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THE ROOT OF THE EVIL

By Count Leo Tolstoy

I

Among the fields, in a walled enclosure, stands an iron foundry, with enormous, unceasingly smoking chimneys, clanking chains, blast furnaces, scattered cottages for overseers and workmen, and a railway siding.

In the foundry and its mines workmen labor like ants. Some hew out the ore from morning till night, or from evening till morn, a hundred yards below the ground, in dark, narrow, stifling, damp corridors, which threaten them perpetually with death. Others, bending double in the darkness, draw the clay and ore to the foot of the shaft, run back with the empty trucks, fill them again, and go on working for twelve and fourteen hours daily the whole week through. So they work in the mines. In the foundry itself, some work at the furnaces in stifling heat, others at the outlets for the melted ore and slag; others again—mechanics, stokers, locksmiths, bricklayers, joiners—labor also in the workshops twelve and fourteen hours a day throughout the week.

On Sundays, these men receive their wages, wash themselves (or sometimes do not wash), get drunk in the public houses and taverns surrounding the factory and luring them on all sides; and early on Monday morning they all set about the same work again.

Near the foundry, peasants are ploughing other men's fields with lean, exhausted horses. These men rose at dawn—if they did not spend the night awake on the marshes, the only place where they can feed their horses. They rose at dawn, came home, harnessed the horses, and, taking with them a lump of bread, went off to plough the fields of other men.

Other peasants are squatting on the highway near the foundry, and, having erected a shed for themselves with matting, break stones for the roads. The feet of these men are bruised, their hands are horny, their whole bodies are dirty; and not only their faces, hair, and beards, but their lungs also, are penetrated with lime dust. Taking from the heap a large, unbroken stone, and settling it between their feet, which are shod in laptie and swathed in old rags, they strike it with a heavy hammer till it splits. Then they take the fragments and hammer them till they are fit for road metal. Then they again take the unbroken stones, and begin again. So they work, from the early summer dawn till night, fifteen or sixteen hours, resting only at midday, and, for breakfast and dinner, refreshing themselves with bread and water.

Thus live all these men—in the mines and foundry, at the plough and breaking stones—from youth till old age. Thus live their wives and mothers, subjected to over-exhaustion and consequent female infirmities; and thus, also, live their old fathers and young children, poorly nourished, badly dressed, in arduous and health-destroying labors, from morning to night and from youth to old age. And now, past the foundry, past the stonebreakers, past the ploughing peasants, meeting and outstripping ragged men and women who wander with wallets from place to place asking for food “for

Christ's sake," drives a carriage with tinkling bells, drawn by four bay horses sixteen hands high, the least valuable of which has cost more than the whole houses and possessions of the peasants who admire the team. In the carriage are seated two girls, with brightly-colored sunshades, and ribbons and feathers on their hats, each of which has cost more than the horse with which the peasant ploughs the field. On the front seat is an officer in a newly washed, white linen coat, with braidings, and buttons that sparkle in the sun; on the box sits a stout coachman, with blue silk shirt sleeves and a velvet overcoat. He nearly runs over the vagrants, and pushes into the ditch a peasant, who, in a dirt-begrimed smock, is jogging past in his empty cart.

"Don't you see that?" shouts the coachman, showing his whip to the peasant, who has not turned aside quickly enough; and the peasant with one hand lugs at the reins, and with the other timidly takes the cap off his dirty head.

Behind the carriage, their nickel-plated machines gleaming in the sun, fly noiselessly two men and a lady on bicycles, laughing merrily; and on they pass, frightening the peasant wayfarers. By the side of the road are two equestrians; the man on an English stallion, the lady on an ambler. To say nothing of the price of the horses and saddles, the black hat with the lilac veil alone has cost two months' stonebreaker's labor; and for the riding stick, a stylish English one, has been paid a week's wages of an underground workman—of the man who, trudging along, happy at having been hired at the pit-mouth, stands aside to admire the well-fed figures of horses and riders, and the great fat, outlandish dog, with the expensive collar, trotting behind with his tongue hanging out. Not far behind this company comes a cart, with a smiling, smart, and becurled maid in a white apron, and a stout, ruddy man with carefully combed whiskers, and a cigarette between his lips, whispering something to the girl. In the cart lie a tea urn, an ice mould, and some bundles tied in serviettes. The man and the girl are the servants of the people in the carriage, on horseback, and on bicycles. The day has not been an unusual one for them. They live thus all the summer. Almost every day they make excursions; sometimes, as today, with tea, ices, and sweet things, to enable them to eat and drink in a new spot each day.

The people in the carriage, on horseback, and on bicycles are three families who live in their country houses. One is the family of a land-owner possessing 6,000 acres; another, of an official in receipt of \$15,000 a year; the third, and most wealthy, are the children of the owner of the foundry.

All these people are not in the least either astonished or stirred to pity by the sight of all the extreme poverty and cruel labor which surround them. They think all this is just as it should be. They are occupied with quite other matters.

