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COUNT TOLSTOY'S SOCIOLOGICAL VIEWS.

FROM AN INTERVIEW.

BY THE REVEREND EDWARD A. STEINER.

WHEN I first saw Tolstoy, fifteen years ago, he was a victor fresh from the battle-field, chasing darkness from his own heart. It was the time of experiments in bearing burdens, plowing fields, and mending shoes; and all these things, which cost him many a tear and many a sweat-drop, seemed fanatical, useless, and profitless, when writing a line might have brought dollars which would have enriched the poor. But the poor became enriched by Tolstoy's bending of the back over the sandy soil of Yasnya's beautiful fields. He bore their burdens; he learned of their woe. He was following in the Master's steps; thus the Master did, and for the selfsame purpose.

At that time a beautiful boy with dreamy eyes was playing about his feet; a child, Danielo, the idol of his heart, the child of his old age. With ruthless consequence Providence asked him who preached renunciation as the first condition of entrance into life, asked him to give up this treasure, and the death angel came and took him: and the great heart throbbed, but was silent; and the blue eyes glistened, but held back the tears. It was the time of his greatest reaction against society and the church, and much of that which he said then and did then, has either vanished or has melted itself into his life. To-day the ruggedness still remains; but the mountain is covered by snow, and the bowlders sleep underneath the coverlid of Heaven's eiderdown. The rough, discordant truths have in them still the ring of conviction; but there is melody in what he says, music in his voice, and charm in his gesture and movement.

Like all Russian villages, Yasnaya has one street, very broad, very dirty, and very crudely built, although a few brick houses are in process of construction. The children seem a little better clad, and the peasants a little more washed, than those of other villages. It also differs from other villages in Russia in that it has a hill, and at the foot of that hill is a dense park, and within that park lives the Count. The entrance is flanked by two homely little towers. To the left is a duck pond, which, in former days, was a boating-place. Further on to the right, in the clearing, what seems like a forest, is a tennis ground, and there is much

merry laughter as we approach, for the love game has invaded the Count's domain and has found many fair victims.

The Count was expecting me, and hardly had I stepped from my bone-breaking telega, when that voice of long ago, weakened somewhat by illness and mellowed by age, greeted me heartily, and I was asked to accompany him on his walk, which proved to be the most interesting part of my visit to him. His form was somewhat bent, his hair whiter, his sharp eyes still keen, but warmer, and the touch of his hand was as firm, but more cordial.

The portraits of him which we see are very fair likenesses, though they present a mountain without the light of the sun, beaten metal without the glow of the fire. The face does not belong to any race; it is not Slavic, certainly not Teutonic. It is a face of the original humanity as it came fresh from the hand of God, and made at a time when there was much to create, and the details seem to have been left out. His eyes are too small, the nose large, the cheek bones have not been chiseled down into their proper places. His step is still elastic, and to walk with him and not have to run is an impossibility, especially for such a short-limbed creature as myself.

We walked through the park, its strong oaks shading the path unto darkness, and stepped out into the fields and meadows of Yasnaya. This place he loves passionately, and every tree and shrub seems to greet him as he passes it. Undulating fields are circled by dense beech woods whose silvery bark reflects now the light of the sinking sun. The nightingales are singing their joyous songs; singing of love and gladness. They have been witnesses of struggles and trials, and in response to their songs have heard many a sigh.

We stepped out upon the road which leads toward Moskow, the road which has been the Mecca of many a pilgrim. They came driving or walking, laden by riches and woe, seeking peace. Sons of rich men who had wasted their all; students, who, in the half-awakening of their minds, were lost in doubt and were seeking a path for themselves; women who had transgressed and who had been sinned against, came hither, to seek peace and life. They came like John the Baptist into the wilderness, some of them repelled by the locusts and wild honey, others putting their shoulder to the task, making hay while the sun shone, raising blisters upon delicate hands, but growing strong in nature's sanitarium and with God's physician.

The peasants whom we met, returning from their day's labor still with elastic step and graceful motion, were remarkably well clad, and the women were remarkably handsome. They all greeted him reverently, and he had a word for each. There was no condescension on his part, no worship on the part of the peasants. They love the Count, and yet not so much as one might expect from what we have read; for, if you hear them tell the story, they will say, "The Count has done nothing

for us," and yet he has won them from drink; he has kept them from starvation; he has roused them from ignorance. He did not make, nor did he care to make, paupers of them, for what he requires of himself, he requires of others; namely, to give everything, and ask nothing in return.

