

Leo Tolstoy *speaks*

Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910) ranks high among those who have profoundly affected people in all parts of the world. His life is one of the most thrilling stories in Christian history.

He was born and reared among the 19th century Russian aristocrats, but his sympathy and love were always with the masses of Russian peasants by whom he was greatly influenced throughout his life. His literary career began at an early age and culminated in the writing of **WAR AND PEACE** and **ANNA KARENINA**, acclaimed as two of the greatest novels of all time. Both books were pageants of Russian history and vivid and understanding portrayals of human behavior.

At the age of fifty Tolstoy underwent a great spiritual experience and his whole life was altered. He renounced his fame as a novelist and forsook his position as an aristocrat to pursue the life of a simple peasant, a Christian anarchist, a follower of the Christ.

The last thirty years of his life were devoted to producing such volumes as **MY RELIGION**, **THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS WITHIN YOU**, and **WHAT THEN MUST WE DO**. In them he revealed to others the way of life he had discovered. Meanwhile he translated his beliefs into action in behalf of the down-trodden peasants, the persecuted non-resisters, the victims of famine and poverty.

Tolstoy still speaks to the world—

“Wearing his peasant dress, his head bent low,
Tolstoy, that angel of Peace, is plowing yet;
Forward across the field, his horses go.” *

ON HIS EARLY DISILLUSIONMENT . . .

"From the age of sixteen I ceased to pray, and ceased, from conviction, to attend the services of the Church and to fast. I no longer accepted the faith of my childhood, but I believed in something, though I could not exactly explain in what. I believed in a God—or rather, I did not deny the existence of a God—but what kind of God I could not have told; I denied neither Christ nor His teaching, but in what that teaching consisted I could not have said."

" . . . I recall how, after I had learned the catechism . . . I knew that it was all untrue."

"I felt that the ground on which I stood was crumbling, that there was nothing for me to stand on, that what I had been living for was nothing, that I had no reason for living . . . there was no real life in me because I had not a single desire, the fulfillment of which I could feel to be reasonable. . . ."

ON HIS DISCOVERY . . .

Then, one spring, alone in the woods, "A voice seemed to cry within me, 'This is He, He without whom there is no life. To know God and to live are one. God is life.' . . . And stronger than ever rose up life within and around me, and the light that then shone never left me again."

"In this way I was compelled to admit that, beside the reasoning knowledge . . . there was in every living man another kind of knowledge, an unreasoning one, faith, which gives a possibility of living."

"The passage which for me was the key to the whole was verses 38 and 39 of the fifth chapter of Matthew: 'It hath been said, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth; but I say unto you, that ye resist not evil.'"

"This simple, clear and practical fourth commandment says: 'Never resist evil by force, never return violence for violence; if any one beat you, bear it; if one would deprive you of anything, yield to his wishes; if any one would force you to labor, labor; if any one would take away your property, abandon it at his demand.'"

"I saw that Jesus did not exhort us to turn the other cheek that we might endure suffering, but that his exhortation was, 'resist not evil,' and that he afterward declared suffering to be the possible consequence of the practice of this maxim."

ON JESUS . . .

" . . . I understood and believed that Jesus is not only the Messiah, . . . the Christ, but that He is in truth the Saviour of the world. I know that he is the only way, that there is no other way for me or those who are tormented with me in this life. I know, that for me as for all, there is no other safety than the fulfillment of the commandments of Jesus, who gave to all humanity the greatest conceivable sum of benefits."

ON THE AIM OF LIFE . . .

"I should like to be firmly convinced that I give people more than I take from them. . ."

"To strive . . . to support myself honestly, that is, to learn not to live upon others; and while I am learning and when I have learned this, to render aid on all possible occasions to the people, with my hands, and my feet, my brain, and my heart, and with everything to which the people should present a claim."

"We do not love people so much for the good they have done us as for the good we have done them."

ON BEGINNING FROM WITHIN . . .

To a prominent visitor: "Young man, you sweat too much blood for the world; sweat some for yourself first. You cannot make the world better till you are better."

"Socialism begins at the wrong end. You cannot organize anything until you have individuals . . . Socialism begins to regulate the world away from itself. You must make yourself right before the world around you can be made right. . . . The modern labor leader wishes to liberate the masses, while he himself is a slave."

"I shall never quite understand the meaning of prayer, but I shall always pray. . . ."

ON COMBATTING EVIL . . .

"If evil still exists in the world, it exists only through the influence of inertia. . . . For those who have faith in the commandments of Jesus, it does not exist at all. It is vanquished by an awakened conscience, by the elevation of the son of man."

"Men wander from the way because they do not believe in this light which is within them, the light of which John speaks when he says, 'In Him was life and the life was the light of men.' "

ON TAKING OATHS . . .