"This will never do," says the lady on horseback, looking back at the dog. "I cannot put up with this." She stops the carriage. All speak together in French, laugh, take the dog into the carriage, and drive on, covering the stonebreakers and the other peasants on the road with clouds of lime dust.

The carriage, the horsemen, and the bicyclists have passed, like beings of another world; and the foundry workmen, the stonebreakers,

and the peasant ploughmen go on with their weary and monotonous toil (for other people), which will end only with their lives.

"That is how some people live!" think they, following the carriage with their eyes. And still more miserable seems to them their miserable existence.

II

What does it mean? Have these workingmen done anything—something very wicked—to be punished in this way? Or is it the fate of all men? Or have those who passed in carriages and on bicycles done, or are they still doing, something very useful or important, for which they are thus rewarded? Not at all! On the contrary, those who work so strenuously are, for the most part, moral, sober, modest, and industrious; the others are, for the most part, depraved, perverted, insolent, and idle. All this exists only because such a system of life is considered right and natural by men who affirm of themselves either that they profess Christ's law of love toward their neighbor, or that they are cultured—that is, perfected—human beings.

And the system exists not only in that little corner of the Government of Tula, which I picture clearly to myself because I see it so often, but everywhere—not only in Russia, from St. Petersburg to Batum, but in France, from Paris to Auvergne; in Italy, from Rome to Palermo; in Germany; in Spain; in America; in Australia; even in India and China. Everywhere, two or three men in a thousand live so that, doing nothing for themselves, they eat and drink in one week what would have fed hundreds for a year; they wear garments costing thousands of dollars; they live in palaces, where thousands of workmen could have been housed; and they spend upon their caprices the fruits of thousands and tens of thousands of working days. The others, sleepless and unfed, labor beyond their strength, ruining their physical and moral health for the benefit of these few chosen ones.

For some men, when they are about to be born, a midwife, a doctor (sometimes two), are summoned; a trousseau is prepared, with a hundred little shirts and swaddling clothes with silk ribbons; and spring rocking cradles are purchased. Others, the enormous majority, are given birth to anywhere and anyhow, without help; they are rolled up in dirty rags, laid on straw in wooden cradles—and the parents are glad when they die. The first are cared for by the midwife, nurse, and wet nurse, while the mothers lie in bed for days; the second are not cared for at all, because there is no one to care for them; and the mothers leave their beds directly after childbirth, light the fire, milk the cow, and sometimes wash their own, their husbands', and their children's clothes. Some children grow up among toys, amusements, and study. Others begin by crawling on their naked stomachs across the threshold, are crippled and devoured by swine, and at five years old begin to labor for masters. Some are taught all the scientific wisdom adapted to children's minds; others are taught the coarsest abuse and the most outrageous superstitions. Some fall in love, have romantic histories, and marry when they have already tasted all the pleasures of love; others are married at sixteen or twenty years of age, as best suits the interests of their parents.

Some eat and drink the very best and most expensive things in the world, feeding their dogs with white bread and meat. Others eat only

bread and kvass, and even that not to their fill; while their food is often stale, to put them off eating much. Some, who do not work, change their fine linen every day; others, working continually at other men's tasks, change their coarse, torn, lousy linen once in two weeks, or else do not change it at all, but wear it till it falls to pieces. Some sleep in clean sheets on feather beds; others on the earth, covering themselves with ragged coats.

Some drive about with strong, well-fed horses, for recreation; others labor miserably with half-starved beasts, and for business walk on foot. Some devise things they may do to occupy their idle time; others have not the time to clean themselves, to wash, to rest, to converse, or to see their families.

Some can read four languages, and daily amuse themselves with the most varied pastimes; others do not even know their letters and have no pleasure but drink. Some know all and believe nothing; others know nothing and believe all the absurdities they are told. Some, when they fall ill, besides all manner of watering places, all possible care, cleanliness, and medicines, go about from place to place seeking for the most healing climate; others lie down on the stove in a chimneyless hut, and with unwashed wounds, without any food except dry bread, or any air besides an atmosphere tainted by the members of the family, by calves and sheep, rot alive and die before their time.

Is this as it should be?

If there exists a Supreme Wisdom and Love guiding the world, if there is a God, He cannot sanction such a division among men: that some should not know what to do with their superfluous wealth, and should squander aimlessly the fruits of other men's toil; and that others should sicken and die prematurely, or live a miserable life of exhausting labor.

If there is a God, this cannot and must not be. If there is no God, then even from the simplest human standpoint, a system by which the majority of men are forced to ruin their lives in order that a small minority may possess superfluous wealth—a wealth which only hinders and perverts them—such a system of life is absurd, because it is detrimental to all men.

III

Then, why do men live in this way?

One can understand why rich men, who are accustomed to their wealth and do not see clearly that wealth does not give happiness, should try to maintain their position. But why do the enormous majority, in whose hands all power resides, and who believe that happiness is in riches, live in poverty and submit to the minority? Why do all the men, strong in physical vigor, in skill, and in the habit of labor—the enormous majority of humanity—submit to and obey a handful of feeble men, generally incapable of anything, and effeminate—old men, and especially women?

