

## INTRODUCTION TO T. M. BONDAREV'S TEACHING

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This work is offered here precisely in the form in which it was written. The only difference from the original is this, that for its peculiar orthography is substituted the one which is generally used in books, and also this, that the whole work is divided into two parts, the exposition and the supplement. In the supplement I have separated what to me appeared as repetition or departure from the exposition of the subject itself.

This work seems to me very remarkable on account of its power, and clearness, and beauty of language, and power of sincerity of conviction, which may be seen in every line, and, above all, on account of the importance, correctness, and profundity of the fundamental idea.

The fundamental idea of this work is this :

In all the affairs of life it is not important to know what it is that is good and necessary, but what of all good and necessary things or acts is of the very first importance, what of a second, what of a third importance, and so forth. If this is true in affairs of life, it is still more true in matters of faith, which defines the duties of man.

Tatian, a teacher of the first times of the church, says that the misfortune of men is due not so much to the fact that men do not know God as to the fact that they recognize a false God – that they recognize as a god what is not God.

The same may be said of the doctrine of men's obligations.

Men's misfortune and evil is not due so much to the fact that men do not know their duties, as to the fact that they recognize false duties; that they recognize as their duty what is not their duty, and do not recognize as their duty what is their chief duty.

Bondarév asserts that men's misfortunes and evil are due to this, that they have recognized as their religious duties many idle and harmful decrees, and have forgotten and concealed from themselves and others their chief, first, indubitable duty, which is expressed in the first chapter of Holy Scripture : In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread.

For people who believe in the sacredness and infallibility of God's word, as expressed in the Bible, this commandment, given by God Himself, and nowhere abolished, is a sufficient proof of its truth.

But for people who do not acknowledge Holy Scripture the meaning and truth of this proposition, if we will only view it without prejudice, as a simple and not supernatural expression of human wisdom, is proved by the analysis of the conditions of human life, as Bondarév proves it in this work of his.

An obstacle to such an analysis is unfortunately found in this, that many of us have become so accustomed to the perverse and senseless interpretations by the theologians of the words of Holy Scripture, that the mere mention that a certain proposition coincides with Holy Scripture serves as a cause for looking with contempt on such a proposition.

" What does Holy Scripture mean to me ? We know that anything you please may be based on it, and that everything in it is a lie."

But that is not true. It is certainly not the fault of Holy Scripture if people have interpreted it wrongly, and a man who tells a truth is not to blame, because he expressed a truth which has been given before, and especially in Holy Scripture. We must not forget that if we admit that what is called Holy Scripture is not the product of God, but of men, there must be some good reason why this human production, and not any other, has been accepted by men as the writing of God Himself. This reason is clear.

This Scripture is by superstitious persons called divine, because it is higher than anything which men knew, and also because this Scripture, despite the fact that men have all the time denied it, has come down to us and continues to be considered divine. It is called divine and has come down to us, only because in it is contained the highest human intelligence. And such is in many places the writing which is called the Bible. And such is the forgotten and omitted utterance, which is not understood in its real meaning, and which Bondarév explains and puts in his jorner-stone chapter.

This utterance and the whole world of the life in Paradise is generally comprehended in its direct meaning, namely, that all actually happened as described, whereas the significance of the whole passage is this, that in a figurative form it presents those as it were contradictory tendencies which are found in human nature.

Man is afraid of death and is subject to it ; a man who does not know good and evil seems to be happy, but he irrepressibly tends to this knowledge : man loves idleness and the gratification of passions without suffering, and yet it is only labour and suffering that give life to him and to his race.

This utterance is not important because it was presumably made by God to Adam himself, but because it is true and confirms one of the unquestionable laws of human life.

The law of gravity is not true because it was enunciated by Newton, but I know Newton and am thankful to him because he discovered for

me the eternal law which gave me an answer to a whole series of phenomena.

The same is true of the law, In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread.

It is a law which elucidates to me a whole series of phenomena. And, having once come to understand it, I can no longer forget it, and am thankful to him who has revealed it to me. This law seems very simple and long known ; but it only seems so, and to convince ourselves of the opposite, we need but look around us. Men not only fail to recognize this law, but even recognize the very opposite. In conformity with their faith, all men – from the king to the beggar – do not strive to fulfil this law, but to avoid fulfilling it. This work of Bondarév is devoted to the elucidation of the eternity and unchangeableness of this law and the inevitableness of the calamities arising from a departure from it.

