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the Religion of Science, and the Extension
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FOUNDED BY EDWARD C. HEGELER

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
<i>Frontispiece.</i> COUNT LEO TOLSTOY.	
<i>The Religious Evolution of Tolstoy.</i> J. V. NASH.....	641
<i>Psychological Chaos.</i> DR. D. E. PHILLIPS.....	658
<i>Birth-Months of Genius.</i> CHARLES KASSEL.....	677
<i>Mo Tse.</i> H. G. CREEL.....	696
<i>The Great Miracle.</i> (Poem) CHARLES S. REID.....	704

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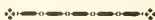
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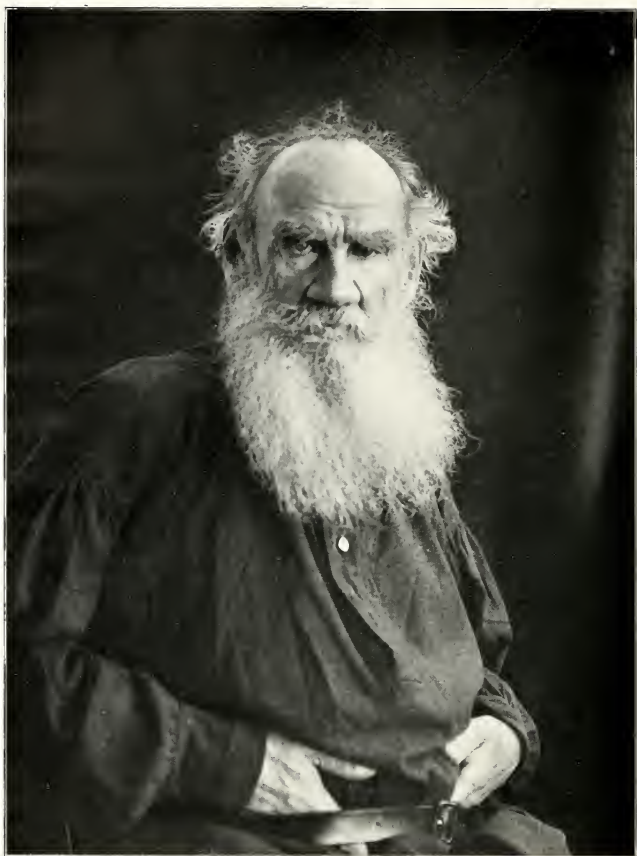
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COUNT LEO TOLSTOY

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Volume XLIII (No. 11) NOVEMBER, 1929

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THE RELIGIOUS EVOLUTION OF TOLSTOY

BY J. V. NASH

WHILE the echoes of the Tolstoy centenary of 1928 still linger in the air, it is a timely moment to compare, or rather contrast, the religious evolution of the great Russian seer with that of his illustrious English contemporary, Charles Darwin; for these two thinkers stand out today as the ones who most profoundly, in their day, impressed world thought; the one from the standpoint of physical science, the other from that of social science and religion.

The study will be interesting for another reason. In my article, "The Religious Evolution of Darwin" (*Open Court*, August, 1928), I pointed out that Darwin is a striking example of the human type described by William James as the "once born," by which he meant those whose outlook upon the world is one of healthy optimism, who are never shaken by emotional crises, and who enjoy, in a spirit of quiet thankfulness, the good things of this life. Tolstoy is an equally typical representative of the "twice born," i.e., those who are torn by an inner conflict, who experience severe emotional disturbance, and who attain equilibrium and interior peace only through a process of "conversion," by which their disharmony is resolved into harmony through the establishment of satisfying relations with God, the universe, or some spiritual power which gives support and purpose to their lives.

In terms of modern advanced psychology, Darwin was an extravert, Tolstoy an introvert.

A preliminary glance at Tolstoy's ancestry will throw light upon the turbulent heredity which formed his background. His ancestor, the first Count Tolstoy, was Peter the Great's ambassador to the

Sublime Porte. He received his title, which he passed on to his descendants, for his service in enticing the Crown Prince, Tsarevich Alexis, back from Italy to Russia, that he might be killed. Leo Tolstoy was this Machiavellian diplomat's great-grandson.

The father of Tolstoy's mother was Prince Volkonsky, who rose to the position of Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Army under the notorious Empress Catherine; he was summarily deposed and disgraced for "refusing to marry the niece and mistress of Potemkin, the most powerful of Catherine the Great's favorites."

Leo's father, Count Nicholas Tolstoy, entered the army before he was seventeen, to help resist Napoleon's invasion of Russia in 1812. Falling into the hands of the enemy, he was taken as a prisoner of war, first to Germany, and later to Paris. Returning home after the peace, he found the family estates heavily encumbered, and his mother—a woman of luxurious tastes—dependent upon him for support. Well wishing friends helped the young man out of his difficulty by arranging a marriage for him with the extremely wealthy but plain featured Princess Mary Volkonsky, several years older than himself. The lady was highly educated, had many accomplishments, and seems to have made a good wife and mother.

The couple had five children: four sons in succession, of whom Leo was the youngest, and then a daughter, Mary, in giving birth to whom the mother died. Leo Tolstoy, born on August 28 (new style, September 9), 1828, was only a year and a half old when his mother died. Naturally, he had no recollection of her, but he idealized her to such an extent in his imagination that, as he tells us, he used to pray to her for guidance amid the temptations of life, and "such prayer always helped me much."

Nicholas, the oldest of the four sons, seems to have been of a highly imaginative nature. When Leo was five, Nicholas informed his three little brothers that he was in possession of a wonderful secret, "by means of which, when disclosed, all men would become happy: there would be no more disease, no trouble, no one would be angry with anybody, all would love one another, and all would become 'Ant-Brothers.'" The little boys organized an "Ant-Brotherhood," cuddling together under chairs and in large boxes. But the great secret was not revealed to them. Nicholas told the neophytes that he had written the secret on a green stick which was buried at the roadside on the edge of a certain ravine.

Leo, in after life, said that he suspected that Nicholas had heard something about the Freemasons, their ideals of human brotherhood and their secret initiatory rites, and also of the Moravian Brothers (the religious sect deriving from John Huss), the Russian word for *ant* being "muravey."

