

Tolstoy, Dostoevskiy, Turgenev

THE THREE GREAT MEN OF RUSSIA'S
WORLD OF LITERATURE

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Count Leo Tolstoy

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A GLANCE at the intellectual life of Russia reveals that her people slept eight centuries from the inception of their kingdom to Peter the Great. They were a whole century awakening, from Peter the Great to Pushkin. The true awakening took place in the second half of the 19th century, in that short period from Pushkin to Dostoevskiy and Leo Tolstoy. Their highly cultured neigh-

bors to the West were suddenly amazed to learn that "the barbarians" created an art. This art was literature — prose fiction, created over night, and more significant and profound than any known to them. One can readily imagine the astonishment of Flaubert who, on first reading the French translation of Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, exclaimed, "This is Shakespeare!" And in a letter to Tourgenyev he wrote thus, "Many thanks for sending me Tolstoy's novel. It is of the very first order. What a painter and what a psychologist! The first two volumes are tremendous, but the third deteriorates terribly—*il degrengole affreusement*. He repeats and he philosophizes. In the end one observes a gentleman-author and a Russian, while up to that point one sees only Nature and Humanity! I shouted with delight as I read the work, and it is a long one. Yes, it is powerful, very powerful!"

The first superficial impression of the astute Flaubert already suggests that contradiction, that dividing line between the powerful portrayal of nature and humanity on one side, and

the striking deterioration in artistic quality when the author philosophizes, — "*Il dégringole affreusement!*" It is this very contradiction that makes it difficult to discuss Tolstoy as an artist. The two, the artist and the moral philosopher are so intimately bound up in him, that neither is intelligible when treated alone. Let any one who imagines that Tolstoy was deficient as a thinker or negligible as a philosopher, dismiss that thought at once. All his creative activity had its source in a will to comprehend life. The same impulse gave birth to philosophy. To grasp him in his totality as an artist and as a moral philosopher, one must have recourse to his biography, his Diary and his artistic creations.

Every artist writes his own biography. But no one revealed himself so fully, so unsparingly, so pitilessly as did Tolstoy. All of his literary activity, in reality, is one huge diary of himself. The crucial psychological problems entailed in this study are principally two. One problem is concerned with the dual aspect of the man. On one hand, a sensitive, sensuous pagan sensing and sharing the joys of living man, animal and things that grow, for even his trees are endowed with sensation. On the other hand, a puritanical moralist preaching a sermon of self-negation, chastity, suffering and humility. The second problem grows out of the first and is concerned with Tolstoy's so-called conversion. There is a general and rather vague idea that a crisis took place at a certain time in his life, a moral and religious upheaval which completely changed his existence and split it, so to say, into two distinct halves. So that whereas before the conversion he is only a great writer, possibly also a great man, after the conversion he steps out of the ordinary conditions of life and becomes a type of Christian martyr, a sage who has reached the highest moral enlightenment, a founder of a religion, a sort of Buddha or Confucius. We shall see, however, that his was not the case of grace descending on one. We shall have no difficulty in following that inner struggle which began almost in childhood and never ceased.

Count Leo Tolstoy was born August 28th, 1828, in Yasnaya Polyana, the ancestral rural estate of his mother. His family was old and noble. The title of Count was conferred on Leo's paternal great-grandfather by Peter the Great. His mother was Princess Volkonskaya and her people were descended from Rurik, the first ruler of Russia. Thus by birth Tolstoy was bound to inherit the aristocratic sentiments of his class. In fact, he never quite freed himself from the subtle influences of the patriarchal rural aristocratic environment in which he was reared. Leo's mother died when he was two years old and his father when he was nine. His bringing up was entrusted to that excellent aunt Tatiana. A true and minute psychological insight into the boy's life can be gained from reading one of his earliest and yet most charming books, "Childhood, Boyhood and Youth," written between the years of 24 and 28. The boy here so minutely described, with his abnormal sensitiveness, his shy awkwardness, his perpetual self-analysis, his brooding dreams, his amusing self-conceit, bears in him the germ of a great artist much more certainly than any small monster of perfection. We feel that this book in which the author is first fully revealed, was the outcome of an overmastering impulse to give expression to the accumulated experiences of an intense and sensitive childhood now receding forever into the past. I shall permit myself only one quotation from this work for it is indicative of much that is to come. The hero relates his feelings when he was 14. "In the course of that year I led a sequestered moral existence centered upon myself. All the abstract questions of the destiny of man, the future life and immortality of the soul came into my conscience. And the weak childish intellect attempted with all the zeal of inexperience to grapple with the questions, the formulation of which constitutes the highest level of the human mind."

At the age of 15 Tolstoy entered the department of philosophy at the University of Kazan. While there he was a fasti-

dious dresser, attended balls given by the local aristocracy, drank, gambled, visited gypsy-singers and houses of ill-fame. Such behavior was considered quite the proper thing for a titled youth; it was "*come il faut*." He did not distinguish himself as a student. In fact he soon became disgusted with the pedagogic methods of the "Temple of Learning" as he contemptuously referred to the University. Two years later he left it without acquiring his degree; he actually flunked in two subjects. Years later he wrote in his Confession: "I was baptized and brought up in the Christian faith. I was taught religion during my childhood, boyhood and youth. But when I left the University, at the age of 18, I no longer believed anything I had been taught."

