

## Letters On War

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### Chapters

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#### Causes of the Transvaal War

I cannot agree with those who attribute the cause of the present war to the behaviour of this or that political leader.

If two men get drunk in a public-house and fight whilst playing cards, I cannot possibly take upon myself to condemn either, however convincing may be the arguments of the other. The cause of their offensive conduct does not by any means lie in the fact that one of them is right; but in the fact that, instead of quietly working and resting, they found fit to drink wine and play cards in a public-house.

Precisely in the same way, when I am told that in any given war which has broken out one side only is to blame, I can never agree with this. It may be admitted that one side is behaving worse than the other, but no investigations as to which side is behaving worse will in any way explain the cause, owing to which such a terrible, cruel, and inhuman phenomenon as war is taking place.

To anyone who does not shut his eyes, the real causes are perfectly evident in regard to the present Transvaal War, as well as to all the wars which have lately taken place. These causes are threefold: firstly, the unequal distribution of property, that is, the robbing of one part of humanity by the other; secondly, the existence of the military class of men educated and foreappointed to murder; and thirdly, the fallacious and, for the most part, fraudulent religious teaching, in which our young generations are forcibly educated. Therefore I think that it is not only useless but harmful to attribute the causes of wars to Chamberlains, William ii.'s, and such like; thus hiding from oneself the true causes, which lie much nearer, and in which we are ourselves participating. Chamberlains and Williams we can only rage against and abuse; but our rage and our abuse will only poison our own blood without changing the course of events; for Chamberlains and Williams are but the blind tools of forces lying far behind them. They act as they are obliged to, and they cannot act otherwise. All history is a series of actions on the part of politicians—exactly similar to those which preceded the

Transvaal War; and therefore it is utterly useless, even impossible to be angry with such men and to condemn them, when one sees the true causes of their behaviour, and when one recognises one's own participation in one or other aspect of their activity, according to one's relation to the three fundamental causes I have mentioned.

So long as we will profit by privileged wealth, whilst the masses of the people are crushed with labour, there will always be wars for markets, gold mines, etc., which we require in order to maintain our privileged wealth. So much the more will wars be inevitable whilst we participate in the military organisation, allowing it to exist, and refraining from combating it with all our power. We ourselves either serve in the army or recognise it as being not only indispensable, but praiseworthy; And then when war breaks out, we condemn some Chamberlain or other. But, above all, war will exist so long as we not only profess, but tolerate without anger and indignation that distortion of Christianity which is called the Christian Church, and according to which such things are admissible as a Christ-loving army, the consecration of guns and the recognition of a Christian and righteous war. We teach our children this religion, we profess it ourselves, and then we say—some, that Chamberlain, others, that Kruger is to blame for the murder of men by each other.

These are the reasons why I cannot agree with you and cannot rebuke the blind tools of ignorance and evil, but see the cause of war in a region in which I can myself contribute either to the diminution or augmentation of the evil. To contribute to the fraternal equalisation of property, to take advantage to the least possible extent of the privileges which have fallen to my lot; to refrain from in any way participating in military activity, to destroy the spell which makes men, whilst becoming hired murderers, imagine that they are acting well by serving in the army; and, above all, to profess the rational Christian teaching, and to endeavour with all one's might to destroy that cruel fraud of false Christianity in which young generations are forcibly educated,—in this three-fold work, as it seems to me, consists the duty of every man who wishes to serve that which is right, and who is justly revolted by the present dreadful war.

(A portion of the above appeared first in Reynolds'.)

## Two Wars

Christendom has recently been the scene of two wars. One is now concluded, whereas the other still continues; but they were for a time being carried on simultaneously, and the contrast they present is very striking. The first—the Spanish and American War—was an old, vain, foolish, and cruel war, inopportune, out-of-date, heathen, which sought by killing one set of people to solve the question as to how and by whom another set of people ought to be governed. The other, which is still going on, and will end only when there is an end of all war, is a new, self-sacrificing, holy war, founded

entirely on love and reason, which was long ago proclaimed {as Victor Hugo expressed it at one of the congresses) by the best and most advanced-Christian- section of mankind against the other, the coarse and savage section. This war has recently been carried on with especial vigour and success by a handful of Christian people- the Doukhobortsi of the Caucasus-against the powerful Russian Government.

The other day I received a letter from a gentleman in Colorado-Jesse Glodwin-who asks me to send him ". . . a few words or thoughts expressive of my feelings with regard to the noble work of the American nation, and the heroism of its soldiers and sailors." This gentleman, together with an overwhelming majority of the American people, feels perfectly confident that the work of the Americans-the killing of several thousands of almost unarmed men (for, in comparison with the equipment of the Americans, the Spaniards were almost without arms)-was beyond doubt a "noble work"; and he regards the majority of those who, after killing great numbers of their fellow-creatures, have remained safe and sound, and have secured for themselves an advantageous position, as heroes.