Go and look at the shops. Look, for instance, at the Moscow arcades before a holiday or at times of cheap sales. Ten or twelve arcades, consisting of uninterrupted rows of splendid shops with enormous panes of thick glass, are filled with various expensive things—for women exclusively; stuffs, dresses, laces, precious stones, boots, ornaments for rooms, furs, etc. All these things cost thousands upon thousands; they were made in factories by workmen who often wasted

their lives on the labor of making them; and they are all utterly unnecessary not only for workmen, but even for wealthy men; they are nothing but the toys and ornaments of women. At the doors, on either side, are porters in uniforms, and coachmen in expensive liveries sitting on the boxes of costly carriages harnessed with horses costing thousands of roubles. Again, thousands of working days have been expended on the production of all these luxurious trappings; laborers, old and young, men and women, have spent their whole lives in fashioning all these articles. And all these things are in the power and in the hands of a few hundred women, dressed in expensive furs and hats of the latest fashion, flitting about in the shops and buying all these wares prepared exclusively for them.

A few hundred women dispose at their caprice of the labor of millions of workingmen, toiling to feed and support themselves and their families. On the caprice of these women depend the life and fate of millions.

How did this happen?

Why do these millions of strong men, who produced all these articles, submit to these women?

A lady in a velvet mantle, and a hat of the very latest style, drives up with a pair of fine horses. Everything she wears is new and most costly. A porter hastens to unfasten the cover of her sleigh, and respectfully holds her elbow while she alights. She walks along the arcade as if it were her kingdom; enters a shop and buys five thousand roubles' worth of stuff for her drawing-room; orders it to be sent as soon as possible, and drives away. This woman is unkind, stupid, and not even pretty; she has never had children, and never in her life has she done anything for others. Then why do the porters and the coachmen and the shopmen cringe before her so obsequiously? Why has the produce of the labor of thousands of workmen become her property? Because she has money. And the porters, and the coachmen, and the shopmen, and factory workmen need money to feed their families. And the easiest and sometimes the only way in which they can obtain this money is to work as coachmen, porters, shopmen, or factory workmen.

Why has this woman got the money?

She has got it because men deprived of their land and unaccustomed to any labor except the machine-weaving of stuffs work at her husband's factory; and her husband, giving the workmen only what is indispensable to their subsistence, takes for himself all the profits of the factory—some hundreds of thousands of roubles; and as he has no use for his thousands, he willingly gives them over to his wife to spend on whatever she may desire.

Here is another lady, with yet more luxurious carriage and clothes, buying various expensive and unnecessary things in the shops. How has this woman got her money? She is maintained by a wealthy land-owner, possessor of 50,000 acres granted to his ancestor by a depraved empress as reward for his debauchery with herself. This man owns all the land surrounding the villages of the peasants, to whom he lets the land at a high rent. The peasants pay the money because without the land they would die of hunger. And this rent is now in the hands of a courtesan, and with it she buys things made by the other peasants who have been robbed of their land.

Here is a third rich woman, walking along the arcade with her mother

and her fiancé. She is going to be married, and is buying bronzes and expensive porcelain. This woman has her money from her father, a high official, receiving twelve thousand yearly from appointments. He has given seven thousand to his daughter as dowry. This money is collected from the peasants in the shape of local and imperial taxes. These taxes have compelled the porter who opens the door (he is a peasant from Kaluga and has left at home a wife and children), and the cabman who drove them (he comes from Tula), and hundreds of thousands and millions of men engaged as servants or workmen, to leave their homes and spend their lives in labor which will be used by women—women whose money has been collected from factory profits, or from rent, or from taxes, by capitalists, land-owners, and officials.

Thus, millions of workmen submit to these women because one man has usurped the factory, another the land, and a third the taxes collected from the workmen. These are the causes of what I saw at the iron foundry.

The peasants plough the fields of other men because they have not enough of their own land; and the land-owner allows them to use his land only on condition that they work for him. The stonebreakers break stones because by that labor alone can they pay the taxes required of them. The foundrymen and miners toil as they do because neither the earth, out of which the iron is dug, nor the foundry, in which it is smelted, belongs to them.

All these men spend their lives in exhausting labor (for other men), because the wealthy have possessed themselves of the land, collect taxes, and own the factories.

#### IV

Why does the land belong, not to those who work it, but to those who do not work? Why do only a small number of men profit by the taxes collected from all, and not all those who pay the taxes? Why do factories belong, not to those who built them and work in them, but to a small number of men who did not build them and do not work in them?