"I am obliged to believe His words, consequently I cannot as I once did, bind myself by oath to serve any one for any purpose, and I can no longer . . . justify myself for having taken an oath because it would harm no one, because everybody did the same, because it is necessary for the State, because the consequences might be bad for me or for some one else if I refuse to submit to this exaction."

ON WAR . . .

"Every war, even the shortest, with all its accompanying losses, thefts, tolerated excesses, robberies, murders, with the supposed justification of its necessity and justice, with the praise and justification of war-like deeds, with prayers for the flag and Fatherland and the hypocritical anxiety for the wounded, corrupts men more in one year than millions of robberies, arsons and murders committed under the influence of passion in the course of hundreds of years."

ON CONSCRIPTION . . .

"General military conscription is the last step in the process of coercion required by governments for the support of the whole structure; for subjects it is the extreme limit of obedience."

ON CAPITAL PUNISHMENT . . .

On witnessing a public execution: "I understood, not with my reason, but with my whole being, that no theory of the wisdom of all established things, nor of progress, could justify such an act, and that if all the men in the world from the day of creation, by whatever theory, had found this thing necessary, I knew it was not necessary. It was a bad thing and that therefore I must judge of what was right and necessary, not by what men said and did, not by progress, but by what I felt to be true in my heart."

ON LABOR . . .

"Work is the inevitable condition of human life, the true source of human welfare."

" . . . physical labor not only does not exclude the possibility of a mental activity, not only improves its quality, but improves the activity itself and encourages it."

ON WEALTH . . .

"Between us, the rich and the poor, there is always a wall of false education, and before we can help the poor we must tear down this wall."

"Today possessions are the root of all evil. They cause the suffering of those who possess and of those who do not possess. And the danger of collision is unavoidable between those who have too much and those who live in poverty."

His advice, then: "Give up everything which we do not absolutely need, and adjust our lives so that we will have to take as little as possible of labor and strength from others."

ON BROTHERHOOD AND EQUALITY . . .

"We all know and cannot help knowing, even if we had never heard it defined and never attempted to define it ourselves, that we all possess an inherent conviction deep in our hearts of the truth of that fundamental doctrine of Christianity, that we are all children of one Father, yea, every one of us, where-soever we live, whatsoever language we may speak; that we are all brothers, subject only to the law of love implanted in our hearts by our common Father."

Therefore: "I can no longer give my support to anything that lifts me above or separates me from others. I cannot, as I once did, recognize in myself and others titles or ranks or qualities aside from the title and quality of manhood. I can no longer cultivate a system of instruction which separates me from men. I cannot in my surroundings, my food, my clothing, my manners, strive for what not only separates me from others but renders me a reproach to the majority of mankind."

ON WORLD LOYALTY . . .

"I understand now that true welfare is possible for me only on condition that I recognize my fellowship with the whole world. I believe this, and the belief has changed my estimate of what is right and wrong, important and despicable. What once seemed to me right and important—love of country, love for those of my own race, for the organization called the State, services rendered at the expense of the welfare of other men, military exploits—now seem to me detestable and pitiable. What once seemed to me shameful and wrong—renunciation of nationality, and the cultivation of cosmopolitanism—now seem to me right and important."

ON THE POSSIBILITY OF PERFECTION . . .

"I was not satisfied with the declarations of the theologians that the Sermon on the Mount was only an indication of the degree of perfection to which man should aspire; that man, weighted down by sin, could not reach such an ideal; and that the salvation of humanity was in faith and power and grace. . . . It seemed to me a strange thing that Jesus should propound rules so clear and admirable, addressed to the understanding of every one, and still realize man's inability to carry this doctrine into practice."

ON THE ROLE OF WOMEN . . .

"It is such women, who have fulfilled their woman's calling, that rule the ruling men and serve as a guiding star to men; such women establish public opinion and prepare new generations of men; and so these women have in their hands the highest power, the power of saving people from the existing and menacing evils of our times. Yes, women and mothers, in your hands more than in any other, is the salvation of the world."

ON ACHIEVING HAPPINESS . . .

"One of the first conditions is that the link between man and nature shall not be severed, that is, that he shall be able to see the sky above him, and that he shall be able to enjoy the sunshine, the pure air, the fields with their verdure, their multitudinous life."

"Another inevitable condition of happiness is work, first, the intellectual labor that one is free to choose and loves; secondly, the exercise of physical power that brings a good appetite and tranquil and profound sleep. . . ."

"The third undoubted condition of happiness is the family."

"The fourth condition of happiness is sympathetic and unrestricted intercourse with all classes of men."

"Finally, the fifth condition of happiness is bodily health."

"I believe that nothing but the fulfillment of the doctrine of Jesus can give true happiness to me. . . . I believe that this doctrine is essential to the welfare of humanity, will save me from the certainty of eternal loss, and will give me the greatest possible sum of happiness."

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