

A MESSAGE TO YOUNG INDIA*

By COUNT LEO TOLSTOI

*This extremely interesting message, one of the last that in all human probability will come from the pen of the great prophet of peace of Russia, is printed now for the first time. It was written some months ago to Mr. Taraknath Das, editor of "Free Hindustan," in response to a letter from the editor asking for the Count's views in regard to the struggle that Young India is making for constitutional government. As will be seen, Count Tolstoi takes the extreme position of non-resistance which he has consistently maintained since his renunciation of the life of a worldly, frivolous Russian noble. The second and concluding half of the Count's appeal will appear in our April issue, and it will be followed by Young India's reply, written by Mr. Das, in which the author presents the cause of Young India in an exceptionally strong paper. The Editor.

"All that exists is One; people only call this One by different names." —Veddas.

"God is Love, and he that abideth in Love abideth in God, and God abideth in him." —/ John IV., 16.

"God is one whole ; we are the parts." —yivekananda.

I.

"Do not seek rest in that plane where the earthly gives birth to thoughts and desires, for if thou dost, thou wilt be dragged through the rough wilderness of life, which is not of Me. Whenever thou feelest that thy feet are becoming entangled in the interlaced roots of life, know then that thou hast strayed from the path to which I beckon thee, for I have placed thee in broad, smooth paths, which are strewn with flowers.

"I have put a light before thee, which thou can'st follow and thus run without stumbling." —Krishna.

I RECEIVED your letter and the two issues of the magazine. Both were intensely interesting to me; indeed, the oppression of a majority is a phenomenon which has always occupied my mind and at present is entirely occupying my attention. I will endeavor to convey to you what I think, both in a particular and a general way, about these causes from which those dreadful calamities have arisen and do arise, of which you write in your letter and which are also mentioned in the two numbers of the Hindoo magazine you sent me.

The causes, owing to which this astonishing spectacle arises, of the majority of the laboring classes submitting to a mere handful of idlers whom it permits to dispose not only of its labor but also of its very life, are always and everywhere the same; whether the oppressors and the oppressed belong to the same or, as in the case in India and in other countries, where the dominant class belongs to an entirely different nation from those oppressed.

It appears especially strange of India, for here we have a people of two hundred millions of individuals highly endowed with spiritual and physical powers in absolute subjection to a small clique, composed of persons utterly alien in thought and aspiration and altogether inferior to those whom they enslave.

These causes, as one can easily see from your letter, from the articles in Free Hindustan, from the highly interesting writings of the Hindoo Swami Vivekananda and others, are in accord with that which causes the distress of all the peoples of our time; in the absence of a rational religious teaching, which, while uniformly elucidating for mankind the meaning of life, would also define the supreme law for the guidance of conduct, and in the substitution for the one and the other of the more than dubious propositions of a false religion and a false science, and in the immoral conclusions called civilization derived from both.

One has already seen, not only from your letter and from the articles in Free Hindustan, but also from the entire Hindoo political literature of our time, that the majority of the leaders of public opinion among the native races of India, while no longer ascribing any significance to those religious teachings which were professed, and are professed, by the Hindoo peoples, now find the sole possibility of deliverance from the oppression they endure, in embracing those anti-religious and subtly immoral forms of social order in which the English and other pseudo-Christian nations live today. Nothing shows more clearly the total-absence of religious consciousness in the minds of the present-day leaders of Hindoo peoples, than does this tendency to instil into the hearts of the natives the acceptance of the forms of life in operation among European nations.

Meanwhile in the absence of this true religious consciousness and the guidance of conduct flowing from it, in the absence which is common in our times to all the nations of the East and the West, from Japan to England and America, lies the chief if not the sole cause of the enslavement of all the Indian peoples by the English.

II.