The Spanish-American War-leaving out of account the atrocities committed by the Spaniards in Cuba, which served as a pretext for it-is very like this: An old man, infirm and childish, brought up in the traditions of a false honour, challenges, for the settlement of some misunderstanding, a young man, in full possession of his powers, to a boxing match. And the young man, who, from his antecedents and professed sentiments, ought to be immeasurably above such a settlement of the question, accepts the challenge. Armed with a casse-tête, he then throws himself upon this infirm and childish old man, knocks out his teeth, breaks his ribs, and afterwards enthusiastically relates his great deeds to a large audience of young men like himself, who rejoice and praise the hero who has thus maimed the old man.

Such is the nature of the first war, which is occupying the attention of the whole Christian world. Of the other no one speaks; hardly anyone knows about it.

This second war may be described as follows: The people of every nation are being deluded by their rulers saying to them, "You, who are governed by us, are all in danger of being conquered by other nations; we are watching over your welfare and safety, and consequently we demand of you annually some millions of roubles-the fruit of your labour-to be used by us in the acquisition of arms, cannon, powder, and ships for your defence; we also demand that you yourselves shall enter institutions, organised by us, where you will become senseless particles of a huge machine-the army-which will be under our absolute control. On entering this army you will cease to be men with wills of your own; you will simply do what we require of you. But what we wish, above all else, is to exercise dominion; the means by which we dominate is killing, therefore we will instruct you to kill."

Notwithstanding the obvious absurdity of the assertion that people are in danger of being attacked by the governments of other States; who, in their turn, affirm that they—in spite of all their desire for peace—find themselves in precisely the same danger; notwithstanding the humiliation of that slavery to which men subject themselves by entering the army; notwithstanding the cruelty of the work to which they are summoned, men nevertheless submit to this fraud, give their money to be used for their own subjugation, and themselves help to enslave others.

But now there come people who say, "What you tell us about the danger threatening us, and about your anxiety to guard us against it, is a fraud. All the States are assuring us that they desire peace, and yet at the same time all are arming themselves against the others. Moreover, according to that law, which you yourselves recognise, all men are brothers, and it makes no difference whether one belongs to this State or to that; therefore the idea of our being attacked by other nations, with which you try to frighten us, has no terrors for us, we regard it as a matter of no importance. The essential thing, however, is that the law given to us by God and recognised even by you who are requiring us to participate in killing, distinctly forbids not killing only, but also every kind of violence. Therefore we cannot, and will not, take part in your preparations for murder, we will give no money for the purpose, and we will not attend the meetings arranged by you with the object of perverting men's minds and consciences, and transforming them into instruments of violence, obedient to any bad man who may choose to make use of them."

This constitutes the second war. It has long been carried on by the best men of the world against the representatives of brute force, and has of late flamed up with special intensity between the Doukhobors and the Russian Government. The Russian Government has made use of all the weapons it had at command—police measures for making arrests, for prohibiting people moving from place to place, for forbidding all intercourse with one another, the interception of letters, espionage, the prohibition to publish in the newspapers information about any and every thing concerning the Doukhobors, calumnies of them printed in the papers, bribery, flogging, imprisonment, exile, and the ruin of families.

The Doukhobors have, on their part, employed their one religious weapon, namely, gentle intelligence and patient firmness; and they say, "One must not obey man rather than God. Therefore, whatever you may do to us, we cannot and will not obey you."

Men praise the heroes of the savage Spanish and American War, who, in their desire to distinguish themselves before the world, and to gain reward and fame, have slain great numbers of men, or have died while engaged in killing their fellow-creatures. But no one speaks, or even knows, about the heroes of the war against war, who—unseen and unheard—have died and are now dying under the rod, in foul prison cells or in painful exile, and who, nevertheless, to the last breath, stand firm by goodness and truth.

I knew tens of these martyrs who have already died, and hundreds more who, scattered all over the world, are still suffering martyrdom for confessing the truth.

I knew Droggin, a peasant-teacher, who was tortured to death in a penal battalion; I knew another, Isyumtcheko (a friend of Droggin), who, after being kept for some time in a penal battalion, was banished to the other end of the world. I knew Olkhovikoff, a peasant who refused military service, and was consequently sent to a penal battalion, and then while on board a steamer which was transporting him into exile, converted Sereda, the soldier who had him in charge. Sereda, on apprehending what Olkhovikoff had said to him as to the sinfulness of military service, went to his superiors and said, like the ancient martyrs, "I do not wish to be among the torturers, let me join the martyrs." And forthwith they began to torture him, sent him to a penal battalion, and afterwards exiled him to the province of Yakutsk. I knew tens of Doukhobors, of whom many have died or become blind, and yet they would not yield to demands which are contrary to the divine law.

