

One would have thought that, to every intelligent man, it must be as clear as day that possession of land by people who do not use it, who refuse hundreds, aye, thousands of starving families the occupation of this land, is as immoral as it is infamous—just like the possession of slaves. Nevertheless, we see cultivated, refined, English, Austrian, Prussian, and Russian aristocrats enjoy this cruel, abominable privilege, and, supported by the ready sophistries which a politico-economic science furnishes them for their excuse, they are not only not ashamed of it, but pride themselves on their possessions.

Now the great merit of Henry George consists in this, that he dissolves into nothingness all these sophistries, which are produced in defense of private property in land, so that the defenders of it do not dare to debate any more, but carefully evade this question, and purposely ignore it with silence. But Henry George has also driven them from this attitude of evasion. And in this, again, lies his great merit. Henry George did not content himself with making this question perfectly clear, so that only those with closed eyes can fail to see the unreasonableness and immorality of private property in land. Henry George was also the first who showed the possibility of solving this question. He was the first who gave a clear and straight answer to the common objections which are brought forward by the enemies of all progress, and which culminate in the assertion that the demands of progress are chimerical, impractical, and wild phantoms which one can and may answer with silence. The plan of Henry George silences these objections and puts the question in such a shape that even to-morrow committees could be appointed for the examination and trial of the plan and its crystallization into law.

In Russia, for instance, we could commence to-morrow to examine the question of buying out the land, or its expropriation without compensation for the purpose of nationalization, and it could be adjusted after various changes in the same way as, 33 years ago, the question of freeing the serfs was decided.

The necessity for a change in their condition has been made clear to the people, and also its possibility (changes and improvements may be made in the details of the single-tax system, but the fundamental idea is certainly feasible), they cannot, therefore, refrain from acting accordingly.

It is only necessary that the fundamental idea of the nationalization of land shall become public opinion.

As I see from your letter and your books you sent me your efforts are in this direction. I sympathize with you with all my heart, and wish you the best of success; for my life is devoted to the same work, which I consider my most sacred duty.

Very respectfully,

LEO TOLSTOY.

## AS TOLSTOY VIEWS THE WORLD AT EIGHTY YEARS.

Portions of a Letter Written by Herman Bernstein from St. Petersburg, July 20. Published in the New York Times of August 9.

I left St. Petersburg on the day after the first convention of the representatives of the Russian press. The cream of Russian publicists had come together for the purpose of considering the most adequate ways and means of celebrating the eightieth anniversary of Tolstoy's birth. Young men and old, men and women, offered suggestions of how best to honor the man who is at present the Russian people's only pride. They spoke with boundless enthusiasm, with fire, with the zeal and earnestness with which an enslaved people, suddenly set free, speak of freedom.

A young journalist rose and in a forceful speech declared that the most suitable means of honoring Tolstoy would be for the entire Russian press on the 28th day of August, the birthday of Tolstoy, to condemn the wholesale executions that are being committed daily in the Russian Empire and to make a general appeal that these death sentences be abolished.

But Russia—all Russia, except the government, the Holy Synod, and the Black Hundreds—seems to have forgotten for a while its helplessness and its misery in its preparations to do honor to Tolstoy. The people throughout Russia are infinitely more interested in the Tolstoy celebration than in the work of the Russian "Parliament." Only from time to time the Union of the Real Russian People, composed of bands of dark reactionaries, in their organs, which are patronized by the Government, but which are ignored by the people, attack Tolstoy in the vilest terms, branding him as an anti-Christ and a traitor. The Church has done all in its power to hinder the jubilee, and on the day that I started for Yasnaya Polyana I read in the newspapers that the St. Petersburg authorities had refused to legalize a society which was to be formed in honor of Tolstoy and which was to be known as the Leo Tolstoy Society.

On the way to Tula, in the train, a stout, red-faced "man with long hair"—a Russian priest—was seated opposite me. Eager to hear a Russian priest's view concerning conditions in Russia, and particularly his opinion of Tolstoy, I entered into conversation with him. When I told him that I was going to see Tolstoy I noticed how his face suddenly brightened, his red cheeks turned still redder, and bending over to me he said in a low voice, so as not to be overheard by the other passengers:

"You are a happy man. \* \* \* When you see that saintliest man in Russia, tell him that you met a Russian village priest who sends him greetings from the bottom of his heart. Tell him that the priest you met bowed his head with

shame for the manner in which the Church has treated Tolstoy. And tell him that the few peasants who have learned to read, read nothing but the Bible and Tolstoy. They understand his works even better than the Bible." . . .

At about 9:30 o'clock in the morning I found myself at the door of the little white house where lives and works the greatest artist and the most remarkable man in the world to-day—Leo Tolstoy. I was met by Nicholas Gusev, Tolstoy's secretary, an amiable young gentleman, who took me into his room.

Presently he entered. I cannot recall now what I said when I shook hands with Tolstoy, but he put me at my ease immediately, and he strengthened my conviction that the greatest men are the simplest men, even as the chief characteristic of the greatest masterpieces is their simplicity. . . .

He asked me about my impressions of Russia, and particularly about the popularity of Henry George's works in America. I related to him the incident that occurred at the convention of the Representatives of the Press.

"Yes," he said, "an appeal by the press for the abolition of executions in Russia would please me better than any other honor." He spoke in a soft, caressing voice, and the peculiar radiance of his face, the far-away look in his eyes—all really gave him the appearance of a saint, "a man not of this world," as Repin had aptly described him. . . .

