitled "On Insanity."

<sup>2</sup> "Unexpectedly" and "Grateful Soil."

intended, certainly not later than the 24th, if all goes well with you and me. How are you and your affairs getting on—both the editing and the household? Aren't you worried too much about them? To have a tranquil mind is the principal thing—more important than all material considerations. . . . Good-bye, my dear old wife. I kiss you." Five days later he wrote another chatty letter, said that he had now decided to leave on the twenty-fifth, and rather pathetically and obviously repeated: "It is fine to visit, but it is better at home."

At home Sonya's rage was mounting. She had the house filled with painters and plasterers, was rearranging all the furniture, and staying up till the small hours of the morning working on her edition. Her answer to Tanya's plea for understanding had been: "You refer to your father's imaginary unhappiness too tragically. Such a fuss over a Circassian." And anyway, she reminded Tanya, if her father ceased to live materially, how and where would his spirit live? She, for one, was not capable of arranging a new life, she concluded.

Nor were Tolstoy's kind letters from Meshcherskoye any palliative. Her brief answers gave no hint of the coming storm, which apparently burst in full fury over the bit of information he unsuspectingly wrote her in his letter of June 19. He had just received "the welcome news," he said, that the authorities had permitted Chertkov to be at Telyatinki during the period of his mother's visit there, which was to begin on June 27.

Something snapped in Sonya after receiving this news. She reacted in a violent manner, physically and emotionally. On June 22 Tolstoy received a telegram: "Sofya Andreyevna intensely nervous attack, insomnia, weeping, pulse hundred. Asked me to telegraph Varya." This telegram had been dictated by Sonya to Varya M. Feokritov, her typist and a close friend of Alexandra, but Varya added the last four words on her own as a hint that the message was really Sonya's. Detecting this hint, Alexandra pointed it out to her father, and after talking it over and deciding that Sonya was in all probability simulating illness, he sent a wire to the effect that it would be more convenient to come on the twenty-fourth.

According to Varya, when Sonya received this telegram she cried: "Don't you see that this is Chertkov's expression, that he won't let him go. They want to kill me, but I have some opium. . . ." And she ran to the cupboard, seized a vial of opium and spirits of ammonia, and declared that she would poison herself if her husband

did not come back. Meanwhile, she had sent another telegram: "Implore you to come quickly, on the 23rd." And since Varya had by now become thoroughly alarmed over her threats of suicide, she agreed to send in her own name a third telegram, also dictated by Sonya: "I think it necessary."

When he received this message, Tolstoy decided to leave at once and reached Yasnaya Polyana late at night on the twenty-third. He wrote in his diary: "Found things worse than I expected. It is impossible to describe the hysteria and exasperation. I restrained myself pretty well, but was not gentle enough."

## v

Sonya's behaviour was not merely the result of Tolstoy's failure to return immediately. A complex of psychotic wounds combined with adverse material factors over the whole course of her married life had brought an inherently unstable nature to the point of mental and emotional collapse. A morbid purity fixation had been outraged before marriage by reading in her future husband's diary of his youthful debauchery, and this condition had been further aggravated by the events of the wedding night and the nature of subsequent sexual relations. Tolstoy's virtual repudiation, after his religious experience, of the kind of existence they had been living for years tremendously widened the rift between them and increased Sonya's feeling of material insecurity, just as his struggle at that time to cease sexual intimacy increased her sense of emotional insecurity. With the coming of old age, the severance of the sexual bond, and his desire to withdraw within himself spiritually, Sonya's isolation from her husband was complete. Since she could not share his spiritual life, she was denied the usual compensations that old married couples enjoy. And now, on top of all this, the fear that he would leave her had entirely undermined what little stability she had left. In a frenzy of desperation she sought for a symbol of her failure and found it in Chertkov.

While waiting for Tolstoy to return on the night of June 23, Sonya wrote a "Memorandum before death" in her diary which she correctly described as "a sick woman's ravings." She told of her condition: spasm in the throat, pain in her heart, aching head, and continued sobbing. She wondered what was the matter with her. Was it hysteria, a nervous stroke, or the beginnings of insanity? Then she lucidly wrote: "Let me confess the truth. I was wretched

because of this long, unaccustomed separation from Leo Nikolayevich. He has a repulsive, senile love for Chertkov (in his youth he used to fall in love with men), and he is completely subject to his will. . . .<sup>1</sup> I am insanely jealous of Leo Nikolayevich's intimacy with Chertkov; I feel that he has taken from me all that I have lived for during 48 years."

The rest of this extraordinary document contains an incoherent account of the events of the last few days, "The worse I feel the better," she revealingly remarked of her distraught state. Then she wrote of her plans for suicide, a description of her coffin with its rounded lid covered with rose-coloured or white brocade, and of how enormous her nose would seem as it stuck up in death. "Quicker! Quicker!" she concluded. "It will be too late. . . . I have drunk the opium. . . . He is coming."

Tolstoy found her very much alive, however, when he entered the room, but he did not succeed in calming her until the early hours of the morning. Three days later another outburst occurred. Sonya had read an entry in his diary made recently at Meshcherskoye: "I want to try consciously to struggle with Sonya by kindness and love." "Am I a wretch that he must 'struggle' with me?" she shrieked, entirely missing the implication of the word in his entry. She demanded the last diary notebook he had completed, for she wished to find out if he had any other remarks about her. Chertkov had it. Then she remembered. Where were his diary notebooks for the last ten years? These, too, he finally had to admit were in Chertkov's possession, but he had put them in a Moscow bank for safekeeping. Sonya scented a plot: Chertkov and his friends could read the things her husband wrote about her in his diary and might publicize them. All day she followed her husband around pleading for the diaries. Lightly clad, she ran out in the rain, returned, and then moaned on the balcony outside his window, preventing him from sleeping. Her hysterical condition continued far into the morning.

Tolstoy had no thought of publishing his diaries. For years, though rather reluctantly, he had given Chertkov access to these little notebooks to aid him in compiling the "Vault," and he had even asked him to delete anything that seemed harmful to other people. To recover these notebooks and prevent Chertkov from

<sup>1</sup> This is followed by a partly erased phrase which is unprintable. In her diary during this year unprintable words, usually referring to Chertkov, are rather frequent.

## ESCAPE

using them now became another fixed idea with Sonya and the cause of infinite misery in the family. This desire was connected, as Tolstoy recognized, with her mortal terror that she would one day be represented to the world as a shrew and the poisoner of her husband's life. With a new fear that anything pertinent she now found in his manuscripts might be made the occasion of a quarrel, he hastened to change the description of the external appearance—vaguely resembling that of Sonya—of an unsympathetic character in a recent tale from “. . . his wife, a handsome, energetic brunette with shining eyes” to “. . . his wife, not very tall, plump, a blonde, with tender, kind blue eyes.”

The next day, June 27, the mere announcement by Bulgakov that Chertkov had arrived in near-by Telyatinki sent Sonya running out of the room shouting that she hated the man. To Goldenweizer, who was present, she admitted that she might be out of her mind but simply could not control herself. In an effort to avoid Chertkov's visit, she hurried off Tolstoy and herself to the estate of her son Sergei, a tedious trip. But they returned after a day's stay, perhaps because she received a severe scolding from Sergei and his sister Tanya, who was also visiting, when she tried to gain their sympathy. Both these older children were extremely worried over the effect of her hysterical actions on their father's feeble health.

The almost daily visits of Chertkov, however, could not be avoided. On his first call she fiercely assailed him on the question of the diary notebooks. In such a situation Chertkov was not the man to stand on ceremony or politeness, and besides he had long entertained a feeling of hostility towards Sonya for interfering in what he considered his private affairs with Tolstoy. In her diary she reported part of his remarks to her on this occasion with some regard for truth. He said to me, she wrote: “Are you afraid that I will *expose* you by means of the diaries of Leo Nikolayevich? I have had it in my power for a long time, and I have sufficient influence to *smirch* you and your family, and if I did not do this, it is only out of affection for Leo Nikolayevich. . . . If I had such a wife, I should long ago have shot myself or run away to America.”

For two weeks the battle of the diaries continued, with all and sundry in the house, servants, children, and visitors, being initiated into various issues of the controversy. Every visit of Chertkov—and he persisted in making them, though with less frequency—was

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a provocation to Sonya and often resulted in a hysterical scene. And Tolstoy's visits to his friend were no less inexcusable in her eyes. A stuffy written apology from Chertkov, conditioned by many subtle phrases, for his harsh statements to Sonya availed him nothing. Tolstoy tried by alternate kindness and firmness to reason with her and control her outbursts, but a day of comparative peace thus gained was followed the next by bitter words, wailing, and extravagant actions that robbed him of his sleep and further undermined his precarious health. He and Chertkov feared that if the diaries were surrendered, she might destroy them. There was also the further worry that in the most recent diaries she might uncover references to his will. But as she tragically put it, either she got the diaries or she would commit suicide. And now her son Leo had come and he supported her demand that the diaries be returned.

On the evening of July 10 another quarrel took place over Chertkov and the diaries. She went on the balcony outside his room late at night, moved about and groaned. As she wrote in her own diary, she lay down on the bare boards in the hopes of finding death on the very spot where forty-eight years ago she had first experienced her husband's love. Now, however, he asked her to go away and let him sleep. Loudly accusing him of driving her out of the house, and shouting that she would kill Chertkov, she rushed out into the dark garden in a thin dress. When she did not return, the distracted Tolstoy woke up his son Leo and Dr. Makovitski and asked them to search for her. They found her lying on the wet grass, threatening to kill herself unless her husband, who had put her out like a dog, as she exaggerated, came to get her. Leo rushed back to his father, apparently used harsh language, and demanded that he go out and persuade her to return, which he did.

Tolstoy wrote in his diary: "Barely alive. A terrible night. Up till four. And more terrible than all was L.L. [his son Leo]. He scolded me like a child and ordered me to go to the garden after S.A." He felt utterly beaten and had about made up his mind that the diaries, which had already been brought back to Chertkov's from the Moscow bank, would have to be taken from him. Meanwhile Sergei and Tanya had been summoned in the hope that they might have a calming influence on their mother.

Another hysterical night on the thirteenth brought Tolstoy to a decision. The next day he wrote a letter to Sonya and gave it to her. It reads:

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stressing their different attitudes towards property, people, and the proper way to live. Then he returned to further conditions:

“4. If my relations with Chertkov at this time distress you, I am ready to forgo seeing him, though I am bound to say that I should find this trying, not so much on my own account as on his, knowing how unpleasant it would be for him. But if you wish me to, I will do it.