The usual answer to the question why the non-workers possess the land of the workers is that the land has been granted them for their services, or bought with the money they have earned. The usual answer to the question why some men—a small number of non-workers, rulers and their assistants—take to themselves the greater part of the wealth of the working classes and use it according to their caprices is that the men who profit by the money collected from the people govern them and defend them and establish among them order and well-being. The usual answer to the question why the non-workers, the wealthy classes, are in possession of the produce and the instruments of labor of the workers is that the produce and instruments of labor have been earned by them or by their ancestors. And all these men—land-owners and government officials, merchants and factory owners—sincerely believe that their possession is perfectly lawful and that they have a right to it. And yet, neither the ownership of land, nor the collecting of taxes and profiting by them, nor the possession of the produce and instruments of labor by non-working men, has the least justification, because land—like water, or air, or the rays of the sun—is an indispensable condition of every man's life, and therefore it cannot be the exclusive

property of one. If land, and not water, air, or sunlight, has become the object of property, it is not because land is not just as indispensable a condition of every man's existence, which cannot therefore be rightly appropriated, but because it is not possible to deprive men of water or the air or the sunlight, whereas it is possible to deprive them of land.

Property in land was established by violence (land was usurped by conquest, and afterwards given away or sold); and in spite of all the attempts to transform it into a right, it still exists only through the violence of the strong and the armed against the feeble and the defenceless.

If only a workingman infringes this imaginary right and begins to plough a field which is considered the property of another man, there appears instantly that on which this imaginary right is based: first, in the form of the police, and afterwards in that of soldiers, who will cut down and shoot those who try to avail themselves of their natural right of drawing their sustenance from the soil. Therefore, what is called the right of landed property is nothing but violence against all who may need that land. Right in land is equivalent to the right which robbers claim in a road they have taken possession of, and along which they allow no one to pass without paying toll.

Still less can the right of governments to enforce taxes find a semblance of justification. It is said that taxes are used for the defence of the State against external enemies, for the establishment and maintenance of internal order, and for the organization of social institutions necessary to all.

But, in the first place, external enemies have long ago ceased to exist, according to the declarations of governments themselves; they all assure their subjects that they desire only peace. The German Emperor desires peace, the French Republic desires peace, England and Russia desire peace, and the Transvaal and China desire it still more. Then, against whom have we to defend ourselves?

In the second place, in order to give money for the establishment of internal order and social institutions, one must be sure that the people who are to establish this order will really do so, and also that the order itself will be a good one, and that the proposed social institutions are indeed necessary for the community. If, on the contrary, as has been the case always and everywhere, the payers of taxes do not believe either in the capacity, or even in the honesty, of those who maintain the system, and besides consider the system itself evil and the proposed institutions utterly inadequate to the needs of the taxpayers, then it is evident that there can exist no right to levy taxes—but only violence.

I remember the wise words of a Russian peasant, a religious and therefore a truly free-thinking man. Like Thoreau, he thought it wrong to pay taxes for purposes his conscience disapproved of, and, when the tax gatherers required him to pay his share, he asked for what purposes the taxes would be used, saying:

"If they are to be employed for righteous uses, I will immediately give not only what you require, but even much more; but if the taxes are destined for evil purposes, then I cannot and will not give a penny, and I refuse to do so of my own free will."

Of course, none stopped to listen to him; instead, they burst open

the doors he had closed, took away his cow and sold it for the taxes. Therefore, in reality, there is only one true and actual reason for taxation, namely, the power that collects them—the possibility of robbing those who pay them voluntarily, and even, in case of refusal, of beating and imprisoning and punishing them, as is done continually.

The fact that, in England, France, and America, and in all constitutional States, taxes are determined by parliaments, that is, by assemblies of pretended “representatives of the people,” does not affect the question, because elections are so organized that the members of parliaments do not represent the people, being nothing but professional politicians, occupied only with their personal ambitions and the interests of their parties; or, if they are not so at first, they become so as soon as they enter parliament. The justifications of the so-called proprietary rights of non-workers over the produce of other men’s labor are equally devoid of foundation.

The rights of property, which are even termed “the sacred rights,” are vindicated by the argument that property is the result of abstinence and of industrious activities useful to mankind. Yet one has only to examine the origin of all great fortunes to be convinced of the contrary.

Fortunes are acquired always either by violence—the most common way—or by avarice, or by some huge villainy, or by chronic swindling, as in the case of trade. The better a man is, the more sure is he of losing his wealth; and the worse a man, the more sure he is of retaining and increasing his fortune. The common sense of the people says, “By honest labor one cannot acquire stone palaces,” and “By labor one becomes, not a rich man, but a cripple.” So it was in ancient times, and so it is, even more so, now, when the distribution of riches has been accomplished in the most inequitable manner. Even if one allows that, in a primitive society, a temperate and industrious man will acquire more than one who is intemperate and lazy, that is not the case in our present society. The workman who ploughs another man’s land, who buys the indispensable necessities of life at the prices demanded of him, and who labors with instruments not his own, can never acquire wealth, however temperate and industrious he may be. On the other hand, the most profligate and idle man who creeps into the good graces of the government or of wealthy people, or who becomes a usurer, or a factory owner, or a banker, or a wine merchant, or the owner of a house of debauchery, can easily acquire a fortune, as we see in thousands of cases.

The laws which claim to protect property are laws protecting only property acquired by theft, which is in the hands of the wealthy; they not only do not protect the workman, who has no property except his labor, but they directly contribute to the exploitation of that labor.