Bondarév calls this law an original law and chief of all other laws. Bondarév proves that sin (that is, error, false act) is due only to a departure from this law. Of all the positive duties of man, Bondarév regards it as the chief, first, and invariable duty of each man to earn his bread with his own hands (meaning by bread every hard, manual labour, necessary for man's salvation from starvation and cold, that is, his food, and drink, and raiment, and house, and fuel).

Bondarév's fundamental idea is that this law (that a man must work in order to live), which heretofore has been acknowledged as a necessity, must be recognized as a good and invariable law of human life.

This law must be recognized like any religious law, like the observance of the Sabbath, the circumcision among the Jews, the fulfilment of the sacraments, the fasts of the ecclesiastic Christians, the fivefold prayer and fasting among the Mohammedans. Bondarév says in one place that if people recognize the bread work as their religious obligation, no private, special occupations can interfere with the execution of this work, just as no special occupations can keep the people of the church from executing the idleness of their holidays.

In all, more than eighty holidays are counted, and to do the bread work only forty days are needed according to Bondarév's calculation. No matter how strange it may at first appear that such a simple, all-intelligible, artless means might serve as a salvation from the endless existing evils of humanity, it is still more strange, when we come to think of it, how we, by leaving it, may seek a cure for our evils in various devices and conceits. But reflect on the matter, and you will see that it is so.

A man ought not to put a bottom into a vat and ought to invent some more cunning means for retaining the water. Such are all our cares about the cure of existing evils. Indeed, whence comes all the

misery of men, if we exclude from the number of miseries those which men have directly inflicted upon each other by means of murders, executions, prisons, frights, and all kinds of cruelties, in which they err by not abstaining from violence ?

All the misery of men, with the exception of direct violence, is due to hunger, to all kinds of privations, to despair in work, and, by the side of these, to excesses, idleness, and vices caused by them.

What more sacred duty can man have than cooperating in the abolition of this inequality, these calamities, this need of some, and this temptation in others ? And how can a man cooperate in the abolition of these calamities, if not by a participation in labour which meets men's needs, and by removing from oneself all superabundance and idleness, which are productive of vices and temptations, that is, if not by doing bread work, by supporting oneself with one's own hands, as Bondarév says ?

We are so entangled by having created for ourselves so many laws, religious, and social, and domestic, so many rules, as Isaiah says, " Rule upon rule, here a rule, and there a rule," that we have entirely lost the meaning of what is good and what bad.

A man celebrates mass, a second collects an army or taxes for himself, a third judges, a fourth learns out of books, a fifth cures, a sixth teaches people, and under these pretexts they free themselves from bread work and impose it upon others, forgetting that people die from exertion, labour, and hunger, and that, to have men celebrate mass, defend us by means of an army, sit in judgment, cure, and teach, it is necessary above all else that men should not starve. We forget that there may be many duties, but that among them there is one that is first and one that is last, and that it is not possible to fulfil the last without having fulfilled the first, just as it is impossible to harrow before ploughing.

It is to this first indubitable duty in the sphere of practical activity that Bondarév's teaching takes us. Bondarev shows that the execution of this duty does not interfere with anything, presents no obstacles, and at the same time saves men from misery, want, and temptations. The fulfilment of this duty first of all destroys that strange division into two classes who hate each other and with flattery conceal their mutual hatred. Bread labour, says Bondarév, equalizes all and will clip the wings of luxury and of lust.

It is impossible to plough and dig wells in costly garments and with clean hands, and while living on dainty food. The occupation with the holy work which is common to all men will bring them together. Bread labour, says Bondarév, is a remedy which saves humanity. If men recognized this original law as a divine and unchangeable law ; if each man recognized bread labour, that is, his support by means of his own labour, as his unalterable duty, – all men would unite in the faith of the one God, in the love of one another, and would destroy the calamities which crush men.

We are so accustomed to the order of things which recognizes the very opposite, namely, that wealth – the means for not doing bread labour – is either a divine blessing or a higher social position, that, without analyzing this position, we feel like recognizing it as narrow, onesided, idle, stupid.

But we must give the matter a serious consideration and analyze this position, to see whether it is just. We analyze all kinds of religious and political theories, and we will also analyze Bondarév's theory as a theory. We shall see what will happen, if, according to Bondarév's idea, the religious propaganda will direct its forces to the elucidation of this law, and all men will recognize as holy the original law of labour. What will happen then ?

