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## INTRODUCTION



BY AYLMER MAUDE

THIS little book shows, in a short, clear, and systematic manner, how the principle of Non-Resistance, about which Tolstoy has written so much, is related to economic and political life.

The great majority of men, without knowing why, are constrained to labour long hours at tasks they dislike, and often to live in unhealthy conditions. It is not that man has so little control over nature that to obtain a subsistence it is necessary to work in this way, but because men have made laws about land, taxes, and property, which result in placing the great bulk of the people in conditions which compel them to labour thus, or go to the workhouse, or starve.

It may be said that man's nature is so bad that were it not for these laws an even worse state of things would exist; that the laws we make and tolerate are outward and visible signs of an inward and spiritual disgrace—the selfishness of man, which is the real root of the evil. But granting that, in a sense, this may be true, we need not suppose man's nature to be immutable, and all progress for ever impossible. Nor need we suppose it our duty to leave pro-

gress in the hands of some kind of a self-acting evolution, whose operations we can only watch as a passenger watches the working of a ship's engines. We may consider the effect of the laws we have made, approve or disapprove of them, discern the direction in which it is possible to advance, and take our part in furthering or hampering that advance.

Laws are made by Governments, and are enforced by physical violence. We have been so long taught that it is good for some people to make laws for others, that most men approve of this. Just as "genteel" people have been known to approve of wholesale while they turned up their noses at retail business, so people in general, while disapproving of robbery and murder when done on a small scale, admire them when they are organised, and when they result in allotting most of the land on which forty millions have to live to a few thousands, and in periodically sending out thousands of men to kill and to be killed. Nor are people much shocked at isolated murders, the responsibility for which is subdivided between the Queen, the hangman, the judge, jury, and officials.

To Tolstoy's mind, violence done by man to man is wrong. We cannot escape the wrongness by doing it wholesale, or by subdividing the responsibility.

But what would happen if we ceased to abet it?

If it were possible forcibly to oblige men to cease from using force, the selfishness which is at the root of the matter would, no doubt, burst out in some fresh form. That is, in fact, pretty much what has happened: weary of strife and private feuds, people consented to leave to Governments the use of force. External peace among individuals has ensued, but in place of strife with club or sword, a new struggle almost as fierce is carried on under legal and commercial forms. Tolstoy's desire is not that people should be compelled to cease from violence, but that violence should become to them abhorrent, and that they should not wish to sway others more than they can be swayed by reason and by sympathy. Were that accomplished, surely we may trust that good would come of good, as now ill comes of ill. At anyrate, as Tolstoy shows, there is no other path of advance. We can neither revert to the belief that to use violence is a divine right of kings, nor can we maintain the current belief that to do so is a divine right of majorities. To be subjected by force to a rule we disapprove of is slavery, and we are all slaves or slave-owners (sometimes both together) as long as our society bases itself on violence.

But can we abolish the use of violence, and cease to imprison and kill our fellow-men?

We can at least consider what Tolstoy says on the matter, and realise that organised violence exists claiming our approval, and that it is

possible to withhold that approval. As for abolishing violence—it is for us not a question of yes or no, but it is a question of more or less. The amount of violence committed depends on the amount of support the violators receive. There are places where it is now impossible to get anyone to become a hangman, and even in England, comparatively brutal as we are, it would be impossible to re-enact the penal code of George III., under which 160 different crimes were punishable with death. To shake ourselves completely free from all share in violence, if we are not quite ready to become martyrs, may seem and does seem impossible. Tolstoy himself does not profess to have ceased to use postage-stamps which are issued, or the highway that is maintained, by a Government which collects taxes by force; but reforms come by men doing what they can, not what they can't. It would be a very easy, and a very silly, reply to the teaching of Jesus, to say that as He tells us to be perfect, and we can't be perfect, we can get no guidance from His teaching. In the same way anyone who wishes to be logical but not reasonable, may say that as Tolstoy tells us to stand aside from all violence, and as we cannot do so, his guidance is useless. Tolstoy relies on his readers to use common sense, and the common sense of the matter is, that if we are so enmeshed in a system based on violence, and if we ourselves are so weak and faulty, that we cannot avoid being

parties to acts of violence, we should avoid this as much as we can.