The other day I read a letter from a young Doukhobor, who had been sent alone to a regiment stationed in Samarkand. Again, those same demands on the part of the officers, the same threats and entreaties, and always the same simple and irresistible replies: "I cannot do what is opposed to my belief in God."

"Then we will torture you to death."

"That is your business. You do your work, and I will do mine."

And this youth of twenty, forsaken of all, in a strange place, surrounded by men who are hostile to him, in the midst of the rich, the powerful, and the educated, who are concentrating all their energies on the task of bringing him to subjection, does not submit, but still perseveres in his heroic deed.

But men say, "These are useless victims; these people perish, but the order of life will remain the same." This, I believe, is just what was said with regard to the sacrifice of Christ, as well as of all the other martyrs to truth. The men of our time, especially the learned, have grown so coarse that they, owing to their coarseness, are even unable to understand the significance and effect of spiritual force. A shell of fifty pounds of dynamite, fired at a crowd of living men—this they understand and recognise as a force; but thought, truth which has been realised and practised in the life, even to martyrdom, which has now become accessible to millions—this, according to their conception, is not a force, because it makes no noise, and one cannot see broken bones and pools of blood. Learned men (true, it is those whose learning is misdirected) are using all the power of erudition to prove that mankind lives like a herd of cattle, that man is guided by economic considerations alone, and that his intellect is given him merely for amusement. But governments well know what it is that rules the world, consequently—

guided by the instinct of self-preservation—they are undoubtedly chiefly concerned about the manifestation of spiritual forces; upon which forces depend their existence or their ruin.

And this is precisely the reason why all the energies of the Russian Government were, and still continue to be, exerted to render the Doukhobors harmless, to isolate them, to banish them beyond the frontier.

Notwithstanding all these efforts, however, the struggle of the Doukhobors has opened the eyes of millions.

I know hundreds of military men, old and young, who, owing to the persecution of the gentle, industrious Doukhobors, have begun to have doubts as to the legality of the activities. I know people who have, for the first time, begun to meditate on life and the meaning of Christianity, only after seeing or hearing about the life of these people, and the persecutions to which they have been subjected.

And the Government that is tyrannising over millions of people knows this, and feels that it has been struck to the very heart.

Such is the nature of the second war which is being waged in our times, and such are its consequences. And not to the Russian Government alone are these consequences of importance; every government founded upon violence and upheld by armies is wounded in the same way by this weapon. Christ said, "I have conquered the world." And, indeed, He has conquered the world, if men would but learn to believe in the strength of the weapon given by Him.

And this weapon is the obedience of every man to his own reason and conscience. This, indeed, is so simple, so indubitable, and binding upon every man; "You wish to make me a participator in murder; you demand of me money for the preparation of weapons; and want me to take part in the organised assembly of murderers," says the reasonable man—he who has neither sold nor obscured his conscience. "But I profess that law—that which is also professed by you—which long ago forbade not murder only, but all hostility also; and therefore I cannot obey you."

And it is just by this simple means, and by it alone, that the world is being conquered.

(First issued in The Clarion. Revised with the original.)

Carthago delenda est

La Vita Internationale and L'Humanité Nouvelle have sent me the following letter:—

"Sir,—With the object of furthering the development of humanitarian ideas and civilisation, La Vita Internationale (of Milan), with the

support of L'Humanité Nouvelle (of Paris and Brussels), has deemed it necessary to interest itself in the difficult problem which has of late arisen in all its gravity and importance, owing to the delicate question about which France and the whole world have become so ardently impassioned—we mean the problem of war and militarism. With this aim in view, we beg all those in Europe who take part in politics, science, art, and the labour movement, and even those who occupy the foremost positions in the army, to contribute to this most civilising task by replying to the following questions:—

"1. Is war among civilised nations still required by history, law, and progress?

"2. What are the intellectual, moral, physical, economical, and political effects of militarism?

"3. What, in the interests of the world's future civilisation, are the solutions which should be given to the grave problems of war and militarism?

"What means would most rapidly lead to these solutions?"