All will work and eat the bread of their labours, and bread and objects of prime necessity will not be objects of purchase and sale. What will happen then ? What will happen will be this, that there will be no people who perish from want. If one man does not earn enough for his own food and for that of his family, another man will give it to him. He will give it to him, because he can do nothing else with the bread, since it cannot be sold. What will happen will be this, that man will not have the temptation, the necessity of acquiring bread by means of cunning or violence, because he is not otherwise provided for. And not having this temptation, he will not employ violence or cunning. That will not be necessary, as it is now.

If he shall use cunning or violence, he will use them only because he likes cunning and violence, and not because he has to, as is the case now.

Nor will the feeble, who for some reason are unable to earn their bread, or who for some reason have lost it, need to sell themselves, their labour, and sometimes their souls, for the sake of earning bread.

There will not exist the present tendency of all to free themselves from bread labour and to impose it upon others, a tendency to crush the feeble with labour and to free the strong from all work.

There will not lie that mood of human thought which directs all the efforts of the mind, not on alleviating the labour of the labouring, but on alleviating and adorning the idleness of the idle.

The participation of all in bread labour and the recognition of the same as the chief of all human affairs produces the same effect that a man would produce with a cart which some foolish people have been drawing with the wheels up, when he turns it down and puts it on its wheels, and does not break the cart, but makes it go easily. But our life, with the contempt for bread labour and its rejection, and our corrections of this false life, is a cart which we are dragging with its wheels up. All our corrections of the matter are of no avail, so long as we do not turn the cart over and place it properly.

Such is Bondarev's idea, which I share in full.

His idea presents itself to me also in this manner.

There was a time when men ate one another. The consciousness of the unity of all men was developed to such an extent that this became impossible to men, and they stopped eating one another. Then there was a time when people took the labour of others by force and turned men into slavery. Men's consciousness developed to such an extent that this became impossible. This form of violence, though surreptitiously retained, has been destroyed in its gross manifestations : man no longer openly takes possession of another man's labour. In our day there exists that form of violence by which men, exploiting the want of others, subject them to themselves. According to Bondarev's idea there is now arriving the time of that consciousness of the unity of men, when it will become impossible for men to exploit the want, that is, the hunger and the cold, of others, in order to subject them to themselves, and when men, by thus recognizing as obligatory the law of bread labour for each, will recognize as their duty unconditionally, without the sale of bread (articles of prime necessity), to feed, and clothe, and warm one another.

From still another side I look upon this work of Bondarev's like this. We frequently have occasion to hear judgments of the insufficiency of mere negative laws or commandments, that is, of rules as to what not to do. People say : " We must have positive laws or commandments, we need rules as to what we should do. ' They say that the five commandments of Christ, – (1) not to regard any one as insignificant or senseless, and not to be angry with any one, (2) not to look upon cohabitation as a subject of enjoyment, not to abandon the mate with whom one has come together once, (3) not to swear to any one in anything, not to bind one's will, (4) to endure offences and not resist them by means of violence, and (5) not to consider any men enemies, and to love the enemies like our neighbours, – they say that all men ascribe to these five commandments of Christ a meaning about what ought not to be done, and that there is no commandment or law which prescribes what ought to be done.

Indeed, it may appear strange why there are in Christ's teaching no definite commandments as to what ought to be done. But this may appear strange only to him who does not believe in Christ's teaching itself, which is not contained in the five commandments, but in the teaching of the truth itself.

The teaching of the truth, as expressed by Christ, is not to be found in the laws about the commandments, – it is to be found in this alone, – in the meaning which is ascribed to life.

The meaning of this teaching is in this alone, that life and the good of life are not to be found in personal happiness, as some people think, but in serving God and men. This proposition is not a

prescription which is to be carried out in order to obtain rewards for its fulfilment ; it is not a mystical expression of something mysterious, but the disclosure of a formerly concealed law of life; it is an indication of this, that life can be a good only with such a comprehension of life. And so all the positive teaching of Christ is expressed in this, Love God and thy neighbour as thyself. There can be no elucidations of this proposition. It is one, because it is all !