"O ye, who see perplexities over your heads and beneath your feet, to the right and to the left ; you will be an eternal enigma unto yourselves until you become humble and joyful as children. Then you will find Me, and having found Me in yourselves, you will rule over worlds, and looking out from the great world within to the little world without, you will bless everything that is, and find all is well with time and with you." —Krishna.

In order to make my thoughts clear I must go back a considerable time. We do not know, and cannot know (I boldly say, we need not) how mankind lived millions or even tens of thousands of years ago; but in all those times of which we have any reliable knowledge, we find that humanity has lived in separate tribes, clans, nations, in which the majority, submitting to the apparently inevitable, has permitted the coercive rule of one or several persons of the minority. We know this beyond a doubt. Notwithstanding the external diversity of events and persons, such an organization of human life has manifested itself in a similar way in all the countries of whose previous history we know anything. And such an order of life, the further back you go, was always looked upon as the necessary basis for concordant social intercourse by both the rulers and the ruled.

Thus it was everywhere. But in spite of such an external order of life having existed for centuries and continuing even until now, a long time ago—thousands of years before our time, in the midst of different nations and often from out of the very center of this order of life resting on coercion, one and the same thought has been expressed,—that in every individual one spiritual source manifests itself, which is life itself, and that this spiritual source tends to unite with everything which is uniform with it, and attains this unification by love. This thought in its various forms has been expressed with more or less completeness and lucidity at different times and in various places. It has been expressed in Brahminism, Judaism, Maz-deism (the teaching of Zoroaster), Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, in the writings of the Greek and Roman sages, and in Christianity and Mohammedanism. Already the fact that one and the same thought has been expressed in the midst of the most diverse nations and at different times and places, indicates that this thought was inherent in human nature and contained the truth in itself.

But to those who considered that the only possible way of uniting people into societies was violence on the part of one set towards others, this truth appeared to be in opposition to the existing order, and, moreover, at the time of its first appearance, it was expressed in such a vague, fragmentary manner, that although the people embraced it as a theory, they were unable to accept it as an authoritative guidance for conduct. Besides, in regard to all the expressions of this truth as it was gradually proclaimed amongst people whose order of life was founded on violence, one and the same thing always occurred, viz., those who enjoyed the benefits derived from power, finding that the recognition by the people of this truth undermined their position, consciously or unconsciously distorted this truth by every means in their power, attaching to it attributes and meanings totally foreign to it, and also opposing its dissemination by downright violence. Thus the truth which is so natural to humanity—that human life should be guided by the spiritual principle which is the foundation of human life and manifests itself in love, in order to enter man's consciousness had to struggle, not only with the incompleteness of its expression and the intentional and unintentional distortions of it, but also with deliberate violence which compels by

means of punishments and persecutions the acceptance of the explanation of the religious law established by the authorities, which is opposed to this truth. Such a misrepresentation and construction of the new but as yet imperfectly explained truth, took place everywhere, in Confucianism. Taoism, Buddhism, Christianity, Mohammedanism, and also in Rrahminism.

III.

"My hand has sowed love everywhere, giving unto all that will receive. Blessings are offered unto all my children, but many times in their blindness they fail to see them. How few there are who gather the gifts which lie in profusion at their feet ; how many there are, who, in wilful waywardness, turn their eyes away from them and complain with a wail that they have not that which I have given them. Many of them defiantly repudiate not only my Gifts, but Me also, Me, the Source of all blessings and the Author of their Being." —Krishna.

"I tarry awhile from the turmoil and strife of the world. I will beautify and quicken thy life with love and with joy, for the light of the soul is Love. Where love is there is contentment and peace, and where there is contentment and peace, there am I also in their midst." —Krishna.

"The aim of the sinless One consists in acting without causing sorrow to others, although he could attain to great power by ignoring their feelings.

"The aim of the sinless One lies in not doing evil unto those who have done evil unto him.

"If a man causes suffering even to those who hate him without any reason, he will ultimately have grief not to be overcome.

"The punishment of evil-doers consists in making them feel ashamed of themselves by doing them a great kindness.