I cannot conceal the feelings of disgust, indignation, and even despair which were aroused in me by this letter. Enlightened, sensible, good Christian people who confess the principle of love and brotherhood, who regard murder as an awful crime, who, with very few exceptions, are unable to kill an animal—all these people suddenly, provided that these crimes are called war, not only acknowledge the destruction, plunder, and killing of people to be right and legal, but themselves contribute towards these plunders and murders, prepare themselves for them, take part in them, are proud of them. Moreover, always and everywhere one and the same phenomenon repeats itself, namely, that the great majority of people—all working people—those very people who carry out the plunders and murders, and on whom all the burden falls—neither devise nor prepare nor desire these things, but take part in them against their will, merely because they are placed in such a position and are so instigated that it appears to them, to each individual, that they would suffer more were they to refuse. Whereas those who devise and prepare for these plunders and murders, and who compel the working people to carry them out, are but an insignificant minority, who live in luxury and idleness, upon the labour of the workers. This deceit has already been going on for a long time, but lately the insolence of the impostors has reached its extremest development, and a great share of what labour produces is being taken away from the workers and used for making preparations for plundering and killing. In all the constitutional countries of Europe the workers themselves—all, without exception—are called upon to take part in these plunders and murders; international relations are purposely always more and more complicated, and this leads on to war; peaceful countries are being plundered without the least cause; every year, in some place or other, people murder and rob; and all live in constant dread of general, mutual robbery and murder. It seems evident that if these things are done, it can only be because the

great mass of people are deceived by the minority to whom this deceit is advantageous, and therefore that the first task of those who are anxious to free people from the evils caused by this mutual murdering and plundering should be to expose the deception under which the masses are labouring; to point out to them how the deceit is perpetrated, by what means it is being upheld, and how to get rid of it. The enlightened people of Europe, however, do nothing of the kind, but under the pretext of furthering the establishment of peace, they assemble now in one, now in another city of Europe, and, seated at tables, with most serious faces they discuss the question how best to persuade those brigands who live by their plunder to give up robbing and become peaceful citizens; and then they put the profound questions: first, whether war is still desirable from the standpoint of history, law, and progress (as if such fictions, invented by us, could demand from us deviation from the fundamental moral law of our life); secondly, as to what are the consequences of war (as if there could be any doubt that the consequences of war are always general distress and corruption); and finally, as to how to solve the problem of war (as if some difficult problem existed as to how to free deluded people from a delusion which we clearly see).

This is terrible! We see, for instance, how healthy, calm, and frequently happy people year after year arrive at some gambling den like Monte Carlo, and, benefiting no one but the keepers of those dens, leave there their health, peace, honour, and often their lives. We pity these people; we see clearly that the deceit to which they are subjected consists in those temptations whereby gamblers are allured; in the inequality of the chances, and in the infatuation of gamblers who, though fully aware that in general they are sure to be losers, nevertheless hope, for once at least, to be more fortunate than the rest. All this is perfectly clear. And then, in order to free people from these miseries, we—instead of pointing out to them the temptations to which they are subjected, the fact that they are sure to lose, and the immorality of gambling, which is based on the expectation of other people's misfortunes—assemble with grave faces at meetings, and discuss how to arrange that the keepers of gambling-houses should, of their own accord, shut up their establishments; we write books about it, and we put questions to ourselves as to whether history, law, and progress require the existence of gambling-houses, and as to what are the economical, intellectual, moral, and other consequences of roulette.

If a man is given to drink, and I tell him that he himself can leave off drinking and that he must do so, there is a hope that he will listen to me; but if I tell him that his drunkenness is a complicated and difficult problem which we learned men are trying to solve at our meetings, then in all probability he will, while awaiting the solution of this problem, continue to drink. Thus also with these false and refined external, scientific means of abolishing war, such as international tribunals, arbitration, and similar absurdities, while all the time carefully omitting to mention the most simple, essential, and self-evident method of causing war to cease—a method plain for all to see. In order that people who do not want war should not fight, it is not necessary to

have either international law, arbitration, international tribunals, or solutions of problems; but it is merely necessary that those who are subjected to the deceit should awaken and free themselves from the spell or enchantment under which they find themselves. The way to do away with war is for those who do not want war, who regard participation in it as a sin, to refrain from fighting. This method has been preached from the earliest times by Christian writers such as Tertullian and Origen, as well as by the Paulicians, and by their successors, the Mennonites, Quakers, and Herrnhuters. The sin, harmfulness, and senselessness of military service have been written about and exposed in every way by Dymond, Garrison, and, twenty years ago, by Ballou, as well as by myself. The method I have mentioned has been adopted in the past, and of late has been frequently resorted to by isolated individuals in Austria, Prussia, Holland, Switzerland, and Russia, as well as by whole societies like the Quakers, Mennonites, and Nazarenes, and recently by the Doukhobors, of whom a whole population of 15,000 for three years resisted the powerful Russian Government, and, notwithstanding all the sufferings to which they were subjected, did not submit to its demands that they should take part in the crimes of military service.

