

"THE SOLDIERS' MEMENTO"

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Fear them not therefore : for there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed ; and hid, that shall not be known. What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light : and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the house-tops. And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul : but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell (Matt. x. 26-28).

Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men (Acts v. 29).

You are a soldier, you have been taught to shoot, stab, march, go through gymnastic exercises, read books, and have been taken out to military exercises and parades ; maybe you went through a war, fighting the Turks or the Chinese, doing everything you were commanded to do.

It did not even occur to you to ask yourself whether what you were doing was good or bad.

But here the command is given to your company or squadron to start out, taking along ball-cartridges. You travel or march, without asking whether you are taken.

You are led up to a village or factory, and you see from afar that in the open square there is a crowd of villagers or factory hands, men, women with their children, old men and women. The governor and the prosecutor, accompanied by policemen, walk up to the crowd and talk to the people about something. The crowd is at first silent, then the people begin to cry out louder and louder, and the officials go away from the crowd. You see that these are peasants or factory hands who are riotous, and that you are brought there to pacify them. The officials several times walk up to the people and walk away again, but the shouts grow louder and louder, and the officials talk among themselves, and you are commanded to load your gun with a ball-cartridge. You see before yourself people, the same from among whom you were taken : men in sleeveless coats, short fur coats, bast shoes, and women in kerchiefs and waists, just such women as your wife or mother.

The first shot you are ordered to fire above the heads of the crowd ; but the people do not disperse, and shout louder than before. Then you are commanded to shoot right, not over their heads, but straight into the crowd.

You have been impressed with the idea that you are not responsible

for what will happen from your shot ; but you know that the man who, weltering in blood, fell down from your shot was killed by you and by no one else, and you know that you might not have shot, and then the man would not have been killed.

What are you to do ?

It is not enough for you to drop your gun and refuse just now to shoot at your brothers. To-morrow the same may be repeated, and so, whether you wish it or not, you must bethink yourself and ask yourself what this calling of a soldier is, which has brought you to such a state that you are compelled to shoot at your own unarmed brothers.

In the Gospel it says that we must not only not kill our brothers, but must also not do what leads to murder, that we must not be angry with our brother, and that we must not hate our enemies, but love them.

In the law of Moses it says distinctly, " Thou shalt not kill," without any explanations as to who may be killed and who not. But in the rules which you have been taught it says that a soldier must fulfil any command of his superior, no matter what it may be, except a command against the Tsar, and in the explanation of the sixth commandment it says that, though the commandment forbids killing, he who kills in war does not sin against this commandment.¹ But in the Soldiers' Memento, which hangs in every barrack and which you have read and heard many a time, it says that a soldier must kill men : " Three fly at you, – the first you stab, the second you shoot, the third you settle with the bayonet ... if the bayonet is broken, beat with the butt ; if the butt won't do, belabour him with your fists ; if your fists give out, hang to him with your teeth." ³

You are told that you must kill, because you have taken the oath, and that the authorities, and not you, will be responsible for your acts.

But before you swore, that is, promised people to do their will, you were even without an oath obliged in everything to do the will of God, of Him who gave you life, – but God has commanded us not to kill.

Thus you could not swear that you would do everything demanded of you by men. For this reason it says directly in the Gospel (Matt. v. 34), "Swear not at all "

. . . " But let your communication be, Yea, yea ; Nay, nay : for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil." And the same is said in James v. 12 : " But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by earth," etc. Thus the oath itself is a sin. And what they say to the effect that not you, but the authorities, will be responsible for your acts is an untruth. Can your conscience be, not in yourself, but in the corporal, sergeant, captain, colonel, or anybody else ? Nobody can decide for you what you can and must do, and what you cannot and must not do. A man is

always responsible for what he does. Is not the sin of adultery many times lighter than the sin of murder, and can a man say to another, " Commit adultery, I take your sin upon myself, because I am your superior " ?

Adam, so the Bible tells, sinned against God and then said that his wife had told him to eat the apple, that the devil had tempted her. God justified neither Adam nor Eve, and told them that Adam would be punished for having listened to the voice of his wife, and that his wife would be likewise punished for having obeyed the serpent. He did not free them, but punished them.

Will not God say the same to you, when you kill a man and say that your captain commanded you to do so ?

The deception is seen even in this, that in the rule which says that a soldier must fulfil all the commandments of his superiors, the words are added : " Except such as are to the harm of the Tsar." If a soldier, before fulfilling the commands of his superior, must decide whether they are not against the Tsar, how much more must he, before fulfilling the command of his superior, consider whether what his officer demands of him is not against the highest Tsar, God ! But there is no act which is more opposed to God's will than the killing of men. And so it is not right to obey men, if they command you to kill men. But if you obey and kill, you do so only for your advantage, in order not to be punished. Thus, by killing by the command of your superiors, you are as much a murderer as that robber who kills a merchant, in order to rob him. The robber is tempted by the money, and you are tempted by the desire not to be punished and to receive a reward. A man always himself answers for his acts before God.

No power can, as the authorities want it to, make of you, of a living man, a dead thing which may be handled as desired. Christ taught men that they are all sons of God, and so a Christian cannot give his conscience into the power of another man, no matter by what title he may be called, - king, Tsar, or emperor. The fact that the men who have taken the command over you demand of you that you shall kill your brothers, proves only that these men are cheats and that, therefore, you must not obey them. Shameful is the position of the harlot who is always prepared to have her body defiled by him who is pointed out to her by her master ; but more shameful is the position of the soldier who is always prepared to commit the greatest crime, - to murder any man who is pointed out to him by his superior.

And so, if you really want to act in godly fashion, you must do this : you must give up the disgraceful and godless calling of a soldier and be prepared to bear all the sufferings which they will impose upon you for this.

Thus the real memento of a Christian soldier is not the one in which it says that " God is the soldiers' general," and other blasphemies, and that " a soldier must, while obeying his superiors in everything, be prepared to kill strangers or friends, even his unarmed brothers;" he must remember the words of Scripture that God

must be obeyed more than men, and he must not fear those who can kill the body, but cannot kill the soul.¹

In this consists the true soldiers' memento, which does not deceive.

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1 In the Rules it says : " By the sixth commandment God forbids us to take the lives of men by violence or cunning, or in any way to violate the security and peace of our neighbour, and so by this commandment quarrels, anger, hatred, envy, and cruelty are also forbidden. But he who kills the enemy in war does not sin against this commandment, because by war he defends our faith, our Tsar, and our country." – Author's Note.

2 Soldiers' Memento, collected by Dragomirov, 19th ed., St. Petersburg, 1899.

3 In Dragomirov's Memento three passages are adduced from the Gospel,—John xv.. Matt. x. 22, and 39. From John, verse 13 is quoted : " Greater love hath n<> man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." apparently in this sense, that the soldiers