“Now 5. If you do not accept these conditions of mine for a kindly and peaceful life, then I shall take back my promise not to leave you. I shall go away. But I shall certainly not go to Chertkov. I will even make it an unflinching condition that he should not come to live near me. But I shall certainly go away, for it is impossible to go on living as we now do.

“I could continue to live this way if I could calmly endure your sufferings, but I cannot. Yesterday you went away agitated and suffering. I wanted to go to sleep, but I began, not so much to think of you, as to feel you, and I could not sleep. I listened till one o'clock and then two, and again woke up and listened, and in a dream, or almost in a dream, I saw you.

“Try to think quietly, dear friend, try to listen to the response of your heart, and you will resolve it all in the right way. As for me, I will say that I have already resolved it, and I *cannot, cannot* decide otherwise. My darling, stop torturing, not others, but yourself—yourself, for you are suffering a hundred times more than all the others.”

True to his word, Tolstoy sent Alexandra that day to Telyatinki for the diaries. Chertkov and his assistants kept her waiting for a long time while they busily copied out passages that might compromise Sonya, and which they felt she might suppress. Then, wrapping up the diaries, and making the threefold sign of the cross with the package over her head in mock solemnity, Chertkov surrendered them with regret. Sonya pounced upon the package when Alexandra returned, but Tolstoy had them locked up in a deposit box in a Tula bank and he kept the key.

In her own diary that day Sonya wrote: “The diaries have been returned, but at what a cost!”

## VI

The situation that had developed at Yasnaya Polyana would probably have been rejected by Tolstoy, the novelist, as “too

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sensational," "untrue to the experience of life." Here was a woman of sixty-six who, after being married for forty-eight years, was accusing her husband of almost eighty-two of homosexual relations with a man of fifty-six! Sonya was willing to go to almost any lengths to drive the hated Chertkov out of her husband's life. In her moments of mental derangement, often accompanied by physical illness, she unquestionably suffered terribly. In her calmer moments, however, she was overwhelmed with remorse and pity for her husband. Some in the household were convinced that her ravings and absurd actions were cunning dissimulation, practised to gain her own ends, not realizing that dissimulation was a symptom of her peculiar illness. Desperately she tried to enlist all on her side, freely pouring forth her woes even to complete strangers. But the only real supporters she had were her two sons, Leo and Andrei, and motives other than those of devotion to their mother played a part in their defence of her cause.

However exaggerated were Sonya's fears of Chertkov, she had real reasons to dislike and distrust him. She had once told him that he was the "best friend" of her family, but that was at a moment when he exuded the personal charm of which he had much. In general, he was a difficult person and quarrelled with friends, even with those who were disciples of Tolstoy—with Maude in England, Gorbunov-Posadov, director of the *Intermediary*, and at one time or another with all of Tolstoy's daughters. His overbearing manner, pomposity, and holier-than-thou attitude were hardly compensated by his moral rectitude and willingness to suffer for his convictions.

Though his relations with Tolstoy were by now most unusual, only the overwrought mind of Sonya could have detected anything perverted in them. Tolstoy once wrote in a light vein: "If there were not a Chertkov, it would be necessary to invent one; for me, at least, for my happiness." Chertkov was his special defender before the world, and no man knew so intimately the master's teaching or could interpret it so successfully. So thoroughly did he understand Tolstoy's thought and moral feeling that he was able to justify his own actions, as well as Tolstoy's, in these terms with uncanny ability. When a Tolstoyan sympathizer, Christo Dosev, wrote Chertkov in the course of this year to protest Tolstoy's slavery to "a stupid, vulgar woman," he answered in a long letter which in its doctrinal aspects might well have been written by Tolstoy. When Tolstoy read a copy of the letter, he commented that it was salutary, elucidating the past and present, and a programme



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for him that he was still far from carrying out. In this instance, however, Chertkov betrayed a tactlessness that was one of his worst faults and often resented by Tolstoy. He was unable to understand how offensive it was to Tolstoy to pass on to him Dosev's crude comments on his wife, or his own still cruder comments on Sonya in his letter, or to quote to a comparative stranger—as he did in his answer—passages from Tolstoy's private diary. In his hostility to Sonya in the present struggle, Chertkov often forgot that she was Tolstoy's wife whom he loved, and to whom he had special obligations sanctified by many years of married life.

At times Tolstoy also grew annoyed with Chertkov for making his manuscripts accessible to his own friends and for some of his critical strictures on his works. But over the years of their association he had come to value highly Chertkov's innumerable services in connection with the editing and publishing of his writings. Loyalty was a strong quality of Tolstoy's nature, and he probably felt it doubly necessary now to defend Chertkov in the light of the mounting criticism of him. As he said many times, this disciple was his best and closest friend.

Chertkov seemed to be the principle irritant in the unhappy domestic strife at Yasnaya Polyana. But the assumption that peace would reign if he removed himself from the scene, as a gentleman normally would in a quarrel between husband and wife, was altogether too simple. The causes of the dissension went much deeper. Besides, he had a spiritual vested interest in Tolstoy and his teaching. He had given up the best years of his life to this cause, and now he had no intention of allowing "the crazy will of a woman," as he expressed it, to endanger his favoured position at the right hand of the master. As the chief editor of Tolstoy's enormous literary heritage and the continuator of his teaching after his death, Chertkov looked forward to occupying the remaining years of his own life with a most congenial and sacred trust. And he was prepared to exert himself to the utmost to defend these prerogatives against Sonya and any members of her family—even against Tolstoy himself.

Chertkov had helpers at Yasnaya Polyana in this struggle. Alexandra took his side and did all in her power to carry out his plans. Painful childhood memories lingered in her mind: the old nurse's cruel story of how Sonya, when pregnant with her, had done everything possible to bring about an abortion since she loathed having

this child; of hearing her mother sobbing of God's injustice at the time of Vanichka's death in taking her son and not Sasha. The feeling between mother and daughter now was often one of hatred. Alexandra believed that there was more cold-blooded selfishness than sickness in her mother's behaviour towards her husband, and Tolstoy was often obliged to beg her to show more consideration for her mother's suffering. Alexandra's close friend, Varya Feokritov, helped Sonya with her edition but conspired against her in the family quarrel. The accomplished Goldenweizer's reverence for Tolstoy made him a willing helper in the interests of Chertkov, and while staying at Telyatinki he visited Yasnaya Polyana nearly every day, faithfully reporting back to Chertkov the events there. Bulgakov, Tolstoy's secretary, tried to be neutral, but he too was somewhat committed to Chertkov as the man who had recommended him. And finally, gentle Dr. Dushan Makovitski, though disinclined to quarrels of any sort, was often filled with hatred for Sonya, whose neurotic condition he felt was all nonsense, because of her tormenting the man he worshipped.

The household was a beehive of conspiratorial activity—eavesdropping, concealing documents, secret messages going back and forth between Yasnaya Polyana and Telyatinki, copies of Tolstoy's letters being smuggled out of the house, and mysterious meetings in the environs. Visitors like Korolenko, that summer, were taken aside by each party and told the real "truth" about the family crisis. All the participants in these events, save Tolstoy, gave the impression of being favoured witnesses to an international scandal rather than to a sorrowful quarrel between a husband and wife in their old age. All of them wrote diaries—eight daily records were being kept simultaneously of the events taking place in this unhappy household. No family quarrel has even been so fully documented.

In this turmoil of misdirected human effort, Tolstoy, the central figure, often appeared like a weary umpire arbitrating between two sweaty, fiercely struggling teams. In a sense, he was now suffering the martyrdom, though in a form he had never expected or wished, that had been inflicted upon many of his followers by the authorities. If he had any doubt as to the course he ought to pursue, his rule was to do that which required most self-sacrifice. This meant to remain at Yasnaya Polyana however severe the trials he had to bear. But torn this way and that by the conflicting demands made upon him by both sides in the struggle, he often lost courage. "It

is very hard for me," he wrote in his diary, "in this house of insane people."

## VII

Tolstoy's hope that by recovering the diaries from Chertkov and depositing them in a strongbox in the Tula bank he would appease his wife proved to be a vain one. The very next day, Sonya fell on her knees in the corridor before her husband's bedroom, seized his legs and screamed: "This is my last request! Give me the key or write me out an authorization to obtain the diaries. I do not believe that you won't give them back to Chertkov."

"Get up. Please get up! For God's sake stop this and leave me alone!" he shouted in a trembling voice.

She jumped up, ran to her room, and then cried out: "I've drunk the whole phial. I've poisoned myself."

He rushed to her, but she answered in a calm voice: "I deliberately deceived you. I didn't drink it. . . ."

Tolstoy went into the garden, his weak heart pounding, and asked Alexandra to tell her mother that she seemed to be doing everything she could to force him to leave the house. In her diary Sonya wrote: "I basely deceived Leo Nikolayevich into thinking that I had taken it [opium], but immediately confessed the deceit and wept bitterly, but I made an effort to control myself."

For days a feeling of tension gripped all in the family in expectation of another mad scene as Sonya continued in a highly nervous state. Now she shifted her ground a bit. The diaries were kept in the background while she concentrated her attacks on Chertkov. Apparently with Tolstoy's promise in mind, made in his letter of July 13, that he would cease meeting with Chertkov if she desired, she strove to bring this about by her behaviour without actually demanding it. She turned every visit of Chertkov into a painful experience for all. Whenever a carriage drove up, she began to tremble, fearing her "enemy" had arrived again. She shadowed him and her husband through the house, refusing to let them talk alone for a moment. To preserve peace Tolstoy felt obliged to ask Chertkov not to mention the diaries in conversation and not try to see him in private. And before visiting Chertkov, he would ask Sonya's permission. If Chertkov delayed his departure of an evening, she would ostentatiously arise and loudly announce: "It's time to go to bed!"

This campaign did not daunt Chertkov, though it kept Tolstoy

in a continual state of worry. But Sonya failed to stop with these tactics. She shouted threats against Chertkov, that she wanted to kill him, to drive a knife into his fat body. Losing all sense of discretion, she plotted with her neighbour, Anna E. Zvegintsev, who disliked Chertkov, to denounce him to the authorities and have him again removed from the district. And a police search was actually made at Telyatinki that summer. Still more disturbing, she read aloud to members of the family and guests a passage in Tolstoy's diary, which he wrote at the age of twenty-three, of his love for men, and she openly accused him and Chertkov of unnatural relations. Her shocking threats and accusations provoked a stern letter of reproof from Chertkov's mother, who was then staying with him.

Tolstoy and the older children thought the time had come to call in a physician to examine Sonya. On July 19 the family friend, Dr. D. V. Nikitin, and the neuropathist, Dr. G. I. Rossolimo, arrived. Dr. Rossolimo's diagnosis of the illness was: "A degenerative dual constitution: paranoial and hysterical, with a predominance of the former. At the present time there is an episodic aggravation." Separation from her husband for a period, and baths and walking, were prescribed.