The impression made upon Leo Tolstoy by this playful fiction of Nicholas was so profound that he never outgrew it. His whole life ultimately became centered upon the quest for the secret of the miraculous "green stick," which would banish evil from the world and usher in the millennium. When an old man of over seventy, he wrote:

"The ideal of Ant-Brothers lovingly clinging to one another, though not under two arm-chairs curtained by shawls, but of all mankind under the wide dome of heaven, has remained the same for me. As I then believed that there existed a little green stick whereon was written the message which could destroy all evil in men and give them universal welfare, so I now believe that such truth exists and will be revealed to men and will give them all it promises."

The family estate where Tolstoy was born was called Yasnaya Polyana, meaning "Bright Glade." It was located about 130 miles south of Moscow, in a pleasantly undulating country, well wooded and with many avenues of lime and birch trees. Tolstoy's extraordinary confidence in himself was no doubt partly due to his family having been for generations the only people of education and authority in a wide territory. The absence of free public discussion in Russia further encouraged a dogmatic attitude toward his own opinions.

Outwardly, Tolstoy's childhood seems to have been happy. As a member of a numerous household, in easy economic circumstances, he had no environmental encouragement to isolation and introspection. Even the game of the Ant-Brothers and the mystification of the green stick would have been treated as fun and quickly forgotten by a child of different temperament. As it was, there were dogs and horses, hunting, and all sorts of outdoor amusements to divert his attention. The result was that, notwithstanding his sensitive spirit, these years of childhood were filled with healthy pleasures that only the most fortunate children are privileged to enjoy.

If there was ever a man who, from a purely selfish point of

view had no reason to rebel against the economic and political *status quo*, which guaranteed him all these good things, it was Tolstoy. Yet such is the unaccountability of human nature, that he was destined to become the deadliest enemy of existing institutions, religious, economic, and political. But this was all hidden in the future, and meanwhile life flowed on happily in "Bright Glade." While still a young child, Tolstoy became a skilled horseman, and horseback riding remained for life a favorite form of exercise.

At the age of thirteen, Leo, with his brothers, went to Kazan, where they entered the university, making their home with an aunt. It is said that the atmosphere of Kazan was not such as would inspire an enthusiasm for learning. Leo Tolstoy registered with the faculty of Oriental Languages; although he made good progress in French and German, he failed in his final examinations at the end of the first year—possibly because of the social distractions in the town—and transferred to the faculty of Law.

Tolstoy at this time was noted for his fine clothes and the care he paid to his personal appearance. A fellow-student speaks of his snobbishness, being driven to his classes by a "fast trotter," while the poorer students went on foot. It appears, too, that he joined a narrow clique of "aristocrats" at the university.

In May, 1847, before he was nineteen, Tolstoy left the university without completing his course or receiving a degree. His failure seems to have caused him deep humiliation; at any rate, after returning to Yasnaya Polyana he compiled a formidable program of subjects for private study.

We get a touch of Benjamin Franklin in the statement of Tolstoy's English biographer, Aylmer Maude, who lived in Russia for many years and knew Tolstoy intimately, that he "was always forming good resolutions and writing them down, but they were never carried out fully, and often not at all." In the same spirit, while at the university, he began the keeping of a diary in which he carefully noted all his derelictions, particularly offenses against the Seventh Commandment, so that he might repent of them and correct them. The truth is that Tolstoy was burdened with a strongly sensual physical nature, which in these years only too often overmastered his powers of resistance.

While at the university, Tolstoy had met an idealistic fellow-student named Dyakov, with whom he formed a close friendship.

The effect of this friendship, he tells us, was "an ecstatic worship of the ideal of virtue, and the conviction that it is man's destiny continually to perfect himself. To put all mankind right and to destroy all human vices and misfortunes appeared a matter that could well be accomplished. It seemed quite easy and simple to put oneself right, to acquire all the virtues, and to be happy."

A pretty large order, as Tolstoy was soon to realize.

This moral enthusiasm was accompanied by a loss of his religious orthodoxy. Years later he wrote:

"I was baptized and brought up in the Christian Orthodox faith. I was taught it in my childhood and all through my boyhood and youth. But before I left the University, in my second year, at the age of eighteen, I no longer believed anything I had been taught."

It was characteristic of him, however, that although he had become intellectually an Agnostic, his diary reveals that he continued to pray frequently and with earnestness, turning to God for help in time of trouble.

The deepest influence upon Tolstoy at this time seems to have been Rousseau.

"I read the whole of Rousseau. I was more than enthusiastic about him, I worshipped him. At the age of fifteen I wore a medallion portrait of him next my body, instead of the Orthodox cross. Many of his pages are so akin to me that it seems to me that I must have written them myself."

Having gone to school to Rousseau so assiduously at such an early age, it was perhaps inevitable that Tolstoy should some day turn his world upside down.

Next we find Tolstoy at St. Petersburg—as it then was—arranging to matriculate at the university there in Law. Then he changed his mind and wanted to enter the army to see service in the campaign against the Hungarian rebels, whom Russia was helping Austria suppress. But the balmy breezes of spring altered his plans. "Spring came," he says, "and the charm of country life again drew me back to my estate."

So he settled down at Yasnaya Polyana and, under the tutor-

ship of a convivial companion, a German named Rudolph whom he had picked up in St. Petersburg, he became a skilled pianist. His life during the next three years was a strange alternation of piety and debauchery. Aylmer Maude considers these years "among the wildest and most wasted years of his life." But the point is that he never yielded without reserve to vice. His conscience gave him no peace. The entries in his diary speak on in terms of self-reproach and penitence. In an access of contrition and resolve he drew up schedules of labor and study; but the schedules were neglected. "Gusts of passion again and again swept away his good resolution." In one of his periods of reformation he established a school for the peasant children of the district; at the end of two years, however, he had to close it because of financial embarrassment arising from losses in gambling.

Years later he told a friend that neither drinking nor gambling, nor any other vice, had caused him such a terrific struggle to overcome as did that of lasciviousness. It must not be imagined, however, that in this matter young Tolstoy was any different from the average young Russian aristocrat of that day. Even his aunt, whom he considered "the purest of beings," had amazingly loose views concerning what was allowable to a young man in the matter of his relations with women.

Head over ears in debts contracted at the gambling table, Tolstoy swore off from cards and decided to accompany his brother Nicholas, now an officer of artillery, to the Caucasus.