"Of what use is superior knowledge in the one if he does not endeavor to relieve his neighbor's wants as much as his own?

"If, in the morning a man wishes to do evil unto another, in the evening the evil will return to him." —Hindoo Kural.

This has taken place everywhere. The fact that love is the highest moral feeling was accepted universally, but the truth itself was interwoven with many and varied falsehoods, which so distorted it that nothing but mere words remained, out of this recognition of love as the highest moral feeling. The theory was advanced that this highest moral feeling is applicable only to the individual life, that it was necessary only for home use; but in social life all forms of violence, prisons, executions, wars, involving acts diametrically opposed to the feeblest sensation of love, were regarded as indispensable for the protection of the majority against

evil-doers. Notwithstanding that common sense clearly indicates that if one set of people can arrogate to themselves the right to decide as to which people are to be subjected to all kinds of coercion for the supposed welfare of the many, it naturally follows that those few individuals to whom violence is so applied could also come to the same conclusion with regard to the ruling caste who subjected them to violence; and although the great religious teachers— Brahmin, Buddhist and especially Christian—anticipating this perversion of the law of love, directed attention to the one inevitable condition of love —the enduring of affronts, injuries, all kinds of violence without resisting the evil by evil, mankind continued to accept what was incompatible: the beneficence of love, and with it the resistance of evil by violence, which is, and must be, opposed to love. And such teachings, in spite of the palpable contradiction which is in them, have taken such a deep hold upon the people, that while believing in love, people fail to question the lawfulness of an order of life founded on coercion ; which includes the imposition not only of tortures, but also of death, by some persons upon others.

For a long time people lived in this obvious contradiction without noticing it. But the day came when this contradiction began to agitate the more thoughtful people of different nations. And the ancient simple truth that it was natural for people to help and to love, instead of torturing and killing each other, began to dawn upon the minds of men and became every day clearer, while the acceptance of those false interpretations by which the deviations from it were justified became less and less convincing.

In ancient times the chief justification of violence was the theory that so-called monarchs, tsars, sultans, rajahs, shahs, and other heads of states had peculiar and divine rights. But the longer people lived, the faith in special rights of monarchs sanctioned by God became weaker and weaker. This faith declined in equal degree and almost simultaneously in the Christian, in the Brahmin, in the Buddhist and in the Confucian spheres, and it has recently become so feeble that it can no longer serve, as it did before, as a justification of acts openly opposed to common sense and to the true religious feeling. People saw more and more distinctly, and to-day the majority see quite clearly, the absurdity and the immorality of the submission of one's will to that of others than oneself, who require of them actions not only contrary to their material welfare but which also are a violation of their moral feelings. It is, therefore, perfectly natural that people who have lost faith in the ecclesiastically supported divinity of the authority of all manner of potentates, should endeavor to free themselves from it. But unfortunately, not only have these monarchs considered to be divinely appointed beings availed themselves of the advantages accruing from ruling nations, but during their domination, and owing to the existence of these pseudo- supernatural beings, an ever-increasing number of persons have sprung up who established themselves near the courts and who under the guise of governing the people, lived upon their labors. And this governing class has taken steps that to the same degree as the old religious fraud about divine rule of monarchs instituted by God himself decays in influence, another and similar deception should take its place, and,

having superseded the old one, should continue in the same way as the old one to keep nations in slavery to a limited number of rulers.

"Foremost and grandest among the teachings of Christ, were these two inseparable truths—*There is but one God; All men are the Sons of God*; and the promulgation of these two truths changed the face of the world, and enlarged the moral circle to the confines of the inhabited globe. To the duties of men towards the Family and Country were added duties towards Humanity. Man then learned that wheresoever there existed a human being, there existed a brother; a brother with a soul as immortal as his own, destined like himself to ascend towards the Creator, and on whom he was bound to bestow love, a knowledge of the faith, and help and counsel when needed."—Mazzini.