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## “Thou Shalt Kill No One.”

BY COUNT LEO TOLSTOY.

[This latest of Count Tolstoy's utterances against war and violence, translated by Aylmer Maude and first published in the *London Tribune*, has been forbidden circulation in Russia. It repeats in a vigorous way, with reference to the present situation in Russia, Tolstoy's well-known teachings on the subject. Publication of it does not, of course, involve our approval of all that he says, particularly some of his reflections on the Church.]

A VICTIM OF THE TRUTH.

Early in July, 1907, a man engaged in the publication of the Petersburg “*Renovation*” was accused of circulating a pamphlet I wrote seven years ago, entitled “*Thou Shalt Not Kill*,” and he was sent to prison by a Petersburg magistrate.

Unimportant as it is in comparison with the continual incarcerations, banishments and executions that are now occurring, this event is rendered remarkable by its cause. Now, when all Russia is groaning with horror at the unceasing murders which are ever increasing in number and in audacity, a pamphlet enforcing the ancient law “*Thou shalt not kill*”—a law acknowledged for thousands of years by all religions—is prohibited, and the man who circulates it is imprisoned as a malefactor.

One would expect the Government, which has struggled so long and so unsuccessfully with the mania for murder that dominates the Russian people ever more and more, to encourage those who circulate thoughts discouraging murder; but, strange to say, the Government, on the contrary, punishes them.

But perhaps the pamphlet, “*Thou Shalt Not Kill*,” in spite of its title, says something else, something opposed to religion and morality.

I wrote it long ago, and might have forgotten its contents. So I have re-read it attentively; and no! It says just what the title indicates, and nothing else. It says that, besides every murder of man by man being a crime opposed to the religious teaching we profess, the murder of kings, emperors, and rulers in general by revolutionaries is senseless, since the state organization cannot be altered by such murders; and the motives prompting them are unfounded, for when killing rulers in revenge for the violence they have committed people forget that they are themselves to blame for obeying governments, and for taking part in what they blame the government for doing. So that the general meaning of the pamphlet is that “*Thou Shalt Not Kill*” means simply that Christians should not kill any one, either directly or indirectly, by aiding murderers.

But perhaps the man engaged in the publication of “*Renovation*” is prosecuted, not for the pamphlet “*Thou Shalt Not Kill*,” written on the occasion of the murder of the King of Italy, but for a pamphlet under the same name, which includes three other articles: “*A*

*Letter to a Non-Commissioned Officer*,” “*The Soldier's Note-Book*,” and “*The Officer's Note-Book*.” I have therefore re-read these articles also, and find in them, as in the first, an enforcement of the command “*Thou shalt not kill*,” and in particular an explanation of the fact that preparation for killing, and coöperation therein, is as criminal and as contrary to the law of Christ as killing itself is. So that in general the meaning of these articles also is that Christian people should neither take part in killing, nor prepare to do so, nor kill any one at all.

THE BLOOD MANIA.

Wonderful is the law of requital, inevitably punishing those who pervert the law of God.

Nineteen hundred years ago Christ, announcing the basic laws of His teaching, placed at the head of them all, not the old law, “*Thou shalt not kill*” (which He considered so well established that He did not talk about it), but the command that every man should avoid all that might lead to murder, should not be angry with his neighbor, should forgive everything, should be reconciled to all men, and should have no enemies (Matt. 5 : 21-26).

Not only was this law not accepted, but even the ancient law forbidding murder was repealed (as it had been by the laws of Moses), and people calling themselves Christians continued to slay both in war and at home all those whose death seemed to them desirable, in full assurance that they were doing right.

The governments of the Christian nations, aided by churchmen, long taught the nations they ruled that the law “*Thou shalt not kill*” does not mean that people must refrain from killing their fellow-men without any exception, but that there are cases when we not only may, but must, kill people, and the peoples believed their governments, and concurred in the killing of those whom the governments determined to murder. But when the time came for belief in the infallibility of governments to break down, the peoples began to act towards those who formed the governments, just as the governments acted towards those whose death seemed to them desirable; only with this difference, that the governments considered it right to kill in time of war, and after certain deliberations called trials, whereas the peoples decided that it is right to kill in time of revolution, and after the deliberations of certain people who call themselves Revolutionary Committees, etc.

And that came about which we now see in Russia; namely, after Christianity has been taught for nineteen hundred years, people have taken to killing one another unceasingly for two whole years already. The Revolutionists kill their enemies, and the Government kills its enemies: men, women and children—all, in fact, whose death they consider desirable; and, what is strangest of

all, while acting thus they all feel fully assured that they are not infringing any moral or religious law.

It has come to this, that were the possibility given to every one to kill all whom they consider harmful to themselves, almost the whole Russian population would be slain. The Revolutionists would kill all the rulers and capitalists; the rulers and capitalists would kill all the Revolutionists; the peasants all the landlords; the landlords all the peasants, etc.

This is not a joke; it is really so. And this terrible condition has already continued for a couple of years, and becomes worse and worse each year, and each month, and each day.