Sonya was outraged. Such cures for one "who has been morally wounded" by the fact that her husband has fallen in love with a man! She went to the Voronka "to measure its depths to see if it were possible to drown herself." Various ways of suicide were imagined, but she favoured Anna Karenina's cruelly vindictive method of throwing herself under the train that would carry off her husband in the separation the doctors advised, and thus inflict on him a totally useless but irrevocable remorse.

A crescendo of scenes culminated in Sonya's leaving home on July 25, because her husband, she said, had driven her out of the house and her daughter had spat at her. She wept at departing, forgave Alexandra, and took some poison with her. Behind her she left a letter for Tolstoy, in which she thanked him for her former happiness and declared that, since the doctors had advised separation, she was going away to leave him free to have all the secrets and meetings with Chertkov that he desired. To the press she also left a letter about the "extraordinary event" that had happened at "peaceful Yasnaya Polyana"—her leaving "with despair in her soul," because she could no longer endure the presence of Chertkov.

But Sonya was careful to depart in the carriage that was being

sent to Tula to meet Andrei, and in a few hours she duly arrived back at Yasnaya Polyana with her son. She feared her husband's derision, but he came to her, she wrote in her diary, kind and touched, and thanked her with tears in his eyes for having returned. Then she immediately brought up the question of Chertkov again and he grew angry.

Sonya, however, had won out once more, for the next day Tolstoy wrote Chertkov to say that, though it pained him, he felt that they ought not to meet as long as his wife's sickly condition lasted. His friend accepted the blow with bad grace, and took the occasion, in replying, to sermonize Tolstoy in Tolstoyan accents on the danger of abandoning the freedom of action necessary to accomplish, not his own will, but the will of Him who sent him.

Earlier in July Tolstoy had decided to alter the will he had executed the previous year. He wished to designate his daughter Tanya as the alternate heir of all his literary productions in the event that Alexandra should die before him. This alteration, he felt, was necessary not only as a legal safeguard, but also as a kind of moral protection for Alexandra in the family. Besides, he did not want to hurt the feelings of his oldest daughter whom he knew could be trusted to carry out his wish that his works become public property in the manner he desired. He signed this new will on July 17 during his last visit to Chertkov at Telyatinki. By mistake the words "being of sound mind and memory" were omitted. He had to make a fresh draft which he wrote out in the woods near Yasnaya Polyana on July 22, and he signed it along with the three witnesses, A. B. Goldenweizer, A. P. Sergeyenko, and A. D. Radynski. This was Tolstoy's last will and testament. A few days later he also signed a separate document which explained why he had felt obliged to make a formal will, and he left specific directions in it for the surrender after his death of all his papers and manuscripts to Chertkov, who was empowered to edit and publish them according to the principles on which he had published Tolstoy's writings during his lifetime.

During Chertkov's visit to Yasnaya Polyana, the day before their meeting ceased, the wary Sonya overheard a snatch of conversation in which Tolstoy asked him if he agreed to the changes he had made, meaning changes in the supplementary note to the will. Her suspicions at once aroused, she demanded of her husband that he tell her what agreement he had been talking about. He refused to answer. She jumped to the conclusion that a secret will

had been the subject of their conversation, and from that time on she daily pestered her husband, Alexandra, Bulgakov, and others on this score.

The subject of the will was now added to Sonya's collection of fixed ideas provoking her hysterical outbursts. Tolstoy's patent evasion on this theme naturally increased her suspicions and agitation. And his situation was rendered doubly painful by the fact that the existence of a will was a matter in which Leo and Andrei could entirely support their mother's demands, though with perhaps more self-interest than filial devotion. For they were keenly conscious of the vast financial possibilities of a literary inheritance from their father. They conducted an unsuccessful inquisition of their own on Alexandra, and Andrei put the question of the existence of a will directly to his father, who firmly refused to give him any satisfaction.

Of course Chertkov and his friends at near-by Telyatinki quickly heard of this new trial of Tolstoy, and they grew alarmed. Chertkov at once wrote him. All this was a deliberate plot, he said. His wife's supposed illness or "fatiguing dissimulation" had first been used to separate them. Now the persistent and united pressure of his wife and two sons was being used to extort from him or to learn from his diaries or papers whether he had made a will depriving them of a literary inheritance. "If they decide that you have not executed a will," he continued, "then they hope to prevent you from doing so by watching over you incessantly until your death. On the other hand, if they learn that you have written a will, they will try to keep you from going anywhere until they can get a physician, in their pay, to pronounce you feeble-minded and thus invalidate the will." Goldenweizer and A. P. Sergeyenko wrote in the same vein to Tolstoy, and all urged him to escape at once to Kochety. Obviously the friends feared more than anything else the defeat of all their plans in the matter of the will.

Tolstoy was annoyed by this concerted and gratuitous advice, and he sharply told Goldenweizer that he entirely disagreed with the sentiments expressed in these letters. "All of you exaggerate. What is said at a moment of irritation, you explain as a deliberate plan. But if it should turn out that you are right, then so much the better; it would give me freedom of action." Though Tolstoy had understandable moments of wavering in his belief, he had little sympathy for the idea that Sonya's hysterical behaviour was merely a cunning device to achieve well-planned objectives. He said to

Bulgakov on one occasion: "Sofya Andreyevna is not well. . . . If Vladimir Grigoryevich [Chertkov] could only see her as she is today! It is impossible not to feel sorry for her sufferings, and impossible to be so hard on her as he and many others are, and as I often am. And she has no reason for her behaviour. If she had any reason, she could not refrain from expressing it. It is simply that she is stifled here and cannot breathe. I cannot fail to pity her, and I rejoice when I am able to do so."

The conspiratorial atmosphere surrounding the will was not to Tolstoy's taste. By nature he was open and frank, and during many years of married life he had had no secrets from his wife. At times he now felt compelled to justify the secrecy to himself. For if he dismissed Chertkov's notion of a deliberate plan on the part of his wife and two sons, he admitted that they had given him much reason to believe that they would make every effort to violate his frequently expressed wishes concerning the disposition of his writings after his death. It is significant that at this time he began "A Diary for Myself Alone," one that would come under the eye of no one, not even Chertkov. And the first entry in this on July 29 reads: "Today I must note one thing: if the suspicions of some of my friends are just, then an attempt has now begun to obtain her ends by affection. For some days now she has been kissing my hand, which she never did before, and there are no scenes nor any despair. May God and good people forgive me if I am mistaken. It is not easy for me to be mistaken in what is kind and loving. I can love her quite sincerely, but I cannot do this in my relations with Leo. Andrei is simply one of those in whom it is difficult to think the spirit of God exists (but remember that it does). I will try not to get irritated, and abide by my primary resolution—silence. I cannot deprive millions of people of what they perhaps need for their souls. I repeat 'perhaps.' But if there is even the smallest probability that what I write is needed by men's souls, I cannot deprive them of that spiritual food in order that Andrei may drink and indulge in debauchery, or that Leo may smear and . . . But heaven help them. Do your own duty and do not judge."

Tolstoy's lurking discontent over the secret nature of his will was suddenly intensified by a conversation with Biryukov. His biographer came for a visit at the beginning of August and was at once informed by both sides of all the unpleasant details of the family quarrel. Since he was close to the Chertkovs, he also heard about the will from them. To their dismay, however, he took a contrary

position on the whole question, and he humbly advised Tolstoy to summon the family and even several friends as witnesses and simply announce his wishes concerning the disposal of his writings after his death. This advice once more aroused in Tolstoy the feeling that he had acted wrongly. In fact, several days before he had entered in his secret diary: "Chertkov has drawn me into strife, and that strife is very hard and repulsive to me." And now he wrote him a letter: "I talked yesterday with Posha [Biryukov] and he very correctly told me that I was at fault in having made my will secretly. I should have done it openly, informing those whom it concerned, or I should have left things as they were and not have done anything. He is quite right that I acted badly, and I now regret it. It was bad to do it secretly, thereby assuming ill-will in my heirs. Above all, it was certainly wrong to avail myself of an institution of the government that I reject by drawing up a will in legal form. The circulation of my writings will hardly atone for the distrust evoked by the inconsistency of my conduct. . . . But I think that for the present it is best to leave things as they are. Yet it is hard."

Panic seized the little group at Telyatinki. A council of war was held, and Chertkov hurried a letter off to Tolstoy to discredit Biryukov on the score that he knew nothing of the facts that had obliged him to write a will and keep it from the knowledge of his family. Tolstoy then asked Chertkov to provide him with the history of these facts. He did in a very long and extraordinary letter that reviewed in detail over many years the attitude of Sonya and certain members of her family to property rights and to Tolstoy's rejection of them. Though the picture is distorted here and there and the interpretation occasionally malicious, Chertkov stuck fairly close to the facts and they invoked the most painful memories in Tolstoy. He capitulated to the triumphant Chertkov and once again agreed with him that the will and the secrecy attendant upon it were necessary, though he still insisted that he was dissatisfied with his own conduct in the whole affair but that he did not know how to act more wisely in this instance.

Meanwhile, Tolstoy's misery continued, though the cessation of Chertkov's visits lessened the frequency of his wife's outbursts. She lived for the hope that he must soon leave Telyatinki, for the police had permitted him to stay only till the termination of his mother's visit in September. Now convinced that there was a will, Sonya blamed her sufferings on Tolstoy's nonobservance of his principles,



whereas formerly she had ascribed them to his adherence to his convictions. He sometimes caught her rummaging among his papers looking for his diary which he now had to keep locked up. When he took his daily walk or ride, she shadowed him for fear he might be having a rendezvous with Chertkov. At times she wondered whether it would not be better to have Chertkov visit the house if it would put an end to their letter-writing. "You are always carrying on a secret amatory correspondence," she furiously objected. And she sent him a mad letter containing the passage from his youthful diary on his love for men and her comments on it.

The strain was telling on Tolstoy. His sleep was disturbed by worry and Sonya's frequent visits at all hours of the night. It was impossible to work. His attempt to treat her tirades with silence only exasperated her the more. He began to feel that there was something ridiculous, humiliating, and shameful in allowing himself to be cut off from Chertkov. Death would seem to him like a welcome relief, he wrote in his diary. For some days he had been thinking about trying to get away from her and go to Kochety for a rest, and Tanya, who was visiting Yasnaya Polyana, strongly encouraged this step. But every time it was mentioned Sonya had hysterics, and she loudly threatened, if he went, to go to her friends the Maslovs where Taneyev was vacationing.