But it was not because he was a poor student that he left the University. It was more likely the first manifestation of his intolerance of the "general tendency." For we see him returning to Yasnaya Polyana and continuing his studies by himself on a scope truly amazing. At this age he was greatly under the influence of Jean Jacques Rousseau. "I have read the whole of Rousseau, all his twenty volumes including his dictionary of music. I was more than enthusiastic about him, I worshipped him — I also remember that I read Voltaire when I was very young, and his ridicule of religion not only did not shock me but amused me very much."

Tolstoy, not yet 19, returned to Yasnaya Polyana to live with his dear aunt Tatiana, to perfect himself, to study, to manage his estate, and to improve the condition of his serfs. "A Squire's Morning" — a short novel written a few years later, gives a fair idea of his own efforts to improve the lot of his serfs, and the utter failure to accomplish anything along these lines. The next three years he lives partly in Yasnaya Polyana, partly in Moscow. Much of this time was spent in hunting, gambling, dissipation and yielding to the charms of the gypsy-singing girls. These dissipations were always followed by periods of repentance, religious humility and draw-

ing up of new resolutions for moral improvement. These years he long afterward summed up sternly in his Confession. "I cannot think of those years without horror, disgust and heartache. There was no vice or crime that in those days I did not commit. Lying, theft, lust, intemperance, violence, murder — I have committed them all. I lived on my estate, I consumed in drink or at cards what the labor of the peasants had produced. I punished them and sold them and deceived them. And for all that, I was praised."

Discouraged with his inability to get on with the serfs and the management of his estate, disgusted with his mode of living, the piling up of gambling debts and his inability to resist the charms of the gypsy girls, he sought an escape. This presented itself when his older brother Nicholas, an artillery officer, returned from the Caucasus on a leave of absence.

In the spring of 1851, the two brothers left for the Caucasus. The Russian government at the moment was engaged in a slow and difficult conquest of the semi-savage mountaineer tribes inhabiting the northern slopes of the Caucasus. It took the Russians almost half a century to conquer this handful of brave mountaineers.

The marvelous scenery of the Caucasus, the mountains, the savage bravery of the natives and the cossacks, and their simple primitive existence had a powerful influence on the latent genius of young Tolstoy. It was here that he wrote "Childhood" at the age of 24.

"The Cossacks" is at once the freshest and the richest of his Caucasian stories. It is a sort of short novel or a long short story. It is autobiographic. Irtenyev of "Childhood," Prince Nekhlyudov of "The Morning of an Esquire," and Olenin in "The Cossacks," is the same young aristocrat, in reality, the author himself. This story is most important from a psychological standpoint, because it reveals much that is hidden in Tolstoy. The two aspects of the author are here portrayed not in one but in two separate characters. Young Olenin, rich, care-

free, but already weary and disgusted with the idle parasitic existence of his Moscow circle, seeks to forget his past and find contentment in the primitive life of the Caucasian cossacks. The other character is Uncle Eroshka, an old cossack who acts as guide to Olenin on his hunting trips. "I am a clever fellow," he brags, "I'm a drunkard, I'm a thief, I'm a hunter. I'm a jolly fellow, I like everybody, I'm Eroshka." His life is characterized by a love of freedom, of idleness, of robbery and of war. "There is no sin, the priests tell lies when they say that there is punishment after death, for there is no hereafter, and after you die, grass will grow over you and that is all." While apparently unimportant, Uncle Eroshka psychologically considered is the most finished of Tolstoy's characters. He reveals better than any other that aspect of the author which says little and is not conscious, but is always at work. Eroshka with his primitive wisdom is a sort of satyr or faun. Like nature he is both cruel and merciful. What will later be separated into good and evil is in him still an undivided harmonious one.

When war broke out between Russia and Turkey, Tolstoy asked to be transferred to the field of action. He then came to witness and participate in the heroic defense of Sevastopol against the Turkish, the English and the French troops. During the siege he wrote the "Sevastopol Sketches," upon the reading of which Tourgenev wrote: "Tolstoy's sketches of the siege of Sevastopol are wonderful! Tears came into my eyes as I read them, and I shouted hurrah!" And Kropotkin fifty years later wrote thus, "All his powers of observation and war psychology, all his deep comprehension of the Russian soldier, and especially of the plain untheatrical hero who wins the battles, and a profound understanding of that inner spirit of an army upon which depends success or failure: everything, in short, which developed into the beauty and the truthfulness of *War and Peace* was already manifested in these Sevastopol Sketches, which undoubtedly represented a new departure in war literature the world over."

When peace was declared Tolstoy returned to Yasnaya Polyana and resumed his early experiments with a school for peasant children. He attacked the problem with characteristic intensity and originality. He read everything that was written on the subject, traveled to England, Holland, Germany and France to study school systems. But now we must record a most important event of his life — marriage. The groom is 34 and the bride, Sophía Andreyevna Behrs, is 18. After the ceremony the young folks settled down in Yasnaya Polyana and lived there, with occasional interruptions, for the next twenty years. These were undoubtedly his best, his most productive years; the years during which he wrote "War and Peace" and "Anna Karenina," the two great novels of the nineteenth century. Here his artistic creative genius reached its highest development. Nor was the young Countess an ordinary woman. She was a devoted and a charming wife, as well as a competent mate in life's work. She helped with the management of the large estate. She took care of the children. There were altogether thirteen of them. She helped her husband with his artistic work. It was said of her that she had copied all of "War and Peace" in her own hand not less than seven times. Tolstoy himself proved to be a thrifty and competent manager. He bred horses, raised sheep and pigs. His estate approximated 600,000 roubles and he was a world famous writer. Here was indeed a lucky mortal! Beneficent providence had showered an abundance of gifts upon him.