#### LOGIC OF TRAGEDY.

The position becomes worse and worse, because the Government, feeling itself obliged to resist this state of things, tries to check it by the only means it considers efficacious. These stupid and cruel means consist in committing the very crimes the Government wishes to suppress. And, as must necessarily be the case, especially now, when, with the present improved implements of murder,—Browning revolvers, bombs, and quick-firing guns with which a little child can kill a hundred strong men,—these foolish and cruel means not only fail to attain their end, but render the position worse and worse.

The tragedy of the present position of the Russian Government is that, though it cannot but see that by the application of the stupid and cruel means it uses affairs only grow worse, it still cannot stop. Not only can it not stop—it cannot use the only possible and efficient means of resisting murder, namely, it cannot explain the criminality and sin of murder. Not only can it not use that means, but it has to employ its own stupid and cruel methods to punish those who wish to employ this one possible way of saving men from the miserable condition in which the Russian people now live.

Government has prohibited the pamphlet "Thou Shalt Not Kill," and imprisoned the man who circulates it. Now it must necessarily prohibit what I am writing to-day, and must punish me also; and, to be consistent, it should long ago have forbidden not only the Gospels, but also the Ten Commandments of the Old Testament, and have punished all who circulated them.

#### ECLIPSE OF FAITH.

Yes, wonderful is the law of requital, which surely punishes those who pervert the law of God.

All Russia groans with horror at the unrestrained and bestial instincts which break out, prompting people to commit most horrible and meaningless murders.

And even the foremost Liberals, men who defend every kind of human freedom, in reply to the question

whether one should respect freedom of life,—that is, should refrain from killing people,—have to remain silent, tacitly admitting murder to be necessary, or they explicitly admit that necessity, as the Revolutionists and the Government admit it. And the Government and the Revolutionists, and murderers belonging to no party, continue to slay one another on the most diverse pretexts.

The position of Russia is terrible. But what is most terrible is not the material position, the slackness of trade, the agrarian disorder, the proletariat, the financial distress, the robberies, the riots, or the Revolution in general; what is most terrible of all is the spiritual and mental disorder at the root of all these ills. What is most terrible of all is that the majority of Russians now live without any moral or religious law binding on all and common to all. Some, identifying religion with obsolete old creeds, which no longer contain any reasonable meaning, nor, above all, any really restraining influence on conduct, guide their lives merely by their own fancies and tastes; while others, assuming all beliefs (religious) to be unnecessary, are similarly guided only by their own most diverse fancies and wishes. So that the majority of people now active in Russia, while pleading most contradictory conceptions as to what forms the welfare of society, are in reality guided only by their own personal and almost animal impulses. And the most terrible thing of all is that these people, having rejected reasonable human life, and descended almost to the level of brutes, are perfectly content with themselves, and are convinced that all the stupidities and nastinesses which they (both Government men and Revolutionists) utter and perpetrate in imitation of the Western nations indubitably prove their superiority to the wise and holy men of the past, and are convinced that not only is there no need to try to set up any religious view of life, common to all,—any faith capable of uniting people,—but that the absence of all belief proves their mental and moral superiority.

#### PSEUDO-CHRISTIANITY.

People can in no way live a harmonious, human life by merely sharing certain political opinions, but only by union in one and the same comprehension of the fundamental meaning of life.

Political opinions cannot unite people, for there may be innumerable political opinions: some people believe in this, others in that kind of parliamentarism, or socialism, or anarchism. But at a given historical period and for a certain people there can be but one highest attainable understanding of life's meaning. So it has always been. So, united by one and the same highest law of life, lived the Greeks, Romans, Arabs, and Indians; so lived and live the Chinese; so lived the European, so-called Christian, nations as long as they really believed the faith

adapted by Paul to pagan morals, and called Catholic religion.

We now see clearly all the discrepancies of that religious, confused, obscure, and hypocritical church-teaching which forbade the reading of the Gospels and put salvation by faith and by the observance of the sacraments in place of deeds of love and the evangelical renunciation of earthly blessings; which made submission to earthly rulers obligatory, instead of the evangelical acknowledgment of the rule of God alone; which admitted miracles, the worship of images and relics, and the infallibility of the Pope. To us the irreconcilability of this doctrine with the simple, clear teachings of the Gospels is evident. But men were born into that false faith, it was instilled into them from childhood, and, however coarse it may appear to us,—sanctioning as it did murders, executions, wars and duels, and at the same time acknowledging a God of love,—men believed in it sincerely, and that belief united them. This union continued for centuries, but a time came when men arose who began to explain the teaching in a fresh way of their own, and Protestantism appeared in its different forms, and quarrels and disputes commenced between various sects of perverted Christianity. These disputes more and more weakened faith; and the end of it was that Paul's adaptation to paganism, being yet further perverted by the churches, ceased to be a religion in the real meaning of that word,—namely, a principle ruling men's life.

The identity of faith, which had till then united men, was broken. People first ceased to believe in religion in one and the same way, and then, in consequence of various interpretations and disputes, ceased really to believe in pseudo-Christian religion itself.

#### THE CHURCHES AND WAR.

Many causes destroyed faith in the Christian religion in any of its forms: Catholic, Greek Orthodox or Protestant. Such causes were: religious disputes, ever increasing enlightenment, but, above all, the fact that Catholic and Protestant Christianity alike permitted executions and wars.