We see numberless administrators—the sovereign, his brothers and uncles, ministers, judges, and clergy—receiving enormous sums gathered from the people, and not even performing the light duties undertaken in exchange for their remuneration. It appears, then, that they steal these salaries gathered from the people; and yet, for this theft of the people’s property, it does not enter the head

of any one to condemn them.

If a workman takes a small part of the money received by these men, or some article bought with this money, he is considered to have violated the sacred rights of property, and for the few farthings he has taken he is tried, imprisoned, or exiled.

A millionaire factory owner promises to pay a workman for his labor a sum which amounts to the ten-millionth part of that millionaire's fortune, that is, almost nothing; the workman, forced by hunger, promises to yield, for a year, twelve hours of labor every day, excepting holidays, full of danger and ruinous to his health; that is, he promises to surrender to the factory owner the greater part of his life, and sometimes his whole life; and government protects equally the one and the other property.

It is clear that the factory owner, year after year, takes from the workman the greater part of his earnings, which he appropriates to himself. It is obvious, therefore, that the factory owner steals the greater part of the workman's property, and he should accordingly be liable to judgment. But government considers the fortune acquired in this way by the factory owner to be sacred property, and punishes the workman who carries away under his shirt two pounds of brass, representing a millionth part of the factory owner's fortune.

If a workman, as demonstrated in the persecutions of the Jews, tries to deprive the wealthy of a small portion of what has been taken from him by law; if a starving man, as happened recently at Milan, tries to take the bread that the wealthy, profiting by the famine, sell to the poor at exorbitant prices; if the workman tries to get back, by strikes, part of the money that has been stolen from him—he violates the sacred rights of property, and the government with its army immediately comes to the help of land-owner and factory owner and merchants, against the workmen. Therefore, the "right" upon which the wealthy have their ownership of land, their appropriation of the fruits of other men's toil, and their exactions of taxes, have nothing in common with justice; and all three are based only on violence maintained by military force.

V

If a workman wishes to plough a field that he needs for his daily bread, or to elude the payment of direct or indirect taxes, or to reclaim from those who have appropriated it the grain he has himself produced, or to possess himself of the instruments of labor without which he cannot work—immediately appear the troops, and by force prevent him from doing so.

Therefore, taxation, the usurpation of land, and the power of capitalists do not constitute the fundamental cause of the miserable condition of the working classes, but only a consequence. The essential reason why millions of workingmen live and labor under the orders of the minority is not that the minority has usurped the land and the instruments of labor and gathers taxes, but that it has the power to do so; because there is force, and because there is an army which is in the hands of the minority and is ready to kill those who refuse to obey the will of the minority.

If peasants wish to take possession of land which is considered the property of a non-working man, or if they refuse to pay taxes, or if strikers wish to prevent other men from taking their places, immediately there appear those same peasants, payers of taxes and

workmen deprived of their land, only they are arrayed in uniforms and armed with guns, who compel their brethren who are not dressed in uniforms to surrender their land, to pay taxes, and to cease their strikes.

When one realizes this for the first time, one cannot believe it; it seems so strange.

The workmen wish to free themselves, and yet they themselves force each other to submit and to remain in slavery.

Why do they do this?

They do it because all the workmen who are enlisted or hired as soldiers are subjected to a skilful process of stupefaction and degradation, after which they cannot help submitting blindly to their superiors, whatever they may be ordered to do.

This is how it is done. A boy is born in the country or in a town. In all the Continental States, as soon as the boy reaches the age when strength, dexterity, and suppleness have attained their maximum, and the spiritual forces are in the most confused and undetermined state (about 20 years of age), he is enlisted as a soldier; he is examined, like a beast of burden, and, if physically strong and in good condition, he is enrolled in some regiment, according to his capacities, and forced to swear solemnly that he will obey his superior like a slave. Then he is separated from all his former surroundings; he is made drunk with gin or beer, clothed in a gaudy dress, shut up in barracks with other lads like himself, where he lives in utter idleness—that is, without doing any useful or reasonable work; he is taught the most absurd military rules and names of things, how to use instruments of murder—swords, bayonets, rifles, and cannon; and, chief of all, he is taught not only implicit but even automatic obedience to his superiors. That is how things happen in countries where military conscription exists; where none exists, men specially appointed for the purpose look out everywhere for good-for-nothing loafers, who cannot or do not wish to live by honest labor, generally depraved but strong men, whom they make drunk, bribe, enlist, shut up in barracks, and subject to the same discipline.

The chief aim of the authorities is to reduce these men to the state of the frog whose leg jerks irresistibly as soon as touched.

A good soldier is one who automatically answers to certain shouts of his superiors by certain definite movements, like the frog. This is attained by forcing these miserable men, dressed in similar, many-colored garments, to walk, and turn about, and jump, and do everything in concert, by command, to the sound of music and drums, during weeks and months and years.