But the enlightened friends of peace not only refrain from recommending this method, but cannot bear the mere mention of it, and when it is brought before them they pretend not to have noticed it, or, if they cannot help noticing it, they gravely shrug their shoulders and express their pity for those uneducated and unreasonable men who adopt such an ineffectual silly method, when such a good one exists—namely, to sprinkle salt on the tail of the bird one wishes to catch, i.e., to persuade the governments, who only exist by violence and deceit, to forsake both the one and the other.

They tell us that the misunderstandings which arise between governments will be settled by tribunals or by arbitration. But the governments do not at all desire the settlement of misunderstandings. On the contrary, if there be none they invent some, it being only by such misunderstanding with other governments that they are afforded a pretext for keeping up the army upon which their power is based. Thus the enlightened friends of peace strive to divert the attention of the working, suffering masses from the only method that can deliver them from the slavery in which they are held (from their youth upward), first by patriotism, next by oaths administered by the mercenary priests of a perverted Christianity, and, lastly, by the fear of punishment.

In our days of close and peaceful relations between the people of different nationalities and countries, the deceit called patriotism (which always claims the preeminence of one State or nationality over the rest, and which is therefore always involving people in useless and pernicious wars) is too evident for reasonable people of our age not to free themselves from it; and the religious deceit of the obligation of the oath (which is distinctly forbidden by that very gospel which the governments profess) is, thank God, ever less

and less believed in. So that what really prevents the great majority from refusing to take part in military service is merely fear of the punishments which are inflicted by the governments for such refusals. This fear, however, is only a result of the government deceit, and has no other basis but hypnotism.

The governments may and should fear those who refuse to serve, and, indeed, they are afraid of them, because every refusal undermines the prestige of the deceit by which the governments have the people in their power. But those who refuse have no ground whatever to fear a government that demands crimes from them. In refusing military service, every man risks much less than he would were he to enter it. The refusal of military service and the punishment—imprisonment, exile—is only an advantageous insurance of oneself against the dangers of the military service. In entering the service, every man risks having to take part in war (for which purpose he is being prepared), and during war he may be, like a man sentenced to death, placed in a position in which, under the most difficult and painful circumstances, he will almost certainly be killed or crippled, as I have seen in Sebastopol, when a regiment marched to a fort where two regiments had already been destroyed, and stood there until it too was entirely exterminated. Another, more profitable, chance is that the man who enters the army will not be killed, but will only fall ill and die in the unhealthy conditions of military service. A third chance is that, having been insulted by his superior, he will be unable to contain himself, will answer sharply, will break the discipline, and be subjected to punishment much worse than that to which he would have been liable had he refused military service. The best chance, however, is that instead of the imprisonment or exile to which a person refusing military service is liable, he will pass three or five years of his life amid vicious surroundings, practising the art of killing, being all the while in the same captivity as in prison, and in humiliating submission to depraved people. This in the first place.

Secondly, in refusing military service, every man, however strange it may seem, can yet always hope to escape punishment—upon his refusal being that last disclosure of the governments' deceit, which will render any further punishment for such a deed impossible, there being no people then left sufficiently stupefied to take part in the punishment of one who refuses to participate in their oppression. So that submission to the demands of military service is, evidently, only submission to the hypnotisation of the masses—the utterly futile rush of Panurge's sheep into the water to their evident destruction.

Moreover, besides the consideration of advantage, there is yet another reason which should impel every man to refuse military service who is not hypnotised, and is conscious of the importance of his actions. No one can help desiring that his life should not be an aimless and useless existence, but that it should be of service to God and man; yet frequently a man spends his life without finding an opportunity for such service. The summons to accept the military service presents precisely such an opportunity to every man of our

time. Every man, in refusing to take part in military service or to pay taxes to a government which uses them for military purposes, is, by this refusal, rendering a great service to God and man, for he is thereby making use of the most efficacious means of furthering the progressive movement of mankind towards that better social order which it is striving after and must eventually attain. But not only is it advantageous to refuse participation in the military service, and not only should the majority of the men of our time so refuse: it is, moreover, impossible not to refuse, if only they are not hypnotised. To every man there are some actions which are morally impossible—as impossible as are certain physical actions. And the promise of slavish obedience to strangers and to immoral people who have the murder of men as their acknowledged object, is, to the majority of men, if only they be free from hypnotism, just such a morally impossible action. And therefore it is not only advantageous and obligatory on every man to refuse to participate in the military service, but it is also impossible for him not to do so if only he be free from the stupefaction of hypnotism.

"But what will happen when all people refuse military service, and there is no check nor hold over the wicked, and the wicked triumph, and there is no protection against savage people—against the yellow race—who will come and conquer us?"