On August 14 Tolstoy wrote in his secret diary: "Always worse and worse. She did not sleep last night. She jumped up in the morning. 'With whom are you talking?' Then she told me horrible things: sexual irritation. Terrible to say. . . .<sup>1</sup> Terrible, but thank God she is pitiful and I can pity her. I will endure. God help me. She has worn everybody out, and herself most of all." Shortly after this Tanya entered her father's room and found him with his face in his hands, sobbing. He repeated to his daughter some of the things Sonya had said to him. She had demanded that they resume what had long since ceased—marital relations!

This last experience was too much for Tolstoy, and he firmly decided to leave for Kochety the next day.

## VIII

Sonya did not carry out her threat to go to the Maslovs and Taneyev. Instead, to the dismay of the whole party, she insisted on accompanying her husband to Kochety. Tanya, feeling that the

<sup>1</sup> Tolstoy struck out three words here.

whole purpose of her father's visit to her estate would be frustrated, sternly warned her mother that she expected her to be on her best behaviour.

For several days relations between husband and wife improved in the cheery surroundings of Kochety, until Sonya read a news account to the effect that the government's ban on Chertkov's living at Telyatinki had been entirely removed. It almost seemed as though the authorities, aware that Chertkov's presence near Yasnaya Polyana was a vital factor in a scandalous family feud, had decided to let him remain there as a part of their indirect campaign against Tolstoy. He and his daughters had known of this news for nearly a week, but had feared to tell Sonya. Now her despair was terrible. "I will kill him!" she shrieked at her husband, and she even drafted a letter to Stolypin, head of the government, demanding that he remove Chertkov from her neighbourhood. Only by reaffirming his promises not to see Chertkov at all and not to give his diaries to anyone, and by agreeing to a new promise she demanded not to allow Chertkov to take photographs of him, could Tolstoy reduce her to some semblance of calm.

Sonya's diary at this time contains shameless expressions concerning the "passionate relations" between her husband and Chertkov. She crazily imagined licentious scenes of perverted intimacies that they wrote to each other in their letters, and the very sight of a photograph of her husband and his friend together caused a hysterical explosion. Fully aware of the horrible thoughts that were filling her mind, it is little wonder that Tolstoy, forgetting his former passionate professions of love for Sonya, should now write in his secret diary at Kochety: "Today, remembering my wedding, I thought that it was a fatal step. I was never even in love. But I could not avoid marrying."

For some time Sonya had been an eager reader of critical attacks on her husband's teaching, and she often appropriated such views and repeated them as her own original observations. Now she tried to draw him into argument so that she could ridicule his convictions before the company at Kochety. Her diary contains the substance of one such discussion on chastity, in which she maliciously parroted ignorant opinions of critics who disregarded Tolstoy's contention that chastity was an unrealizable Christian ideal towards which all should strive even though they could never achieve it. She fulminated that it was all very well for her husband to preach chastity. "But at his wish," she declared, "I've been pregnant sixteen times:

thirteen children born and three miscarriages. In those days he suggested to me, a young woman, that he could not work or write or be healthy if I refused to cohabit with him."

Tolstoy continued "to struggle with Sonya by kindness and love." And when that failed, he observed silence. At times, however, all his good intentions were forgotten in the face of her mad unreasonableness, and then angry words would fly. After such an exchange, he bitterly wrote in his secret diary on August 28: "It is continually harder and harder with Sofya Andreyevna. Not love, but a demand for love that is close to hate and changes into hate. Yes, such egoism is insanity. Having-children formerly saved her—an animal love, but all the same a self-sacrificing one. When that ended there remained only a terrible egotism. It is egotism of a most abnormal character—insanity."

Whatever harsh sentiments about his wife Tolstoy permitted to himself in the privacy of his secret diary, he did not lightly tolerate them from anyone else. In this respect he continued to rebuke the indignation of Alexandra and the offensive asperity of the little group of friends. Hardly a letter to Chertkov, chafing in his isolation and wounded pride, failed to carry a plea for greater understanding of Sonya's wretched condition. "I know it appears strange to you," Tolstoy wrote in one of these letters, "but she often seems to me terribly pitiable. When I consider what it must be like for her alone at nights, more than half of which she spends sleepless, with a dim yet painful consciousness that she is not loved and is a burden to everyone, except the children, I cannot help pitying her."

After another unpleasant scene, Sonya left for home on August 29 to comfort her favourite son Leo, who was involved in a court case. Husband and wife parted in loving fashion, kissing and weeping, and begging each other's forgiveness for all that had passed. At last Tolstoy was able to settle back to enjoy the quiet and rest which had been the purpose of his visit to Kochety. He wrote her kind letters, describing his daily occupations, inquiring about her health, and drawing an alluring picture of how fine their life could be together if she could only master the feelings that tormented her.

Sonya's replies were complaining, suspicious, and her true state of mind she described in a letter to Tanya, in which she declared that her husband must definitely make a choice between her and Chertkov, "the man he now loves so insanelly." Soon Tolstoy received an alarming report from Alexandra of the goings-on at Yasnaya

Polyana—Sonya's agitated condition continued. She had called in a priest, shocked him with her lengthy tale of misery, and had him sprinkle holy water over her husband's room in order to drive out Chertkov's evil spirit. A few days later Sonya arrived back at Kochety, refusing to be separated any longer from her husband.

On the urging of Tanya and Alexandra, Chertkov at this time wrote Sonya a long letter in an effort to effect a reconciliation. In encyclopaedic fashion he reviewed the whole troubled course of their relations, tried to explain away his harsh words to her as having been the result of an occasional loss of "spiritual equilibrium," and made an earnest plea at the end that she throw off the burden of hostility and hatred of him that oppressed her and tormented others. Her answer was equally detailed, going over all the old scores she had to settle with him. But her attitude was utterly unforgiving: he was an obnoxious intruder in her family, had caused all her suffering, and she demanded that he leave them in peace.

Tolstoy's brief period of quiet was abruptly terminated by Sonya's return to Kochety. Her nervous irritation continued, and the climaxing hysterical outbursts now exhausted his patience. "Today, the 10th, everything is still the same," he wrote in his secret diary. "She eats nothing. I went to her. . . . In the morning I thought I could stand it no longer, and that I should have to leave her. There is no living with her, only torment, as I told her. My trouble is that I cannot remain indifferent. Towards evening the scenes began again: dashes into the garden, tears, screams. When I went after her to the garden, she cried out: 'He's a beast, a murderer! I can't endure the sight of him!' She ran to hire a cart with the intention of leaving at once. So it went on all evening."

Tolstoy's despair and shame were increased by the rumours and first-hand reports passed on to him by the sleuthing friends at Yasnaya Polyana, who found his family life such a fruitful field for their personal diaries. Varya Feokritov took down verbatim Sonya's remarks, when she had returned from Kochety, concerning her plans for Tolstoy's works after his death. If he left no legal will, she intended to publish his writings for her own profit. However, if he willed all to Chertkov or to the public, she said, then she would simply refuse to surrender his unpublished pieces, which she would insist had all been written before 1881. And anyway, she declared, she and her sons would contest a will, maintaining that it was made under duress when he was feeble-minded. Varya

Feokritov gave a copy of these remarks to Goldenweizer, who promptly sent it on to Tolstoy after using it for his own diary. Tolstoy could hardly doubt the truth of this unpleasant report, but he was in no sense grateful to those who made it available to him, for he curtly wrote Goldenweizer: "Though it is hard for me to know all this and to know that so many outsiders know about it, it is salutary for me. However, in what Varvara Mikhailovna [Varya Feokritov] writes, and in what you think about this, there is much and bad exaggeration, a disregard of her sickly condition, and a confusion of good sentiments with those that are not good."

With a new firmness Tolstoy resisted all Sonya's hysterical attempts to get him to return to Yasnaya Polyana with her or even to name a definite date. Finally, "insanely sobbing," as she described herself, she left without him on September 12. He did not join her until September 22, in time to be on hand for the next day; their forty-eighth wedding anniversary. Terror seized him, he wrote in his secret diary before leaving, at the thought of what awaited him there. His fears were justified. She greeted him with bitter reproaches.

## IX

Dressed in a white silk gown, Sonya stood with her husband before a screen on the day of their forty-eighth wedding anniversary. Bulgakov nervously clicked the shutter. But the picture did not turn out well, and the next day she insisted that another be taken. His dislike for this business made no difference to her. Had he not let Chertkov take scores of pictures of him? Besides, a newspaper, she heard, had published a rumour that they were divorced. She would send this photograph to the press and prove to the world that Tolstoy still loved her. "She needs only one thing," he had written in his diary a week before, "that people should think that *I love her*. That is what is so terrible." She clung to his arm, turned her face full towards him, and tried to elicit with her faded smile an answering smile from him. But he stared stonily ahead, profound discontent frozen forever on his careworn face.

Alexandra raged, scolded her father. Why had he allowed himself to be photographed with his wife when she had forced him to promise not to let Chertkov take him? Besides, he had done nothing about the fact that her mother, while he was at Kochety, had removed from their favoured position over his desk a large photograph of Chertkov and his nephew and one of her and himself and

replaced them by her own photograph and one of his father. Tolstoy, feeling harassed and gloomy over this criticism from his daughter, shook his head and sorrowfully remarked that she was becoming like her mother. Shortly after he rang for her to come to his study and take dictation. She refused. He sent Bulgakov for her. She entered, sat in silence, her pencil poised. He tried to begin, but his old head fell on the arm of the chair and he burst into sobs.

"I don't need your stenography!" he cried through his tears. She rushed to him and asked his forgiveness, and they both wept.

The unpleasantness over the photographs did not end there. Perhaps to please Alexandra, and because he felt that he must be firm, Tolstoy put back in their original places the pictures that Sonya had removed. She indulged in another hysterical fit when she discovered the change. So her husband, forbidden to see Chertkov, could not part with his picture, she fumed. She ripped it from the wall and tore it up. Weeping and raving about the house, she threatened suicide. Going to her room, she began shooting a toy pistol, hoping that her husband would hear and run to her rescue. But he sat gloomily in his study. Instead, old Marya Schmidt, who was calling at the time, grew terrified over the shots, and hurried off a message to Alexandra, who was visiting her sister-in-law with Varya, to return at once. When they arrived late that night a stormy scene ensued, with Sonya shouting that she would drive Varya away as she had driven away Chertkov. Alexandra went to her father and declared her intention of leaving the house. "It all leads to one end," he wearily replied. In the morning, Alexandra, taking Varya with her, moved to her little house at Telyatinki, near the Chertkovs. She came to Yasnaya Polyana a few hours every day to work for her father.