An interesting illustration of the spiritual *Strum und Drang* through which he was passing is found in the following entry made in his diary on June 11, 1851, during this sojourn in the Caucasus:

"Yesterday I hardly slept all night. Having posted up my Diary, I prayed to God. It is impossible to convey the sweetness of the feeling I experienced during my prayer. . . . I desired something supreme and good; but what, I cannot express, though I was clearly conscious of what I wanted. I wished to merge into the Universal Being. I asked Him to pardon my crimes; yet no, I did not ask for that, for I felt that if He had given me this blissful moment, He had pardoned me. I asked, and at the same time felt that I had nothing to ask, and that I cannot and do not

know how to ask; I thanked Him, but not with words or thoughts. I combined in one feeling both petition and gratitude. Fear quite vanished. I could not have separated any one emotion—faith, hope, or love—from the general feeling. No, this was what I experienced: it was love of God, lofty love, uniting in itself all that is good, excluding all that is bad. How dreadful it was to me to see the trivial and vicious side of life! I could not understand its having any attraction for me. With a pure heart I asked God to receive me into His bosom! I did not feel the flesh. . . . But no, the carnal, trivial side again asserted itself, and before an hour had passed I almost consciously heard the call of vice, vanity, and the empty side of life. I knew whence that voice came, knew it had ruined my bliss! I struggled against it and yielded to it. I fell asleep thinking of fame and of women; but it was not my fault, I could not help it."

So the conflict goes on, God on one side calling him, and Mephistopheles seductively beckoning on the other. A few days after the entry just quoted, he reflects at some length on suffering and death; then the lure of the flesh seizes him again. The entry concludes:

"How strong I seem to myself to be against all that can happen; how firm in the conviction that one must here expect nothing but death; yet a moment later I am thinking with pleasure of a saddle I have ordered on which I shall ride dressed in a Cossack cloak, and of how I shall carry on with the Cossack girls; and I fall into despair because my left moustache is thinner than my right, and for two hours I straighten it out before the looking-glass."

While he was not technically in the army, but only a sort of gentleman observer, his intrepidity in an expedition against the Tatars so favorable impressed the Commander-in-chief that he urged Leo to secure a military commission. While waiting in Tiflis to pass his examination, he composed his first story, "Childhood," which was sent to the editor of *The Contemporary* at St. Petersburg and promptly accepted.

As a lieutenant in the army Tolstoy saw much action and won

repeated recognition. In his leisure time he wrote more stories, and still further varied his program by falling in love with a charming native girl; but she discouraged his attentions because he did not sufficiently measure up to her "cave man" ideals.

In his diary at this time Tolstoy notes his chief weaknesses as gambling, sensuality, and vanity. Sensuality, as usual, he finds the most deadly of his temptations; "it increases with abstinence and therefore the struggle against it is very difficult. The best way is by labor and occupation."

Meanwhile, the Crimean War broke out. Tolstoy distinguished himself brilliantly* in the defense of Sebastopol. Then he yielded again to the lure of gambling, and in the fit of penitence following the debauch he busied himself with the idea of establishing a new religion. He writes in his diary:

"A conversation about Divinity and Faith has suggested to me a great and stupendous idea, to the realization of which I feel myself capable of devoting my life. This idea is the founding of a new religion corresponding to the present state of mankind: the religion of Christianity, but purged of dogma and mysticism: a practical religion, not promising future bliss but giving bliss on earth. I understand that to accomplish this the conscious labor of generations will be needed. One generation will bequeath the idea to the next, and some day fanaticism or reason will accomplish it. Deliberately to promote the union of mankind by religion—that is the basic thought which, I hope, will dominate me."

But the military campaign drew him back into more practical matters; in the following August he participated in the battle of Chernaya. The great fortress of Sebastopol was now about to fall, and Tolstoy was given the task of clearing two of the bastions before they were abandoned, as well as assembling the reports from the artillery commanders. His military service ended with his dispatch as courier to carry the reports to St. Petersburg.

In St. Petersburg Tolstoy fell in with a circle of literary men and led a Bohemian—indeed a somewhat disreputable—existence. One day the poet Fet, calling on Turgenev, saw a sword hanging in the hall, and a young officer, whose name he learned was Leo

Tolstoy, sprawled out asleep on the sofa in the sitting room. It was then ten o'clock in the morning. "He is like this all the time," Turgenev remarked. "He came back from his Sebastopol battery, put up here, and is going the pace. Sprees, gipsy-girls, and cards all night long—and then he sleeps like a corpse till two o'clock in the afternoon. At first I tried to put the brake on, but now I've given it up and let him do as he likes."

Yet Turgenev saw in Tolstoy even at this early period something more than a dissipated young officer. Some time later, writing from France to a friend in Russia, he said: "I hear that you have become very intimate with Tolstoy. . . . I am very glad. When that new wine has finished fermenting, it will yield a drink fit for the gods!"

Tolstoy, however, managed to keep sober long enough to turn out many stories; and, as usual, we find him bitterly reproaching himself for his many falls from grace. Some years later, in looking back on the hectic days of his youth, he wrote:

"I cannot think of those years without horror, loathing, and heartache. I killed men in war and challenged men to duels in order to kill them; I lost at cards, consumed the labor of the peasants, sentenced them to punishments, lived loosely and deceived people. Lying, robbery, adultery of all kinds, drunkenness, violence, murder—there was no crime I did not commit, and people approved of my conduct, and my contemporaries considered and consider me to be a comparatively moral man."

All in all, this period seemed to him a "terrible twenty years of coarse dissipation, the service of ambition, vanity, and above all of lust." Probably he exaggerates the picture, in the impetuosity of his penitence, just as Paul in the New Testament excoriates himself as the "chief of sinners." And then Tolstoy characteristically adds, "With all my soul I wished to be good; but I was young, passionate, and alone, completely alone, when I sought goodness."

When nearly thirty, Tolstoy went abroad, staying for a time in Paris, where he was deeply moved by seeing a criminal guillotined. But he was soon back in Russia. After a visit to St. Petersburg, where he found that he had been quickly forgotten, he went on to Moscow, where he lived in a furnished apartment with his only

sister and his brother Nicholas. He became interested in athletics, or rather gymnastics, which were in fashion at the time, and we find him spending much time at the principal gymnasium, performing various feats. Unlike most introverts, Tolstoy was an expert in many forms of physical exercise, such as horseback riding, swimming, and skating.