"Nearly fifty years ago," he went on slowly, "the great question that occupied all minds in Russia was the emancipation of the serfs. The burning question now is the ownership of land. The peasants never recognized the private ownership of land. They say that the land belongs to God. I am afraid that people will regard what I say as stupid, but I must say it: The leaders of the revolutionary movement, as well as the Government officials, are not doing the only thing that would pacify the people at once. And the only thing that would pacify the people now is the introduction of the system of Henry George. I have outlined a plan according to which the agrarian question can be solved, and have submitted my plan to the Government as well as to the Duma. I have written about it to one who occupies a high post in the official world, and whose family I have known very well. But his hands are tied. His attitude toward the Court and toward his enemies is such that he cannot do anything in this direction. I do not reproach him. I only feel sorry for him. They do not understand that the proper solution of the land question is the only means of pacifying nine-tenths of the Russian population.

"As I have pointed out in my introductory note to the Russian version of 'Social Problems,' Henry George's great idea, outlined so clearly and so thoroughly more than thirty years ago, remains to

this day entirely unknown to the great majority of the people. This is quite natural. Henry George's idea, which changes the entire system in the life of nations in favor of the oppressed, voiceless majority, and to the detriment of the ruling minority, is so undeniably convincing, and, above all, so simple, that it is impossible not to understand it, and, understanding it, it is impossible not to make an effort to introduce it into practice, and therefore the only means against this idea is to pervert it and to pass it in silence. And this has been true of the Henry George theory for more than thirty years. It has been both perverted and passed in silence, so that it has become difficult to induce people to read his work attentively and to think about it.

"It is true that there are in England, Canada, the United States, and Germany very good little journals devoted to the single tax idea, but they have only an insignificant number of subscribers. Among the majority of the intelligent people throughout the world the ideas of Henry George are unknown, and the indifference toward them is even increasing. Society does with ideas that disturb its peace—and Henry George is one of these—exactly what the bee does with the worms which it considers dangerous but which it is powerless to destroy. It covers their nests with paste, so that the worms, even though not destroyed, cannot multiply and do more harm. Just so the European nations act with regard to ideas that are dangerous to their order of things, or, rather, to the disorder to which they have grown accustomed. Among these are also the ideas of Henry George. 'But light shines even in the darkness, and the darkness cannot cover it.' A truthful, fruitful idea cannot be destroyed. However you may try to smother it, it will still live, it will be more alive than all the vague, empty, pedantic ideas and words with which people are trying to smother it, and sooner or later the truth will burn through the veil that is covering it and it will shine forth before the whole world. Thus it will be also with Henry George's idea.

"And it seems to me that just now is the proper time to introduce this idea—now, and in Russia. This is just the proper time for it, because in Russia a revolution is going on, the serious basis of which is the rejection by the whole people, by the real people, of the ownership of land. In Russia, where nine-tenths of the population are tillers of the soil, and where this theory is merely a conscious expression of that which has always been regarded as right by the entire Russian people—in Russia, I say, especially during this period of reconstruction of social conditions, this idea should now find its application, and thus the revolution, so wrongly and criminally directed, would be crowned by a great act of righteousness. This is my answer to your question about the future of Russia. Unless this idea is introduced

into the life of our people Russia's future can never be bright."

Thus ended our first conversation. Tolstoy advised me to meet Nikolayev, the translator of Henry George, who lives a little distance away from the Tolstoy home.

"Talk this matter over with him and then we will continue our conversation." . . .

After dinner Tolstoy played several games of chess with a young composer. . . . Soon the young composer and M. Tchertkov, Tolstoy's most intimate friend, who lives but a few versts from Yasnaya Polyana, took their leave. Tolstoy rose, and, looking out of the window for some time, said ecstatically:

"What a wonderful sunset!"

It was indeed the most beautiful sunset I had ever seen. Tolstoy stood for several minutes, absorbed in thought. Then, turning to me, he said, in a low voice:

"Yes—yes, I am growing old and weak. My end is nearing rapidly. And the older I grow the happier I am. You cannot understand it. When I was as young as you I did not understand it. Yes, the older I grow the happier I am."

Suddenly he asked, in a soft yet searching tone:

"Tell me, what are your religious views on life? But be sincere. Few people are sincere when they speak of this question."

I answered sincerely, as well as I could.

"Religion must be the highest form of love," said Tolstoy after a while, "or love is merely a word. All religions are based on love, but Christianity is based on the highest form of love."

"In practice as well as in theory?" I asked.

"Meanwhile only in theory. But the world is growing ever more perfect. It cannot become perfect unless our inner religious consciousness is directed toward this highest form of love. With the highest form of love as our law we will be perfect."

During the following half hour Tolstoy commented on several subjects. He spoke of Repin's latest work, expressed a lively interest in the coming elections in the United States, and said some very complimentary things about William Jennings Bryan, who had visited him several years ago, and whose photograph I noticed in a conspicuous place in Tolstoy's workroom. . . .

I shall never forget the impressions I received that day in Yasnaya Polyana. The wonderful sunset that I was fortunate enough to watch in the presence of the great master is one that can never be effaced from my memory. Nor shall I ever forget the kindly words of encouragement that Tolstoy said to me as I bade him farewell.

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