Sonya was somewhat humbled by this unexpected turn of events and made a serious effort to control her more extreme actions. In her anxiety now to please Tolstoy, she often amazed him with nervous, endless, and frequently senseless chatter. And he found something unpleasantly incongruous in an old woman's explosive acts of tender love. Grateful for this degree of relief, however, he tried to repay her affection. "Today I realized for the first time a possibility of overcoming her by love and kindness," he hopefully wrote in his secret diary.

But the tension was still there, as Sonya's own diary at this time indicates. She continued to trail him around, to require an accounting of his every movement, to snoop among his papers, and to

demand that he read his mail to her. When he objected to this surveillance, to being a rag under his wife's slipper, she ironically accused him in turn with having fixed ideas. He wants to be free, she wrote in her diary. "But is he not free now, except for intercourse with Chertkov and a mad desire to see him?"

At this moment, however, Chertkov at near-by Telyatinki, sulking like Achilles in his tent, was indignant over Sonya's blistering rejection of his letter of reconciliation. He testily wrote Tolstoy that he had made a big mistake in allowing "a spiritually alien person" to interfere in their relations. Depressed by reproaches and accusations from this quarter too, Tolstoy entered in his secret diary: "They tear me to pieces. I sometimes think I ought to get away from them all." Though he recognized some justice in Chertkov's complaints, he frankly replied: "I fully agree that I have made a mistake and that it ought to be corrected. But the whole matter seems to me much more complicated and difficult to resolve than it can possibly appear even to such a close friend as yourself. I must solve it alone in my soul, before God, and I am trying to do so, and every interference makes this task more difficult. Your letter pained me. I felt that I was being torn in two—no doubt because, rightly or wrongly, I detected a personal note in what you wrote." There were moments when, in his sense of the word, Tolstoy wondered whether his friend was a truly religious man. Chertkov realized that he had overshot the mark, and he immediately replied, humbly begging the master's forgiveness.

Badgered on every side, Tolstoy found little time or inclination for his dwindling literary work. Not to be writing saddened his spirits all the more and made his existence seem peculiarly futile. A rich artistic design had flashed into his mind and cried out for realization. On October 2 he entered in his diary: "I have written nothing, but at night I thought well and clearly about how fine it would be to depict artistically the triviality of the life of the rich and civil-official classes, and of the peasants and workers, and then portray among these and others a single spiritually living person in each class. It could be a woman or a man. Oh, how wonderful this could be! And how it attracts me! What a superb thing it could be!"

But art had now to give way to his moral struggle over his wife as he stood on the edge of the grave. For on the same day he made the following entry in his secret diary: "Today I felt a strong desire for artistic work, but I realized the impossibility of concentrating on it because of her, of this persistent feeling about her, and because of

## ESCAPE

the struggle within me. But of course that struggle, and the possibility of victory in it, are more important than any possible work of art."

The next day, Tolstoy, worn-out with the emotional strain of the past months, fell dangerously ill. He had convulsions and a prolonged period of unconsciousness. Sonya, in a frenzy of despair, clasped her husband's twitching legs and softly whispered: "Lord, only not this time, only not this time!" And she said to Alexandra, who had been hurriedly called: "I suffer more than you. You will lose a father, but I will lose a husband for whose death I am to blame!" For all her sincere and terrible grief, she could not resist the desire to purloin Tolstoy's portfolio, containing papers; she hid it in her cupboard. The children observed her in this act and hastened to secure from her his secret diary and the key of his desk. When Tanya demanded the portfolio, she returned it, saying that she did not want Chertkov to get it.

Tolstoy made a quick recovery. But Sergei, Tanya, and Alexandra held a council, and Sergei warned his mother that if she did not come to herself, the family would place her under the control of doctors and separate her from her husband. For if he died, said Sergei, the whole world would believe that it was her doing. Thoroughly contrite now, Sonya begged forgiveness of Alexandra and Varya and asked them to return to the house, which they did.

A few days after Tolstoy's illness, the now thoroughly shaken Sonya melted to the point of inviting Chertkov to call. Once the invitation was tendered, she longed to revoke it. Terrible palpitations seized her, she wrote in her diary, as she heard the sound of his approaching carriage. She had begged her husband not to embrace him in the customary fashion of intimate Russian male friends, and she had purposely ordered an early bath for him so that the visit would be cut short. Though she avoided Chertkov when he came, she peered through her husband's window with opera glasses to see how they met after their long separation. Victimized by her extreme agitation all that day, Tolstoy decided that he would seek no more visits from Chertkov.

Any hope of tranquillity Tolstoy expected from this decision was blasted, for Sonya found a misplaced copybook containing the entries, running from July 29 to September 22, of his "Diary for Myself Alone." She came upon this little book which he had tucked away in one of his boots. Of course, she did not scruple to read it, despite the plain statement on the first page that it was intended only



for himself. In it were various frank reflections on the family strife and also plain allusions to his will and to some of its terms.

The hysterical scenes began all over again. Sonya's discovery confirmed not only her suspicion about the will, but all her other suspicions, which was a typical reaction for a person with her mania. For days, she wrote in her diary, she went about with only one thought—suicide. Her husband would give all his works to the public and thus would take "the bread from the mouths" of her twenty-three children and grandchildren. He was holding a threatening dagger over her—if he should die before her edition of his works was published, she might well lose all the income. Of course, that "wicked Pharisee," Chertkov, was the cause of it all. "I must end these tortures more quickly," she wrote, "or tomorrow Mr. Chertkov will be carrying away not manuscripts, but *me* to a lunatic asylum!"

Sonya left a letter on her husband's desk, in which she argued the family's rights to his literary inheritance with considerable skill from her point of view, and she must have stung his conscience to the quick by heaping scorn on him for repudiating his principles in making a legal will. And she even offered to renounce her own rights to his works in favour of her children and grandchildren. "I am seized by horror," she prophetically concluded about the will, "at the thought that I may survive you and see the evil that will spring up around your grave. . . ."

Tolstoy answered her objections about the will with silence or a plea that she refrain from mixing into his affairs. But in his secret diary he wrote: "A letter with reproaches because of some document about rights, as if the question about money were the most important thing. Yet this is better, clearer, but when she exaggeratedly speaks about her love for me and goes on her knees and kisses my hand, it is very hard."

Sonya's spying on his movements continued. She followed him for miles in a carriage, fearful that he would try to meet Chertkov, and from concealment she watched him in the distance with opera glasses. One day, with an air of determination, he firmly announced that he was going to Telyatinki, for he had heard that Chertkov's wife was ill. Despite a hysterical scene, he left. She followed soon after, running nearly all the way to Telyatinki, and hid in a ditch to await the meeting. But Tolstoy did not arrive, for he had decided that the visit would be unwise. She returned hours later, numb with cold, and took her place at the dinner table, sitting there

silent, accusing, without eating, fully clothed in her coat, hat, and galoshes.

At last Tolstoy had begun to feel the futility of continuing this seemingly endless struggle with Sonya by love and kindness. He wondered whether his very presence was not actually hindering her recovery from her sick abnormality.

On October 20, an old peasant friend, M. P. Novikov, close to Tolstoy in spirit, visited Yasnaya Polyana. They talked a great deal together. When Novikov reminded Tolstoy of his former unfulfilled promise to visit him, he replied that he could now keep his promise, for he was superfluous at Yasnaya Polyana and might come one day to die in his hut. Late that night, when Novikov was about to retire, Tolstoy softly entered his room and said with some agitation: "I didn't want to speak to you about my affairs, but I've only just understood and felt, without explaining it to you, why I've always been unable to visit you. I'll not conceal from you the fact that in this house I'm roasted as though I were in hell. I've always thought and desired to go off somewhere—to the woods, to a watchman's hut, or to some poor peasant in the village where we could help each other, but God did not give me the strength to tear myself away from my family—my weakness, my sin. For my own satisfaction I could not oblige others to suffer—even my family. . . . I couldn't run away secretly without causing an uproar and bringing grief to my family, and my wife would on no account agree to my going to you or to anyone else. If I insisted, there would at once be the scenes customary in our circle—tears, hysterics, fainting fits—and I would not be able to endure them."

The surprised Novikov did not know what to make of this unexpected declaration, and he timidly offered a true story about a peasant friend whose wife was a chronic drunkard. For years her husband had done everything to cure her—he had ordered special prayers from the priest, bought miracle-working icons, and had gone on a holy pilgrimage. But last summer, concluded Novikov, he flogged his drunken wife a couple of times and it acted better than all saints. She was cured.

Tolstoy liked this story and laughed. But growing serious again, he said: "I've endured more than your friend. For thirty years I've borne this cross and bear it still. . . . They value me here in rubles and say that I'm ruining the family. True, they have taken loving care of me physically; they see to it that my food does not grow cold, and that I have a clean blouse and breeches. . . .

But no one, except Sasha, has any interest in my spiritual life. I will go away, I will unfailingly go away," he ended in a toneless voice. And at parting, he said once more: "We shall soon see each other, perhaps even sooner than I expect."

Three days later Tolstoy actually wrote Novikov a letter, recalling their conversation and asking him to search out in his village a warm hut should he decide to come.

Sonya relentlessly, fatally, pursued her mad course—peeping from behind doors at her husband, dashing into his bedroom in the dead of night to demand his diaries or that he burn his will. A firm was again tempting her with an offer of a million rubles for the publishing rights of all her husband's works. The very thought was repulsive to him. The whip of Novikov's peasant friend dangled perilously before him. He planned a statement to the newspapers, aimed at preventing Sonya from selling the rights to his works to anyone.

He had begun to make secret plans, to tell Alexandra and to ask her to inform Chertkov. Should he go, each of them would use a pseudonym in all communications. A feeling of tense expectancy took possession of him. Habit, duty, and love for Sonya demanded that he stay. When he whispered his intentions to dear old Marya Schmidt, this frightened worshipper exclaimed softly: "Darling Leo Nikolayevich, this will pass; it is only a momentary weakness." And he replied: "Yes, yes, I know that it is a weakness, and I hope that it will pass." He sincerely hoped. But at the same time he waited for a real reason for leaving Yasnaya Polyana forever, and he knew in his heart of hearts that he would take advantage of it. And the unfortunate, tragic Sonya soon gave him that reason.

On October 28 Tolstoy wrote in his diary what had happened in the early hours of that morning:

"I lay down at half-past eleven. Slept till three o'clock. I awoke, and again, as on previous nights, I heard the opening of doors and footsteps. On other occasions I had not looked at my door, but now I glanced at it and saw through the crack a bright light in the study and heard a rustling. That was Sofya Andreyevna searching, probably reading. The day before she had asked, insisted, that I should not close my doors. Both her doors were open so that she could hear my slightest movement. Day and night my every word and movement must be known to her and under her control. Again footsteps and a cautious opening of doors, and she went out.