In 1858 one of his aunts, the Countess Alexandra A. Tolstoy, who was influential at Court, came to Moscow to live; a close bond of sympathy sprang up between them, and this aunt in later years was able to secure for Tolstoy considerable protection from annoyance by the government. In this same year Tolstoy, when out with a hunting party, missed fire at an enormous bear, which knocked him down and bit him savagely in the face before being driven off and killed.

In 1859 Tolstoy, now thirty-one years old, was deeply depressed by his brother's ill health. He wrote in his diary: "The burden of the estate, the burden of bachelor life, and all sorts of doubts and pessimistic feelings agitate my mind."

Another trip abroad was decided upon; in July, 1860, accompanied by his sister, now married, and her children, he left for Berlin. After wandering through Germany, the party joined Nicholas, who had been ordered to the Mediterranean for his health. At Hyères, in September, Nicholas died. Leo, stunned with grief, found himself unable to work or to make plans for the future. He conceived the odd idea of writing a sort of agnostic *Life of Christ*. "At the very time of the funeral," he jotted down in his diary, "the thought occurred to me to write a Materialist Gospel, a Life of Christ as a Materialist."

Writing to a friend concerning the death of Nicholas, he said:

"Nothing in my life has so impressed me. It is true, as he said, that nothing is worse than death. And when one realizes that *that* is the end of all—then there is nothing worse than life. Why strive or try, since of what was Nicholas Tolstoy nothing remains his?"

Having finally pulled himself together, Tolstoy went to England: he spent six weeks in London, studying English educational methods and visiting the House of Commons, where he heard Palmerston speak. "At that time," as he quaintly expressed it, "I knew

English with my eyes but not with my ears." He was suffering frightfully with the toothache; but he had a prejudice against dentists and never in his life allowed one to tamper with his teeth. A toothache, he declared, always subsided if given time enough; moreover, primitive man had no dentists and got along very well without them.

Stopping in Brussels on his way back to Russia, Tolstoy met Proudhon, the pioneer Socialist, and wrote "Polikushka," one of his best stories. April, 1861, just as the American Civil War was breaking, and a month after Alexander II's liberation of the Russian serfs, found Tolstoy back in the homeland, which he was destined never to leave again during the remaining half century of his life. In his later years it was intimated to him that if he left Russia the government would never allow him to return.

Settling down once more on his estate, he assumed the duties of a local Arbiter of the Peace. He began experimenting in the neighboring schools with the educational principles he had learned while abroad, and started a monthly magazine, *Yasnaya Polyana*, as an organ of his educational work. Tolstoy's own model school greatly astonished visitors. There was no discipline whatever, no memorizing of lessons, and no home work; the children sat wherever they liked, and a generally jolly atmosphere prevailed. "A child or a man," Tolstoy asserted, "is receptive only when he is roused; and therefore to regard a merry spirit in school as an enemy or a hindrance is the crudest of blunders."

On September 23, 1862, Tolstoy married Sophia Andreyevna Behrs, the daughter of Dr. Behrs, a Court physician of German origin. A loyal wife, and a devoted mother to his numerous children, her sound, practical business sense again and again saved Tolstoy's affairs from shipwreck. It was characteristic of Tolstoy that, before his marriage, he handed his private diary to his intended wife for perusal. The contents of it proved a terrible shock to her, but after a night of weeping she assured him of her forgiveness of all that was past. The bride was but eighteen years of age; Tolstoy was thirty-four. Countess Tolstoy never fully shared her distinguished husband's views as a reformer, but for many years she rendered efficient service as his secretary.

The responsibilities of marriage had a stabilizing effect on Tolstoy, and for the next fifteen years he lived happily and busily on

his estate. He suffered somewhat from indigestion, however, as a result of his former riotous living and the hardships of army life. During a period of twenty-six years, the Countess bore thirteen children, eight of whom grew up. Naturally loving children, Tolstoy was an indulgent father, entering joyfully into the children's games and interests. The development of his estate, the raising of live-stock, butter-making, tree-planting, fruit-culture, and even bee-keeping figured among his activities. He found time, too, for diversion as a sportsman. And this was not all.

Within two years after his marriage, Tolstoy began work on the greatest of his novels, *War and Peace*, inspired by the Napoleonic invasion of Russia. The writing of it occupied five years.

The desire for self-improvement seized him with renewed vigor. He became convinced that "without a knowledge of Greek, there is no culture." And so, during the winter of 1870-1, when nearing forty years of age, he began to learn Greek; with so much diligence, that he was soon reading the classical Greek authors without difficulty. An interlude of ill health, spent on an estate which he purchased in the province of Samara, was followed by the compilation of a *Reader* for the school-children, and the writing of his next great novel, *Anna Karenina*.

His affairs prospering, and his literary work received everywhere with acclaim, it might be supposed that Tolstoy should be happy and contented, looking forward to a serene old age in the midst of the delightful family group which was now growing up around him. But just at this time the religious problem began weighing upon his mind as never before; he fell into the depths of melancholy and began brooding over the deep mysteries of life and death. Writing to a literary friend, he said: "It is the first time you have spoken to me about the Deity—God. And I have long been thinking unceasingly about that chief problem. Do not say that one cannot think about it! One not only can, but must! In all ages the best, the real people, have thought about it. And if we cannot think of it as they did, we must find out how to." And he wants to know whether his friend has ever read Pascal's *Pensées*.

In truth, Tolstoy was rapidly approaching the great religious crisis of his life. The mental struggle lasted four years, culminating in 1878, when he was fifty years old. He began attending

church regularly, and closeted himself in his study morning and evening for private prayer. The high spirits for which he had been noted gave way to a deep humility. Considering it sinful to harbor an enmity, he wrote to Turgenev, from whom he had been estranged, begging for forgiveness and reconciliation. He was passing through the pangs of his spiritual rebirth.

On November 8, 1878, his wife wrote to her sister: "His eyes are fixed and strange, he hardly talks at all, has quite ceased to belong to this world, and is positively incapable of thinking about everyday matters."

The next year, when writing his *Confession*, Tolstoy himself described the process of his "conversion."