I will say nothing about the fact that as it is the wicked have long triumphed, that they are still triumphing, and that while fighting one another they have long dominated the Christians, so that there is no need to fear what has already been accomplished; nor will I say anything with regard to the dread of the savage yellow race—whom we insistently provoke and instruct in war—that being a mere excuse, and one-hundredth part of the army now kept up in Europe being sufficient for the imaginary protection against them—I will say nothing about all this, because the consideration of the general result to the world of such or such actions cannot serve as a guide for our conduct and activity.

To man is given another guide, and that an unfailing one,—the guide of his conscience, following which he indubitably knows that he is doing what he should do. Therefore, all considerations of the danger that threatens every individual who refuses military service, as well as of what menaces the world in consequence of such refusals—all these are but a particle of that enormous and monstrous deceit in which Christian mankind is enmeshed, and which is being carefully maintained] by the governments who exist by the power of this deceit.

If man act in accordance with what is dictated to him by his reason, his conscience, and his God, only the very best can result for himself as well as for the world.

People complain of the evil conditions of life in our Christian world. But is it possible for it to be otherwise, when all of us acknowledge not only that fundamental Divine law proclaimed some thousands of years ago, "Thou shalt not kill," but also the law of

love and brotherhood of all men, and yet, notwithstanding this, every man in our European world practically disavows this fundamental Divine law acknowledged by him, and at the command of President, Emperor, or Minister, of Nicholas or William, arrays himself in a ridiculous costume, takes an instrument of murder, and says, "Here I am, ready to injure, ruin, or kill anyone I am ordered to"?

What must a society be like which is composed of such men? Such a society must be dreadful, and indeed it is so!

Awake, brethren! Listen neither to those villains who, from your childhood, infect you with the diabolic spirit of patriotism, opposed to righteousness and truth, and only necessary in order to deprive you of your property, your freedom, and your human dignity; nor to those ancient impostors who preach war in the name of a cruel and vindictive God invented by them, and in the name of a perverted and false Christianity; nor, even less, to those modern Sadducees who, in the name of science and civilisation, aiming only at the continuation of the present state of things, assemble at meetings, write books, and make speeches, promising to organise a good and peaceful life for people without their making any effort! Do not believe them. Believe only the consciousness which tells you that you are neither beasts nor slaves, but free men, responsible for your actions, and therefore unable to be murderers either of your own accord or at the will of those who live by these murders. And it is only necessary for you to awake in order to realise all the whole horror and insanity of that which you have been and are doing, and, having realised this, to cease that evil which you yourselves abhor, and which is ruining you. If only you were to refrain from the evil which you yourselves detest, those ruling impostors, who first corrupt and then oppress you, would disappear like owls before the daylight, and then those new, human, brotherly conditions of life would be establish for which Christendom—wary of suffering, exhausted by deceit, and lost in insolvable contradictions—is longing. Only let every man without any intricate or sophisticated arguments accomplish that which to-day his conscience unfailingly bids him do, and he will recognise the truth of the gospel words: "If any man willeth to do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it be of God, or whether I speak from Myself" (St. John vii. 17).

(First issued in Westminster Gazette. Revised with original.)

To a Non-Commissioned Officer

(Translated by Aylmer Maude)

You are surprised that soldiers are taught that it is right to kill people in certain cases and in war, while in the books admitted to be holy by those who so teach, there is nothing like such a permission, but, on the contrary, not only is all murder forbidden, but all insulting of others is forbidden also, and we are told not

to do to others what we do not wish done to us. And you ask, is not this a fraud? And if it is a fraud, then for whose sake is it done?

Yes, it is a fraud, committed for the sake of those accustomed to live on the sweat and blood of other men, and who have therefore perverted, and still pervert, Christ's teaching, which was given to man for his good, but which has now, in its perverted form, become the chief source of human misery.

The thing has come about in this way:-

The government, and all those people of the upper classes who are near the government, and who live by the work of others, need some means of dominating the workers, and this means they find in their control of the army. Defence against foreign enemies is only an excuse. The German Government frightens its subjects about the Russians and the French; the French Government frightens its people about the Germans; the Russian Government frightens its people about the French and the Germans, and that is the way with all governments. But neither the Germans nor Russians nor Frenchmen desire to fight their neighbours and other people; but, living in peace, they dread war more than anything else in the world. The government and the upper governing classes, to excuse their domination of the labourers, behave like a gipsy who whips his horse before he turns a corner and then pretends he cannot hold it in. They provoke their own people and some foreign government, and then pretend that for the well-being or for the defence of their people they must declare war,, which again brings profit only to generals, officers, officials, merchants, and, in general, to the rich. In reality war is an inevitable result of the existence of armies; and armies are only needed by governments in order to dominate their own working classes.