The mind is more free than the body,—let us, at least, try to understand the truth of the matter, and not excuse a vicious system in order to shelter ourselves. When we have understood the matter, let us not fear to speak out; and when we have confessed our views, let us try to bring our lives more and more in harmony with them.

To free ourselves from the perplexity produced by the dual standard of *legality* and of *right*, would alone be an enormous gain. Take, for instance, the drink traffic in England;—what friction and waste of power has resulted from the attempts to legislate on the matter. How greatly brewers, distillers, and dealers have gained in respectability by the fact that their occupations were *legal*, if not *right*. And is it not becoming evident that it is not by laws that such evils as the drink trade can be met?

But, we are told, people are so inconsiderate and so wrong-headed that nothing but the strong arm of the law will restrain them. To disturb their respect for the law is dangerous.

Of course it is dangerous! Every great moral movement and every strong reform movement has its very real dangers. A century and a half after St. Francis of Assisi had stirred Europe by his example of self-renunciation and devotion to the service of others, such a crowd

of impudent mendicants shirking the drudgery of a workaday world were preying on society in his name, that Wyclif denounced them as sturdy beggars, and strongly censured any "man who gives alms to a begging friar."

History is apt to repeat itself in such matters, and, no doubt, Tolstoy's views will be again and again exploited by unworthy disciples. But is humanity to stagnate because what is evil is so easily grafted on what is good? To think and to move may be dangerous, but to stagnate is to die; and progress along the path of violence—as Babylon, Assyria, Egypt, Rome, Spain, and many other nations have shown—is progress to destruction.

No doubt, too, many good people will be shocked at Tolstoy's statement that "Laws are rules made by people who govern by means of organised violence." They will plead that, in modern Governments, the administrative functions are becoming more and more predominant, and the coercive ones are falling more and more into abeyance. But the reply is, that Governments need only drop these dwindling and secondary functions in order to escape the criticism here levelled at them. Governments which, without insisting on having their services accepted, are content to offer to organise society on a voluntary basis—killing no one, imprisoning no one, and relying on reason and persuasion to make their decrees prevail—are not here attacked.

And whatever good-natured people may wish to believe about Governments, the fact is that existing Governments rely on force, and that when they do not rely on force we do not call them Governments, but voluntary associations.

That men concerned in governing others know this, is shown all through history, and has been again shown recently in South Africa. As long as Kruger and his party had the armed force, the Boer reform party, the miners, and even Messrs. Beit, Rhodes, & Co., had to submit. In the time of the Raid the question who, in future, should make the laws, hung in the balance—it might be Kruger, or Rhodes, or somebody else; but it was sure to be the man, or men, who could obtain the advantage of being allowed openly, systematically, and unblushingly, to do violence to those who disobeyed them. Men who were organising the buccaneers one day, might become (and may yet become) a “Government” another day. In fact, just as in Sparta it was considered immoral, not to thieve, but to be caught thieving, so among modern moralists (such as Paley) it has been gravely argued that the morality of using violence against the men in power depends on the chance of being successful.

Tolstoy says that the systematic use of organised violence lies at the root of the ills from which our society suffers; and while agreeing in the indictment Socialism brings against

the present system, he points out that the establishment of a Socialist State would involve the enforcement of a fresh form of slavery—direct compulsion to labour. And if he is not at one with the Socialists, neither is he at one with the Revolutionary party of Russian Anarchists usually spoken of in England as “Nihilists.” They, indeed, are often very bitter in their denunciations of Tolstoy, whose influence has increased the moral repugnance felt for their policy of assassination. Their accusation that Tolstoy wishes to oppose despotism by mere metaphysics is, however, met in the present work by a direct and explicit appeal to conscientious people not voluntarily to pay taxes to Governments which spend the money on organising violence and murder.

This view of the duty of individuals towards Governments has had exponents in our own language. The saintly Quaker John Woolman wrote in his journal in 1757—

“A few years past, money being made current in our province for carrying on wars, and to be called in again by taxes laid on the inhabitants, my mind was often affected with the thoughts of paying such taxes . . . there was in the depth of my mind a scruple which I never could get over; and at certain times I was greatly distressed on that account. I believed that there were some upright-hearted men who paid such taxes, yet could not see that their example was a



sufficient reason for me to do so, while I believe that the spirit of truth required of me, as an individual, to suffer patiently the distress of goods, rather than pay actively." He found he was not alone among the Friends of Philadelphia in this matter.