"Five years ago something very strange began to happen to me. At first I experienced moments of perplexity and arrest of life, as though I did not know how to live or what to do; and I felt lost and became dejected. These moments of perplexity were always expressed by the questions: 'What is it for? What does it lead to?' . . . These questions began to repeat themselves frequently, and more and more insistently to demand replies. They seemed stupid, simple, childish questions; but as soon as I tried to solve them, I became convinced that they are not childish and stupid, but that they are the most important and deepest of life's questions. . . .

"And I could find no reply at all. My life came to a standstill. . . . Had a fairy come and offered to fulfil my desires, I should not have known what to ask. . . . The truth seemed to be that life was meaningless. I had, as it were, lived, lived, and walked, 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—complete annihilation.

"It had come to this, that I, a healthy, fortunate man, felt I could no longer live: some irresistible power impelled me to rid myself of life one way or other. I cannot say I *wished* to kill myself. The power which drew me away

from life was stronger, fuller and more widespread than any mere wish. . . . And it was then that I, a man favored by fortune, hid a cord from myself lest I should hang myself from the crosspiece of the partition in my room where I undressed alone every evening. . . .

“And all this befell me at a time when all around me I had what is considered complete good fortune. I was not yet fifty; I had a good wife who loved me and whom I loved, good children, and a large estate, which without much effort on my part improved and increased. I was respected by my relations and acquaintances more than at any previous time. I was praised by others, and without much self-deception could consider that my name was famous. And not only was I not insane or mentally unwell, but on the contrary I enjoyed a strength of mind and body such as I have seldom met with among men of my kind: physically I could keep up with the peasants at mowing, and mentally I could work continuously for eight or ten hours without experiencing any ill results from such exertion. . . .

“The question which brought me to the verge of suicide was the simplest of questions present in the soul of every man, from the foolish child to the wisest elder: it was a question without answering which one cannot live, as I had found by experience. It was, What will come of what I am doing today or shall do tomorrow—What will come of my whole life?

“My position was terrible. 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 ever expecting an examination of finite things to supply a meaning to life. The finite has no ultimate meaning apart from the infinite. The two must be linked together before an answer to life’s problems can be reached.

“It had only seemed to me that knowledge gave a definite answer—Schopenhauer’s answer: that life has no meaning and is an evil. On examining the matter further,

I understood that philosophic knowledge merely asserts that it cannot solve the question, and the solution remains, as far as *it* is concerned, indefinite. And I understood, further, that however unreasonable and monstrous might be the replies given by faith, they had this advantage, that they introduce a relation between the finite and the infinite, without which no reply is possible.

"Faith still remained to me as irrational as it was before, yet I could not but admit that it alone gives mankind a reply to the questions of life: and consequently makes life possible. . . . Faith is the strength of life. If a man lives, he believes in something. If he does not see and recognize the illusory nature of the finite, then he believes in the finite; if he understands the illusory nature of the finite, he must believe in the infinite. Without faith he cannot live. . . .

"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 understood this; but it made matters no better for me. I was now ready to accept any faith if only it 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. . . .

"During that whole year, when I was asking myself almost every moment whether I should not end matters with a noose or a bullet—all that time, beside the course of thought and observation about which I have spoken, my heart was oppressed with a painful feeling which I can only describe as a search for God."

Yet his intellect refused to allow him to believe in the God described in the Church's creeds; on the other hand, he could not live without God. "Not twice or three times, but tens and hundreds of times," he writes, "I reached a condition first of joy and animation, and then of despair and consciousness of the impossibility of living."

At last, the solution burst upon him in a blinding flash of light. The phenomena accompanying his illumination will be familiar to those who have read Bucke's *Cosmic Consciousness*. Tolstoy, in describing the great event, writes:

"I remember that it was in early spring: I was alone in the wood listening to its sounds. I listened and thought ever of the same thing, as I had constantly done during those last three years. I was again seeking God.

"'Very well, there is no God,' said I to myself. 'There is no one who is not my imagination but a reality like my whole life. He does not exist, and no miracles can prove his existence, because the miracles would be my perceptions, besides being irrational.' . . .

"But then I turned my gaze upon myself, on what went on within me, and I remembered that I only lived at those times when I believed in God. As it was before, so it was now; I need only be aware of God to live; I need only forget him, or disbelieve in him, and I die. . . 'What more do you seek?' exclaimed a voice within me. 'This is he. He is that without which one cannot live. To know God and to live is one and the same thing. God is life. Live seeking God, and then you will not live without God.' And more than ever before, all within me and around me lit up, and the light did not again abandon me."

Tolstoy had begun to feel a strong kinship with the peasants. They somehow had solved the deep problems of life and death; and, notwithstanding the hardships of their lives, they were happy. He, the cultured aristocrat, held long conversations with these simple souls. Count Keyserling, in his recent book, *Creative Understanding*, remarks that Tolstoy's being driven to communion with illiterate peasants is a striking commentary on the shallowness of "Being" among the Russian upper classes with whom he should have had most in common. And Edward Garnett adds: "By his analysis of the emotional poverty of the life of the privileged classes, who, divorced from the knowledge of actual struggle and real interest in the facts of life, fill up the void with pride, sensuality, and weariness of life, Tolstoy drives the herd of aesthetic impostors and dilettanti before him like sheep."

To be sure, Tolstoy realized the mixture of truth and superstition in the religion of the peasants, but he considered it a lesser evil than the hypocrisy and materialism of the Church rulers. Still, he clung to the Church itself as long as he could. "I attended the services, knelt morning and evening in prayer, fasted and prepared to receive the Eucharist." But most of the service was meaningless to him; he felt that he was acting falsely, and "thereby quite destroying my relation to God and losing all possibility of belief."

It seemed to him that he must choose between Orthodoxy and truth. "Questions of life arose," he said, "which had to be decided; and the decision of these questions by the Church, contrary to the very bases of the belief by which I lived, obliged me at last to own that communion with Orthodoxy was impossible." He thought of the rivalry of the different Christian communions, of the spirit of sectarian hatred denying Christ's rule of love, and of the support which the Russian Church gave to war and militarism. The Russo-Turkish war of 1877 and the execution of youths for political offences at home gave him special food for reflection. "I took note," he tells us, "of all that is done by men who profess Christianity, and I was horrified"; the Church's spokesmen were "all living a lie." He resolved upon a thorough study of theology and of the Bible at first hand. "I must find what is true and what is false, and must disentangle the one from the other."