The thing is a crime, but the worst of it is that the government, in order to have a plausible basis for its domination of the people, has to pretend that it holds the highest religious teaching known to man (i.e. the Christian), and that it brings up its subjects in this teaching. That teaching, however, is in its nature opposed not only to murder, but to all violence, and, therefore, the governments, in order to dominate the people and to be considered Christian, had to pervert Christianity and to hide its true meaning from the people, and thus deprive men of the well-being Christ brought them.

This perversion was accomplished long ago, in the time of that scoundrel the Emperor Constantine, who for doing it was enrolled among the saints.[1] All subsequent governments, especially our Russian Government, do their utmost to preserve this perverted understanding, and not to allow the people to see the real meaning of Christianity; because having seen the real meaning of Christianity, the people would perceive that the governments, with their taxes, soldiers, prisons, gallows, and false priests, are not only not the pillars of Christianity they profess to be, but are its greatest enemies.

In consequence of this perversion, those frauds which have surprised you are possible, and all those terrible misfortunes occur from which people suffer.

The people are oppressed, robbed, poor, ignorant, dying of hunger. Why? Because the land is in the hands of the rich; the people are enslaved in mills and in factories, obliged to earn money because taxes are demanded from them, and the price of their labour is diminished, while the price of things they need is increased.

How are they to escape? By taking the land from the rich? But if this is done, soldiers will come and will kill the rebels or put them in prison. Take the mills and factories? The same will happen. Organise and support a strike? But it is sure to fail. The rich will hold out longer than the workers, and the armies are always on the side of the capitalists. The people will never extricate themselves from the want in which they are kept, as long as the army is in the hands of the governing classes.

But who compose these armies that keep the people in this state of slavery? Who are these soldiers that will fire at the peasants who take the land, or at the strikers who will not disperse, and at the smugglers who bring in goods without paying taxes, who put in prison and guard there those who refuse to pay taxes? The soldiers are these same peasants who are deprived of land, these same strikers who want better wages, these same taxpayers who want to be rid of these taxes.

And why do these people shoot at their brothers? Because it has been instilled into them that the oath they were obliged to take on entering the service, is binding, and that though it is generally wrong to murder people, it is right to do so at the command of their superiors. That is to say that that fraud is played off upon them which has occurred to you. But here we meet the question. How is it that sensible people—often people who can read, and even educated people—believe in such an evident lie? However little education a man may have, he cannot but know that Christ did not sanction murder, but taught kindness, meekness, forgiveness of injuries, love of one's enemies; and therefore he cannot help seeing that on the basis of Christian teaching he cannot pledge himself in advance to kill all whom he may be ordered to kill.

The question is, How can sensible people believe, as all now serving in the army have believed and still believe, such an evident fraud? The answer is that it is not this one fraud by itself that takes people in, but they have from childhood been deprived of the proper use of their reason by a whole series of frauds, a whole system of frauds, called the Orthodox Faith, which is nothing but the grossest idolatry. In this faith people are taught that God is triple, that besides this triple God there is a Queen of Heaven[2], and besides this Queen there are various saints whose corpses have not decayed, [3] and besides these saints there are icons[4] of the Gods and of the Queen of Heaven, to which one should offer candles and pray with one's hands; and that the most important and holy thing on earth is

the pap,[5] which the parson makes of wine and white bread on Sundays behind a railing; and that after the parson has whispered over it, the wine is no longer wine, and the white bread is not bread, but they are the blood and flesh of one of the triple Gods, etc All this is so stupid and senseless that it is quite impossible to understand what it all means. And the very people who teach this faith don't tell you to understand it, but only tell you to believe it; and people trained to it from childhood can believe any kind of nonsense that is told them. And when men have been so befooled that they believe that God hangs in the corner,[6] or sits in a morsel of pap which the parson gives out in a spoon; that to kiss a board or some relic, and to put candles in front of them, is useful for life here and hereafter,—they are called on to enter the military service, where they are humbugged to any extent, being made to swear on the Gospel (in which swearing is prohibited) that they will do just what is forbidden in those Gospels, and then taught that to kill people at the word of those in command is not a sin, but that to refuse to submit to those in command is a sin. So that the fraud played off on soldiers, when it is instilled into them that they may without sin kill people at the wish of those in command, is not an isolated fraud, but is bound up with a whole system of fraud, without which this one fraud would not deceive them.

Only a man who is quite befooled by the false faith called Orthodoxy, palmed off upon him for the true Christian faith, can believe that there is no sin in a Christian entering the army, promising blindly to obey any man who ranks above him in the service, and, at the will of others, learning to kill, and committing that most terrible crime, forbidden by all laws.

A man free from the pseudo-Christian faith called Orthodoxy will not believe that.