Nearly a century later Henry Thoreau wrote in his admirable essay on "Civil Disobedience"—

"I heartily accept the motto—'That Government is best which governs least'; and I should like to see it acted up to more rapidly and systematically. Carried out, it finally amounts to this, which also I believe,—'That Government is best which governs not at all'; and when men are prepared for it, that will be the kind of Government which they will have. . . .

"It is not a man's duty, as a matter of course, to devote himself to the eradication of any, even the most enormous wrong; he may properly have other concerns to engage him; but it is his duty, at least, to wash his hands of it, and, if he gives it no thought longer, not to give it practically his support.

"I do not hesitate to say that those who call themselves Abolitionists should at once effectually withdraw their support, both in person and property, from the Government of Massachusetts, and not wait till they constitute a majority of one, before they suffer the right to prevail through them. I think it is enough if they have God on their side, without waiting for that other

one. Moreover, any man more right than his neighbours constitutes a majority of one already.”

Holding these views, he refused to pay the poll-tax, and was put in prison for one night, till someone paid the tax for him—much to his disgust.

Tolstoy, therefore, is in good company in holding the view that it were better to offer a passive resistance to Governments than voluntarily to pay what they demand and misapply. Such refusals might bring about the bloodless revolution of which Thoreau spoke—

“If a thousand men were not to pay their tax bills this year, that would not be a violent and bloody measure, as it would be to pay them, and enable the State to commit violence and shed innocent blood. This is, in fact, the definition of a peaceful revolution, if any such is possible. If the tax-gatherer or any other public officer asks me, as one has done, ‘But what shall I do?’ my answer is, ‘If you really wish to do anything, resign your office.’ When the subject has refused allegiance, and the officer has resigned his office, then the revolution is accomplished.”

But while we remember that Tolstoy is in good company in this matter, and that he here offers just what some people pine for—something definite and decided to do or to refuse to do—we shall, I think, make a sad mistake if we fail to differentiate between the main intention and drift of his work, and such a piece of practical advice as this.

The main intention and drift of the work is to show that progress in human well-being can only be achieved by relying more and more on reason and conscience, and less and less on man-made laws; that we must be ready to sacrifice the material progress we have been taught to esteem so highly, rather than acquiesce in such injustice and inequality as is flagrant among us to-day; that what we desire is the supremacy of truth and goodness, and that consequently violence from man to man must more and more be recognised as evil, whether it boasts itself in high places or lurks in slums—and that we must more and more free ourselves from the taint of murder that clings to all robes of state.

These things, to my mind, seem certainly true; we must turn our back on the religion of Jesus if we would rebut them.

But as soon as it comes to any definite precept and external rule to do this, or not to do that—there is room for reply. What is really needed, and what Tolstoy is aiming at, is that mankind should steadily advance towards perfection, and no one action can be the *next step* for all men in all places. So when we come to the injunction to pay no tax, we may remember the passage (Matt. xvii. 24–27) in which Jesus is reported to have told Peter to catch fish and pay the tax for them both. The passage seems to mean: “We are in no way bound to pay, but if they demand the tax of you, give it, not because you are under

any obligation, but because we must not resist him that is evil. If any man would take your cloak, give him your coat also." And that is what Tolstoy thought it meant when he wrote *The Four Gospels*.

In the present work, however, he is not interpreting the Gospels, but is dealing with present problems on the plane of thought of the jurists and the economists. And whatever may be the best method of undermining the authority of the prince of this world, his condemnation by Jesus makes in the same direction as Thoreau's "Civil Disobedience" and Tolstoy's theory of "Non-Resistance." Each in his own way says, "The kings of the Gentiles have lordship over them; and they that have authority over them are called Benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is the greater among you, let him become as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve" (Luke xxii. 25, 26).

The prince of this world is judged,—the change foreshadowed is a vast one, and must commence with a change of each man's inner self. But its outward manifestations may be as various as the flowers of the field which are all fed by the same rain and sunshine from above.

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