Christ's laws and commandments, like the Jewish and Buddhist laws and commandments, are only indications of those conditions in which the temptations of the world take men away from the true comprehension of life. And so there can be many laws and commandments; but there can be but one positive teaching about life, about what ought to be done.

The life of each man is a motion somewhere ; whether a man wants to or not, he moves, he lives. Christ shows man his path, and at the same time shows those deviations from the true path which may lead him on the false road; of such indications there may be many, they are the commandments. Christ gives five such commandments, and those which He gives are such that until now it has been impossible to add one, or detract one from them. But there is given but one indication of the direction of the road, just as there can be but one straight line which indicates direction.

Consequently the idea that in Christ's teaching there are only negative commandments, and none that are positive is correct for those only who do not know or do not believe in the teaching of the truth itself, in the direction itself of the true path of life, as pointed out by Christ. But the people who believe in the truth of the path of life, as pointed out by Christ, cannot look for positive commandments in His teaching.

The whole positive activity, the most varied, which results from the teaching of the true path of life, is clear and always indisputably determined for them. Men who believe in the path of life are, according to Christ's utterance, like a spring of living water, that is, like a spring welling up from the ground. Their whole activity resembles the flowing of water which runs everywhere in spite of the obstacles which detain it. A man who believes in Christ's teaching can as little ask what he is positively to do, as the spring of water can, which is welling up from the earth. It flows, watering the earth, grass, trees, birds, animals, men. The same does a man who believes in Christ's teaching about life.

A man who believes in Christ's teaching will not ask what to do. Love, which will become the power of his life, will show him correctly and indubitably when and what to do first, and what last.

To say nothing of those indications with which Christ's teaching and our heart are filled, that the first and most exacting work of love consists in giving food to the hungry and drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, helping the poor and the imprisoned, - the whole

of Christ's teaching, and reason, and conscience, and feeling, everything urges us, before all other works of love toward the living, to support this life of our brothers, – to free them from suffering and death, which overcome them in their unequal struggle with Nature, – that is, it urges us on to the most necessary work for the life of men, – to the simplest, foremost, gross, hard labour on the land.

As the spring of water cannot ask whither to send its water, whether to spurt the water upward on the grass and the leaves of the trees, or to pour forth downward to the roots of the grass and the trees, even so man who believes in the teaching of the truth cannot ask what he must do first, whether to instruct the people, to defend them, to give them the pleasures of life, or to support them who are perishing from want. And just as the spring flows on the surface and fills the ponds and gives the animals and men to drink only after it has watered the earth, so a man who believes in the teaching of the truth can cooperate with the less pressing demands of men only after he has satisfied the first demand, that is, after he has contributed to their support, to their liberation from ruin, in consequence of a struggle with want. A man who professes the teaching of truth and of love not in words, but in deeds, cannot be mistaken as to where he must first of all direct his activity. A man who posits the meaning of life in the service of others can never make the mistake of beginning to serve a hungry and freezing man by writing resolutions, casting cannon, manufacturing elegant articles, or playing the violin or the piano.

Love cannot be foolish !

Just as love of man does not permit one to read novels to a hungry man, or to warm up a freezing person by putting on him earrings and bracelets, even so love of man does not permit the ministration to them to consist in cheering the satiated, abandoning the hungry and the freezing to fate.

Love that is true, not in words but in deeds, cannot be foolish ; it is only love which gives penetration and wisdom, and so a man who is permeated by love will make no mistake and will always do that first which his love of men demands, – what supports the life of the hungry, the naked, the oppressed ; and what supports the life of the hungry, the freezing, and the oppressed is the struggle, the direct struggle with Nature.

Only he who wants to deceive himself and others can, in moments of danger and of men's struggle with want, evade bringing aid, increase men's want, and assure himself and those who are perishing in his sight that he is busy finding or inventing means for their salvation.

Not one sincere man, who puts his life into the ministration to others, will say this. And if he says it, he will never find in his conscience a confirmation of his deception ; he will find it only in the tricky devilish teaching about the division of labour. But in

all the expressions of human wisdom, from Confucius to Mohammed, he will find one thing only ; he will find it with particular force in the Gospel ; he will find the demand for serving men not according to the theory of the division of labour, but in the simplest, most natural, and only necessary means ; he will find the demand for serving the sick, the imprisoned, the hungry, and the freezing. But it is impossible to offer aid to the sick, the imprisoned, the hungry, and the freezing in any other way than by means of one's immediate, present labour, because the sick, the hungry, and the freezing do not wait, but die of hunger and of cold.