In spite of the Count's peasant dress, his coarse linen blouse, the common black belt, and mended boots, there are ages between him and the peasant, and, in spite of himself, he towers above them. He is the Count; they are the peasants. To be as near to them as he is, has cost him endless struggle. Many a time the spirit of his ancestors rose within him, and he stretched his hand toward the cane which had danced so lustily upon the backs of the Mujicks in olden days, for they did exasperate him; yet he always withdrew. But those eyes could not help smiting the offender and cowing him into submission.

He had strange ways of educating his peasants, educating them through hardship, through sacrifice. When one told him that there were only three spades in the village, he told him it was well thus; for, in lending, they were learning to love. It is a method which often works the other way. He has stumbled and fallen like all mortals, and plowed into his face are the furrows of woe, drawn by disappointment. He has had a weary road toward the cross—or rather, underneath the cross—and many a time he has fallen, bleeding and cursing.

On we walked toward the setting sun between the ripened grain-stacks. Rabbits ran by us fearlessly, and the field birds were not frightened from their nests; for it is a long, long time since the last gunshot wounded one of God's creatures. The nightingale grew silent, the crickets chirped, and in melancholy mood we talked of failing health and coming death. Breaking into a silent moment, I asked him, "Count, what about the future? I mean the future of humanity. What will be the ultimate form of society?" "The future," he answered, "is with God to know, and for us to prepare. Our business is to live right now, and God will make all things right then." Startling was his remark about Socialism. "The greatest enemy to humanity is this Social Democracy. It is the preparation for a new slavery. It teaches a future good, without a present betterment. It promises golden streets without the bloody Gethsemane." "But, isn't Socialism a preparation for an ideal state?" I asked. "No; indeed not. It is just the contrary. It will regulate everything, put everything under law. It will destroy the individual; it will enslave him. Socialism begins at the wrong end. You cannot organize anything until you have individuals. You are making chaos instead of cosmos. You will breed terrorism and confusion which only brute force will be able to quell. Socialism begins to regulate the world away from itself. *You must make yourself right, before the world around you can be made right.* No matter how wrongly the world deals with you, if you are right, the world will not harm you, and you may bring it

to your way of thinking. The modern labor-leader wishes to liberate the masses while he himself is a slave."

While he spoke his eyes rested firmly upon me; the sentences came from his lips like water from a spring. There was no possibility of replying; one could not disagree with him. He continued his speech—a sermon among the oaks which I alone heard—waking in me the consciousness of the self; impressing upon me the value of the individual and the power of the soul. He did not overawe or master me, but he made me master of myself. What he said there in his own speech, in that language which has all the melody of the Italian and all the forcefulness of the German, sounded in my ear like a recall to fundamental Christian ideas. I seemed to feel like Nicodemus, who heard as news what he should have known as a fact: "You must be born again." It resounded in the silence of the forest: "You must deny yourself; give up—renounce—sacrifice—follow me." These were the echoes of his speech. "You must teach the whole truth—no half-truth. If you teach that, you lie," and his voice rolled like thunder, and his eyes flashed lightning. "Young man," he continued, and he touched my shoulder, and his eyes searched mine, "art thou a teacher in Israel, and knowest not these things? What right have you to teach that which is not the word of Jesus?" He said this not in anger, but firmly and kindly.

"What do you teach about salvation?" he asked me abruptly. I told him. "You men," he said in reply, "are just beginning to see that salvation is not by magic, and that a man's salvation begins in the struggle of his own soul, and ends when he believes the words of Jesus." I asked him to tell me his view. "You remember my paragraph about the thief on the cross?" I asked him to repeat it, and he said, "Like the thief on the cross, I believe in the doctrine of Jesus, and this has made me whole. I once was filled by despair of life, and fear of death, but am now full of happiness and peace. Like the thief, I knew that my past and present life was vile. I knew that I was wretched and suffering, and that all those about me suffered and were wretched, and I saw nothing but death to save me from this condition. I was nailed to the cross of suffering and sin; and, as the thief saw before him, after the sufferings of a foolish life, the horrible shadows of death, so I beheld the grave opening before me. In all this I felt like the thief, but he was about to die; I still lived. Just as soon as I understood the words of Jesus, life and death ceased to be evil, and I tasted a joy which death cannot take away. That is salvation within the reach of everyone."

We had run our ten miles, and many a mile deep into the heart of things. We had wandered aimlessly into a forest, and path and highway were both lost to us. It seemed strange that just then he was belaboring me because of my Christological views, for all at once he said, "I have lost the way." "We are in the woods," I replied, and he

caught the meaning of this slang phrase, and said, "No; not I. I will find the path, which is the law of Christ, and we will be out of the woods soon. You will wander in the darkness, though you say you see a great light; but the main thing is to see the path, and that you haven't found. It can be found only by giving up,—surrendering all,—and that is the reason that so few enter into the narrow gate. Young man," he said, taking my arm, and leading me over tangled underbrush, speaking in a half whisper, "sell all that thou hast." It was a call to a consecration which was far from formal speech. Deeper and deeper cut his convincing words; and then we found the path, and walked upon it toward the well-lighted, welcoming house.