I shall touch in passing only upon the two great novels, in order that we may follow that unceasing inner work which alone was responsible for their creation.

"War and Peace" is a chronicle of two aristocratic Russian families. The mighty drama of the Napoleonic advance from 1805 to 1812 comes into the novel insofar as it affects the members of those two families. But Tolstoy is not content to tell us of historic events. He develops a philosophy of history. His theory is that the so-called great men of history

count for very little. They are figureheads of forces beyond their control. They do most good and least harm when, like the Russian field marshal, Kutuzov, they are aware of the true direction of the great human forces and adapt themselves to them. But then they are modest, and the world does not regard them as great. The typical case of the "impotent great man" is Napoleon in 1812, at the time of his invasion of Russia. He posed before the world as the man of destiny whose will and intellect decided the fate of empires. Yet from first to last, during the campaign, he never knew in the least what was about to happen. The result was decided by the spirit of the Russian nation, and by its steadfast endurance. Every common Russian soldier who dreaded the thought of submitting to a foreigner, to an "Anti-Christ" and who, therefore, cooperated with the natural course of events, did more to further the result than Napoleon, whom Tolstoy calls "The most insignificant tool of history," who even in St. Helena was never able to understand what caused his overthrow.

It is a truly philosophical work. The predominant note here is one of Homeric or Shakesperean naïvete, a disinclination to reward good or condemn evil, a feeling that the responsibility for human life must be sought elsewhere than in ourselves. The author is consistent throughout in this attitude, save in the case of Napoleon. The latter is an enemy, morally guilty. Tolstoy is appalled by Napoleon's conceit in thinking that he was making history and reshaping the world. Tolstoy's attitude toward his characters is interesting. "I am alive and I want to live!" exclaims Pierre Bezukhov. And every living person lives as he sees fit, and the author is not indignant if life is coarse and common, or even immoral. Some are better, others worse, some petty, some big, but to denounce or to damn is not necessary. One must strive only against Napoleon who would rob us of our dignity as human beings. Not so in "Anna Karenina!" Here the author sits in judgment. The characters in this book fall into two categories. In one, the

individuals obey the rules and are saved and rewarded. In the other, they follow their own inclinations, break the rules and are punished more or less severely, depending upon the degree of infraction. But the main offender is Anna. She sinned, therefore she must be punished. The epigraph of the novel, borrowed from the Gospel, is intended for her. "*Revenge is mine, I will repay.*" The author leads his lovely heroine unfalteringly to her terrible destiny. He does it calmly, pitilessly, yea with triumph and rejoicing. Having killed her he ends the novel by converting Levin to belief in God. Thus creates the Tolstoy we as yet do not know. Simultaneously, the Tolstoy we know, that inimitable painter of living life, gives us an unforgettable portrait of a gifted, beautiful woman joined by marriage to a walking automaton, to a living corpse. What an antithesis to lovely Anna is this tall, gaunt, lop-eared, cadaverous Karenin, discoursing gravely on the wisdom of his government, the sanctity of the orthodox church, and the inviolability of marriage ties. "But," says the author, "he knew nothing of life, he did not understand anything in it, so that when he was for the first time confronted by one of life's problems, he simply did not know what to do." Anna's passion for Vronskiy is made as inevitable as nature itself.

On the other hand, the author is lavishly pouring life's gifts upon the mediocre Levin. His is family happiness, his is wealth, and spiritual contentment to boot. Why, indeed, such rewards for one, and a cruel, ignominious death for the other? The only answer is that Anna broke her marriage ties. Apparently these ties were sacred to the author and had to be preserved at all costs.

Further elucidation of this problem is to be found, as is usual with Tolstoy, in his next work. The famous "Confession" was published when the author was 51 years old. There we find that after a tranquil period, Tolstoy again found himself at grips with doubts. Essentially a disbeliever and a profound sceptic, a sort of Russian nihilist, he still has not the

courage to face with equanimity that which he knows to be the inevitable end — death, annihilation. He seeks a powerful ally who could give a meaning to life that death could not deprive. He finds this ally in the concept of Good. We learn that Good is God. Everything, therefore, must be subjugated to the service of Good. Anna must be punished so that the higher harmony and the law of Good may prevail. She must be destroyed so that the author can have his peace of mind. This peace, bought so dearly, will not however last long. But let us turn to the "Confession."

"I felt," we read, "that what I had been standing on had broken down. The truth is that life is meaningless. I lived, and walked, till I had come to a precipice and saw clearly that there was nothing ahead of me but destruction. It was impossible to stop, impossible to go back, and impossible to close my eyes or avoid seeing that there was nothing ahead but suffering and real death — annihilation. I was tempted to commit suicide. There is an Eastern fable of a traveller overtaken on a plain by an enraged beast. Escaping from the beast he leaps into a dry well, but sees at the bottom of it a dragon which opens its jaws to swallow him. And the unfortunate man, not daring to climb out lest he be destroyed by the enraged beast, and not daring to leap to the bottom of the well lest he be eaten by the dragon, seizes a twig in a crack in the well and clings to it. His hands are growing weaker, and he feels he will soon have to resign himself to the destruction that awaits him above or below; but still he clings on; and sees that two mice, a black mouse and a white one, go regularly round and round the stem of the twig to which he is clinging, and gnaw at it. And soon the twig itself will snap and he will fall into the dragon's jaws. The traveler sees this and knows that he will inevitably perish; but while still hanging he looks around and finds some drops of honey on the leaves of the twig and reaches them with his tongue and licks them. So I too clung to the twig of life, knowing that the dragon of death was inevitably

awaiting me, ready to tear me to pieces. I tried to lick the honey which formerly consoled me; but the honey no longer gave me pleasure, and the white and black mice of day and night gnawed at the branch by which I hung....