"I don't know why this aroused in me an unrestrainable aversion

and indignation. I tried to go to sleep again but could not. I tossed about for an hour, lighted a candle, and sat up. The door opened. Sofya Andreyevna came in and asked: 'How are you?' and she was surprised to see my light. My aversion and indignation grew. I choked and counted my pulse—97.

"I could lie there no longer and suddenly took the final decision to go away. I wrote her a letter and began to pack only what was necessary for the trip. I woke Dushan and then Sasha, and they helped me pack. I trembled at the thought that she would hear and come out—scenes, hysteria, and then there would be no getting away without an uproar.

"By six o'clock everything was somehow packed, and I went to the stable to tell them to harness. Dushan, Sasha, and Varya finished the packing. It was still night—pitch dark. I missed the path to the wing of the house, stumbled into a thicket, pricking myself, ran into the trees, fell, lost my cap and couldn't find it, made my way out with difficulty and got back to the house. I found another cap and with a lantern made my way back to the stable and saw to the harnessing. Sasha, Dushan, and Varya came out with me. I trembled, expecting to be pursued. But at last we drove off. At Shchyokino station we had to wait an hour, and I thought she would appear at any moment. However, we took our places in the railway carriage and started. My fear passed and pity for her arose in my heart, but no doubt that I had done what I had to do. Perhaps I am mistaken and am merely justifying my actions. But it seems to me that I have saved myself—not Leo Nikolayevich, but something of which there is still a bit left in me."

## Chapter XLI

### TO SEEK, ALWAYS TO SEEK

ON THE morning of October 28 Sonya rose late, as was her custom. She went to greet her husband. He was not in his room—strange at that time of the day. An old fear gripped her. She ran to Alexandra.

“Where is papa?”

“He has gone away.”

“How has he gone away? When?”

“Last night.”

“Impossible! Sasha, dear . . .”

“Well, do you think I’m fooling? I’m telling you what has happened.”

“Has he gone away for good?”

“Probably for good.”

“Alone?”

“No, with Dushan.”

“Darling, Sasha, dear . . . ! Tell me—where has he gone to?” Sonya clasped her hands imploringly. Her knees sagged and she leaned against the door.

“I don’t know where he’s gone,” Alexandra answered. “He told me nothing, only gave me a letter for you.”

“My God!” murmured Sonya. She tore open the letter and began to read:

“My departure will grieve you. I am sorry for that, but please understand and believe that I could not act otherwise. My position in the house is becoming and has become unbearable. Apart from anything else, I can no longer live in these conditions of luxury in which I have been living, and I am doing what old men of my age commonly do: leaving this worldly life in order to live out my last days in peace and solitude.

“Please try to understand this and do not follow me if you learn where I am. Your coming would only make your position and mine

worse and would not alter my decision. I thank you for your honourable forty-eight years of life with me, and I beg you to forgive me for anything in which I have been at fault towards you, as I with all my soul forgive you for any wrong you have done me. I advise you to reconcile yourself with the new position in which my departure places you and not to have an unkindly feeling towards me. If you want to report anything to me, give it to Sasha. She will know where I am and will forward what is necessary. But she cannot tell you where I am, for she has promised me not to tell anyone."

Sonya could bear to read only the first sentence. She rushed out of the house and dashed towards the pond. Alexandra, Bulgakov, and several servants ran after her. Reaching the little platform from which the women rinsed the laundry, she slipped, fell on the planks, and rolled off into the shallow water. Alexandra and Bulgakov with the aid of a servant pulled her out and with difficulty got her back to the house.

The hysterical Sonya's ravings and crude suicide attempts made the rest of that day at Yasnaya Polyana a mad experience for the whole household. She tried to jump out of the window, and again she dashed for the pond and was hauled back. A penknife, scissors, and heavy objects with which she feebly tried to injure herself were taken away from her. She had to be watched every moment. Roaming from room to room she wailed that she could not live without her husband. Her passionate outbursts of grief were a curious mingling of sentimentality and hate. Claspings to her breast her husband's pillow, a small one that she had made for him, she covered it with kisses, moaning:

"Dear Lyovochka, where is your worn little head lying now? Do you hear me?"

And the next moment she screamed:

"He's a beast! He couldn't have acted more cruelly! He deliberately wanted to kill me!"

In fact little serious concern for her absent husband was reflected in Sonya's grief. Her attention was centred primarily upon herself, an accepted phase of the derangement from which she suffered. She seemed now to realize the awful truth that the glory in which she had basked for years had vanished from her side, and that the world would attribute Tolstoy's flight from home to her behaviour. Nor did the deception that had characterized the whole course of her nervous illness desert her at this awful moment. For she sent

a servant to the station to find out what train Tolstoy had taken and dispatched a telegram to it: "Return at once. Sasha." But the servant revealed this fraud to Alexandra, who exposed it by a telegram of her own. To a chance reporter disguised as a friend, Sonya did not hesitate to show Tolstoy's farewell letter, apparently believing this to be her best defence before the world. To Alexandra, however, she declared her intention of running down her husband. If she found him, she said that would be the end of his escapes, for she would watch him day and night, even sleep at his door if necessary.

All the children, except Leo, who was abroad, were summoned in this emergency. They quickly gathered at Yasnaya Polyana and decided to send for a doctor and a nurse to keep their mother under constant observation. This new doctor, a mental specialist, found no evidence of paranoia in Sonya, but rather a psychopathic neuropsychic hysteria. Her violent agitation hardly lessened. She wrote Tolstoy a pathetic letter the day after his flight: "Lyovochka, darling, come home and save me, dear, from a second attempt at suicide. Lyovochka, friend of my whole life, I will do everything, everything you wish; I will renounce all luxury entirely; I'll be friendly with your friends; I'll cure myself; I'll be kind. Dear, dear, come back; you must *save* me. Even the Gospel says you can never, in *any circumstances*, desert your wife. My dear, darling, friend of my soul, save me, return. Come back if only to say farewell to me before we part forever." Poor Sonya's repentance was too late.

## II

At last he was on the road! The great adventure had begun. But the setting was not the one he had so often imagined—of the Brahmin, bent with years, trudging his solitary way along a dusty path to some lonely wilderness refuge. Tolstoy sat gloomily in a smoky, crowded, noisy, third-class railway coach. He seemed more like some aged modern Don Quixote with Dushan, his faithful Sancho Panza, off on a hopeless quest of spiritual knight-errantry.

What a complex series of material circumstances, psychological factors, rational speculation, and moral urges had created this unique situation. On the one hand, from the time of his youth Tolstoy had indulged in dreams of abandoning civilization and living like a peasant, joining the carefree Cossacks, becoming a holy pilgrim, or entering a monastery. And after his spiritual

regeneration these dreams found real substance in his desire to lead a simple life of bread-labour and service to others, which was so much at variance with his comfortable Yasnaya Polyana existence. In one form or another both the dreams and the positive plans for an entirely different life were reflected in the hopes and yearnings of his imaginary characters—Olenin, Pierre Bezukhov, Kornei Vasilyev, Saryntsov, and Father Sergei.

On the other hand, unhappy experiences of Tolstoy's married life both aided and hindered the fulfilment of his dreams and spiritual desires. They aided in the sense that he often felt he could no longer live with his wife and must go away, and always, of course, it was to go away and realize his ideal existence. Again and again he expressed this intention in his diary, and on several occasions, notably before Alexandra's birth in 1884, and at the height of Sonya's affair with Taneyev in 1897, he very nearly left home. And in the latter instance, it is significant that he never destroyed the farewell letter to his wife, as if he sensed that his determination, though unfulfilled, was unaltered. Yet these unhappy experiences also hindered him from going away, because he accepted them as a cross he must bear out of love for Sonya and duty to his family. The unpleasant incident in his study in the early hours of the morning of October 28 suddenly simplified this inhibiting complex and provided the essential impulse to action. He left home to get away from Sonya, whom love and kindness could not change, but he had left also to realize his dream of a new life. On his own moral terms it was a weakness, as he had admitted to Marya Schmidt. He had lost his spiritual struggle and regained his humanity.

How hard it had been to take that step after so many years of doubt and hesitation. And somehow Tolstoy felt that it was irrevocable—there was no returning. Conscience, however, still tugged at him. He had been on the train only a short time when he turned to the silent, faithful Dushan and said mournfully: "I wonder how Sofya Andreyevna is now? I'm sorry for her."

With an effort Tolstoy finally put these sad thoughts out of his mind. "How fine it is to be free," he declared, as though trying to cheer up his anxious companion rather than himself. Soon he began to take an interest in the passengers sitting around him. The coach was full of peasants and workers. They had long been taking an interest in him, for some had recognized him and the word had gone around that this was the great Tolstoy. Naïvely he had imagined that he could escape from Yasnaya Polyana and hide



himself from Sonya in some remote place, forgetting that his face was one of the best known in Russia. Reporters and police agents were quickly on his trail, and headlines—"Leo Tolstoy Leaves Yasnaya Polyana!"—shouted their news to the world before he even had time to select that peasant hut to which he would withdraw from the world "to live out his last days in peace and solitude."

If Tolstoy's features had failed to betray him, his conversation would have given him away. For he was soon engaged in an animated discussion with a peasant, a surveyor, and a student, and the subjects of course were his favourite ones—religion, the single tax of Henry George, the use of violence, and education. Warming up to the debate, he rose to his feet in order more forcefully to drive home his points, almost shouting so that he could be heard above the customary medley of train noises. The discussion turned into a lecture as passengers from both ends of the coach left their seats and gathered around to listen to Russia's most famous man. The student assiduously took notes. This man, who a few hours before had stealthily run away from his wife to seek a peaceful retreat, now stood in a crowded third-class railway coach and expounded the eternal law, like some Biblical prophet with his massive, grey-bearded head, emphatically declaring that he did not believe in a God who created the world but in One who lived in the consciousness of people.

After an hour of this Tolstoy grew weary and was content to sit quietly and listen approvingly to the accordion playing and tuneful songs of a group of workers at the rear of the coach. He had decided to visit his sister at the Shamardino Convent. The nearest station was Kozyolsk. Although it was only some seventy miles from Yasnaya Polyana, the trip consumed more than six hours. Dr. Makovitski, who detested Russian trains, bitterly declared that this incredibly slow ride under the most uncomfortable conditions helped to kill the ailing Tolstoy. Reaching Kozyolsk late in the afternoon, they drove by cab to Optina Monastery near Shamardino. Going to the monastery inn, he said to the monk in charge in asking for a room:

"My being here may perhaps be disagreeable to you. I'm Leo Tolstoy, excommunicated by the Church, and I've come to talk with your elders and tomorrow will go to my sister at Shamardino."