To a man who professes the teaching of the truth, his life itself, which consists in serving others, will point out that original law which is expressed in the first book of Genesis, In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, which Bondarév calls the original law and proves to be positive.

This law is indeed such for men who do not acknowledge the meaning of life which is revealed to men by Christ, and such it was for men before Christ, and such it will remain for men who do not acknowledge Christ's teaching. It demands that each should live on his labour according to the will of God, as expressed in the Bible and in reason. This law is positive. Such is this law until the meaning of life has been revealed to men in the teaching of the truth.

But with the higher consciousness of the meaning of life, revealed by Christ, the law of bread labour, remaining as true as ever, becomes only a part of the one positive teaching of Christ about serving men, and receives the significance, not of a positive, but of a negative law. This law, with a Christian consciousness, points only to an old temptation of men, to what men must not do in order that they may not deviate from the path of true life.

For a believer in the Old Testament, who does not acknowledge the teaching, this law has the following meaning : " Earn your bread with your own hands.'" But for a Christian it has a negative significance. This law says : " Do not assume it as possible to serve people by swallowing up the labours of others and by not earning your own sustenance by your hands."

This law is for a Christian an indication of one of the most ancient offences from which people suffer. Against this offence, terrible in its consequences and so old that we can with difficulty recognize it as a deception, and not as a natural human property, this teaching of Bondarev is directed : it is equally binding on him who believes in the Old Testament, and on the Christian who believes in the Holy Scripture, and on him who does not believe in the Scripture, but follows reason alone, and on him who recognizes the teaching of the truth.

Reader and dear brother, whoever you may be, I love you, and not only do not wish to grieve and offend you, to bring evil into your life, but want this much, – to serve you.

I could write a great deal, and I feel like doing so, in order to prove the truth of this proposition and overthrow the arguments which I hear against it. But no matter how much I may write, how well I may write, how logically right I may be, I shall not convince you, if you struggle with your reason against mine, and your heart will remain cold.

I am afraid of that ; I am afraid of harming you with the pride of my reason, with my coldness. All I ask you is not to dispute, not to prove, but to ask your heart.

Whoever you may be, no matter how talented you may be, or how good, or in what condition you may be, can you be calm at your tea, your dinner, at your business of state, of art, of learning, of medicine, or teaching, when you hear or see at your porch a hungry, freezing, sick,, weary man ? No, you cannot ! But they are always there, if not at the porch, they are ten sdzhens, ten versts away. They are there, and you know it.

You cannot be calm, you cannot have joys which are not poisoned by them. In order that you may not see them at the porch, you must bar them from you, keep them from you by your coldness, or go somewhere where they are not to be found. But they are everywhere ! And even if a place were found where you would not see them, you will nowhere get away from the consciousness of the truth. What is to be done?

You know yourself, and this whole book tells you what.

Descend to the bottom (to what to you seems to be the bottom, but what is the top), stand by the side of those who feed the hungry, clothe the freezing,- fear nothing, - it will not be worse, but better in every respect. Stand in a row with them, with unskilled hands take hold of the first work which feeds the hungry and clothes those who are cold, - of the bread labour, of the struggle with Nature. - and you will feel for the first time a firm soil under your feet : you will feel that you are at home ; that you are free and firmly settled ; that you have nowhere else to go to, and you will experience those whole-hearted unmixed joys which you will find nowhere, behind no doors and behind no curtains.

You will learn of joys which you did not know ; you will know for the first time those simple, strong men, your brothers who, far away from you, have so far fed you,

and, to your surprise, you will discover in them such virtues as you did not know before ; you will see in them such modesty, such goodness, namely toward you, which, you will feel, you do not deserve.

Instead of contempt and ridicule, which you expected, you will see such kindness, such gratitude, such respect for you, because, having lived all your life by their labours, and despising them, you have suddenly come to your senses and are willing to help them with your

unskilful hands.

You will see that what to you appeared as a little island, on which you have been sitting, to save yourself from the sea which was swamping you, is a bog in which you have been sinking ; and that the sea of which you have been afraid is firm ground over which you will pass safely, calmly, joyfully, and it cannot be otherwise, for from the deception which you did not enter yourself, but were led into, you will make your way out to truth, and from the departure from the will of God you will pass over to its fulfilment.