"Instinctively I felt that if I wished to live and understand the meaning of life I must seek this meaning not among my class who have lost it and wished to kill themselves, but among those milliards of common working people who support the burden of their own lives and ourselves. My position was terrible. I knew I could find nothing along the path of reasonable knowledge, except a denial of life; and in faith I could find nothing but a denial of reason, still more impossible to me than a denial of life. Finally I saw that my mistake lay in expecting an examination of finite things to supply a meaning of life. The finite has no ultimate meaning apart from the infinite.

"What am I? A part of the infinite. In those few words lies the whole problem. I began dimly to understand that in the replies given by faith is stored up the deepest human wisdom. I was now ready to accept any faith, if it only did not demand of me a direct denial of reason — which would be a falsehood. And I studied Buddhism and Mohammedanism from books, and most of all, I studied Christianity both from books and from living people. I first turned to the orthodox church, but in spite of my readiness to make all possible concessions, I saw that what they gave out as their faith did not explain the meaning of life but obscured it.

"And I began to draw near to the beliefs among the poor, simple, unlettered folk: pilgrims, monks, sectarians and peasants. I became convinced that they have a real faith, which is a necessity to them and gives their lives a meaning and makes it possible for them to live....In contrast with what I had seen in our circle, where the whole of life is passed in idleness and amusements and dissatisfaction, I saw that the whole life of these people was passed in heavy labor, and that they were con-

tent with life. While we think it terrible that we have to suffer and die, these folk live and suffer and approach death with tranquillity, and in most cases gladly.

"And I learnt to love these people. The more I came to know their life the more I loved them, and the easier it became for me to live. So I went on for about two years, and a change took place in me which had long been preparing. The life of our circle, the rich and the learned, not merely became distasteful to me, but lost all meaning for me; while the life of the laboring people, appeared to me in its true light. I understood that that life is true, and I accepted it."

And further we read, "God is life. And more than ever before, all within me and around me lit up, and the light did not again abandon me. And I was saved from suicide. I returned to a belief in God, in moral perfecting. *The aim of man in life is to save his soul, and to save his soul he must live 'godly' and to live godly he must renounce all the pleasures of life, must labor, humble himself, suffer and be merciful.*" One would think that the question of God and religion were now solved for all time. However, in the diary of October 14, 1897, that is eighteen years after his conversion, we read the following: "Not long ago I felt God for the first time; that he existed and that I existed in him." And in parentheses: "Horribly bad, not clear. But I felt it clearly and especially keenly for the first time in my life." And again in the diary of July 17, 1898, "An inner struggle. I believe little in God. All last night I did not sleep. I rose early and prayed much." I am reminded here of that other seeker after God — Dostoevskiy, in whose diary I read the following: "Who knows but what it is altogether true that some people try to convince others with foam on their lips, solely for the purpose of convincing themselves, and that in the end they die without succeeding."

The inner struggle is one between the conscious and the subconscious. And the latter is always the stronger. It runs far back like the roots of a tree. It is always active even though it

is inarticulate. Because the two were poorly balanced in Tolstoy, spiritual contentment could be secured only at the expense of one or the other. The alternative was either to subjugate the conscious to the subconscious, as he did in the first half of his life, or the reverse, to subjugate his subconscious pagan soul to his Christian conscience, as he was attempting in the second half. One could predict almost with certainty that this original, powerful, but unfortunately one-track mind would go the limit once he chose his path. And so he did. One is frequently amazed at the childish naivete of a genius, at his inability to see all sides of a problem, to weigh opposition, or to see the humorous aspect of a situation.

Tolstoy visited the free lodging houses in Moscow and was appalled by the misery of the poor classes. He attempted to collect money among his rich friends, he enrolled people willing to help. But he soon realized the impotence, as well as the hypocrisy, of private charity in the face of such poverty. He went back to Yasnaya Polyana to ponder over the problem. The conclusion he came to was that neither he nor his kind had any moral right to attempt to help these people. He and his kind stood in need of moral reformation. "I am a weak worthless parasite, I am a louse devouring the leaves of the tree, and I want to help the growth and the health of that tree, I want to cure it." And a little later an even greater truth was revealed to him through a very ordinary occurrence. He was returning, one evening in Moscow, from wood sawing together with a carpenter by the name of Semion. The latter handed a three cent piece to an old beggar and asked him for two cents change. The old man showed two three cent pieces and a one cent piece. Semion was about to take the one cent piece, then changed his mind, took off his hat, crossed himself and left the old man the three cent piece. Tolstoy gave the beggar a twenty cent piece. Now he knew that Semion's savings amounted to six roubles and fifty cents. In proportion to Semion's giving he should have given the beggar three

thousand roubles. But even if he gave 100,000 roubles, he would still have had 500,000 left. "Only when I have nothing will I be able to do a little good." And only now he grasped the meaning of Christ's saying "He who will not leave everything — his home, his children and his fields to follow Him, is not his pupil."