The monk politely replied that all were welcome there, and Tolstoy was assigned a comfortable room. He had sent a telegram

and a letter to Alexandra to inform her and Chertkov of his whereabouts, and after posting his diary, he went to bed, "to try to sleep," as he wrote his daughter.

## III

Early next morning A. P. Sergeyenko, one of Chertkov's assistants, arrived at the monastery inn for the obvious purpose of obtaining information on Tolstoy's condition and state of mind which he would report to his employer, who had already written a letter for the press to explain the reasons that had obliged Tolstoy to leave home, and to express his own joy over this event. Sergeyenko's account of what had happened at Yasnaya Polyana after Tolstoy's departure, especially Sonya's attempt to drown herself, depressed him. And in this disturbed frame of mind he wrote Alexandra a rather bitter letter, in which he said: "The chief thing is that they [his children] should understand and try to suggest to her [Sonya] that for me—with her spying, eavesdropping, eternal reproaches, her ordering me about, her constant control over me, her feigned hatred of the man nearest and most necessary to me, together with her evident hatred of me disguised as love—life was not merely unpleasant but simply impossible. If anyone should wish to drown, it is certainly not she but I. Let her know that I desire only one thing—freedom from her, from this falsity, pretence, and the hatred which fills her whole being."

Tolstoy walked around the familiar grounds of the monastery. If only they would not require him to go to church, he thought, how pleasant it would be to live the peaceful life of these monks. He wanted very much to talk with the celebrated ascetic, Father Joseph, but as an excommunicate he felt awkward about intruding where his presence might not be desired.

In the afternoon he visited his sister Masha at Shamardino Convent. They both wept as he told her of his life at Yasnaya Polyana over the last few months and why he had felt it necessary to leave. Masha did not criticize his decision; she had long been aware of Sonya's hysterical behaviour. Declaring that he would not return, he asked his sister about the possibilities of renting a hut in the vicinity of Shamardino. Somehow it did not occur to him how unwelcome he would be in the neighbourhood of these two famous religious institutions, the heads of which were already worried over his presence. Yet he actually hunted that day for a desirable hut, but with no success.

The next day, while he was again visiting his sister, Alexandra arrived with Varya Feokritov. The distance between Yasnaya Polyana and his first haven seemed to be lessening. Though he had asked his daughter not to attempt to join him until he summoned her, she had felt it necessary to come. The detailed account she gave of events at home alarmed him even more than the recital of Sergeyenko. And when she said that her mother had guessed where he was and threatened to pursue him, a kind of panic seized him. He decided to push on as soon as possible.

Alexandra brought her father several letters from the family which did nothing to raise his drooping spirits. Ilya and Andrei wrote to condemn his desertion of their mother. However wretched his life at home had been, they argued, he ought to have remained and endured it. Tanya neither approved nor disapproved his action. Only Sergei frankly supported his father's departure and even wondered why he had not taken this step long before.

Tolstoy replied in a general letter to all the children. He wrote in a kindly spirit and tried to explain why he could not have acted otherwise. At the same time he also answered Sonya's letter which she had written on the day after he left home. Any lingering hope she may have cherished that he would quickly return to her was stifled in the first sentence: "A meeting between us, and still more my return *now*, is entirely impossible." He pleaded with her to reconcile herself to his absence and try to understand his position. Her present mood and attempts to commit suicide, he said, made his return unthinkable, for she obviously still lacked control of herself, which had been the reason why he had gone away. Yet he held out hope for her: "try to direct your strength towards pacifying your soul," he wrote, "and not towards getting whatever you want, and then you will obtain what you desire. . . . Do not think," he added, "that I went away because I do not love you. I love and pity you with all my soul. But I cannot do otherwise than I am doing. . . . Farewell, dear Sonya, and may God help you! Life is not a joke, and we have no right to throw it away at our own caprice, and to measure it by length of time is also unreasonable."

That evening Tolstoy, Alexandra, and Dushan sat around the table in his room in the inn and with the aid of maps and train schedules planned their next move. He decided to go south to Novochoerkassk and stay with relatives, the Denisenkos. From that point on the plans became vague. Perhaps they would try to get passports and hide out somewhere in Bulgaria. If this proved

impossible, he would seek out some of his followers in the Caucasus and live with them. In the excitement of planning he had forgotten his rule—to live for the present only. He suddenly remembered it and, as though displeased with himself, he abruptly ended the discussion: they could decide tomorrow what to do.

At four o'clock the next morning, however, Tolstoy woke Alexandra. They must be off. He had already aroused Dushan. Sleep had deserted him that night, for the fear that Sonya might arrive at any moment tormented him. They were soon on their way to the Kozyolsk station, where they boarded an early morning train. The last lap of his great adventure in search of peace and solitude had begun.

## IV

There were no peasants and workmen in the second-class car in which Tolstoy now travelled to engage him in heart-warming discussions about religion, the land question, and education. He asked Alexandra for a newspaper and was much chagrined at reading all about his flight from home. In fact, nearly everybody on the train was reading and talking about it. His daughter overheard cynical remarks of unsuspecting passengers concerning her mother and father. In no time the news ran through the whole train that Tolstoy was on board, and Alexandra had to speak sharply in order to drive away would-be visitors from her father's compartment. A man with a red moustache walked up and down the aisle, stupidly disguised now in the uniform of a railway employee, now in civilian clothes—the ubiquitous police agent. Tolstoy's secret plan of escape seemed to have become the common property of all.

Late in the afternoon Tolstoy experienced a severe chill. Dr. Makovitski took his temperature. It was slightly over a hundred. His fever rapidly increased. Fear gripped the little group, but Tolstoy, sensing their worry, tried to cheer them up. It seemed dangerous to continue the journey. Since the train stopped at Astapovo<sup>1</sup> for a considerable wait, Dr. Makovitski hunted up the stationmaster and persuaded him to provide a bed for Tolstoy in his little house on the side of the railroad tracks. The sick man was at once helped to bed.

After a spell of slight convulsions, Tolstoy slept quite well and awoke the next morning, Monday, November 1, feeling much better and with a lowered temperature. He dictated a telegram to

<sup>1</sup> Now called Leo Tolstoy Station.

Chertkov about his illness, but declared his intention of continuing his journey. When Alexandra suggested that she inform the family, as she had promised to do if he should become seriously ill, he implored her not to. The only person he had any desire to see, he said, was Chertkov, and she at once telegraphed him to come.

Shortly after this, perhaps because his conscience troubled him over summoning Chertkov and no member of his family, Tolstoy dictated a letter to his two oldest children, Sergei and Tanya. He begged them not to reproach him, for he felt that he could not ask them to come without their mother. He had called Chertkov, he wrote, because he had devoted his life to a cause which he felt, mistakenly or not, was of importance to all people. With a premonition of the end, he thanked them for their kindness to him, offered some fatherly advice to Sergei, and asked them to try to calm their mother, for whom he felt the most sincere compassion and love.

Towards evening Tolstoy's condition grew worse; pneumonia had set in. Now thoroughly alarmed, Dr. Makovitski and Alexandra decided to call Dr. Nikitin from Moscow without seeking Tolstoy's permission. Alexandra sent a telegram to Sergei to ask him to secure the services of the Moscow physician at once.

In the course of the day Tolstoy had dictated to Alexandra for his diary a statement on God: "God is not love, but the more love there is in man, the more is God made manifest in him, and the more truly does he exist."

Chertkov arrived with Sergeyenko on Tuesday morning. The two friends greeted each other with deep emotion. Chertkov kissed his hand and they both wept. Tolstoy plied him with questions about Yasnaya Polyana and the family. The agony of his past experiences with Sonya apparently still fresh in his mind, he asked him, according to Chertkov's account, to do everything possible to prevent her from coming to him. When Chertkov reported that Sonya had agreed not to try to see her husband against his wish, he grew calmer. What he did not report was that Sonya, in the midst of her first grief over her husband's departure, had made an effort to be reconciled with his friend and her enemy. She had sent Bulgakov to Telyatinki to ask him to call.

"Why should I go?" said this high priest of spiritual love. "Merely in order that she should humble herself before me and ask my forgiveness? . . . It is simply a trick to get me to send a telegram to Leo Nikolayevich for her." He refused to go. But Sonya

was so convinced he would grant her wish that she had already indiscreetly sent a telegram to her husband to announce that she had become reconciled with Chertkov.

That evening Tolstoy's son Sergei arrived. He had set out for Astapovo at once upon receiving his sister's telegram asking him to send Dr. Nikitin. At first Sergei hesitated to enter the room, for Tolstoy was still under the delusion that the family knew nothing of his whereabouts. His father was happy to see him but obviously disturbed over his arrival. Sergei calmed his fears by saying what was partly true—that he had learned his father was at Astapovo from a conductor on the train.

Since the sick man's condition did not improve, the Zemstvo physician from a neighbouring town was called in. Tolstoy hopefully asked if he would be able to resume his journey within two days. When the doctor said that it would be more like two weeks, he turned his face to the wall. He was entirely unaware that the secret he so wished to preserve was humming in all directions on the telegraph and telephone wires. Police officials demanded to know from railroad officials why Tolstoy had not been moved to a hospital. Reporters from Moscow and Petersburg wired the stationmaster for detailed reports of the sick man. And one of these reporters had already informed Sonya that her husband was dangerously ill at Astapovo. She immediately hired a special car for herself, members of the family, and her doctor and nurse. They arrived at Astapovo very late at night on Tuesday.

## v

Still fearful that Sonya would come, Tolstoy had asked Alexandra to wire his sons to prevent this, "because my heart is so weak that a meeting would be fatal, though otherwise I am better." This message was handed to Sonya after she arrived. On Wednesday morning the family held a council in the special car and decided that a meeting of their mother and father might be injurious to him. So long as there was a chance of his recovery, they would allow her to see him only if he desired it. All the doctors, and there were eventually five of them in attendance, emphatically supported this position. With some complaining, Sonya agreed, for she said that she did not wish to cause her husband's death. They further decided that they would keep from their father any knowledge of the presence of the family at Astapovo, since he would guess that his wife was with them. Arrangements were made to live in the special

car, which was placed on a siding. By now the stationmaster had moved out of his little house and given it up entirely to the sick man and his attendants.