The dogs danced about the dear old Count, and I made the acquaintance of Biolok, a Siberian sledge-dog, a liberated creature, whose former masters are but slaves, whom the Count would like to liberate also. Rushing out of the house came a well-knit youth, of some eighteen years, who embraced the Count affectionately—a boy disciple from a neighboring estate who had just returned from a summer's campaign of education. He was clad in peasant garb, his face was strong and handsome, a youthful John who was seeking the approval of his master. Yet this master acted like a boy with his disciple—laughed, joked, pinched the young fellow, clapped his hands in glee. In fact, there was nothing grandiose about him. He was just a brother with a brother mortal. This is to me one of the most agreeable things about the Count—his humility. He never speaks of himself as a master, a prophet, or an apostle. He listens as if he were a pupil, and when I had finished an interview, it was always a question in my mind as to who did the interviewing.

Upon the subject of art the Count has decided ideas. In spite of his simple life, he has æsthetic views which he seeks to satisfy. His contention with modern art is, that it has not created its own standard, but that it clings to pagan ideas which are unwholesome and unchristian. "Why," he said, "women make anatomical museums of their parlors, and call that displaying taste in art. The Greeks deified the body; our time should deify the spirit, and only that is art for us which represents spirit, which not only holds up the mirror to the times, but which also says what the times should be. There is no such a thing as art for art's sake, but there is such a thing as art for truth's sake. If art is here to give pleasure, it must be true pleasure. The art for to-day must be the art of to-day, and not the art and ideals of centuries ago. Our worship of the product of old masters is often a blind following of blind leaders, and disastrous to households and nations. Just as much as I wish the women with whom I associate to be decently clad, just so much do I require of the art with which I surround myself." These seem to me sound principles which we might heed.

From this subject it was easy to speak of Wagner and Nietsche, the latter having just died. "Nietsche," said the Count, "was the chief

egotist of the century, and, no doubt, he was abnormal even before he became insane. I have a theory," he continued, "that all insanity is due to egoism—too much thinking upon self; and if I ever visit an insane asylum I shall try to test this theory."

"Money, what a curse it is," the Count continued, without any seeming connection with our previous conversation. "It is cursing my own children, and I am delighted when they lose it. Doesn't it seem strange to you? Just so I should be delighted if Russia were whipped in China. You see that I am a dreadfully inconsistent individual."

Yes, he is a great piece of humanity, and he spoke as a man speaks who, half confused, is reaching up toward the Divine, yet he knows the way and walks upon it in undisturbed quiet, this great toiler in the deep of human suffering. In the twilight of our forest walk, or by the candle light in the sitting-room, I can but faintly draw his picture or echo his thoughts. To understand him one must not only read him, but one must meet him; see the kernel in the human shell; hear the giant in thought ring out his defiance against church and state, and see him, the repentant sinner, smiting his breast; see him fighting like a giant and toddling like a child, his arms stretched out toward the mute sky; a king dealing out of his treasury, a beggar asking for mercy. Tolstoy reaches the greatest heights because he walks upon the lowest plain. Everywhere is seen in him the incomplete, the struggling, the inconsistent.

He is a rationalist, and yet so mystical and spiritual that one may see Heaven's glow in his eyes and a halo about his head. He is an individualist. He calls out the liberating words of Paul, "Stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made you free," and yet he is bound to humanity by every suffering nervestring. The worst that can be said of Tolstoy is just this: he is incomplete, but he is honest. He is cruelly honest. It is an honesty which becomes almost a travesty in the blurred light of our own day. Yet he means to help, though he hurts in the helping. He believes it is easy to be happy by renunciation, if we overcome that which makes us unhappy. "It is better for thee to enter into life halt and maimed," and he is entering thus—poor because riches would cast him into hellfire. He has entered the narrow gate which so many seek and so few find, because it can be found only by those who will climb the rugged steeps which lead to it.

A few orthodox thoughts came to me in this unorthodox atmosphere. The first was, that the spirit is to-day the most powerful agency in the world. For example, here is an unprotected man, who hates the sight of guns, living in a military country under despotic government, attacking it mercilessly, yet he remains unharmed. Here he lives in this isolated spot, humbly, hating notoriety, seeking not the praise and companionship of men, yet this small place has been sought by the hungry eyes of thousands, and his name is trumpeted by the lips of the weak and ignorant. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit," saith the Lord.