To those who, belonging to the ruling classes, introduced Christianity among heathen populations, it was natural, when adopting and introducing Christianity, either to hide or not to perceive all in it that was irreconcilable with the pagan order of life from which they reaped advantages. When such men adopted Christianity and introduced it among the people, one of two things had to occur: either they had to alter the organization of pagan life into conformity with the Christian teaching, or they had to alter Christian teaching into conformity with the existing order of life. They chose the latter alternative; that is, in utilizing Paul's interpretations, they

so perverted the teaching that everything in true Christianity that ran counter to the existing order, which rested on violence and murder, was hidden and explained away. And to explain Christianity so that it should not contradict the pagan organization of life and the toleration of murder, on which the whole order of pagan life rested, it was necessary to alter and to hide the very essence of Christianity.

In Judaism and in Mohammedanism it was possible to evade the commandment "Thou shalt not kill" without destroying the law, for both religions divided mankind into the faithful and the unfaithful, and so one could regard the command "Thou shalt not kill" as referring only to the faithful. But in Christianity—which by its very essence regards all men as brothers, and in which the whole teaching is based on love, expressed by forgiveness of injuries and the love of enemies—one could not do this; and to permit the murder of any one at all destroyed the chief basis of the teaching. Therefore, to conform Christianity with murder was impossible, except by interpretations which destroyed the very essence of the faith. That was what was done. And when it had been done, perverted Christianity ceased to be a religion. And the result was that adherence to the Christian Church faith became either a matter of habit, or of respectability, or of profit, or merely a poetic mood; and among Christian people no real religion remained,—that is to say, no faith which really united people and guided their actions.

#### DECLINE OF THE FAITH IN FORCE.

It would seem that, having lost the one principle—religion—which is capable of uniting people, men of the Church-Christian world would have disintegrated, fallen apart, and ceased to live a common life; but this did not occur. It did not occur because emancipation from belief in perverted Christianity did not come all at once, but little by little; and side by side with this emancipation from union by faith, people were more and more bound by another union, founded no longer on religion, but on power,—on that power which was based on and supported by false religion. Men, ceasing to believe in God and in His law, believed more and more, as they were bidden, in the power of the rulers and in *their* law. And when faith in false Christianity disappeared, faith in governments and in their power and in their law replaced the vanished false religion, and continued to hold people together in an artificial union.

But a union based, not on religion, but on the inertia of power, could not endure. A time came when, with the spread of enlightenment, people realized that there is no inner reason for submitting to such, and not to such other, power. And understanding this, men ceased to

believe in the need of obeying governmental power and began to resist it. This struggle commenced long ago, but showed itself especially strongly at the close of the eighteenth century. It went on during the last century, and still continues in more or less hidden forms all over the so-called Christian world, and is now going on with special intensity in Russia.

What we now see in Russia is this conflict of those who, having lost the inner religious bond that united them, have also lost faith in the need of obeying the powers that be. The conflict consists in this, that men try to free themselves from coercive power by the same coarse and cruel means that government has used, and still uses, to hold them in submission to itself.

If this struggle manifests itself in more hideous and cruel forms in Russia than in other countries, that is only because in Russia the struggle has come at a later period.

(Concluded next month.)

### The London Times Justly Rebuked.

The *Manchester Guardian* and a number of other English papers have taken the *London Times* severely to task for its inhospitable utterances in regard to the proposed visit of the German Emperor to Great Britain. Here is what the *Guardian* says:

"There have been signs recently of an approach to more cordial relations between our own and the German governments, and the visit of the Emperor William to England ought in the normal course to stimulate this tendency. Those international firebrands on this side of the North Sea, however, to whom friendship between England and Germany is the greatest of misfortunes, are now actively engaged in preventing such a consummation. The *Times* lends itself to this work with the readiest zeal. Nobody who studies its columns can have failed to notice the systematic campaign which its correspondents in every foreign capital have been conducting against Germany, the basis of which is the concerted sophistication of public opinion. That is mischievous enough, but its latest essay in the art of embitterment is in perhaps as violent conflict with good manners as with good morals. It is quite possible that Prince Bülow may accompany the Kaiser on his visit to England, and it is obvious that were he to do so its importance would be considerably increased. The *Times* in a leading article yesterday undertakes to explain to the Chancellor precisely how he should behave and what should be his emotions if he is to be admitted to our

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shores. It begins by suggesting that Prince Bülow may be thinking of visiting England not to get on a better footing with ourselves, but in order to throw dust in the eyes of the world. After this insinuation of chicanery it reminds him that during the Boer War the German newspapers were not polite to English Imperialism, and tells Prince Bülow that he must now apologize for this. Even that, it seems, will not be enough. He must give some 'proof that the repentance of those who have wronged us and who would be well with us is sincere.' Inhospitable impertinences of this kind offered by a paper of the prominence of the *Times* to the Prime Minister of a great power who is expected as a visitor here are something of a trial to one's faith in the future peace of Europe, but still more to faith in the future of English journalism."

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