A new truth revealed itself. It was so simple. "To enter the Heavenly Kingdom one must not desire estate or money. Private property is the root of all evil. Private property is not a providential law, a will of God or a historic necessity, but a weak and contemptible superstition. It is as easy to destroy it as it is to brush away a slender cobweb." And so he resolved to obey Christ's sermon and to forsake all — his home, his children and his fields and to distribute his 600,000 roubles in order that he may have the right to do good. His resolution met with vigorous opposition on the part of the countess. We read in the reminiscences of his brother-in-law Behrs, that Tolstoy, not wishing to resist evil, decided to turn over all his property to his wife and children, and that from that time on he lost all interest in his estate and money, and would have nothing to do with them. But he remained to live under the same roof in relative comfort and security, if not in actual luxury. Apparently he did not possess the courage of a Francis of Assisi, and that caused him a great deal of moral suffering. He never sought to justify this contradiction between preaching and practice except by confession of weakness on his part and a feeling that it would be unchristian to oppose his wife.

Having reached a new understanding of life, he now felt that all he desired before: honor, riches and self-aggrandizement, seemed evil; while poverty, humility, self-sacrifice and service of others seemed good. He cast off his European clothes, put on a peasant's garb, began to clean his own room, fire his oven, plow, seed and even make his own boots. He abandoned his artistic activities and devoted himself to religious studies. From now on, say from the age of 57, his art

and philosophy come to an end, and his sermonizing begins. His new religious views are summed up in the next treatise, "What I Believe In." In it we read: "The passage which was to me the key that unlocked the whole, was contained in two verses, the 38th and 39th of the fifth chapter of Mathew: "Ye have heard that it was said, an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth; but I say unto you, Resist not him that is evil." Tolstoy repeated and enlarged these views in "What then Must We Do," "On Life," "What is Religion," "What Is to Be Done?," and many other pamphlets and essays. His esthetic and his moral sense became definitely divorced. He began to deny his own art for moral reasons.

In "What Is Art," Tolstoy presents a searching and original exploration of the subject. In spite of its rather debatable premises and erroneous conclusions, there is much to be learned from it. His sincere and powerful language coupled with argumentation that is all but irrefutable combine to threaten many of our cherished notions. He defines art as a means of conveying feelings or emotions to one's fellow beings. However, the only feelings worth conveying are religious feelings. Therefore, the best art is that which conveys a religious feeling for it unites men in brotherly love. All other art is either bad or in any case not significant.

In keeping with this moral transformation, Tolstoy forsakes his early artistic forms and seeks new ones. He aims primarily at simplification. Art must be shared by the masses; it must, therefore, be simple. Above all it must be religious. This new form takes the shape of folk tales written in a simple clear style. While there is no denying that some of these possess literary merit, the fact remains patent that the great genius of Tolstoy failed to recreate itself in this new peasant medium. Occasionally only, as if to demonstrate that his great creative genius was not completely smothered by religious cant, the artist turns to purely creative effort, and then we are rewarded by such gems as "The Death of Ivan Ilyitch," "The

Pacemaker," or "Khadzhi-Murat." Tolstoy was now mainly concerned with preaching to the world that truth which he thought he had discovered or rediscovered in the message of Christ. In the name of this truth he began to denounce and reject everything that did not agree with it, and his anathemas sounded in their drastic frankness like revelations. Tolstoy framed his moral rules only according to the values by which "the enormous masses of working people" live. It was in the name of these values that he attempted to transform all modern life, cutting off without mercy everything that might threaten the pre-individual compactness of mankind. And since Culture and Civilization are the main agents of differentiation, therefore of division, he rejected in toto these great obstacles on the path leading "Back to Nature." He grasped with an almost pathologic eagerness at every opportunity of accusing all aspects of culture; an eagerness which is responsible for many a narrow and unjust incrimination on his part; for example, his attacks on the medical profession. On the other hand he was always ready to praise everything that pertained to the folk-masses. We learn that a composition of a certain peasant boy, Fedka, was superior to his own and to Goethe's, that the Russian folk-songs rated above Beethoven's 9th Symphony, because they were natural; that Pushkin and Beethoven please us not because there is any absolute beauty in them, but because we have been just as corrupted as they are. Shakespeare with his aristocratic contempt for a mob is only a mediocre talent, and so on.

The social philosophy of Tolstoy can be summed up in five postulates:

1. The enslavement of men is the result not of any sociological law but of legislation.
2. The slavery of the present time proceeds from three legislations; those pertaining to the soil, the taxes and private property.
3. Every government is an institution for committing the most terrible crimes through violence.

4. True social betterment is possible only through moral and religious perfecting of every individual.
5. In order to get rid of the government one must not resort to any external means, that is to violence; what is necessary is to refuse to participate in it. Namely: (a) not to accept the office of a soldier or a field marshal, of a minister or an elder, a juryman or a member of parliament; (b) not to pay taxes; not to make use of government institutions, or to use its money in the form of salaries or pensions; not to resort to official force to protect one's property.

This is a fairly complete anarchistic program, indeed. And the method proposed for attaining it is a passive universal boycott. What Tolstoy attempts to do is not so much to replace the capitalistic order by communal anarchism, as to protect the communal-agrarian order against external destructive forces, against the invasion of the village by that new enemy — capitalism, advancing from the West. Both in his populism and in his anarchism Tolstoy represents the agrarian conservative principle. The approaching conflict between the capitalistic bourgeois and the rising proletariat does not interest him. He does not understand its significance. Socialism is but another form of dispised liberalism. Karl Marx is a representative of a "false principle" of capitalistic culture, of disfranchized workers, of governmental force. Salvation lies in turning back. Tolstoy maintains that culture and progress are superstitions. Humanity is not necessarily progressing, as most of the Asiatic peoples witness. He denies history. That is the secret of the ease of his negations as well as of the practical impotence of his sermon.