Meanwhile, as a result of his new experience of God, the whole direction of his life was violently turned about; there was (to borrow the Nietzschean phrase) a complete "transvaluation of all values." Fame, honor, riches, were forgotten forever; in their place he substituted poverty, humility, self-sacrifice, and the service of others. And with the change there came an unspeakable happiness. In May, 1879, he is rejoicing in the beautiful spring and writes to a friend: "It is so long since I enjoyed God's world as I have done this year. One stands open-mouthed, delighting in it and fearing to move lest one should miss anything."

His religious experiences and his investigations in the field of theology and Biblical criticism were set forth in a series of books, which occupied his attention during the next few years: *Confession*, *A Criticism of Dogmatic Theology*, *Union and Translation of the Four Gospels*, and *What I Believe, or My Religion*.

As preparation for his examination of the Old Testament, Tol-

stoy took lessons in Hebrew from a Moscow rabbi, and mastered the language with such success that he was enabled to read the Hebrew Scriptures and understand the precise meaning of important words and passages. His previous study of Greek enabled him to perform the same operation upon the New Testament.

These laborious studies led him to the conclusion that the dogmas of the Church are based upon misinterpretations, that they are supported by evidence which will not stand the simplest tests of logic, and are defended by arguments that are an insult to human intelligence. Nothing but the authority of the Church, he declared, prevented the exposure of the fraudulence of its theology. The Church itself seemed to him nothing better than "power in the hands of certain men," an obstacle to moral progress and to a right understanding of life and religion.

Many statements in the Bible, he points out, upon the literal interpretation of which is built the superstructure of theology, must now be read in a purely figurative sense. For modern astronomy makes it impossible to believe in a literal heaven above the earth and a literal hell beneath it. So the idea of the Ascension cannot be taken literally, when it is realized that the earth is rapidly revolving on its axis, so that there is no absolute "up" or "down," and only empty space, in freezing cold, outside the earth. It is utter nonsense, Tolstoy insisted, to talk about such dogmas as statements of fact; faith in them, he added, is not a virtue but the vice of credulity. He was a pioneer Modernist.

But along with all this destructive criticism, Tolstoy emphasized more passionately than ever the moral grandeur of the teachings of Jesus. The dogmas of the Church, he believed, had merely the effect of distracting attention from the things which Jesus cared most about—love, pity, repentance, the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. As H. G. Wells, in our own day, once observed, in a witty epigram: "Repentance is the beginning and essential of the religious life; and organizations, acting through their secretaries and officials, never repent."

Tolstoy went on to point out that Jesus never mentioned Adam or Eve, the Fall of Man, the Holy Trinity, and so on; nor did he assert that he was the Son of God in any other sense than that in which all men may become so, as when he taught the disciples to pray to "Our Father," and again when he said, "I am in my Father,

and ye in me, and I in you." He believed that if mankind would accept the simple teachings of Christ in the gospels, it would revolutionize society.

This naturally led to an exhaustive examination, by Tolstoy, of the teachings of Jesus, divorced from theology and dogmas. He found five great rules. (1) The commandment, "Thou shalt not kill," is not enough; one must not even be angry with one's brother. (2) The commandment, "Thou shalt not commit adultery," is not enough; one must not even be lustful mentally. (3) One must not take any oaths, because it destroys freedom of future action. (4) The old law of "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" must be replaced by the rule: Resist not him that is evil. (5) "Ye have heard that it was said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy; but I say unto you, Love your enemies. . . . that ye may be sons of your Father which is in heaven. . . . Ye therefore shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

The observance of these rules, without reservation, constituted for Tolstoy the essence of religion. He did not consider it important to make any assertions about the personality of God or the creation of the world; such things might be inherently unknowable, and in any event discussion of them leads only to confusion and conflict. It is only by recognizing a moral order in the universe and adjusting ourselves to it that life can have a real meaning and purpose; this moral order, said Tolstoy, is summarized by the teachings of Jesus, which the churches have obscured with their clouds of metaphysical dogma.

On the one hand, Tolstoy repudiated orthodox religion, and on the other hand the scientific materialism which would explain away the human soul in terms of the flux of atoms.

The Old Testament he considered much like the sacred scriptures of other ancient peoples, in which spiritual and poetic elements of much beauty are mixed with crudeness and immorality. In the New Testament he was antagonistic to the teachings of Paul, whom he considered a politician and opportunist. The words of Jesus were all that really mattered, especially the Sermon on the Mount. Whatever was obscure or contrary to reason, he simply ignored. The miracles he would explain naturalistically where possible, and draw from them whatever moral lessons they might contain. But he held that a miracle such as the feat of walking on wa-

ter had no religious significance. In fact, he dropped the miracles altogether from his own translation of the gospels.

As to immortality, for a long time Tolstoy considered it improbable and took no interest in it; later, however, his sense of oneness with the infinite became so intense that it seemed inconceivable that his spirit should cease with death. Nevertheless, the subject was so baffling that he felt it wise not to dogmatize with reference to the nature of the future life, but rather to look forward to it, whatever it may turn out to be, with confidence. The great thing, meanwhile, was to do everything possible to make this a better world. In spiritism and psychic research he took no interest whatever; he considered such tamperings with so profound a mystery an impertinence.

Tolstoy's conception of religion was purely individualistic—a matter of getting into and keeping in right relations with one's conscience and with God. He believed that if every individual would strive to solve the problem for himself, then all would be well with society as a whole. Similarly, it will be recalled, the laissez-faire school of economists held that if each man were allowed to promote his own welfare in his own way, without hindrance by the government, then the welfare of society would follow automatically. The theory sounded logical, but unfortunately it did not work, and the worst horrors of the industrial system resulted from its application. Tolstoy's disregard of the claims of society was one of the most serious defects of his system.

After having exhausted the study of the Christian Scriptures, Tolstoy passed on to an examination of the sacred books of India and China. This led to a notable broadening of his outlook; he felt that the fundamental spiritual truths are common to all the great religions. And although he insisted to the end of his life on the necessity of a literal application of the teachings of Christ, as he interpreted them, we learn with some astonishment that as time went on he became indifferent to the historicity of Jesus. The principles were more important to him than the man. He seems to have regarded with entire complacency the possibility of its being proved that Jesus never lived. In a letter to a friend, discussing a recent book which took this position, he said:

“In this book it is very well argued (the probability is as strong *against* as *for*) that Christ never existed. The

acceptance of this supposition or probability is like the destruction of the last outwork exposed to the enemy's attack, in order that the fortress (the moral teaching of goodness, which flows not from any one source in time or space, but from the whole spiritual life of humanity in its entirety) may remain impregnable."