Disaster nearly overtook the family's well-intentioned plans that very day. Sonya had brought with her Tolstoy's little pillow. She now pleaded with Dr. Makovitski that it should once again be placed under his head. The gentle Dushan agreed and Tanya gave it to him. Tolstoy instantly recognized the pillow and wanted to know how it got there. Unable to lie, Dushan explained that Tanya had given it to him. Disturbed but joyful, Tolstoy asked to see his beloved daughter. He eagerly put many questions to her about his sons, which she had great difficulty in answering without betraying the fact that they were only a few yards away. Then he wanted to know all about Sonya: What was she doing? How did she occupy herself?

"Perhaps you had better not talk, papa. You get excited," replied the tearful Tanya, afraid of betraying her mother's presence at Astapovo by the slightest word.

"Tell me, tell me! What can be more important to me than that?" he asked in a sobbing voice. She mumbled something and hurriedly left the room.

Learning, perhaps from Chertkov, that Goldenweizer and Gorbunov-Posadov had arrived, Tolstoy wished to see them. Such visits taxed his waning strength, but these were old friends who loved him. After they left, however, he wrote in his diary: "Today, the 3rd, Nikitin, Tanya, and then Goldenweizer and Ivan Ivanovich [Gorbunov-Posadov]. So this is what has come of my plans! 'Do what's right, come what may!'<sup>1</sup> It is all for the good of others and chiefly of myself."

That night he slept badly, became delirious, and his heart action was very weak. But the doctors still had hope.

## VI

By Thursday the attention of the world press centred on little Astapovo. The place swarmed with reporters, smoking, drinking, bored with the hourly bulletins and the absence of any sensational news. They held up anyone coming out of Tolstoy's room for a story, or ran down members of the family for a bit of human interest. Sonya was the only one willing to talk, and she talked to

<sup>1</sup> *Fais ce que doit advenir que pourra*; a favourite saying of Tolstoy's.

them at random, in her most irresponsible manner, even declaring that Tolstoy had left home as a kind of publicity stunt to attract attention to himself. Embittered by the fact that she was not allowed to see her husband, she persuaded the unsuspecting Alexandra to let her into the anteroom so that cameramen could film her as though she were really going to see Tolstoy. Sonya, who, as Tolstoy's wife, should have been the most pitied person in the tragedy of death that was being enacted, was the most abject and pathetic. Instead of being by the side of her husband, she wandered aimlessly around the station under the guard of her sons or her nurse. At times she was escorted to the stationmaster's little house and would peer hopelessly through her husband's windows. Then the window in one of the other rooms would be opened and she would learn the latest news of his condition. Returning to the special car she gave vent to her tears. If only he could have read and answered the last letters she had written him. In them she had begged for mercy, protested her innocence in everything, and tried to explain away all her recent suspicions, spying, and eavesdropping as a result of "an irrational and passionate love" for him that had suddenly taken possession of her during those last months!

The tiny station restaurant laboured overtime to feed the crowds and even tried to serve vegetarian meals for the Tolstoyans. The telegraph office was swamped with messages from all over the world. Government officials and police were frantically communicating with one another, wondering whether extra precautions ought not to be taken to preserve order.

Meanwhile, Tolstoy, lying in his sick room, constantly attended by doctors and nurses, with Chertkov, Alexandra, Sergei, and Tanya in the anteroom, ready for any call, was entirely ignorant of all the worldly commotion over his illness. There was something tragically ironic in his leaving his beloved Yasnaya Polyana to seek an obscure life of peace and solitude only to find himself as never before the centre of attention, care, and international interest.

From Thursday to Saturday Tolstoy's condition fluctuated, inspiring alternate hope and despair among all who attended him. The pneumonia was accompanied by violent hiccoughing and severe heartburn that caused him much discomfort, and the accumulated nervous exhaustion of the past months left him no vitality to combat disease. Much of the time his mind remained clear, but there were extended periods of delirium and semi-consciousness. He kept asking for someone to write down his



thoughts. Though he struggled hard to dictate, nothing came or only a jumble of words. Then he would demand to have his statement read back to him and grew agitated when this could not be done. Chertkov solved the difficulty by reading back passages from his *Circle of Reading*, which calmed him.

Once, in a delirious state, he implored Alexandra to catch his words. She could make out nothing of what he said. "Come closer," he begged, "it is so simple." She bent down and strained at the sense, but all she could understand was: "To seek, always to seek." At another time he tried to say something to Tanya. She asked him to repeat it and finally caught the words: "On Sonya . . . On Sonya much is falling. We have arranged badly . . ."

On Saturday Tanya sat by his side while one of the doctors prepared a camphor injection. Shortly after the injection he suddenly sat upright and said in a distinct voice: "But I advise you to remember one thing: there are a multitude of people in the world, but you regard only one, Leo."

During all his illness Tolstoy showed no fear of death, nor any regret over the thought that he might die. In a letter to Chertkov shortly before he left home, he had expressed the hope that he might meet his end in full possession of his faculties so as not to be deprived of the precious moments of dying which may be so beautiful. But those beautiful moments were now denied him. His mind was often clouded and clearly tormented by the memory of the recent tragic struggle with his wife and the fear that she might confront him with another hysterical outburst.

That Saturday night, when his condition was very bad, he said to his son Sergei: "I will go somewhere so that no one can interfere with me." Then he added in a loud tone of conviction: "To escape . . . I must escape!" Soon afterwards he called to Sergei and muttered some words which only Dushan could make out: "Truth . . . I love much."

On this same day the Abbot Varsonofi with a brother monk from Optina Monastery arrived at Astapovo. They were under orders from the Synod to persuade Tolstoy to die reconciled to the Church. In fact, ever since receiving the first news of his illness there had been much agitation in high ecclesiastical circles to make the most of this opportunity. The Metropolitan Anthony had telegraphed Tolstoy on November 4 from Petersburg to urge him to return to the Orthodox faith, but the attendants did not even deliver this message to the sick man. Then Anthony had wired the Bishop of

Kaluga to send the ascetic, Father Joseph, of Optina to Astapovo as the man most likely to impress Tolstoy. This monk was ill, however, and Abbot Varsonofi was given the commission instead. Mindful of the duplicity of the clergy at the time of Tolstoy's illness in the Crimea, neither members of the family nor his physicians, who were fully aware of his wishes in this respect, would permit Varsonofi to enter the sickroom. The abbot was obliged to telegraph the bishop of his failure, but he added by way of justification that not even the governor of the province or high Petersburg officials had been permitted to see Tolstoy.

## VII

Towards midnight on Saturday Tolstoy began to sink rapidly and the doctors lost all hope. Since he was in much pain, they decided to give him a morphine injection. He objected to this but after the injection he grew quiet for several hours. The room was in semi-darkness, illuminated by a single candle. Chertkov sat at the head of the bed, Sergei at the foot. The door leading to the next room had been opened. In there waited several people, among them Tanya, Alexandra, and the brothers. Doctors came and went quietly. Only the laboured breathing of the dying Tolstoy could be heard in the oppressive stillness.

At about two o'clock in the morning one of the doctors suggested that Sonya be called. Chertkov at once left the room. She entered, her face frozen in grief, and for a few moments stared at the bed from a distance, as though afraid to approach. Then she swiftly went to her husband, kissed his forehead, sank on her knees and murmured: "Forgive me!" Fearful that he might recognize her, a doctor led her into the next room.

The effects of the morphine wore off about three o'clock, for Tolstoy began to move about and groan. His pulse action was barely perceptible and he did not regain consciousness. His breathing became slower and softer. Sonya came in again, knelt by his bed, and uttered words of love that he could no longer hear. His breathing ceased. Complete silence reigned, suddenly broken a few moments later by the sharp voice of one of the doctors announcing: "A quarter to six." It was November 7. Dr. Makovitski, "holy Dushan," faithful to the last, went up to the bed and closed Tolstoy's sightless eyes.

Throughout cities and towns of Russia hundreds of thousands of

## LEO TOLSTOY

people waited patiently before the news centres, anxiously following the frequent bulletins from Astapovo. Finally the flash came: "Tolstoy is dead!" A hush fell over the crowd. All took off their hats. Some wept softly.

Two days later the train bearing the coffin arrived at Zaseka station near Yasnaya Polyana. Several thousands of people had assembled. Many thousands more would have come if the government had not forbade the railways to supply extra trains. Stout shoulders carried the coffin all the way to the house. A long file of silent people marched behind. In front two villagers bore a banner on poles on which was inscribed: "Leo Nikolayevich, the memory of your kindness will not die among us orphaned peasants of Yasnaya Polyana."

For hours people filed by the open coffin in the house to take their last farewell. Then the coffin was closed and carried by Tolstoy's sons to the Zakaz woods near by. All knelt bareheaded. "Eternal Memory" was sung, but no priests were present at this first public funeral in Russia without religious rites. Sonya stood with her family. She bore herself silently and with restraint. Chertkov was not present.

They buried Tolstoy in the spot he had selected, where his beloved brother Nikolai, when they were children together, had hidden the little green stick. On it was written that wonderful secret which, when known to mankind, would bring about a Golden Age on earth. Then all human misery and evil would vanish, and all men under the wide dome of heaven would be happy and love one another.

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ERNEST J. SIMMONS

## RUSSIAN TRANSLITERATION TABLE

*(Based on the New Russian Orthography)*

*Nota Bene:—*

1. Russian Christian names (Петр, Александр, etc.) that have common English equivalents (Peter, Alexander, etc.) retain their English form, except when they appear in the titles of books or articles.

2. The family names of a few Russian authors that have acquired fixed spellings in English (Gorky, etc.) retain their popular English spellings, except when they appear in the titles of books or articles.

А а—A a	Н н—N n
Б б—B b	О о—O o
В в—V v	П п—P p
Г г—G g (in the genitive endings <i>ero</i> and <i>oro</i> , <i>г = v</i> )	Р р—R r
Д д—D d	С с—S s
Е е—E e (when initial and after <i>ь, ъ</i> and all vowels, except <i>ы</i> , — <i>e = ye</i> ; after <i>ы</i> , <i>e = ie</i> )	Т т—T t
Ё ё—Yo yo (after <i>ж</i> and <i>ш</i> , <i>ё = o</i> )	У у—U u
Ж ж—Zh zh	Ф ф—F f
З з—Z z	Х х—Kh kh
И и—I i (after <i>ь, н = yi</i> )	Ц ц—Ts ts
Й й—I i (the combinations <i>ий = i</i> and <i>ый = y</i> )	Ч ч—Ch ch
К к—K k	Ш ш—Sh sh
Л л—L l	Щ щ—Shch shch
М м—M m	Ъ — (omitted)
	Ы — y
	Ь — (omitted)
	Э э—E e
	Ю ю—Yu yu (after <i>ы</i> , <i>ю = iu</i> )
	Я я—Ya ya (after <i>ы</i> , <i>я = ia</i> )

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