As long as civilization exists no justice in Tolstoy's sense is possible because the very essence of civilization is based on social and individual differentiation. The justice Tolstoy aims at amounts to a complete social and cultural levelling of mankind. The smallest attempt at something personal is already

the beginning of separation and leads to divergence of interests, wills, ambitions—to that individual self-assertion in which Tolstoy sees the main evil of human existence. Abolish the ego for the sake of the aggregate, and the justice of perfect equality and brotherhood will reign on earth. This is the very antithesis of Nietzsche's philosophy. Thus we reach the very root of Tolstoy's anarchism. Its paradoxical feature is that it is passive and not revolutionary.

Tolstoy's views on sex are expressed in the ultra ascetic *Kreutzer Sonata*. Absolute chastity, complete abolition of sex, is, according to him, the final goal of Christianity. Every act of sexual intercourse is a fall, a sin, even in the married state. The objection that this view will naturally bring about the extinction of the human race is met with the argument that having accomplished its highest aim, the race would have no reason for further existence and might as well disappear. Of all the passions that of sex is the most difficult to subdue. Tolstoy's dislike of women is probably based on that very ground. He considered women vastly inferior to men mentally and even more so morally.

Tolstoy's ideas did not evoke much enthusiasm among the intelligentsia. There were followers, to be sure. A new creed was formed whose adherents were called "Tolstoyans." Tolstoy colonies were formed in Russia as well as abroad. They usually failed after two or three years of existence. It appears that the stumbling block to success was the ever present "chiseler" and the ineffectiveness of the principle of non-resistance of evil when applied to that species.

Tolstoy's sermon was a sincere and an impassioned protest against the existing evils, against the government, the czar, the orthodox church. All of his tendentious artistic writings exerted this particular influence of awakening of compassion, love of humanity and a sense of profound grief at the existence of evil. But let us leave the stern judge and the doctrinaire, and return once more to the artist.

The philosophers of the Alexandrian school tell us that the human being is made up of three elements; the body, the soul, and the spirit. Tolstoy is preeminently the painter of the body and the soul of man. No sooner does he deviate from that middle ground in the direction of the spirit, in the direction of abstract thought, or philosophy, than one notices a waning of his power, in fact, his definite limitations. The passions and tragedies of that abstract realm were left to Dostoevskiy to explore. But in the portrayal of the emotional man, Tolstoy's power is limitless. The painters of the Italian renaissance, the sculptors of ancient Greece portrayed the body with greater skill than Tolstoy. Modern music and to some extent, modern literature, penetrated more deeply into the intellectual sphere of man, but never and nowhere was the soul of man dissected in all its nakedness and portrayed with such fidelity and power as in the creations of Tolstoy. Here he has no rivals not only in the literature but in the other arts as well.

Certainly in the portrayal of the human body through the medium of language Tolstoy is a supreme master. He accomplishes his results without resorting to long and minute descriptions. On the contrary, he is brief, direct and simple, selecting only a few, apparently insignificant, physical traits. These traits, however, have the quality of something very personal, very intimate. Nor does he introduce them all at once. He scatters them throughout the book and weaves them into the very woof of action. Recall the upper lip of Princess Bolkonskaya covered with a small mustache. It becomes prominent when the lighthearted princess prattles her silly social gabble. We see it again when she lies dead and the slightly prominent lip seems to say "why did you do this to me, I have not done anything wrong." Somehow, this unimportant physical characteristic is expressive of the very essence of the superficial princess, as well as of her tragic end.

On the eve of the invasion of Moscow by the French, a youth by the name of Vereshchagin is accused of treason and is

beaten to death by a mob. He is described as a young man with a long *thin* neck. "His weak, *thin* legs were weighted down with heavy irons. The young man heavily dragged his feet on to a platform and with an obedient gesture folded his *thin* hands in front of him. The long *thin* neck displayed a bluish vein——. After his killing, the same people who did it, now gazed with compassion upon the dead body with a bluish face smeared with blood and dust, and with a severed long *thin* neck." Not a word about the inner, emotional state of the victim; instead, the word *thin* is repeated eight times in different combinations in the course of five pages; thin neck, thin legs, thin hands, and so forth. And this external sign completely reflects the inner state of Vereshchagin, his relation to the mob. That is the customary method of Tolstoy, from the visible to the invisible, from the external to the inner, from the bodily to the spiritual, or at least, to the emotional.

At times these body characteristics are bound up in a most profound basic thought, in the main-spring action. Such is the obesity of Kutuzov, the field-marshal of the Russian forces. The shapeless, heavy, clumsy, obese body of the elderly man is significant of a passionless, contemplative impassiveness of his intellect; of a Christian, or even better, of a Buddhist negation of one's own will, and submission to the will of fate or God. In the eyes of Tolstoy he is preeminently a Russian hero, a people's hero of inactivity or rather of passivity, as opposed to the vain fruitless activity of Napoleon, the impulsive, conceited hero of Western culture.

Not less profound is the characteristic "Roundness" of the other typically Russian hero, Platon Karataev, the illiterate peasant-soldier. "Platon Karataev," says the author, "remained for Pierre Bezukhov the deepest and most precious impression. He personified everything that is simple, truthful, Russian, kind and round. When Pierre saw him the next morning, his first impression of something round was completely confirmed. The entire figure of Platon was round, the head was

completely round, the back, the chest, the shoulders, even the hands were round. Pierre even sensed something round in the body odor of this man." The roundness personified for Tolstoy that eternal, impassive sphere of everything that is simple, *en rapport* with nature, the elemental spirit of the Russian people. Roundness suggests total absence of differentiation, of individualization. Platon's life taken by itself has no meaning. It has a meaning only as a part of a whole which he constantly felt. It is a negation of personality. Platon is a molecule. Roundness equals impersonality, it is a symbol. Here we see how Tolstoy expresses by means of an external physical sign an enormous abstract generalization bound up in the most fundamental principles of his artistic, philosophic and religious creed.