This letter was written in 1900, when Tolstoy was seventy-two years old. Apparently it marks the culmination of his religious evolution. The very next year he was formally excommunicated by the Russian Orthodox Church, as "a new false teacher." To the edict of excommunication he sent a spirited reply; and with reference to the edict he said to friends who visited him at this time, "I positively decline to accept congratulations!"

The three foundation stones of Tolstoy's religion in its final phase were universal love, the rejection of private property, and non-resistance. He insisted that there must be no compromise in the application of these principles to everyday life. His attempt to give away his own property, including the copyright of his books, involved him in insoluble difficulties, for there was the question of the support of his wife and children to be considered. His wife was successful to some extent in preventing him from completely dissipating his property. This was the root of the painful estrangement which finally parted Tolstoy and his wife and in the end brought unspeakable misery upon them both.

In the matter of non-resistance, even the most devoted of his friends were appalled by his uncompromising attitude. For instance, W. T. Stead once asked him whether he would not use force to prevent a drunken man kicking a child to death. After careful thought, Tolstoy said that even here he could make no exception. Elsewhere he wrote: "A true Christian will always prefer to be killed by a madman, rather than to deprive him of his liberty." He even intimated that the rule should be extended to animals. The most passive Hindu could hardly have gone farther than this.

But Tolstoy honestly was convinced that if he allowed the least compromise with his principles on this subject, it would create a loop-hole through which, eventually, all the horrors of tyrannical government, oppression, war, and militarism would somehow creep back.

Again, paradoxically enough, Tolstoy's exaggerated doctrine of non-resistance was the best weapon that he could have employed for his own self-defense against force. In the eyes of the Czar and his government, Tolstoy was undoubtedly the most dangerous man in Russia. But how could they justify forcible measures against a man whose philosophy of absolute non-resistance acquitted him of even the thought of committing or encouraging any overt act of violence against the government? To have sent Tolstoy to the gallows, to prison, or to Siberia on some trumped-up charge of conspiring against the government would have shocked public opinion throughout the world and would have brought down upon the Russian government a torrent of international protest which even the most callous autocracy did not dare to face. The Czar, when urged to imprison Tolstoy, replied, "I have no intention of making a martyr of him, and bringing universal indignation upon myself." But many of his most important writings were suppressed by the government and had to be smuggled out of Russia for publication.

There were, nevertheless, many inconsistencies in Tolstoy's theories and practices. For instance, he transcended the idea of a personal God, and disapproved of prayer in the sense of petition. Still, he prayed constantly, and admitted that he found himself using a more personal note in his prayers than he could defend philosophically. But he continued the prayers, because he found great help in them—thereby becoming unconsciously a Pragmatist. During one of his last conversations, he said, "I speak of a *personal* God, whom I do not acknowledge, for the sake of convenience of expression." Some time before, he had observed that there are really two Gods: a non-existent God who serves people, and a real God—the Creator of all that is—whom people forget but whom all have to serve.

But inconsistencies never disturbed Tolstoy. He probably would have agreed with Emerson's dictum about inconsistency being "the bugbear that frightens little minds."

Perhaps the most extraordinary of all the apparent paradoxes in Tolstoy's program for the improvement of mankind was his advocacy of celibacy. As already indicated, he was a man of strong animal passions and in his youth he had, according to his own admissions, indulged in much promiscuity. After his marriage, these irregularities ceased, but his virility may be inferred from the fact

that the last of his thirteen children was born when he was sixty years old. For many years he defended the ideal of monogamous marriage. Finally he dumbfounded his friends by coming out as an advocate of absolute celibacy. Some scoffers raised the cry of "sour grapes," suggesting that Tolstoy was now old and feeble and wanted to deny to others what he could no longer enjoy himself. But this was not true; for when on the verge of seventy years, Tolstoy naively admitted that he himself had not succeeded in realizing his ideal of celibacy; but, he remarked, "that is no reason for abandoning the struggle." And he still hoped that God would aid him to attain the goal.

When his friends expostulated with him, in the matter of his advocacy of celibacy as a universal rule, pointing out that such a policy if adopted would depopulate the earth in one generation, Tolstoy calmly replied that he could not help this; that perhaps the ideal could never be widely achieved, but that this was no reason why it should be abandoned as an ideal to be striven for.

Tolstoy's attempt to put his social and economic program into practice alienated many of his friends. And it appeared that, in practice, many of his extreme policies—such as the absolute prohibition of private property of any kind—were unworkable. Tolstoy colonies sprang up, not only in Russia but in England and other countries, which were anything but successful. Count Keyserling says that Tolstoy's own estate became the worst managed in the country.

But Tolstoy had the courage of his convictions and did his best to live according to his principles. He held that each man should "work as much as possible, and content himself with as little as possible." He himself adopted peasant dress and performed heavy manual labor daily on his farms. And he found that this program, instead of detracting from his literary work, made him more efficient in it. The development of his moral principles led to his abandonment of hunting and shooting, but he still found enjoyment in horseback riding and in walking. He became a vigorous champion of temperance; many of his most powerful short stories were written primarily as propaganda to rescue Russia from the curse of drink. In his later years, though it cost him a powerful effort, he gave up the use of tobacco, and even adopted vegetarianism.

During the great Russian famine he saved countless lives through practical relief work on a large scale.

At one time he thought of abandoning home and family and going out into the world as a penniless beggar, taking St. Francis of Assisi as his model. The domestic troubles arising from his anti-property views led him to think seriously, when nearing seventy, of retiring into a place of solitude to spend his last years in meditation upon the Infinite, after the fashion of the Hindu sages. But various hindrances caused him to postpone putting the plan into execution. Meanwhile, in 1899, when he had turned seventy, he published his great novel, *Resurrection*. This book, as Garnett says, "brings into one artistic nucleus and expresses with the most adroit and passionate sincerity all the humanitarian convictions of Tolstoy's gospel of the brotherhood of man."