And that is why the so-called Sectarians, i.e. Christians who have repudiated the Orthodox teaching and acknowledge Christ's teaching as explained in the Gospels, and especially in the Sermon on the Mount, are not tricked by this deception, but have frequently refused, and still do refuse, to be soldiers, considering such occupation incompatible with Christianity, and preferring to bear all kinds of persecution, as hundreds and thousands of people are doing: in Russia among the Doukhobors and Molokans, in Austria the Nazarenes, and in Sweden, Switzerland, and Germany among members of the Evangelical sects. The government knows this, and is therefore exceedingly anxious that the general Church fraud, without which its power could not be maintained, should be commenced with every child from early infancy, and should be continually maintained in such a way that none may avoid it. The government tolerates anything else, drunkenness and vice (and not only tolerates but even organises drunkenness and vice—they help to stupefy people),—but by all the means in its power it hinders those who have escaped from its trap from assisting others to escape.

The Russian Government perpetrates this fraud with special craft and cruelty. It orders all its subjects to baptize their children during

infancy into the false faith called Orthodoxy, and it threatens to punish them if they disobey. And when the children are baptized, i.e. are reckoned as Orthodox, then under threats of criminal penalties they are forbidden to discuss the faith into which, without their wish, they were baptized; and for such discussion of that faith, as well as for renouncing it and passing to another, they are actually punished. So that about all Russians it cannot be said that they believe the Orthodox faith,—they do not know whether they believe it or not, but were converted to it during infancy and kept in it by violence, i.e. by the fear of punishment. All Russians were entrapped into Orthodoxy by a cunning fraud, and are kept in it by cruel force.

Using the power it wields, the government perpetrates and maintains this fraud, and the fraud upholds its power.

And, therefore, the sole means to free people from their many miseries lies in freeing them from the false faith instilled into them by government, and in their imbibing the true Christian teaching which is hidden by this false teaching. The true Christian teaching is very simple, clear, and obvious to all, as Christ said. But it is simple and accessible only when man is freed from that falsehood in which we were all educated, and which is passed off upon us as God's Truth.

Nothing needful can be poured into a vessel full of what is useless. We must first empty out what is useless. So it is with the acquirement of true Christian teaching. We have first to understand that all the stories telling how God six thousand years ago made the world; how Adam sinned and the human race fell, and how the Son of God, a God born of a virgin, came on earth and redeemed man, and all the fables in the Old Testament and in the Gospels, and all the lives of the saints with their stories of miracles and relics, are nothing but a gross hash of Jewish superstitions and priestly frauds. Only to a man quite free from this deception can the clear and simple teaching of Christ, which needs no explanation, be accessible and comprehensible. That teaching tells us nothing of the beginning, or of the end, of the world, nor about God and His purpose, nor in general about things which we cannot, and need not, know; but it speaks only of what man must do to save himself, i.e. how best to live the life he has come into, in this world, from birth to death. For this purpose it is only necessary to act to others as we wish them to act to us. In that is all the law and the prophets, as Christ said. And to act in that way we need neither icons, nor relics, nor church services, nor priests, nor catechisms, nor governments, but, on the contrary, we need perfect freedom from all that for to do to others as we wish them to do to us is only possible when a man is free from the fables which the priests give out as the only truth, and is not bound by promises to act as other people may order. Only such a man will be capable of fulfilling—not his own will nor that of other men—but the will of God.

And the will of God is not that we should fight and oppress the weak, but that we should acknowledge all men to be our brothers, and

should serve one another.

These are the thoughts your letter has aroused in me. I shall be very glad if they help to clear up the questions you are thinking about.

(Reprinted from The New Order.)

Constantine the Great was decreed to be a god by the Roman Senate, and was made a Christian saint by the Eastern Church.—Trans.

The Holy Virgin, the "Mother of God" and "Queen of Heaven," plays a prominent part in the Orthodox Eastern Church, i.e. the Russo-Greek Church.—Trans.

One proof of holiness adduced as justifying admission to the rank of sainthood is the non-decomposition of the holy person's corpse. These miraculously preserved bodies are enshrined in chapels, monasteries, and cathedrals, and are there visited by pilgrims, who offer up prayers at the shrine, place candles before it, and usually leave some contribution for the benefit of the establishment. The inspection allowed is not very close, and there are stories of people being employed to stuff the saints with straw. These tales are, however, considered irreligious.—Trans.

The icons of the Eastern Church are not "graven images," but are pictures painted in a conventional cadaverous manner on wood; these are often covered with an embossed metal cover allowing only the hands and face to be seen, and making the icon as much like an image as a picture.—Trans.

"The pap" is the author's irreverent way of referring to the mixture of bread and wine administered by the priests of the Orthodox Eastern Church at the celebration of the Holy Eucharist.—Trans.

This refers to the common practice of hanging an icon in the corner of each dwelling-room. These icons are called "gods," and are prayed to in a way that among common and devout people often amounts to idolatry.—Trans.