For acts of disobedience they are punished in the most cruel way, and sometimes even by death. At the same time, drunkenness, depravity, idleness, foul language, and murder, instead of being forbidden, are encouraged, and brothels are provided for them. The soldiers are treated to gin, they are taught shameful songs, and trained to murder. (Murder is considered so good and praiseworthy a deed among this class of men that, in certain cases, officers are required to kill their friends—in so-called duels.) And so a gentle and kind-hearted boy, after a year of such training (earlier than that a soldier is not ready—that is, he still retains human qualities), becomes what the authorities wish him to be, a senseless

and cruel, powerful and terrible instrument of violence in the hands of his superiors.

Every time I pass the Imperial Palace at Moscow in winter, and see the young sentinel in his heavy fur coat standing by the sentry box, or pacing in his enormous goloshes along the pavement, carrying on his shoulder a rifle of the latest model with a sharpened bayonet, I look him in the eyes, and invariably he turns away from my glance, and every time the thought strikes me: "Only a year or two ago that man was a bright, country lad, ingenuous and kind-hearted, who would have talked to me cheerfully in good Russian, and related to me, with the consciousness of his peasant's self-respect, his whole history. Now he looks at me full of resentment and dejection, and to all questions he can only answer, 'Yes, sir,' or 'I don't know, sir.' If I forcibly entered the door by which he stands—as I always feel inclined to do—or if I caught his rifle with my hand, he would run his bayonet into my stomach without the slightest hesitation, would draw it out of the wound, wipe it, and continue pacing along the asphalt in his goloshes, till the corporal came to relieve him, whispering in his ear the password and watchword. And he is not alone," I continue thinking; "in Moscow alone, there are thousands of such boys, almost children, transformed into machines, and armed with rifles. There are millions of them in Russia and all over the world. They have taken these unintelligent, but strong and agile, lads, have bribed and depraved them, and through them rule the world."

This is terrible.

It is terrible that bad and idle people should, with the help of these deceived men, be possessors of all those palaces and that guiltily acquired wealth—that is, of the labor of the whole people. But most terrible of all it is that, in order to attain these ends, they had to brutalize these simple and kind-hearted lads, and that they have partly succeeded in doing so.

If the possessors of wealth defended their own property, it would not be so infamous; but it is awful that, to enable them to rob and to defend their plunder, they should make use of the very men they have robbed, and in so doing degrade the souls of their victims. Thus workmen—soldiers use violence against their brother workmen because there exist means of transforming men into unthinking instruments of slaughter; and governments, having enlisted or hired men as soldiers, subject them to this process.

VI

But if this is so, then the question naturally arises: Why do men become soldiers? Why do their fathers allow this?

They could become soldiers, and submit to discipline, so long as they did not realize the consequences. But now that they clearly see the results, why do they go on submitting to the deceit?

They do so because they believe military service to be not only a useful, but an undoubtedly praiseworthy and excellent, occupation. And they think it a good and praiseworthy occupation because they are taught to do so by the training to which they are subjected from childhood, and which is strenuously maintained in later years.

Therefore, the existence of the army, also, is not the fundamental cause, but only a consequence. The first cause is in the doctrine which teaches men that military service, the aim of which is murder,

is not only a sinless, but even a commendable, admirable, and heroic occupation.

Thus the cause of the miserable condition of mankind lies even deeper than first appears.

At first, it seems that the root of the evil lies in the fact that land-owners have usurped the land, and capitalists the instruments of labor, and that governments extort taxes by violence; but if one asks oneself why the land belongs to the wealthy and laborers are deprived of its use, and why the working classes must pay taxes without profiting by them, and why not workmen but capitalists are masters of the instruments of labor, one realizes that the cause of it all is the existence of an army, which maintains the possession of the land by the wealthy, collects taxes from the working classes for the use of the wealthy, and protects the wealthy in their ownership of the factories and costly instruments of labor.

When one asks oneself why, in an army, the very workmen who have been deprived of all they need should persecute themselves, their fathers, and their brothers, one sees the reason to be that, by the help of methods specially designed for the purpose, conscripted or hired soldiers are trained in such a manner that they lose all that is human in them, and become unconscious and passive instruments of murder in the hands of their superiors.

Finally, when one asks oneself why men, having realized this deception, still continue to enlist as soldiers or to pay taxes for their hire, one sees that the reason of this is in the doctrine which is taught not only to soldiers but to all men generally—that doctrine according to which military service is an excellent and praiseworthy occupation, and murder during war an innocent action. Therefore, the fundamental cause of the evil is the doctrine taught to mankind. From it arise poverty and depravity, hatred, executions, and murder.

What is this doctrine?

It is the doctrine called Christianity, and its substance is as follows: There is a God, who, 6,000 years ago, created the world and the man Adam. Adam sinned; and for his sin God punished all men, and then sent His Son—God, like the Father—to the earth in order that he should be executed. The fact that the Son of God was crucified delivers men from the punishment they must bear for Adam's sin. If people believe all this, then Adam's sin will be forgiven them; if they do not believe, they will be cruelly punished. Proof that all this is true is given in the fact that it has all been revealed to men by God Himself, knowledge of whose existence is gained from the very men who affirm the doctrine in question. Passing by the various modifications of this fundamental teaching in accordance with different creeds, the general and practical inference from it is the same in all creeds, namely: Men must believe what is taught them, and submit to the existing authorities.