At last, in the autumn of 1910, when Tolstoy was eighty-two, he became involved in intrigues between certain intimate friends and members of his family over the matter of his will. His health was failing, and the domestic situation grew intolerable. On October 28, 1910, at about five o'clock in the morning, while his wife was still sleeping, Tolstoy stole out of the house, with the assistance of his daughter, Alexandra, and drove away in a carriage, accompanied only by his personal physician, Dr. Makovitsky.

Tolstoy had no definite plan or object in view, except to get away from an impossible environment. He decided, *en route*, to visit his sister Mary, who had become a nun and lived at the Shamardino Convent. After a disagreeable train journey in a third-class coach, involving exposure to cold wind and rain, Tolstoy arrived at the convent in a badly disorganized condition. The next day his daughter joined him, found him a very sick man, and decided to hurry him off to the milder climate of the Caucasus. In the early morning hours the party boarded a train for Rostov-on-Don, where it was planned to secure passports to leave Russia. But at noon Tolstoy was seized with such a desperate illness that the journey had to be broken at the next station, which happened to be a little town called Astapovo, where the station-master placed his house at the disposal of the distinguished invalid.

Tolstoy's wife, finally learning of her husband's whereabouts, hurried to Astapovo; but she was refused admittance to the house until after Tolstoy had lost consciousness. In *Reminiscences of*

Tolstoy, by his son, Count Ilya Tolstoy, there is a pathetic photograph of the Countess Tolstoy peering in at the window of the house which she was not allowed to enter. Count Ilya remarks with some bitterness: "If those who were about my father during the last years of his life had known what they were doing, it may be that things would have turned out differently." And he quotes a relative as saying, with reference to Tolstoy and his wife: "What a terrible misunderstanding! Each was a martyr to love for the other; each suffered without ceasing for the other's sake; and then—this terrible ending! It was as if Fate itself had stepped in with some purpose of its own to fulfil."

Meanwhile, the Archbishop of St. Petersburg, Metropolitan Antonius, sent a telegram urging Tolstoy to repent of his heresies and be reconciled with the Church; but the telegram was not shown to the dying man, for it was remembered that when a similar telegram had been sent to him during a previous illness, he had remarked to his son: "Tell these gentlemen that they should leave me in peace. . . . How is it they do not understand that, even when one is face to face with death, two and two still make four?"

Toward the end he was heard to murmur: "Ah, well! . . . This also is good—All is simple and good—It is good. . . . yes, yes!" And again: "It's time to knock off. . . . All is over!—Here is the end, and it doesn't matter!" The end came at seven minutes past six o'clock on Sunday morning, November 7 (November 20, Western style), 1910.

Instead of dying in solitude, after the manner of the Hindu sages, as he had wished, Tolstoy's life went out in a blaze of publicity, for the dramatic circumstances of his flight had been telegraphed all over the world, and the little town of Astapovo was soon swarming with government officials, police, reporters, photographers, moving picture operators, and curiosity-seekers of all kinds.

Crowds lined the railway as the train bearing his coffin made its way slowly back to Yasnaya Polyana. From the station to the house the coffin was borne by Tolstoy's sons and some faithful peasants. A procession almost a mile long followed, with two choirs singing "Eternal Memory." Without religious service or orations, the body was laid to rest, as he had desired, at the spot where, as a child seventy-five years before, he fancied there lay buried the magic

green stick with the formula which was to make all mankind good and happy.

Tolstoy's productivity was immense, touching practically every phase of human interest. As an artist in the novel, the short story, and the drama, he is one of the greatest glories not only of Russian but of world literature. Even William Dean Howells, the chief literary pundit of America in his day, acknowledges his great debt, as a writer, to Tolstoy's models. Yet Tolstoy never regarded literature from the point of view of "art for art's sake." In *What is Art?* he defends the thesis that the importance of all art lies in the fact that "it lays in the souls of men the rails along which in real life their actions will naturally pass." Back of the artist stood the propagandist; and had Tolstoy not been a genius the propaganda would have ruined the art.

As a religious and social reformer, his influence was mainly that of a powerful dissolvent. No other one man has ever made such a clean sweep of the inherited *status quo*; even Voltaire left many traditional institutions untouched. Nor did Tolstoy himself foresee the lengths to which his work, once started, was to carry him. It was because in Russia the Church was so closely tied up with the State and with social and economic evils of all kinds that, having questioned the validity of the Church's pretensions, Tolstoy was led on step by step, into conflict with the entire socio-political-economic organization. Because of the hideous tyranny of the Russian autocracy, he took up his pen against patriotism and force-supported government of any kind. It was a slow process; had he not lived into extreme old age his evolution could never have reached its final stages.

Within four years after Tolstoy's death, Europe became engulfed in the Great War, in the course of which the Russian throne crashed to the ground, carrying with it the political structure, the church, and the economic system. There is no doubt that Tolstoy would have regarded with utter abhorrence the program of Lenin and his associates, though his own labors probably did more than any other single factor to prepare the stage for the coming of the Bolshevik dictatorship; just as in an earlier day, Jean Jacques Rousseau, the mildest of philosophers, with his democratic and equalitarian ideology unwittingly put in motion forces that led to the Reign of Terror and the coming of the "Man on Horseback."

Yet to-day, in the perspective of more than a century, we see that the French Revolution and the Napoleonic conquests were but brief and transitory episodes, resulting from a peculiar concatenation of circumstances, in the emancipation of Europe from the shackles of medievalism.

The heart of Tolstoy's philosophy was that no good could come from the exercise of force. And in the final statement of his personal creed, Tolstoy, the introvert and religious seer, might have clasped hands with Darwin, the extravert and scientist. For Darwin, popularly regarded as a materialist and the father of the theory that all life is a ruthless struggle for existence, issuing in the survival of the physically fittest, summed up his true personal philosophy by saying, "Fame, honor, pleasure, wealth—all are dirt compared with affection."

So, too, Tolstoy came back always to Love. Visitors remarked that to hear the shaggy-haired, ruggedly masculine patriarch speaking of Love was deeply impressive. When everything was said and done, he believed that Love was all that mattered. He referred to it as "the motive power of life." And he summed up the results of a lifetime of almost fabulous historical research, personal experience, and profound reflection, in the simple words, "God is Love."