This generalizing quality of expression is sometimes possessed by an individual member of the body, for example, by Napoleon's hands. When, during the meeting of the emperors, Napoleon pins the order of legion d'honneur upon a Russian soldier, "He removes the glove from his small white hand and, having torn it, throws it away." A few lines farther we read; "Napoleon withdrew his small pudgy hand."

But not content to show Napoleon's hands, the author permits the reader to see the naked body of the hero. He divests him of the vain external insignia of human power and grandeur and returns him to the first, the common principle of animal nature, as if to convince him that this demi-god is made of the same frail mortal flesh as the rest of us, that his body is no different from that which in his estimation is "*chair à canon*" — cannon fodder. On the morning preceding the battle of Borodino, the emperor is completing his toilette in a tent. "He turned his thick back, then his fat chest to the brush of the valet, while another valet sprinkled eau-de-cologne on the pampered body of the emperor." "The white pudgy hand, the rather fat body," indicate in the author's mind a lack of acquaintanceship with physical labor and an affinity

with the idle class "which sits on the shoulders of the working people," that "canaille," people with soiled hands, whom he so lightheartedly sent to death as cannon fodder with one movement of his white hand.

When Vronskiy sees Anna Karenina for the first time, he recognizes at once that she belongs to the aristocratic world, that she is beautiful, that her lips are red and that her grey eyes are luminous and that an excess of something fills her entire being and in spite of herself is manifested in her eyes, and in her smile. And as the narrative unfolds a trait is gradually added to a trait. During the conversation with her sister-in-law Dolly, Anna grasps her hand "with her energetic small hand." Tanya, Dolly's daughter, playing with Anna, removes the ring from a white tapering finger. Anna's hands are more expressive of her charm than even her face. The essence of that charm is a combination of delicacy and strength. She holds herself very erect. Her gait is light, impetuous and determined. In dancing she displays a definite grace, lightness and precision of movements. Even in the disobedient ringlets of her coiffure, there is the same tension, the same excess, as in the radiance of her eyes and in the involuntary smile playing between her eyes and her lips. And, finally, when she appears at the ball, we are privileged to see her nude body; "A black, low-cut velvet gown displayed her full shoulders and bosom which appeared as if carved from old ivory, her beautifully rounded arms and slender wrists." All these scattered traits, these small insignificant remarks, complete one another so that quite naturally, and without an effort on our part, there is formed before our eyes one whole living, particular, personal being. We feel, when we lay the book down, that we have seen Anna Karenina with our own eyes and that we would recognize her at once upon meeting her.

The language of body movements, if not as varied as the language of words, is more immediate, more expressive and more suggestive. Tolstoy utilizes with inimitable skill this

inverted relationship between the external and the internal.

After the battle of Borodino, in a tent for the wounded, a doctor in a bloody apron, and with blood-smeared fingers holds a cigar between the little finger and the thumb so as not to soil it. The position of the fingers suggests what? — Continuous horrible work, absence of squeamishness, indifference to wounds and blood as a result of a long habit; as well as fatigue and a desire to relax. The complexity of all these inner states is focused in one little physical detail — in the position of the two fingers, the description of which occupies one half of a line.

This gift of Tolstoy's which Merezhkovskiy so aptly called "the clairvoyance of flesh," is not limited to human beings. The description of Fru-Fru, the horse Vronskiy rides in the race, is no less remarkable than that of Anna. There is a striking parallelism in the appearance and the fate of the two. You will recall that Vronskiy's first impression of Anna was that she belonged to the upper world. In the description of the horse we read, "she was not without faults. But she had one quality which outweighed all possible faults; she was a thoroughbred." The bodily configuration of both is sharply delineated and determined, combining grace with force, delicacy with strength. Both are possessed of impetuous lightness and precision of movements, together with a *passionate, supercharged, stormy*, pent up orgiastic excess of life. Like Anna, Fru-Fru "without words" understands her master. Between the master and the horse there is a peculiar relationship, not only bodily, animal, but emotional as well. Vronskiy loves his horse not as an animal, but almost as a rational being, as a woman. Fru-Fru, woman-like, loves her master's power, and like Anna, she will obey that terrible but sweet power even unto death, to the very last breath. And the inevitable tragedy of love, the eternal tragedy, the childish play of Eros will destroy both.

I am tempted to give one more example of Tolstoy's art.

In *War and Peace*, Pierre sees Natasha after a long separation and the death of her fiance, Prince Andrey. She has changed to such an extent, that he does not recognize her. "No, this cannot be she," he thought. "That severe, thin, pale, aged face. It cannot be she." But at that moment Princess Maria said, "Natasha. And the face with attentive eyes, with effort and difficulty with which a rusty door is opened, smiled, and out of that door a wave of happiness seized him and swallowed him up. When she smiled, all doubts vanished, it was Natasha and he loved her." During this most important and determining scene in this entire novel, four words are uttered by Princess Maria, "You do not recognize?" But we feel that Natasha's silent smile is stronger than words, and that Pierre's fate will be sealed by it.