This doctrine is the foundation of the deceit through which men come to consider military service a good and useful occupation, enlist as soldiers, and become like machines, without will, oppressing themselves. If there are unbelievers among these deceived men, they are exceptions; and believing in nothing else, and consequently having no firm basis, they too yield to the general current, and, although they realize the deception, they submit to it as the

believers do.

Therefore, in order to remove the evils from which mankind suffers, neither the emancipation of land, nor the abolition of taxes, nor the communizing of the instruments of production, nor even the destruction of existing governments, is required; the only thing needed is the annihilation of the teaching falsely called Christianity, in which the men of our time are educated.

## VII

At first, it seems strange to people who are familiar with the Gospels that the Christian teaching, which proclaims sonship to God, spiritual freedom, the brotherhood of man, abolition of all kinds of violence, and even love toward enemies, should have degenerated into the strange doctrine which teaches blind obedience to authority, and even murder if these authorities require it. But if one examines the process by which Christianity entered the world, one realizes the reason for this.

When the pagan monarchs, Constantine, Charlemagne, Vladimir, adopted Christianity clothed, as it was, in the forms of paganism, and christened their peoples in the new religion, they did not dream that the teaching they had accepted destroyed the power of kings, the army, and the state itself—institutions without which the men who first adopted and introduced Christianity could not imagine life. At the beginning, not only was the destructive force of Christianity unnoticed, but men even thought that Christianity supported their authority. But the more Christian the people became, the more clearly appeared the essence of Christianity, the more evident grew the danger to paganism it presented. And the greater that danger became, the more laboriously did the ruling classes try to stifle, and if possible to quench, the light they had unconsciously brought into the world with Christianity. For this purpose, they used all possible means—prohibition against reading or translating the Gospels; slaughter of all who pointed out the true meaning of the Christian teaching; hypnotism of the masses by the pomp and splendor of rituals; and especially hair-splitting and equivocal distortions of Christian precepts. In proportion as these methods were employed, Christianity became more and more modified, till at last it became a teaching which not only did not contain any principles destructive to the pagan system of life, but, on the contrary, justified that system from a pseudo-Christian standpoint. There appeared Christian monarchs, and Christian armies, and Christian wealth, and Christian law courts, and Christian executions. The ruling classes have done for Christianity what doctors do in epidemics. They have prepared a culture of harmless Christianity; and when once it has been inoculated, true Christianity is no longer dangerous. Church Christianity must inevitably either repel reasonable men as an outrageous absurdity, or else, if adopted, so utterly alienate men from true Christianity that through this distorted form they can no longer see its real meaning, and even regard the real meaning with anger and animosity. This Christianity thus made harmless—evolved during centuries by a wish for self-preservation among the ruling classes—with which the people are inoculated, constitutes the teaching through which men obediently perform actions not only hurtful to themselves and their friends, but distinctly immoral and incompatible with the

requirements of conscience; the most important of which actions, by its practical consequences, is the performance of military service, that is, willingness to kill.

The evil of this false Christianity consists chiefly in the fact that it neither prescribes nor prohibits anything. All ancient religions, like the law of Moses, give rules which require or forbid certain actions; it is the same with the Buddhist and Mohammedan religions; but Church Christianity gives no rules whatever, except verbal professions of faith, the acknowledgment of dogmas, fasts, sacraments, and prayers (and even these can be eluded by people rich enough); it only lies, and permits everything, even actions contrary to the very lowest requirements of morality.

According to this Church doctrine, everything is allowed. One may have slaves (in Europe and America the church was the champion of slavery); one may acquire fortunes gained from the labor of one's oppressed brethren; one may be wealthy in the midst of crowds of Lazaruses crawling under the tables of the revellers—and that is even very good and praiseworthy, if one gives only one-thousandth part for churches and hospitals; one may keep back by violence one's riches from the needy, and imprison men in solitary cells, and put them in irons, and chain them to trucks, and execute them; all this is blessed by the church. One may lead a depraved life during all one's youth, and then call one of these debaucheries by the name of marriage and have it sanctified by the church. One may even divorce and marry again. And, chief of all, one may kill; one may kill in defending not only one's self, but one's apple trees, or in punishment; and especially one may, and it is even one's duty and praiseworthy, to kill in war, at the order of one's superiors. The church not only sanctions but prescribes this.

Thus the root of all the evil is the false teaching. Abolish the false doctrine, and there will be no more armies; and if there are no armies, the violence, oppression, and deprivation to which nations are subjected will disappear of themselves.

So long as men are educated in the pseudo-Christian doctrine which sanctions everything, including murder, the army will remain in the hands of the minority; and the minority will always use that army to extort from the people the products of their labor, and, what is worse than all, to deprave the people—because, if the people were not depraved, the minority could not take from them the fruits of their toil.