Another thought came to me forcibly, and it is this: the need of emphasizing to-day the new birth. We have reacted so much against the emotional element in conversion that we have no conversion at all. I felt in Yasna something of the pangs of the new birth; what it means to unwrap one's self from the cocoon of selfishness and sin and feel the glory of taking wing as God's liberated child. There came to me there in the stillness the call to heroic sacrifice, "Zur Entsagung." To renounce the world, the flesh, and the devil—all these old truths knocked again at my heart as they never had before. In some way, old truths became new truths. I have since that time seen resting upon them the real light, as if I had walked awhile with Him of old who called to his disciples to forsake all and follow Him.

I missed one thing in Tolstoy—we all miss it—because of his agnostic view in regard to the person of Christ. It robs the Count of a precious experience, of a personal companion, of much which makes spiritual atmosphere. I missed that in him, but he missed more in me, and misses more in us. I hold the Christ Divine, and would not let him be robbed of one jewel in his royal diadem, and put no one above Him. To Tolstoy this is a matter of no interest; it matters not who Christ was; but when one reads the Gospel, it is not enough to say it is divine and then put the custom of a place, the law of a country, above it. Tolstoy illustrated this point thus: "I was passing one day before the Borovitsky gate at Moscow. Under this gate was an old lame beggar with a dirty cloth wrapped about his head. I wished to give him alms, but at that moment a soldier rushed from the Kremlin, wearing the state insignia of military dignity. The beggar fled at his approach. The grenadier, after a vain attempt to come up with the fugitive, poured forth imprecations upon him. He spoke in the name of the law. I immediately asked the grenadier: Have you read the New Testament? He replied that he had. I recalled to him the passage which begins, 'If thine enemy hunger, feed him.' The soldier was troubled at first, and then replied: And do you know anything about military regulations? After that he returned triumphantly to his post." Here was proclaimed by a poor, ignorant man, the opposition between the gospel of love and the regulations of hatred; between the doctrine of Jesus, full of compassion, and the social state, built of pitiless laws.

He was the only man that I ever met, who had solved with an inflexible logic the question which eternally confronts us in social relations, rising continually before every man who calls himself a Christian. Those who are shocked at the least suggestion of qualifying the divinity of Jesus, often qualify his teachings. Here Tolstoy is as firm as a rock. To him the words of Jesus are the words of God. These are his words to me that night: "It does not matter to me who Jesus was. I can get along without knowing or saying, but the words of Jesus are divine; without them I cannot live." Strange, hard words they were, and they

shocked me, but have I not read somewhere, "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me"? There is almost an antagonism to the church which is painful, and one could wish it were not so, but do you know what church it is and what Christ it preaches, and what lives are lived by those who profess to be his ministers?

No; he is not a Christ, but he is a John the Baptist; his gospel is written on the tablets of Moses; his beatitudes have in them the ring of the ten commandments. They were graven by the finger of Jehovah, not spoken by the gentle Jesus. But his way of preaching the gospel reaches where our way does not reach; his gospel reaches the lowest and brings the greatest low. It is a gospel which cannot be misunderstood; it is as clear as noonday. It is a gospel which rouses in man the will, which awakens the soul, and lifts it from its slumber or sloth to a large life and to heroic service. God needs such men in this, his day—large men who live above the fog; great men ready to sacrifice for righteousness' sake. There are too few who do not hedge and halt and trim, who dare to bear the brunt; too many time-servers, dust-lickers, who grow like mushrooms in the shade, and who die like morning-glories in the broad sunlight; too few of us who believe that the Gospels are for this time and forever, and who are willing that the Kingdom of God should come within us. This is Tolstoy's great cry: "The Kingdom of God is within you, and you are to be the pattern after which the Kingdom of this world is to fashion itself."

"Young man," he said, and they were almost the last words he spoke, "you sweat too much blood for the world; sweat some for yourself first. You cannot make the world better till you are better."

I have seen many a mountain and I love them all,—the Jungfrau in her chastity, Mt. Blanc with his icy collar, the Monk, hooded and shrouded,—but there is one rock standing alone, towering above the village of Zermatt, bride of the sky, mother of life-giving waters, now shrouded in mystic clouds, now sharp and clear standing between earth and sky. It is the solitary Matterhorn which I love best. The Matterhorn among the great is Tolstoy. I still feel resting upon me those eyes with their life-giving warmth; I still hear the mellow voice which persistently but lovingly said, "Young man, you cannot make the world better until you are better," and then I said, "Good night." I may never again say to him, "Good night," but I trust I shall say, "Good morning."