We have looked at both aspects of Tolstoy and now let us attempt a co-relation of the two, a synthesis. It is quite evident that there is a striking disproportion between the subconscious creative power of the man, that which we call genius, and his conscious mind or intellect. To quote Merezhkovskiy: "His genius is too big for his mind, or his mind is too small for his genius." His great contemporary, Dostoevskiy, with customary keenness, puts his finger on the problem in a most succinct manner. "Tolstoy" says he, "despite the enormous creative genius, belongs to that type of Russian that sees only what is directly in front of him, and for that reason aims at that point only. To turn the neck to the right or to the left, in order to examine what is on both sides, he is, apparently, unable to do. Were he able to do so, he would at once proceed to state the very opposite, for in any event, he is always utterly sincere." When Tolstoy states that all the scientific discoveries from Newton to Helmholtz, "all these," as he puts it, "investigations of protoplasm, of molecular dimensions, the spectral analysis of stars, are unnecessary and nonsensical when compared with that science of the good of the people." he does just what Dostoevskiy says — he aims at one

point. After that one is not surprised to learn that Shakespeare is a mediocre talent, that Napoleon was a little fool and that ancient Greeks "were a semi-savage, slave-holding people who were highly skilled in portraying the nude body and in erecting buildings pleasing to the eye, but who were morally deficient. All nudity is ugly even that of Venus de Milo, and art of that kind ought to be destroyed since its only aim is to spread immorality."

In his novel "The Adolescent," Dostoevskiy, the proletarian, points to a contrast between himself—the "creator of 'casual' Russian families," and Tolstoy, the painter of finished types of the titled gentry of the past. "If I were a Russian novelist," says Vereshilov, "I would pick my heroes from the class of titled gentry, for it is only in this type of cultured Russians that one observes a semblance of a graceful decorum and elegant impression. I speak earnestly, though, of course, I am anything but a nobleman. Here there were at least definite types with a sense of honor and obligation. Our novelist's position would be quite clear, he could write in the historical sense only, for the elegant type is no longer in existence."

This profound observation throws a flood of light on the social genesis of Tolstoy's art. His philosophy and his art, his ethical and social ideals, were predetermined primarily by his affinity with the class of the landed gentry. The other determining factor was the crisis of the feudal order which came with the liberation of the serfs in 1861. In Tolstoy's works two images are apparent. One is that of the despairing and dying noble, the other that of the declassé seeking to identify himself with the peasant.

In the period before the reform of serfdom, the "penitent noble" attempts to appease his conscience and to oppose the advent of capitalism by creating a social idyll such as we have seen in "The Squire's Morning." The reform of 1861 put an end to that dream. A new class, the bourgeois, was replacing the landed aristocracy. In "War and Peace," the nobles domin-

ate the scene both socially and culturally, but in Anna Karenina they are not nearly so important. Here the center of gravity shifts to Levin who suffers acutely the degradation of his class, even to the point of questioning the very purpose and essence of life. As always happens, the more sensitive and more advanced members of a class facing a catastrophe, members of a class about to be thrown into discard, usually desert it and seek to identify themselves with some other class. Tolstoy ignored the new classes and groups which arose in the second half of the 19th century, such as the bourgeois, the intelligentsia and the proletariat. For him there existed but two classes, the peer and the peasant. He ardently wished to fuse with the peasant, to become a real Russian muzhik. *Hence the puerile affectation of a peasant's garb, the cobbler's tools, and so forth.* "I am more of a muzhik than you are," he once said to Maxim Gorky. When Tolstoy took his ground against capitalism it was primarily as against the despoiler of the village. His sermon was utopian and in a sense reactionary. *Its final goal was not socialism, but a patriarchal peasant anarchistic commune.*

He remained in his old age a lone and pathetic figure. His search for religious affirmation brought him doubts and despair. He was even less fortunate in his search for the solution of the the political and economic ills of his age. The parasitic existence of his class wallowing in luxury and in sins and the hopeless and degrading poverty of the peasant and the working class caused him intense suffering and humiliation.

Maxim Gorky in his "Reminiscences" makes this statement: "Tolstoy is a national writer in the truest sense of the word. He embodied in his enormous soul all our shortcomings, all the malformations wrought by our long history. His vague sermon of 'inactivity,' 'of non-resistance of evil,' all that is the unhealthy fermentation of the old Russian blood poisoned with Mongolian fatalism and, so to say, chemically inimical to the West with its tireless productive work, with its active resistance to life's evils. There have appeared among

us those who have sensed that our light is to come not from the East, but from the West. But Tolstoy consciously or unconsciously interposes himself as a huge mountain on our road to Europe, to active life."

At the height of the most abominable reaction following the abortive revolution of 1905, in the asphyxiating atmosphere of official public opinion, it was Tolstoy, the last Christian apostle of forgiveness, who threw down his challenge in his public letter, "I Cannot Be Silent," as a condemnation of those who did the hanging, as well as of those who remained silent. We shall always appreciate in him not only his great genius, but likewise that unyielding moral courage which did not permit him to remain within their church, their society and their government, and condemned him to loneliness amidst innumerable admirers. In spite of the profound difference between the teaching of Tolstoy and the teaching of socialism there is a deep moral kinship between the two: the honesty and fearlessness of their defiance of violence and slavery, and an unconquerable striving for brotherly love.

On October 20th, 1910, Tolstoy left his home and family to spend his last days in accordance with his doctrine. During his flight he became ill at Astapovo, a small railway station, and died one week later on Nov. 4th, 1910, at the age of 82.