#### VIII

The root of all the miseries of the people lies in the false doctrine which is taught them under the name of Christianity. Therefore, it would seem to be the obvious duty of every man who is free from this religious deception and who wishes to serve the people, by word and deed, to aid the deluded masses in delivering themselves from the deception which is the cause of their miserable condition. It would seem that, besides the general duty of every moral man to denounce falsehood and to profess the truth he knows, every man desirous of serving his fellows cannot help, out of pity, wishing to deliver them from the deception to which they are subjected and by which all their misery is caused.

And yet, the very men who are freed from the deception, and independent, and educated on the money of the working people, and

therefore bound to serve them, do not realize this.

"Religious doctrines are of no importance," say these people. "It is a question for the conscience of each separate individual. The political, social, and economical organization of society is the necessary and important thing, and to that must be directed all the efforts of the men who wish to serve the people. Religious doctrines are of no importance, and, like all superstitions, they will disappear of themselves when their time comes."

So say these educated men; and wishing to serve the people they enter the service of the government in the army, or as clergy, or members of parliament, endeavoring to improve the external forms of life of the deceived people by participation in the activities of the State, without denouncing the religious deception of which the people are victims. Others, the revolutionists, also do not touch the religious faith of the people, but enter into hostilities with the existing governments, seeking to gain possession of power by the same methods of violence and deception which are used by the governments they oppose. Others, socialists, etc., organize trade unions, co-operations, and strikes, thinking the condition of the people can be improved, although they remain in the same state of superstition or scepticism produced by the false doctrine.

And not only do none of them hinder the diffusion of the false religion which is the cause of all the evil, but when the necessity presents itself, they fulfil the religious rituals which they acknowledge to be a lie; they swear allegiance, they assist at church services and solemnities which stupefy the people; and they do not prevent their own or other people's children from being taught in schools this so-called religious instruction—the very lie upon which is founded the slavery of the people.

This failure of educated people (who, of all others, could and ought to destroy the false doctrine) to comprehend the chief cause of the evil upon which all their energies should be directed, and the diversion of those energies toward false aims, constitute one of the chief reasons why the existing system of life, which is evidently false and destructive to all men, maintains itself so firmly.

Because the true Christian teaching, which would meet the requirements of our time, is concealed from men, and a false doctrine is taught in its place, therefore arise all the miseries of our world.

If only men who desire to serve God and their neighbors would realize that humanity is moved not by animal requirements, but by moral forces; and that the chief moral force and motive power of humanity is religion, that is, the clear perception of the meaning of life, and, in consequence of this perception, the discrimination between good and evil, between the important and the non-important; if only men were to realize this, they would see immediately that the fundamental cause of the misery of contemporary humanity is not in the external, material circumstances, neither in political nor economic conditions, but in the perversion of Christianity, in the substitution for truths that are necessary to mankind and that correspond to the needs of the present age, of senseless and immoral absurdities and sacrileges, called Church Christianity, according to which evil is considered good and the unimportant important, and good is considered evil, and the important of no account.

If only the best and unfettered men, sincerely desirous of serving the people, could realize that it is not possible to improve, by any external means, the condition of a man who thinks it wrong to eat meat on Fridays and right to punish by death a guilty individual; or of one who thinks it important to render the customary homage to an image or an emperor, and a minor duty to swear obedience to the will of other men, and to train himself to murder; if only men could realize that neither parliaments nor strikes, nor trade unions nor co-operative societies, inventions, schools, universities, academies, nor revolutions, can be of any real use to men holding a false religious life-conception; if only this were understood, all the energies of the best men would naturally be applied, not to the effects, but to the cause; not to State activity or revolutions, or socialism, but to the denunciation of the false religious doctrine, and the rebuilding of the true one. If only men were to act in this way, all the political, economical, and social questions would be solved naturally—not as we speculate and prescribe, but as they ought to be.

These questions will be solved as soon as men's religious life-conception is transformed; and they will be solved the sooner the more we apply our energies, not to the effects, but to the causes of life's phenomena.

Looking at the awful system of human life which now prevails, contrary both to reason and feeling, I asked myself, "Can it possibly be necessary?" And the answer I have found is, "No, it is not necessary." It must not, it cannot, it shall not be. But it will cease to be, not when men have reorganized their relations in one way or another, but when they cease to believe the lie in which they are educated, and believe instead the supreme truth, which was revealed to them nineteen hundred years ago, and is clear, simple, and accessible to their reason.

Leo Tolstoy

#### A MESSAGE TO THE AMERICAN PEOPLE\*

Yasnaya Polyana

When I read your letter it seemed to me impossible that I could send any message to the American people. But thinking over it at night, it came to me that, if I had to address the American people, I should like to thank them for the great help I have received from their writers who flourished about the fifties. I would mention Garrison, Parker, Emerson, Ballou, and Thoreau, not as the greatest, but as those who, I think, specially influenced me. Other names are Channing, Whittier, Lowell, Walt Whitman—a bright constellation, such as is rarely to be found in the literatures of the world! And I should like to ask the American people why they do not pay more attention to these voices (hardly to be replaced by those of financial and industrial millionaires, or successful generals and admirals), and continue the good work in which they made such hopeful progress.

Leo Tolstoy

\* Extract from a letter from Count Tolstoy to Mr. Edward Garnett.